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President Michael R. Lovell, center (facing camera), and Professor David A. Strifling, left, observe and engage with students in a group exercise in the Environmental Law class on April 16, 2024.

Marquette’s Water Initiatives Show President Lovell’s Legacy

BY DAVID A. STRIFLING

On September 19, 2014, Dr. Michael R. Lovell delivered his inaugural address as Marquette University’s 24th president. Dr. Lovell announced that Marquette would expand its role in the water sector, encouraging Marquette faculty, staff, and students to develop water solutions “that will change the world.” This was not an isolated commitment; it extended Dr. Lovell’s previous history of strong support for water initiatives, and it continued during the subsequent decade.

My purpose is to reflect on Dr. Lovell’s significant legacy in the water sphere, as most recently embodied in Marquette’s evolution as a center for work aimed at helping to solve the world’s water problems.

The growth in Marquette’s interdisciplinary water research team evidences the university’s unwavering commitment to the subject. The group includes faculty members from disciplines including biology, economics, education, engineering, law, and political science. Their expertise is substantial and varied.

Dr. Lovell was always proud to mention the team’s interdisciplinary projects, often noting how many different academic units were involved from across campus under the guiding hand of Dr. Jeanne Hossenlopp, vice president for research and innovation. Most recently, the water group secured Marquette’s largest-ever federal award for water research, a large-scale interdisciplinary research partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to promote healthier environments for both military personnel and civilians.

Of course, these research efforts are only one aspect of Marquette’s commitment to water innovation. The university also has become a leader in water education, sustainability, and community engagement and partnerships. It is educating future generations of water leaders in a variety of academic disciplines.

Some of this work had been ongoing prior to Dr. Lovell’s arrival at Marquette, such as the formation of the Water Quality

The Law School joins in mourning the death of Marquette University President Michael R. Lovell in June 2024. In place of his usual column, Dean Joseph D. Kearney offers this abridgment of an appreciation of President Lovell, written by Professor David A. Strifling, director of the Law School’s Water Law and Policy Initiative; the full essay is available on the Marquette Law School Faculty Blog (June 17, 2024).

Center in the College of Engineering and the Law School’s active engagement in the Milwaukee regional water initiative from its creation in the early 2000s. But with Dr. Lovell’s call—and challenge—to all units of the university for greater engagement, these water efforts flourished. For example, the Law School announced a Water Law and Policy Initiative that now offers students a wider suite of courses and fieldwork opportunities, regularly hosts public events and conferences, and pursues independent and funded research opportunities.

A discussion of Dr. Lovell’s water legacy would be incomplete without mentioning his work prior to his arrival at Marquette. As chancellor of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, he was a driving force behind the establishment of The Water Council, a key Milwaukee-based organization dedicated to establishing the region as a global hub for solving critical water challenges.

President Lovell’s focus on water issues was quite evidently rooted in his strong Catholic faith. He often was interested in discussing Pope Francis’s encyclical letter confirming that water is “a fundamental right,” which is “indispensable to human life,” and calling for engagement in an “open and respectful dialogue” about water policies, laws, and technologies. Dr. Lovell also signed the St. Francis Pledge, committing Marquette to join many other academic institutions recognizing a duty to care for the environment and to protect the poor and vulnerable. With Dr. Lovell’s passing, it is up to us to steadfastly carry on this important work. ■