This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

That is a line from one of my favorite hymns, and it seems entirely appropriate for the occasion.

Today is a great day for Canisius and for all those who care so deeply about our Catholic, Jesuit, urban mission.

I am humbled to see you all gathered here today to celebrate with us, as we look forward, with great hope, to our future.

I would like to start, as always, with gratitude.

To God, for his grace in guiding me to this point and calling me to serve this community, as president of Canisius College.

To Bishop Fisher, for your partnership as we work together to fulfill the Catholic mission of Canisius College.

To Father O’Keefe, for your blessing as we endeavor as collaborators in the ministry of Jesuit higher education here at Canisius College.

To our elected officials, for understanding the important role Canisius College plays in serving your constituents by providing a transformative educational experience to generations of leaders.

To the Canisius community: faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, donors, Trustees and Regents, and to the people of Buffalo and Western New York, for the incredible welcome my family and I have received.

To the members of the Presidential Search Committee, for an incredible introduction to Canisius on January 22 this year—exactly nine months ago—and for believing in my vision for what we could accomplish together at Canisius.

To the members of the Inauguration Committee, for your tireless efforts in planning and hosting this significant event in the life of the college.

To my parents, Joanne and Steve, for instilling in me a deep and abiding faith in God and his divine plan for my life, which is the only way a boy from the town of Arouca, in Trinidad and Tobago, could grow to become the man elected the 25th president of The Canisius College of Buffalo.

To my siblings, family and friends, for your unwavering support and for sustaining the relationships that have grounded me throughout the years.

To my in-laws, who have joined in supporting Alison and me on this adventure.

To my mentors, including Dr. Gabriel Esteban, who you have heard from earlier, and Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, president emeritus of the University of Detroit Mercy,
who is here with us today, and Msgr. Robert Sheeran, and many others, for the invaluable counsel on my professional path.

To the many colleagues throughout my career, who have played a role in shaping the experiences that made this moment possible.

To the delegates representing the many institutions of higher education, and to my colleague presidents, for your leadership of, and commitment to, our shared project.

And, of course, to my wife, Alison, and my children.

There are no words sufficient enough to express my gratitude for you accompanying me on this journey. Please know that I love you and appreciate you.

It is a difficult proposition to talk about our future, without providing appropriate historical context, so let's briefly reflect on our past.

In the beginning...

Perhaps not that far back in the past.

Almost 500 years ago...

Yes, almost 500 years ago, St. Ignatius Loyola and his companions—a group of ten men in total—of varying ages, from different countries and cultures, and distinct socioeconomic circumstances, discerned that they should bind themselves together in furtherance of a common mission.

The result of that group discernment was the founding of the Society of Jesus, commonly referred to as the Jesuits.

The common mission of the Jesuits, from the very beginning, was: to spread the Good News, reach out to those on the margins, and educate persons for and with others.

All for the greater glory of God, or Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam for those of you familiar with Latin.

That Jesuit mission spread throughout the world and was animated here, in this incredible community of Buffalo, NY, 152 years ago with the founding of Canisius College.

Beginning on September 5, 1870, with 35 students, and continuing through today, Canisius has transformed countless lives, families, and communities, by delivering an incredible education, grounded in our Jesuit mission.

Today, almost 500 years after the founding of the Jesuits and 152 years after the founding of Canisius College, our common mission is renewed through the Universal Apostolic Preferences, or UAPs, which guide all Jesuit works.

As the director of the work, I am responsible for that mission at Canisius.

It is a responsibility I accept humbly and wholeheartedly, with the support of my family and friends and the Canisius community, because this is the work I am called to do for the greater glory.

The four UAPs were developed, consistent with the Jesuit tradition, through a process of discernment, which lasted 16 months, thereafter they were presented to, and confirmed by, the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The UAPs call on Jesuits and their lay collaborators to:

(1) promote discernment and the Spiritual Exercises,

(2) walk with the excluded in a mission of reconciliation and justice,

(3) journey with young people in the creation of a hope-filled future, and

(4) collaborate in the care for our common home.

What does that mean for Canisius, as a Jesuit university?

How do we envision our Canisius community contributing to the shared mission of the worldwide Society of Jesus?

It begins, as is our way of proceeding, with reflection and discernment.

Not for 16 months, like the Jesuits did most recently, or three months, like St. Ignatius and his companions almost 500 years ago, but for the remainder of our time together today.

And it goes without saying, but I will anyway, that our discernment does not end today.

To guide our discernment, I would like to offer some context and a verse of scripture.

The context is the world in which we live today.

Consider the multiple crises we face in our society, which in many ways are existential.

Our climate is changing and as a result once in a generation weather events occur far more frequently.

Approximately 100 million of our brothers and sisters around the world have been displaced from their homes, by war, violence and persecution.

Millions of people right here in the US, and many in our communities, are housing insecure and food insecure.
Our criminal justice system negatively impacts communities of color disproportionately, while our education system at all levels fails students of color at alarming rates.

Countless innocent lives have been lost to gun violence and mass murders, including right here in our community.

We have lost our ability to have civil discourse, in the halls of government and on our campuses, with those who are different than we are, forgetting that in spite of our differences we are all one human family.

Hold those images in your mind, and consider this verse from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verse 1-3.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Then, in Verse 8, Paul notes that: Love never fails.

And he closes, in Verse 13, by stating clearly: these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

As we reflect on our world today and the supreme power of love, the questions emerge: what does it all mean for Canisius and for all of us gathered here today? How do we respond? What can we do?

The author Jim Manney describes the practice of Ignatian discernment as asking the question: is this action consistent with who I am and who I want to become.

So what action must we undertake in light of all this.

I suggest we return to the beginning and to St. Ignatius, who offers an observation, following the fourth week of the Spiritual Exercises, in the Contemplation to Attain Love, where he notes:

Love ought to manifest itself more in deeds than in words.

As an institution, founded in the Jesuit tradition, Canisius College will respond by action.
Canisius and all who make up our community: faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, neighbors, friends; we will, by our actions, Rise to meet this moment.

In our classrooms, labs, clinical spaces, residence halls, athletics spaces, and everywhere we live, work, study, play, eat and serve:

We will Renew our commitment to justice; To ensure that we leave our planet as a true inheritance for future generations. To bring an end to racism, sexism, homophobia, islamophobia, and any other “isms” and “phobias” that denigrate our shared humanity.

We will Inspire a new generation of leaders; Who will not accept the status quo. Who will challenge any and all systems of inequity. Who will change the very world we leave to our children and their children.

We will Serve every person we encounter with love; Because, that is the only way we will realize our fullest potential.

We will Empower others to act the same; By our courage, through meaningful collaborations, and by offering our unrelenting support.

Bernice King, the daughter of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, wrote on the 50th anniversary of his assassination: that Love is not a weak, spineless emotion; it is a powerful, moral force on the side of justice.

Canisius College will be a force for justice in our city, region, state, country and world. And we invite any and all willing collaborators to join with us, so that together we can RISE to meet this moment.

Together we must Renew our commitment to justice.
Together we must Inspire a new generation of leaders.
Together we must Serve every person we encounter with love.
Together we must Empower others to do the same.
In so doing, we shall fulfill our mission at Canisius.
And Together We will RISE.

Thank you! God Bless You! Go Griffs!