

President Dobbins' Inauguration Speech - 2/19/21

Thank you all for being here - on this special day, as we come together - in person, and virtually.

I would like to acknowledge some special guests that are watching remotely or attending in person today:

My nieces and nephews watching from wherever you are - whenever you can. Know that I look forward to a time when we can all be together again.

My brother in law Steve Macaluso and his wife Mary, who are here to show their support of me - and to represent their siblings Sam and Jim Macaluso - who could not be here today.

My sister, Loretta Grote and her husband Steve, and my brother Brian and his wife Mary - who are similarly here to show their support and to represent our sibling Michelle - who could not be here in person. They also here to represent our deceased parents, Daniel and Patricia Dobbins, - who are here with us in spirit.

My "Other Mom and Dad", Sal and Eva Macaluso are here with us. I credit them for their wise decision decades ago to choose to move to a town with a college in it. A decision that forever changed my life.

My daughter Allison and her husband Mike Schaal, a 2006 alumnus, are also here with us today. They are welcomed, despite the fact they are here without our grandchildren, Owen and Emily.

And of course, there is my better half, Mickey. While I am being inaugurated as the 33rd President of McKendree University, there is no doubt who is CEO of our household. In all seriousness, whatever I have accomplished and become since arriving at McKendree, is due to Mickey. She is the voice in my head, the warmth in my heart and the hand at my back.

I would also like to thank all those who sent letters of support in anticipation of today. I appreciate your kind words and encouragement.

Today, we celebrate our long and proud history, as we do each year on Founders Day. It is important that once a year we devote this day to honor and reflect upon our heritage... to take time to acknowledge that we are here today - only because of the vision, efforts, and sacrifices of so many others who have come before us.

In just a few years, McKendree University will enter its third century of existence.

Think about that.... For at least eight generations... right here in Lebanon, IL... since 1828... there has been a McKendree.

In that time, we have faced and survived many challenges with COVID-19 being the latest addition to the list.

Throughout these significant events, the University has endured AND evolved:

- We McKendreans are resilient.
- When tested, we meet challenges. - We bend, without breaking.
- We have maintained a solid and respected reputation.

- We have experienced growth of all kinds... from enrollment, to the buildings on our campus... the programs we offer... and the now global footprint of our student body.
- We remain forward-thinking.

Just as Bishop William McKendree, our founders, and our past presidents knew their purpose and vision, we too, have a plan for the path forward. I acknowledge my college president, Gerrit TenBrink, and my friend and our longest-serving president, James Dennis. Both had a tremendous effect on me and on countless others. Their contributions to this university have - and will impact generations to come.

I am deeply honored and humbled to serve McKendree University as its 33rd president. And while some of you have known me for years—or even decades—others may need an introduction. So, let me tell you a bit about myself.

I grew up in Pittsfield, Illinois, - a small farming community about 100 miles north of here. McKendree has been part of my life since I arrived on campus for my Junior year in 1979 to study business administration and accounting. I was drawn to McKendree because of its strong business program... the opportunity to work - while completing my degree via an internship ... and the opportunity to play basketball for a legendary coach and alumnus, Harry Statham.

Truth be told, I would have listed those opportunities in a different order, back then.

I came of age on this campus. For me - McKendree was the perfect mix – a challenging academic experience... the opportunity to grow as a person... and a caring Faculty and Staff determined to help me succeed.

I also learned a number of important leadership lessons as a former Bearcat student-athlete that I have used throughout my life:

- The importance of teamwork and earning the respect and trust of your teammates
- The discipline, preparation, and hard work it takes to achieve your goals
- The need for communication, listening, and feedback
- How to keep your composure under pressure
- And, to always learn and improve from your setbacks.

As is the case for many McKendreans, I too met my wife, Mickey, here as a student. We both graduated in 1981, and McKendree has been an important part of our lives ever since.

Today, we tell our students to “Make their Mark” - - in their careers, in their communities and on the world. My McKendree experience prepared me well to “Make My Mark”... while at the same time, forever placing its mark -- on me.

Throughout my life - my faith, my upbringing, and values have called me to serve others. My deep commitment to serving McKendree began not long after graduation. I committed early on to repay the scholarships the school provided me, so others could have the same opportunities I was afforded.

In the beginning, that was more about giving time, versus talent and treasure.

I found myself serving on the Alumni Board, and eventually as its president. By virtue of my leadership on the Alumni Board, I became a member of the Board of Trustees, a role I filled for

32 years. From 2007 to 2015, I was privileged to serve as Board Chairman. And finally, in January of 2020, I became President of the University.

Did I - as a student, or anyone else for that matter, - ever imagine that I would one day lead my alma mater as President? Of course not. Like many, Mickey and I graduated - ready to Make Our Mark on the world... without an idea of how, exactly, that would happen.

Little did I know - that my focus on serving McKendree would be such a catalyst for my career. My college experience prepared me for personal and professional success, and leadership in my business career. It also instilled in me a passion for lifelong learning.

After I graduated, I earned an MBA and became a CPA. I have been in leadership roles in companies in a number of industries spanning air filtration, upholstered furniture, wire cable and harnesses, and industrial textiles. I have held positions ranging from Clerk and Controller to CFO and President.

Throughout my business career, my service to McKendree - has co-existed. Without knowing it... without a purpose beyond helping McKendree deliver on its mission - and achieve its vision... I now realize - I was also receiving over three decades of training to serve the University as President.

When I accepted this position, I knew challenges and tough decisions would lie ahead.

None of us, however, could foresee the disruption caused by COVID-19 this past year. I'm extremely proud of how our McKendree team rallied to execute our mission and provide a high-quality learning experience during this crisis. Our students were able to continue their goal of pursuing their college degrees. Together, we made that possible with ingenuity, perseverance, and flexibility. I witnessed the can-do spirit of our students, faculty, and staff. They demonstrated what we can accomplish when we all work hard together. It re-affirmed my belief that McKendree is truly a "special place".

Early on, I chose "One McKendree" as the theme of my presidency, to reinforce the concept of unity. Together, we work for a common purpose—and that is McKendree's mission: to provide a high-quality education to outstanding students. We will never lose sight of that focus. It is the reason we exist.

We should all be proud of how McKendree has grown, and how it continues to evolve. A new strategic plan will be our blueprint for the future. It identifies six objectives that form the acronym "UNITED," which is consistent with our "One McKendree" theme. These objectives are:

- Updates and modernization
- Name recognition and identity
- Intellectual experience
- Technology and training
- Engagement
- and... Diversity and equity.

The Strategic Plan Committee is developing a detailed framework to define this vision, which will eventually be shared broadly.

In closing, I will address each group of the University's stakeholders:

- To Our Students – As future teachers, scientists, performers, and business and health care professionals, know that you are our purpose and our hope. Know that we will continue to create an environment that is diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all. I aspire to serve you, - as you pursue your academic and co-curricular dreams - and to help you become the very best version of yourselves.
- To Our Faculty and staff – Thank you for your hard work, dedication, service, and commitment to McKendree and its students. You are the foundation of this University. I appreciate the patience and understanding you have shown me this past year. I aspire to serve you - in a manner that allows you to effectively pursue your vocations of - teaching, leading, and supporting our students.
- To Our Alumni – We value and appreciate you. Many of you have given your “time, talent, and treasure” to this University. If you have not connected with us in a while, I invite you to “come back” - “Get to know us again”. “Become involved”. There will always be a place for you here. I aspire to serve you - in a manner that allows you to always say, you are “proud to be a Bearcat.”
- To Our Generous Supporters – We thank you for your past generosity, and we rely on your continued support. Throughout McKendree’s history, philanthropy has been vital in helping fulfill our mission. I aspire to serve you - by being a good steward - and by ensuring that you continue to “see the value” in supporting this University.
- To Our Trustees – As a longtime former member of this group, I thank you for your friendship and your commitment to the University. I’m grateful for your support and the confidence you have shown in me. I aspire to serve you - in a manner that maintains your “confidence and trust”, and furthers our mission.
- The United Methodist Church – We cherish our long affiliation with the Church. I aspire to serve you - by remaining true to Bishop McKendree’s vision of an education that nurtures the mind, body, and spirit.
- Members of the Clergy – I ask for your good will, blessings, and prayers, asking God to guide us on our path forward, while I aspire to serve all - through socially and morally responsible behavior.
- Our Friends and Members of the Community – McKendree’s success is tied closely to that OF the community. I aspire to serve all - in a way that encourages engagement ... and serves our region as a neighbor, partner, and educator of future leaders and professionals.

We are all stewards of this great institution. More challenges undoubtedly lie ahead. As we go forward, let’s renew our joy, our hope, and our passion” for the important work we do here.

I love this University, and I am determined and proud to guide it with a humble and steady hand.

On Founders Day, we celebrate all that McKendree has accomplished in 193 years. This is a place of the “past, present, AND future”. It is resilient. It has endured. Today is the day we set aside to pause -- reflect – and be inspired by that.

It also provides an opportunity for us to gather and focus - on what we can accomplish...
Together... United...as "One McKendree."

Thank you.

Let's go, Bearcats!