

Our Opposition to the Invitation of President-elect Donald J. Trump to deliver the Commencement address at the University of Notre Dame

Friends,

Please join us in signing this letter to Father John Jenkins, CSC, President of the University of Notre Dame, expressing our opposition to the potential invitation of President-elect Donald J. Trump to deliver the Commencement address in May, 2017. The President-elect does not stand for the values we hold dear at Notre Dame, and he should not represent us on the world's stage.

The full text of the letter is below. Feel free to sign as an individual, as a club, as a student organization, or similar body; all are welcome to sign this letter, regardless of your class year. Please only sign once -- it will take us some time to upload each signature. We will deliver these signatures in print to him and his office at a future date. Thank you.

December 7, 2016

Dear Father Jenkins,

We write to you today regarding the invitation of President-elect Donald J. Trump to speak at the University of Notre Dame's Commencement ceremonies this coming May, in accordance with past tradition. It has been the longstanding practice of our University to invite the newly elected President to deliver the Commencement address, offering his advice to graduates while speaking on the topic of virtue.

We, as members of this University and its community, firmly believe that no invitation should be extended to President-elect Trump to speak at our Commencement ceremonies.

There are many values which we hold dear at Notre Dame: the development of mind, body, and spirit in accordance with our values as Catholics; a willingness to embrace opposing viewpoints; and the pursuit of a common good. As you said yourself, Father Jenkins,

"Either we walk together in mutual support, or we do not walk at all. Either we are all Notre Dame, or none of us are. Let each of us respond to the challenges at this time by recommitting ourselves to respect for each member of the community, to joining in mutual support and to foster conversations that engage and enlighten rather than tear one another down."

It is clear to us that the President-elect does not share these values.

He began his campaign with an assault on the character of Mexican immigrants. He continued throughout the campaign – as he has throughout his entire life – with degrading rhetoric and behavior towards women. He celebrated his electoral victory with the appointment of a white nationalist as his Chief Strategist.

This behavior is not consistent with our mission at the University of Notre Dame. His hateful rhetoric towards people of color, his embrace of sexual assault, and his utter lack of respect for opposing viewpoints not only render him unfit for the Oval Office, but unfit to set foot on our campus.

In the ten days after the election, the Southern Poverty Law Center documented 867 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation. Mosques have received letters threatening genocide, Latino citizens have been threatened with violence and deportation, and students have endured racially driven bullying and violence. His candidacy, and soon-to-be presidency, has elevated the hateful rhetoric and actions of white nationalists, bigots, and conspiracy theorists alike.

As you are aware, we have already joined many members of our community in calling on you to establish a Sanctuary Campus here at Notre Dame. We applaud you for your continued commitment to ensuring our undocumented classmates – those studying through the DACA program – will finish their degrees. It is that commitment to our shared values that inspires our words today.

However, we fear for the safety of so many of our classmates, peers, and community members should the President-elect deliver the Commencement address in May. He has already proven himself unwilling to denounce violence and hatred on behalf of his cause. He has brought with him a string of intimidation, hate crimes, and ignorance. Were he to deliver the Commencement address on our campus, we have no doubt that the safety of many in our community would be at risk.

We do not air these concerns lightly; the President-elect represents a unique and immediate danger to many students, faculty, staff, and community members here at Notre Dame. His presence on our campus will create an unnecessary and dangerous situation.

As a leading institution of higher education, we are called to wrestle with opposing viewpoints. We agree with you, Father Jenkins: the elected leader of the nation should be listened to, whoever they are, whatever their views. However, when those views promote sexual assault, hatred towards others, and fear for one's safety, we have a moral duty to stand up and do better.

Let us be clear: our concerns are not partisan in nature. We are willing and able to challenge our positions, just as those who disagree with us should be willing and able to challenge theirs. Rather, our concerns are twofold:

First, we must ensure the safety of our community members. We believe the presence of the President-elect will pose a heightened threat to our peers, and is thus unacceptable.

Second, we must promote the development of our shared values as the nation's preeminent Catholic university. The President-elect does not represent the good that comes from Notre Dame, and should not represent us on the world's stage.

We are confident that you will come to the correct decision; there is certainly no shortage of impressive and appropriate speakers for our Commencement.

We thank you for your careful consideration of this matter, and look forward to your timely response.