

Transcript of Kerry Robinson address to
Catholic Leadership Collaborative Kick-off Event – February 12, 2019

To making the world better and the church stronger. I was particularly struck, as a child, by the observation that my moral heroines and heroes were bearing witness to the worst of what humankind can do to one another and to the planet. And yet every day showed up from a conviction of faith, determined to alleviate human suffering, advance justice, advance peace. While they saw so much destruction and inequity and injustice and human suffering, they were so purposeful in their ministry, and had a palpable sense of joy about them. Even as a child, I was struck by that, wanting to be like them, to be like you. I imagined I could never be as selfless or as holy, so I began to pray that maybe I could do something with my life as I grew up, that would strengthen and serve the lives and ministry of my moral heroes and heroines.

I believe in the kind of strange, and wild, and wonderful invitations I've had to serve the church ever since that prayer has been answered. Raskob about 40 years ago, just over 40 years ago, had a similar instinct to those of you who are forming the Catholic Leadership Collaborative. That was in the world of philanthropy. We realize that the family that we were funding some of the same national initiatives that other Catholic families across the country were likewise funding. It occurred to use that we would be stronger in collaboration, so we intentionally introduced ourselves to several families from across the country that had likewise set up Catholic foundations and formed a consortium which is now known as FADICA, Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities. My father had the honor of being the first president of FADICA, so I truly grew up as a child, not just with the example of Raskob but the example of many other Catholic families who were serving the church in similar vain.

It is where I first met Bridget and Sister Helena and have learned much from them as well as our other colleagues. Speaking personally, I think our family's philanthropy is radically enhanced by participation in the consortium that is FADICA. I thought I would make my entire life's work on behalf of the church in the field of religious philanthropy, I was very happy giving other people's money away and advising others on how best to give money away.

But 21 years ago I received a fateful call from a Catholic Priest, a Priest of the Archdiocese of Hartford, Father Bob Beloin. He had been very happy as a Pastor in parish ministry but had been asked by his Archbishop to leave parish ministry which he loved and serve as a campus minister at Yale University. When he arrived on Yale's campus, he noted that 25% of the student population admitted to being Catholic, but hardly anyone was coming to Mass or participating in any of the ministries campus ministry offered. It was curious because it was predominantly the campus ministry had a board that was prominently lay, and smart Yalies, faculty and alumni, but they had presided over several decades without proper board governance or best managerial practices in board governance, no term limits for example. If there was fiscal distress, one of them would write a check and sort of patch that up. So, they hadn't committed to a solid fundraising development effort. Consequently were in debt and responding to fiscal distress by reducing staff and reducing programs, this is what Father Bob inherited, and he spent his first three years persuading his board that they needed to be serious about fundraising.

This led, eventually, to the fateful call that he made to me asking if I would be the director of development and work with him to expand Catholic life on Yale's campus. Something I loathed and was deeply distressed at even the idea. I had no training, no experience, no background, and I was full of misunderstandings about what fundraising really is all about. I've since vowed to correct and disabuse people of those same incorrect understandings of fundraising, because I learned so much when I eventually said yes to him and helped him build out Catholic life on Yale's campus.

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I mention this for two reasons. The first is that it was the most profound example, personal experience I had of lay clergy collaboration. We were true partners in this. I wasn't his boss, he wasn't my boss. Together we reported to a board of trustees and were passionately committed to the mission of bringing to consequence a Catholic intellectual and spiritual center at one of the great universities. Of course we didn't want to give Yale just one more thing to boast about, we wanted to demonstrate what campus ministry could look like for the sake of the most talented generation of Catholics yet born and those to come. Our emphasis was really on the mission to inculcate an adult mature faith in this young generation and figure out ways to keep them engaged in the life of the church, providing good formation and training and equipping them even as 22 year olds, 25 year olds, 28 year olds to serve in meaningful positions of leadership in the church. Whether that was on parish pastoral councils or diocese and finance councils or the boards of trustees of all the organizations you run and belong to yourselves.

Half way through the capital campaign with Father Bob on Yale's campus the sexual abuse revelations in 2002 came to light. Father Bob and I had been traveling all over the country, even to St. Louis, to meet with Yale Catholic alumni talking about our expansion and our mission. One of the things that we were most proud about is that on Yale's campus we were taking the topics of the day, illuminating them from the perspective of faith, and inviting students into a rich discussion and dialogue about the centrality and importance of faith in light of anything current happening. In such a way, we're helping them develop a moral vocabulary. A way to speak about their faith with credibility at the level of university discourse. Suddenly the topic of the day was our own church's great and grave failure and the sexual abuse crisis.

Our board did not want us to be distracted and said, "Kerry, you didn't cause this, you're not part of this, don't worry about it, just keep raising money." Father Bob and I felt that that was fundamentally unfair and unfaithful. If your family is in crisis, you do everything possible to affect healing and reconciliation. It's a moral obligation to be part of the solution. We felt obligated to and responsible to respond to students' questions about this, and to harness whatever resources we had at our disposal to benefit the church.

That gave rise to a three-day conference called Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church. Three day conference, the material was wrenching, but everybody left hopeful with a sense that this is our church, we are not abandoning this church. We are staying and helping call it to greater levels of accountability, transparency, and holiness. We are going to recognize and utilize the talents of all the baptized, ordained religious, and especially lay, whose gifts and expertise were frequently underutilized and overlooked.

That gave birth to Leadership Roundtable, which I have had the privilege of leading and now serving as global ambassador of. In that capacity we harness senior level executive talent from both the church and the secular world. We bring people together, much like this afternoon, around round tables. We are clear to be as diverse as possible in the invitation so that every sector and expertise is covered. We ask that there be a presumption of goodness extended to all in the room, we remind people that everybody present cares deeply about the health and vitality of the church now and in the future. In that regard we encourage candor and charity in the discussions. It's been a privilege to earn the trust and confidence of the hierarchy through this work and to help bring entrepreneurial solutions to managerial challenges.

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So, in closing, because we will have a wonderful panel to expand on these ideas and amplify the discussion, in closing just a couple of maxims that I have learned over the course of my life in all of these expressions of ministry. Collaboration is a key ingredient into the most creative and effective ministries that I've ever seen as a funder or ever participated in as a lay woman who deeply loves this church. The importance of baptism and all of its rights and responsibilities should never be taken for granted. Catholics have risen to levels of affluence and influence in the US and count among the highest echelons of leadership in every sector, we are no longer solely an immigrant church. Many of these Catholic leaders want to contribute what they do best to the church that they love. This is far beyond contributing financially. Diversity matters. Who is at the table of decision making and deliberation matters. It's why there is such an important urgent need to ensure that women in particular and young adults are given leadership opportunities and included in decision making. Finally, laity are often an overlooked and underutilized resource, but the beauty is that laity are a resource. You are all an expression of that and together wonderful grace-filled things can happen.

Thanks very much.