

MEMORANDUM

February 6, 2019

Dear FIU family,

In recent years, I have made numerous references to the “life of the mind.”

I first heard this concept when our second President Gregory Baker Wolfe used it as a reference point at one of the many commencements that he led during his term as our leader (1979-86). What a fascinating way to describe some of the many passions that drive our academic life. But it has stuck with me.

Through the years, our efforts have pivoted around creating our version of the life of the mind: dedication to building a cosmopolitan liberal arts curriculum, critical thinking pedagogies, the creation and propagation of affinity symbols for our institution (we are Worlds Ahead – a university seal, trademark and logo, repeated mantras defining our culture, a university mascot, special colors, and a distinct architectural eclecticism) and our more recent student and curricular initiatives around global learning.

Throughout this period, our built environment has expanded enormously to accommodate the physical consequences of the maturation of our version of the “life of the mind.” Space has been dedicated to classrooms, laboratories, libraries and archives, computer-related initiatives, physical health, athletics and wellness (largely through physical fitness). Only more recently have we had the foresight and resources to build more “collision spaces” and gathering areas. We understand that social exchange is critical to the life of the mind.

Many of the universities against which we model our curriculum and physicality have origins in faith-based initiatives and initiators. Despite the evolution of church and state dynamics, and despite the importance of secular education as a driving force for modernization, we know that spirituality is an important if not central dimension to human development. A commentator from an earlier time reminds us to “refuse to be average or to surrender to the chill of your spiritual environment.” In many ways our spiritual environment at FIU can and should be warmed.

The university’s diversity and its global mix of students provides a vibrant laboratory for the cultivation of spiritual strength and understanding among students and professional staff alike. FIU has a variety of active faith-based groups and hard-working student clubs that focus on cultivating spiritual strength and ethics. A shared space for discovery and understanding would facilitate their work.

To accommodate the plurality of faiths and perspectives at FIU, we are proud to announce that local philanthropists and humanitarians **Trish and Dan Bell** have **stepped forward with a \$5 million donation to help our FIU build a non-denominational chapel**, a sanctuary from the fast pace of university life. Interfaith centers are not inherently temples, mosques, synagogues, churches, or gurdwaras, but welcoming places for all faiths and for spiritual exploration. Meeting the needs of different faiths, the sacred spaces within interfaith centers are distinct. They are symbolic of the pluralism and diversity that public institutions must embrace.



Listen to Trish Bell and then Dan:

"Dan and I have always believed strongly that a strong spiritual foundation, regardless of one's faith and religion, is a critical ingredient in building a well-rounded and balanced life. Consequently, when we discovered that there was no FIU chapel, we were sincerely thrilled to have this opportunity to play a significant role in helping to bring such a vibrant element to the life of this outstanding university."

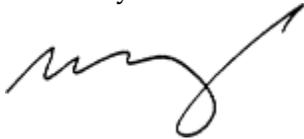
"Trish and I hope that this chapel will quickly become a place where people of similar as well as vastly different religious traditions and beliefs can gather together to celebrate and contemplate their faiths, and meaningfully connect with others. Hopefully this new chapel will become one more of FIU's very highly successful elements in its continuous effort to foster a sense of worldwide community and shared humanity here on campus."

This chapel will serve as an interfaith gathering place for worship, contemplation, spiritual strengthening and understanding. It will offer a space for ceremonies, spiritual lectures, leadership enhancement and discussions, and individual reflection. As the percentage of non-religious affiliates in the United States likely increases over the next few years, the chapel will serve as an important center for spirituality, which is on the rise according to a recent Pew survey: the percentage of Americans who felt a “deep sense of spiritual well-being” has increased to nearly sixty percent.

The proposed chapel location and design are still being conceptualized, but we hope for it to hold up to 250 seated people, have sufficient meeting space for students in our interfaith community, feature a conference room for meetings of group leaders and others who seek a spiritual approach to their problem solving or who are teaching spiritual/religious studies subject matter.

As caring human beings, we have the obligation and opportunity to make the world a better place. At FIU we do this one student at a time, every day trying to enhance knowledge and appreciation for all the blessings that our education and our institution can give us. Creating this dedicated space for spiritual exercise and renewal at FIU will help us in our quest to continue to turn the impossible into the inevitable and in the process make the world a better place for our sons and daughters and others who follow in our footsteps!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark B. Rosenberg', with a long, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Mark B. Rosenberg
President