

Dear Rector Jaroslav Demko. Dear students and faculty.

I am highly honored and deeply humbled to receive your very special honorary degree from the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, my wife, Elizabeth, and I wanted to visit the birthplace of my parents on the outskirts of what is now Bratislava. Private travel behind the Iron Curtain was difficult and not encouraged. However, in 1987, Notre Dame offered a trip from Vienna down the Danube River that made this experience possible.

During this trip, we realized that although the University of Notre Dame was founded by an order of French priests and a high majority of the students were of European background, there was no formal relationship with Europe. We proposed to establish what is now the Institute for European Studies, a program to bring Notre Dame to Europe and Europe to Notre Dame. The purpose was to introduce our students to European culture, languages, and current events. It was intended fully for the students — no policy center, think tank, or ivory tower for high-level faculty.

Our initial years were quite successful, offering lectures, conferences and seminars on European events and bringing European dignitaries of varied professions to campus. All of this was popular with our students and public audience. It so happened that our Director, Jim McAdams, was friendly with the Rector of Ukrainian Catholic University, and with this connection, we could extend our resources by connecting with the best Catholic Universities in Central and Eastern Europe. This was an opportunity to support and partner with those Catholic Institutions that continued their mission despite Soviet influence and suppression. We created the Catholic Universities Partnership. Our gatherings have always been wonderful opportunities to share missions and develop friendships, all as part of a common cause. Now, I am particularly delighted that our students, too, are able to meet each other and visit Ružomberok.

My wife and I have visited Ružomberok several times and have been captivated by the beauty of the area and much enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the university community and the town representatives. We have been very impressed with the growth of your university into a first-rate academic institution, one that serves your students, country, and the Catholic mission so well.

We would enjoy nothing more than to visit your beautiful town again on October 19th to accept the honor you have bestowed on me. And maybe even raise a glass of Slivovitz in celebration. But alas, sometimes age and health interfere!

I have enjoyed my association with the Catholic Universities, particularly with your university. I have always been proud of my Slovak heritage. I wish you continuing success in your commitment to educating the future leaders of Slovakia.

Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Bob Nanovic