

Memo



Date: May 6, 2008

Dr. Jose Rodriguez

Associate Vice President and Dean of Students

To: All Students

CC: **Rev. James J. Maher, C.M.**

Vice President

Division of Student Affairs

Subject: Honoring Our Religious Pluralism

I recently had the privilege of speaking to a group of Hindu students, who expressed distress as a result of a Letter to the Editor published in the Queens Campus student newspaper, the Torch. The students felt that this letter suggested that the Hindu students did not have a rightful place in our University community. Our discussion, as well as a later dialogue between the editors of the Torch and the Hindu students facilitated by Fr. James Maher, was very fruitful.

St. John's University is a religiously pluralistic environment founded by the Vincentian Community, a Catholic religious order. Because of our religious principles we are uniquely situated in the world of education to provide opportunities for all of our students to speak openly and thoughtfully about their fundamental beliefs and values. Engaging in such opportunities sometimes results in the development of a deeper understanding of those beliefs that we hold most dear.

Talking about religion to people of other faiths, however, is not often easy. Speaking of her struggle to bring religious dialogue to the world of journalism, author and radio host Krista Tippett says in her book, *Speaking of Faith: Why Religion Matters and How to Talk About It*, "journalists and intellectuals and analysts who emerged from twentieth-century halls of learning and political culture were trained not to take religion seriously, to see and hear its humanity, its force in culture, its power to mobilize lives and communities." (p135.) At St. John's University we take all religions seriously. Accordingly we welcome students of many faiths, including the Hindu students, to our University community. We encourage our students to grow in their own beliefs while learning from the wonderful diversity that surrounds them.

Over the summer, our new students have been asked to read Krista Tippett's book as part of the Summer of 2008 New Student Orientation program. We have also invited Ms. Tippett to speak at St. John's in October. Perhaps this summer you may also want to read her book? Reading about her spiritual journey is a wonderful way to provide sustenance for your own journey, as well.