

## FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE TO THE 13<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL ICUSTA MEETING

As I look back over the first twenty-four years in the history of ICUSTA, I have been fortunate to have attended 9 of the 12 past Biennial meetings. I missed only the inauguration meeting at UST Chile in 1993, the meeting at STU Canada in 1999, and at UST Chile once again in 2015, and of course now the 13<sup>th</sup> at Avila in 2017. It was at the 1999 session where the then President of UST Houston, Rev Michael Miller, proposed to the delegates that I serve as the Executive Director of ICUSTA and that ICUSTA be housed at UST Houston, USA---and so the years have unfolded. My experience as your Executive Director has been personally rewarding in that I have visited Catholic institutions and made friends in every continent. I have grown in international perspective and in my commitment to Catholic education because of the friendships and inspiration that resulted in my service to ICUSTA. None of us have a monopoly on new or good ideas, I have learned much, brought home new ideas, and shared experiences with all of you. And I hold these experiences dear to my heart and thank my many ICUSTA friends for their support, inspiration and most of all their faith in ICUSTA.

Each of our biennial meetings has been encouraging to all of us who attended---the promise of international engagement with like-minded people has whetted our institutional appetites. Sharing our mission, aspirations and friendships with other Catholic universities from all parts of our world has had a positive effect in strengthening our own individual commitment to our Catholic identity. I trust that you have had a similar experience. I thank all of you for your support of the mission and vision of ICUSTA over the years, and applaud each of you for maintaining your identity as a Catholic university.

I believe a bit of history is in order. It all began in 1993 when a young man from Santiago, Chile, inspired by the wonderful experience he had as an exchange student to North Carolina in the USA, decided to take his relatively new Institution, the University of Santo Tomas, international. ICUSTA was thus founded at UST Santiago, Chile, when a small group of Catholic universities gathered on the UST campus in Santiago to organize an International organization to encourage international exchange. I believe if my memory is correct that some five other universities from around the world attended ICUSTA's creation. The young man was of course the Founder of ICUSTA and UST Santo Tomas, Dr Gerardo Rocha Vera.

Gerardo soon after paid an unannounced visit to my office in the summer of 1994, where I was then the President of UST Houston, 1988-1997. He proceeded to tell (not ask) me that since Houston was the center of the world---for other St Thomas Aquinas universities, UST Houston must host the second biennial meeting of this new international organization called "ICUSTA"---in 1995. I spoke no Spanish and Gerardo struggled then with his English, but somehow we communicated. I called to my office, Dr

Gustavo Wensjoe, then an assistant professor in International Studies, and asked Gustavo to act as translator. (Many of you will recall Dr. Wensjoe fondly as he became a staunch supporter of all things international at UST Houston, who unfortunately died in an accident in his native Peru some years ago.) Dr Wensjoe soon became as partisan in behalf of hosting the second biennial as was Gerardo---overwhelmed as I was, I agreed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ICUSTA Biennial was held at UST in 1995, I recall we had some nineteen delegates from Catholic universities from around the world, who all said they wanted more, and thus ICUSTA was well on its way. (I only found out years later that while Dr Rocha was in my office on a hot August 1995 day, his family was outside in his car---Carla his wife, and her three kids soaking up the summer heat in Houston, while their dad worked hard for ICUSTA's future.)

We have been blessed that the Rocha Family has seen fit to continue to support the dream of their dear husband and father---our founder Gerardo Rocha. The family has organized a Foundation, The AngelicvM Foundation. Gerardo Gabriel Rocha Vera, the son of our founder is the President and his wife Carla is on their Board. Grants from the Rocha family foundation have made it possible for ICUSTA to organize grant programs to stimulate international exchange among our members, and to support our biennial meetings, to encourage growth and attendance.

So delegates this is the story of our heritage, welcome to our 13<sup>th</sup> ICUSTA Biennial meeting. There is a world out there in need and we have a responsibility as Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning to go out into that world with our faculty, our staff and most importantly our students to discover those needs. We must then work together in accordance with Pope Francis's dictum spelled out in his recent Encyclical on The Environment, to strengthen together our commitment to a trio of life's responsibilities the Pope listed in that important Encyclical: our God; our neighbors; and with everything in our home---planet earth. As Pope Francis said: "we humans are made for Love!" I would only add that "ICUSTA too is made for love." I love my experience, my love and prayers to you all, May God bless you all and your work.

So, my friends as you can see we share a common purpose in our ICUSTA and a shared vision as well. I know you all will be working on initiatives and ideas at this important meeting. Thank you all for your interest in the future of ICUSTA. Your work is in my thoughts and prayers.

Dr Joe "Tip" Mc Fadden