

Address to Religious Congregations

I want to speak to you for a few minutes about LaGuardia Community College and about a new program that could use your help.

If you have not been to LaGuardia, you need to know that it is conveniently located and easy to find – the campus is in Long Island City, very near the 33rd Street/Rawson stop on the 7 line.

The LaGuardia student body is large and diverse. They have over 13,000 students who were born in more than 150 different countries and who speak more than 100 languages at home. Indeed, LaGuardia calls itself “The World’s Community College.”

LaGuardia is a two-year college, which means it offers associate degrees that prepare students for transfer to four-year schools and for careers. LaGuardia offers over 30 different degree programs and schedules classes both days and evenings. You can study liberal arts like history, music, psychology, science, and math – but you can also study for careers in nursing, accounting, education, computer technology, and photography. At LaGuardia, you can learn to be a sign language interpreter, a paramedic, a paralegal, or a physical therapist.

Beyond educating its students, LaGuardia is also dedicated to serving the people of Queens. So, there is a center to assist small business. LaGuardia hosts Workforce 1 (a job placement center). There is a Center for Immigrant Education and Training. LaGuardia has the largest program for teaching English to immigrants in the New York metropolitan area. There are programs in both English and Spanish to help

people earn their GED. There is a Performing Arts Center that offers theatre and musical entertainment at very low prices. LaGuardia helps high school students prepare for their Regents Exams and the SAT. There are programs for veterans, for children, and for people who are preparing to take the citizenship exam. There are non-credit courses that prepare people to become real estate agents, bookkeepers, florists, nurse's aides, practical nurses, and construction managers. There are still more services, but I'm sure you get my point: LaGuardia does everything it can to serve the people of Queens.

Finally, you need to know that LaGuardia is inexpensive. Because LaGuardia is part of the City University of New York – a public institution supported by the city and state – tuition rates are low. Tuition for full-time students is just \$1,400 a semester, or \$2,800 a year. And, if you qualify, there is financial aid available. I'm sure you know that a private college would cost 20 or 30 thousand dollars a year. So, LaGuardia is quite a bargain.

So, you see, LaGuardia is easy to find, is large and diverse, offers more than 30 degree programs, provides all sorts of services for the community, and is inexpensive. LaGuardia serve all ages – so, if you have a high school student at home or if you have an interest in continuing your own education – you have a standing invitation to visit the campus.

One last thing. LaGuardia is part of a Ford Foundation initiative called “Difficult Dialogues.” To my knowledge, this is the first time that LaGuardia Community College has been in communication with us. In general, colleges and houses of worship do not talk to each other. The Ford Foundation is encouraging us to have a conversation. We should talk to each other because we have many things in common: we both care

about the future of young people. We both educate the young. We both recognize that young people have a spiritual life that shapes, motivates, and enlarges their academic life. We both value freedom – for the Mosque, it is freedom of religion. For LaGuardia, it is academic freedom.

In order to have this conversation, next Spring LaGuardia is sponsoring a series of “study circles” throughout Queens. Each of these study circles will bring together a group of 8-to-12 people for a discussion of religious diversity and values. A study circle will meet for two hours a week for 4 weeks. It is hoped that each study circle will have a mix of people – people of different ages and different religions – people from the College and people from the community. Each group will have one or two facilitators – people trained to keep the discussion on track and productive. LaGuardia wants to learn from you so that it does a better job teaching you and your children. For us, it would be a chance to meet some new people, talk about our faith in a comfortable setting, and learn what some of your neighbors from other backgrounds are thinking.

If you might be interested in participating in a study circle next Spring, come see me at the end of the service so I can give you a card with a number to call. I also have a brochure with a Directory of Services offered at LaGuardia; it includes numbers you can call if you are interested in any of the services that I mentioned.

LaGuardia thanks us for our time and attention and looks forward to seeing some of us in its study circles.

Thank you very much.