It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you Father John Jenkins, who will deliver tonight the President’s Annual Address to the Faculty.

Father John kindly asked the Faculty Senate if he might give the Annual Address at a meeting of the Senate, which would be open to other members of the faculty, and the Senate was happy to extend him the invitation to speak to us. His presence here dignifies the Senate.

When Father John first presented to me the idea of giving the address at a regular meeting of the Senate, I was thrilled, but I told him I’d have to get back to him later, after consulting with our Executive Committee. I know that might have sounded a bit off-putting, but it really reveals something very important about the “power” of the chair of the Faculty Senate, and about the Senate itself.

The chair of the faculty senate doesn’t have any “power,” at least not in the traditional sense. He or she is a member of the executive committee of the senate and the executive committee sets the agenda for the senate. The chair is a leader but not an authority or a potentate. The Senate itself doesn’t have legislative power but is, rather, the voice of the faculty, and has all the persuasive power that the voice of the faculty can muster through research, consultation,
reasoned argument and exposition. And that power to persuade is no small thing.

The Faculty Senate was created by an ad-hoc committee of faculty convened in November of 1967 by Father John Walsh, C.S.C. After two meetings of the ad-hoc committee, the full senate had its first meeting on November 29, 1967, where they received the address of then-president Father Theodore Hesburgh. (So, we're following in his footsteps here.) One meeting later, in early January of 1968, the Senate approved its first bylaws, where it stated: “It shall be the responsibility of the Senate to represent faculty opinion.” The bylaws go on to state: “The Faculty Senate is conceived as an assembly through which the faculty can exercise a collective and independent voice in the governance of the University.” I don't know if that line was in the original bylaws or if it was added later. I do know that it expresses the essence of what the Senate is: a collective and independent voice.

I also know, if my math is correct, that this November marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Faculty Senate of the University of Notre Dame. I suspect that over 500 faculty members have taken part in the work of the Senate over those 50 years. And I think we deserve to have an anniversary party sometime soon to commemorate that hard work.

Well, I think I've introduced the Senate more than I've introduced our guest, on the assumption that he is well known to all. Please help me try to make up for that by giving a most warm welcome to Father John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., the 17th President of the University of Notre Dame.