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Jerome Gilbert: In the spirit of John Marshall, a creed to be admired by all

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Just a few months into my presidency I came across the Marshall University Creed in the student handbook and was touched by what it says about the basic values of our university. I have since cited the Creed in a number of speeches I've given and have it featured on our website at marshall.edu/president.

The Creed references drawing inspiration from the university's namesake, U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall, who helped frame our nation's judicial branch and ensure the Constitution remains a strong guide to our government. It states that we not only are developing the intellects of our students, staff, and faculty, but also are creating new knowledge, defending individual rights, and exercising civic responsibility. It further describes the traits members of the Marshall community strive to exemplify, including "independence, initiative, achievement, ethical integrity, and commitment to community through association and service."

The Creed affirms Marshall is a community that is respectful of others, duty-bound to support the common good, supportive of diversity, and prepared to correct threats posed by injustice. These concepts made me proud to think about the behavior the Marshall community holds up as model conduct for ourselves.

Even though not explicitly stated in the Creed, Marshall also stands firmly against prejudice based on sexual preference, intolerance of different religious beliefs, sexual assault, and bullying and other forms of intimidation. We are an open community, where all are welcome and we empathize our commonalities. We understand diversity is a quality that adds richness and value to our decision-making and to our lives in general.

In a world and political environment that seem more and more characterized by intolerance, self-indulgence and other actions that tilt more toward incivility than civility, Marshall and Huntington are seizing the opportunity to stand together to promote many of the ideals stated in the Creed. By promoting behavior that displays respect and personal integrity - as well as institutional integrity - we show by our actions what we truly value.

Marshall is committed to working with Huntington and the entire region to improve the well-being of our fellow citizens. We will do this by educating our students not only in their academic pursuits but also by teaching them about civic responsibility and about living a life of integrity. We are, in fact, preparing our students to go on to be responsible citizens of the world.

Since I came to Marshall in January, I have seen countless examples of our students, faculty, and staff reaching out in the spirit of service, concern and plain old brotherly love to make things better for our communities. Recent examples I have seen first-hand are the Empty Bowls project for the local food banks, the fundraising effort for the CONTACT Rape Crisis Center, the redistricting proposal for police patrol areas by a Marshall mathematics class, the Marshall Medical Outreach project to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, and of course, just in the last week or so, the flood relief efforts.

At Marshall, we pride ourselves in understanding that being an educated person is more than just possessing knowledge, facts, and abilities. It is also about knowing how to live a meaningful life, as is reflected in our Creed. We need to continue to show by example that we are indeed our brothers' - and sisters' - keepers.

Jerome A. "Jerry" Gilbert, Ph.D., is the 37th president of Marshall University. He took office in January 2016.

