

# Membership in the Bar is a Privilege Burdened with Conditions



By Robert A. Kutcher

Chief Justice Warren Burger stated those words almost 35 years ago, and they hold true today. Our license to practice comes with obligations, foremost of which is professionalism. Over the past six months, I've had the opportunity to travel around the state and attend multiple local and specialty bar functions. I appreciate the hospitality shown to me by everyone. These Bar meetings are professionalism at its best.

One of the most enjoyable experiences I have had as Bar president was to attend and speak at the swearing in of the 312 new members of our Bar. Those of us who have been practicing for a few decades forget the enthusiasm and excitement of taking the oath. These new lawyers have virtually their entire future in front of them. They are our future. For those new lawyers who don't have a mentor, I urge you to look into our Mentoring Program. Practicing law can be a challenge, and we want to help.

In the continuum of time, it was only the week before that I attended the Red Mass and the memorial service held at the Supreme Court where I heard those lawyers who preceded us being honored and remembered. Especially moving was the special tribute paid to our late Chief Justice Pascal F. Calogero, Jr. (*Read the eulogy beginning on page 264.*)

Similar events took place around our state. Court opening or memorial ceremonies were held in Lake Charles, Shreveport, Covington and Monroe. While the ceremonies vary slightly, their fundamental messages and experiences are the same. We honor those on whose shoulders we stand and welcome those new lawyers who will stand on our shoul-

ders. The world is changing, but it is up to each of us to honor those who preceded us and help those who will succeed us.

Giving back is important. In October, we held our annual Lawyers in Libraries program. I am pleased to report that our fellow members gave their time to volunteer at 139 separate events in every parish that issued an invitation. All of these lawyer volunteers should be applauded. They appreciate that they are in a position to help others. All of us should do so. By volunteering, they each made someone's life easier. (*Read more about the Lawyers in Libraries events beginning on page 254.*)

In addition to Lawyers in Libraries, the Bar has been active in other areas. Our Community Action Committee expanded its Secret Santa Project and is planning a project to collect personal items for female prisoners. Our annual Conclave on Diversity will be in March, and our Committee on the Profession has had programs in all four Louisiana law schools. Our attorney volunteers have been busy helping our fellow members and the community. I encourage everyone to do likewise.

Recently, the judges of the Eastern District of Louisiana held a day-long program for practicing lawyers. It was remarkably successful, not just from a substantive point of view but from the ability of judges and lawyers to interact professionally and personally. Events such as these foster the camaraderie that we can lose in today's demand society.

We each have our practices but, when it comes to guarding our judicial system, we aren't plaintiff lawyers, we aren't defense lawyers, we aren't business lawyers or transactional lawyers.

It doesn't matter on what side of the

V you are. We should all remember that our adversaries are not our enemies. The judge is not our enemy. The judiciary is the foundation of the system upon which the law sits. Judges can't protect themselves from unwarranted attacks. The very nature of judging dictates that half the litigants will be unhappy. It is up to us to safeguard the integrity of the judicial system and honor the rule of law.

It is very easy these days to conduct business by email and text. Unfortunately, this absence of personal interaction also creates keyboard bullies who would never behave as rudely in a phone call or face-to-face meeting. Personal relationships are important. Sometimes just picking up the phone works. It is important to remember that we all live in small towns, and all any of us have to sell is our reputation. Guard it carefully. Honor your obligations, show up on time, and remember that you're not the most important person in the room.

It seems that, today, it is very difficult for people to disagree without being disagreeable. It is up to all of us to not only uphold the rule of law but also to set the example of being civil and courteous while doing so. Chief Justice Burger once noted that everyone involved in the judicial process owes a duty of courtesy to each other. On behalf of the Court, he stated, "[t]he license granted by the court requires members of the bar to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with the role of courts in the administration of Justice." *In Re Snyder*, 472 U.S. 634, 644-645 (1985).

For the benefit of society, we should all dedicate ourselves to the rule of law, not just for our profession but for our communities as well.