

State Supreme Court justice inspires WSU students

Mary Fairhurst tells packed audience to believe in miracles

By Tom Hager

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Students packed a room in Washington State University's Bryan Hall for a session with state Supreme Court Chief Justice Mary Fairhurst, but they got much more than they anticipated Friday.

Fairhurst gave a motivational speech at the end of her 70-minute session, asking



Fairhurst

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the students what they would do if they knew that they couldn't fail. She testified to the obstacles in her own life, as she defeated cancer twice. Her second battle was against Stage 4 colon cancer, when she was given two years to live. Now she is healthy once again, and is encouraging students to believe in miracles.

"Since I had the miracle — 'no evidence of disease' depending on your perspective — I try to include it in all my speeches," Fairhurst said. "That's one of the reasons why I'm still here, to instill hope and faith, belief, that we can have impacts, and we can make a difference."

On Thursday, she was elected as 56th chief justice of the Washington state Supreme Court by her fellow justices.

Fairhurst said she was especially grateful for the support of longtime Chief Justice Barbara Madsen, who nominated her for the position.

"She has been a tremendous leader, and I will rely on her guidance as I assume this awesome responsibility," said Fairhurst. "I have always had a passion for educating the public about the judicial branch."

Fairhurst, who was raised Catholic, has had to balance that faith while

making some of the most important decisions of her career.

Asked Friday about the proudest decision she has made, she recalled her dissent in the 2004 *Andersen v. King County* case, which ruled that the state's 1998 Defense of Marriage Act defining marriage between a man and woman was legal. The state eventually enacted same-sex marriage in

2012, but Fairhurst was blazing the trail years earlier with her dissent in the 2004 case.

"Even in the Catholic faith there is such a wide spectrum of where people are very strong and completely in step with the Vatican and some are much broader," Fairhurst said. "(The dissent) would have been against the Catholic teachings and wasn't sure whether I

would still get communion or in some places you would be excommunicated. I wasn't, but there was some question about it."

Fairhurst, who was elected to the court in 2002, earned both her undergraduate and law degrees from Gonzaga University.

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