What an honor that we gather to celebrate the life of such a fine man.

I have a question for you. Has anyone in this chapel ever met a man more optimistic or encouraging than Thad Seymour?
Has anyone in this chapel met someone who could be more cheerful and stern...at the same time?

Does anyone in this chapel know a couple as well matched, mutually supportive, or deeply caring as Thad and Polly?

Has anyone ever known a man who could weather hardship and difficulty without the slightest diminution of his spirit?

In the recent video by the Winter Park Health Foundation, Thad simply says, in a manner both profound and earnest and so deeply characteristic: “I am grateful for everything.”

We are here to celebrate that man and to count our blessings for having known him. In this I am sure I am joined by two former presidents of Rollins College in attendance today, Dr. Rita Bornstein and Dr. Lewis Duncan.
I know we are grateful for having shared this time and space with such a beautiful soul.

President Thaddeus Seymour’s academic pedigree comported with the best: undergraduate study at Princeton University and the University of California at Berkeley, master’s and doctoral degrees in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

At the age of 30, he was tapped to move from teaching at Dartmouth College to becoming its Dean of the College. Among his notable successes at Dartmouth was coaching the rowing team to victory in the Dad Vail Regatta in his first year—beating Rollins by three inches.

At the advanced age of 40, he stepped into his first college presidency. His nine years at Wabash College, in Crawfordsville, Indiana, left a deep impression on the students who passed through the campus. From the “Sons of Wabash,” a group of 40 alumni who continue to get together regularly, come these thoughts: “In a period of generational estrangement, he represented a father
figure—Dad Thad. . . . He made us all better.” “And having now spent four decades contemplating the impact of the years that we shared with the Seymours at Wabash, we have come to realize that the joy we recognize as Wabash was largely the manifestation of [their] presence.”

In 1978, he came to Rollins, to leave a similarly deep impression on our history. He recommitted the College to its foundation in the liberal arts, winning grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities for writing and the classics, and from the Olin Foundation for a new library. The College introduced the first Master of Liberal Studies degree in the state of Florida. *Time* magazine named Rollins one of its nine “nifty” colleges.

One of the things that Thad and I share, more than simply a love for this fine college, is a belief that it can be better than it is. As President of Rollins, Thad called us to our core mission, being the rigorous study of the liberal arts and sciences. Thad inherited a college that had a lot of problems to solve. He went about those tasks without ever losing focus on the centrality of the liberal arts mission.
But Thad was also about fun: What better way to break in the new Alfond Stadium at Harper-Shepherd Field than an exhibition game with the World Champion Pittsburgh Pirates? Or to celebrate the rededication of the College’s oldest building, Pinehurst Cottage, by portraying Edward Payson Hooker, Rollins’ first president, in period dress—complete with top hat and moustache?

Or, of course, Thad’s love of magic and delight in performing. Speaking from experience, I know that college presidents need some magic now and then, always for good, of course, though there are days when some of the Dark Arts would come in handy.

And, let us not forget, Thad brought back Fox Day. I think I am grateful for that? But really, Fox Day embodies so much we love about Thad: a sense of the importance of traditions; a belief that playfulness and wholesome fun are also what both life and college are about; and an ability to combine seriousness of purpose without taking ourselves too seriously.
Perhaps most memorable was Thad’s fondness for random acts of kindness. When he saw an unsuspecting member of the Rollins community perform a good deed—something as simple as picking up a piece of trash from the sidewalk, he would surprise them with a silver dollar.

I have in my hand here an authentic Thad Seymour Silver Dollar. It is an Eisenhower silver dollar from 1978. If one didn’t know better, one would think it might be Thad himself.

The coin was a reward for selfless service, just as Thad and Polly invested their selfless service in our community; Thad helping to found a Habitat for Humanity chapter here and Polly starting the Winter Park Public Library’s New Leaf Bookstore.

Speaking personally, Thad and Polly have been nothing but generous and steadfast supporters of Peg’s and my work since the moment we joined this community.
What you might not know is that The College of Wooster, where I served as President before coming to Rollins, is in the same fiercely competitive athletic league as Wabash. We would often trade banter. I remember once when I came over to Thad and Polly’s to watch a live stream basketball game between Wooster and Wabash. It was a great contest; Wabash won. In a way quintessentially Thad, I think he actually felt a little sorry for me, and went on about how good the Wooster team was.

One of the things I most deeply appreciate about the ethos of Rollins College is our unabashed belief that kindness matters. For me, as for so many, Rollins has two shining beacons of this ethos, this belief in kindness: Thad Seymour and Fred Rogers.

To quote again our dear friend: I am grateful for everything...but I am especially grateful for Thad.
I close with two very important announcements.

Every year during the week in which we honor the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Rollins has an annual Day of Service. The service project involves students, faculty, staff, alumni, Upward Bound students and community members. Service sites have included Boys & Girls Clubs, the Wells-Built Museum and the Winter Park Day Nursery. The day concludes with a community picnic on campus.

From this point forward, this shall be called the *Thad & Polly Seymour Day of Service*.

Second, I am sure you have taken notice as our forthcoming Lakeside Neighborhood of student residences, and outdoor and indoor community spaces, rise out of the ground. This project will be central to campus as it is central to our mission. It will house 500 students, but more importantly, its design and program will underscore our
commitment to student well-being, mental health, and recreation.

It will be comprised of three buildings. I am pleased to announce a most fitting tribute: one of them shall bear the name Thaddeus Seymour Hall, so that his name shall be spoken by scores of students on a daily basis for decades to come, recalling his legacy of leadership at Rollins.

Thank you.