Dear Rice students, faculty and staff:

We expect spring break to be a joyful time for our students: joyful as they depart for vacation or visits with their families, and joyful as they return to the campus to their friends and studies. But this year we experienced a series of events in quick and almost unprecedented succession that brought home to us the fragility of life and the importance of every member of our university community. Even as we mourned the loss of two students shortly before spring break, we received the news that another student, Reny Jose, has been missing since last Monday night from a house he was renting with friends in Panama City Beach, Fla. Local authorities have launched a major search with no success thus far. While we pray that he will be found safe, and are doing everything we can to assist the Florida police authorities, we are very concerned about him.

This followed on the heels of the news that junior James Ragan lost his courageous battle with cancer, and a week later the accidental death of Emma Bravo. While death is something we all face, we do not expect the young people who we bring to our campus full of so much promise to be among those lost. In a small community like Rice, each loss spreads with ripples across our campus. Losing any member of our community is heartbreaking, but to lose two in such a short period of time, with deep concern about a third, is something that shakes us to our very core.

For many, this will be magnified by the fact that we also suffered the loss of two students last summer: Vivian Guan in a traffic accident and Alex Zhou to cancer. We are fortunate in that it is not typical for us to lose even one or two students in a year; to have four within a year and deep concern about the well-being of a fifth is unfathomable.

For those of you who knew Emma and James, let me offer my deepest condolences; for those who are praying for Reny's safe return, we share your concern and are here to support you. At times like this, we are called upon to live up to our most cherished values and sense of our culture, and to be there for each other and do what we can to offer comfort and support. Please look out for each other, and if you or someone you know needs additional help, please take advantage of the university's counseling services. Students can contact the Rice Counseling Center at any time at 713-348-4867. Employees can get help from the Rice Employee Assistance Program at 713-500-3327.

Our hearts go out to the families of these students, to their fellow students in their respective residential colleges and to their teachers, friends and classmates, who will feel the losses and fear most deeply.

When tragedy strikes this hard, there are no easy answers or solutions. But we are a caring community and we must help each other through this grief and uncertainty.

I hope we can report soon that Reny has been found and is safe. But let us honor these three students and two more we lost last summer with a moment of silence at noon on Monday, wherever you may be. The chapel bells will ring first for Reny, as we pray for his safe return. This will be followed by four rings for each of the four students we have lost this year, in honor and remembrance of what they brought to our university.

Each student, each teacher, each employee at Rice is a treasured member of our community. Let us take care of each other, and provide joy in companionship when we can, and solace in times such as these.

With sorry and sympathy,

President David Leebron