

Opening Convocation
Fall 2015
Rose Hills Auditorium

Good morning. It is my pleasure to officially open the 2015-2016 academic year with all of the promise it holds for each of us individually and as a community. Today the focus of our Convocation is an exploration of Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, "Praise be to you" a title that springs from the words of St. Francis of Assisi's well-known and beloved canticle.

Our keynote speaker, Fr. John Coleman, and our faculty panel will discuss Pope Francis' moving and challenging Encyclical and will help us reflect in greater depth on its relationship to us and to our University. In *Laudato Si*, the Pope urgently appeals "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet," thus the title of today's convocation, "Shaping the Future." He states that "we need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."ⁱ This powerful and refreshingly direct Encyclical calls each of us to participate fully in shaping the future of our planet while challenging us to find complex solutions to this critical issue of our time.

Now, as important as this Encyclical is to our world, you might ask why we chose this theme of *Shaping the Future* as the theme of this year's Opening Convocation? One could argue that the fact that the Pope has provided us this eloquent and assertive treatise that respects science as critical to the understanding of the natural and spiritual world explains our choice. Or perhaps his affirmation of the importance of research, inquiry, academic freedom, education AND social and economic justice is reason enough. But there are two additional and intrinsically connected reasons that compel us to think about our role in shaping the future of our planet. First: the mission of our University charges us to provide students "a superior education enhanced by an emphasis on building leadership skills and fostering a spirit to serve others." And we state openly that "Our measure of success is graduates who are committed to using their knowledge and skills to better themselves, their environments and the world." Our mission is irrevocably linked to the future of our planet. And our mission as we know comes from a deeply abiding source, and that is our second reason, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Since their founding in 1650 and well past their establishment of Mount Saint Mary's in 1925, the CSJs have lived fully their commitment to responding to the needs of the times. And it will be of no surprise to anyone in this assembly

that their concern for our fragile earth and its destructive impact on our most vulnerable sisters and brothers has been at the center of their work for decades. Their more recent 2013 Calls to Action articulated much of what is at the center of today's discussion. They challenged themselves and us to participate in building a just Earth community recognizing the interdependence of humanity and nature.

Today we celebrate the opening of the academic year but we also celebrate a very important anniversary. 90 years ago, under the leadership of Mother Margaret Mary Brady, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet founded this University and today, we gather as a community to recommit to our University's mission and to follow the call of the Sisters of St. Joseph to act for justice, to prepare ethical, strong, and wise leaders, and to participate in the healing of our planet.

Our Strategic Plan continues to provide us the path toward this and I am so proud of and grateful for the progress we have made over these past two years. Heather Brown will update us on this progress in a few minutes but let me point to several ways in which we are moving forward.

We remain committed to preparing students as 21st century global citizens through the infusion of the liberal arts across all academic programs and the globalization of the curriculum and our campuses. To this end, our faculty continue their critical work on the reimagining of the General Studies Curriculum (a hefty endeavor to be sure) with plans to implement a revised program next fall. The Center for Global Initiatives has opened and with the leadership of our new director, Dr. Eric Apfelstadt, we will provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff to engage more deeply in the global community, both locally and internationally. As we seek to bring the world to our students and to send our students out beyond our borders, we have set an ambitious goal as part of our global vision. We want to provide the opportunity for all interested students to travel abroad for learning opportunities in other countries, and we have set a bold goal that at least 50% of our traditional undergraduate students have that opportunity by the year 2025. To that end, I am happy to announce that we have received a grant that will move us toward this goal. Mount Trustee Stephen Page and the Page Family Foundation have given the Mount a five-year, \$250,000 challenge grant that will support our ability to provide opportunities for students to engage in the global community, regardless of their financial restrictions. We are very grateful to Steve Page and his family for this lead challenge gift.

We continue to move our wellness agenda forward through expanded programming focused on increased physical fitness, emotional well-being, physical safety, sound nutrition and the construction of the Wellness Pavilion on our Chalon campus. The Pavilion is in design phase and will provide space for the educational, recreational, physical, emotional and spiritual health and well-being of our community. You will be hearing much more about the Pavilion and the healthy living movement over the coming year but I am happy to update you on our fundraising results thus far. To date, we have raised over \$18M of the \$35M we are seeking to make this project a reality.

We continue to expand access to students seeking a Mount education through the creation of new programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels, and through flexible scheduling of courses for our WEC through an expanded class schedule, hybrid courses and online opportunities. This fall marks the opening of our new MS in Health Policy and Management and the launching of an online baccalaureate program in Criminology as well as an online AA program in computer science; our business, sociology, and psychology faculty are preparing online programs for our nontraditional students that will be reviewed this semester as well. I know we have much discussion ahead of us about how we do online teaching and learning in a way that reflects the values and the excellence

that are at the heart of this institution. I look forward to those discussions as we prepare for the coming year and the coming decades.

As part of our commitment to expanding access, we have increased financial assistance across our undergraduate, WEC, and graduate programs. Growing our scholarship program is a critical component of our comprehensive fundraising campaign and it is my pleasure to announce that we have already raised close to \$5M in new scholarship support over the past year. Perhaps even more impressive, I can share unofficially that as of yesterday, we have exceeded the Ann Peppers two-year \$500,000 challenge grant that I announced in April. And instead of taking two years, we raised the whole thing in only 5 months.

As we focus on our planet, we here in California are very focused on changing the way we live in a time of great drought. Please know that the Mount is doing its part. I am happy to report several initiatives in place or in process that will impact our consumption of precious water. We have installed new irrigation controllers that measure the soil to determine how much watering is necessary and thereby prevent overwatering. We have converted all sprinkler heads to a high-efficiency version that reduce run-off and evaporation. And this fall, we will convert ½ acre (22,000 square feet) of grass and high-volume water-use planter

areas to drought-tolerant planter beds with minimal drip irrigation systems. The total savings of these initiatives is over 1,000,000 gallons of water per year.

As I wrote to you this summer, I have received the Executive Report from our campus climate assessment and I look forward to discussing the report with you. The report helps us identify what is working well but it also brings to light the fact that we do not all experience Mount Saint Mary's in the same way. Some of us feel very at home while others of us do not feel fully valued. We have work to do – and this work is one of my highest priorities this year. In addition to sharing the written report with you, I will convene several meetings on both campuses to go over the report and to provide space and time for discussions of our way forward. Please keep an eye out for announcements of these forums in mid-September and please join these important discussions about making this community a place where all feel valued, appreciated and supported.

And now perhaps most fitting as we celebrate 90 {Unstoppable} years, this year marks the opening of the CSJ Institute. I want to thank the incredible advisory group of Mount faculty and staff and members of the extended CSJ community who came together and crafted the following vision statement for our institute:

Rooted in the rich history and charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, the Institute advances the CSJ commitment to serve all persons without distinction, to respond to the needs of the times, and to prepare fearless visionaries for a just future.

We will begin the search for a director of the Institute immediately and I am so grateful that we have raised the funds needed to get this up and going. I am also happy to announce that we will sponsor the first of many pilgrimages to Le Puy, France this spring. The program, *In the Footsteps of the Founders*, will be open to faculty, staff, trustees, regents, alums and Sisters of St. Joseph.

It seems appropriate to end now with this focus on our founders. I thank you all for being here today. Thank you for helping us be the University we are called to be. And as I close, I ask that we use this moment to offer our deepest thanks to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. And so, would all of the Sisters of St. Joseph who are here with us today please stand so that we can express our gratitude?

ⁱ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* (June 2015), 14.