

Opening Convocation  
Fall 2016  
Rose Hills Auditorium  
Doheny Campus

Welcome to the 2016-2017 academic year! It is good to be together again! A special welcome to the new members of our community! We look forward to meeting all new faculty and staff later in our program.

There is much good news to share about our strong enrollment and the quality of the students who will grace our classrooms and offices in the coming year; we have made great strides in completing or making significant progress on almost all of the 81 strategic initiatives established for the first three years of the Strategic Plan and I look forward to sharing with you the thoughtful objectives put forth by this community for the final two years of the plan. Our faculty will be completing the academic goals for the coming two years and when we have those, we will share the full document with the community. Fundraising continues to be strong with over \$51M raised in cash, pledges and planned gifts – and all of this in under two years. My thanks to all who have contributed to bringing these resources to our University! Our faculty envisioned and moved forward a new General Studies program, aptly entitled LACE in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the first dimension of that program, the first year seminar, launches this fall. This University is deeply grateful for the vision, the commitment and the stamina it took and will take to create the full LACE program. We could spend much time this morning talking about these achievements for they are indeed noteworthy, but I am going to shift gears. We have things we need to discuss.

As the summer months passed with pictures on Facebook and Instagram of graduations, family reunions, weddings, and interesting trips, I know we were also all affected by the violence that communities across our nation and across the globe experienced. I had thought of listing the cities across our country that witnessed the death of black men, police officers, members of the gay community but the list seems to get longer and longer as violence continues to erupt in our cities and towns; I thought of referencing the terror attacks in countries like France, Germany, and Afghanistan but the number of incidents and countries affected seems to multiply on a weekly basis. I thought I might speak to the hateful rhetoric that has become part of our political

speech, but have felt so distressed by the frequency of what once seemed an anomaly that I have found myself often breathless, weighed down, fearful. I, like you, find myself asking, “How do we right these incredible wrongs? How do I, how do we, comfort those communities most affected by the violence and vitriol that has become such a part of our lives? How do we as a university respond to these times? To our students? To each other?”

And as I reflect, pray, meditate and ponder, I have been gifted with the only answer that makes any sense to me in this chaotic noise: “Unifying Love.” I, we, are gifted by the presence and the witness of our founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph, who do not see despair, hopelessness, hatred or fear as viable paths. We are gifted by the example of six women who came together in a small city in France in 1650, who chose to live among the people they would serve, who asked the people what they needed and then went about the work of justice and healing. These early Sisters of St. Joseph sought to bring those in the margins, those most vulnerable, those in greatest danger, to the center. Their first ministry was to teach lacemaking to women who had been prostituted as a means of survival for they knew that teaching this trade, this art, would empower these women, would lead them from victimhood to independence. They understood that learning leads to transformation, to dignity, to possibility. And in 1925, the CSJs of Los Angeles responded to the needs of those times and opened a college for women because they knew that access to a high quality education would empower women and transform their lives. Across their history, the CSJs commit themselves to the work that needs doing. And so must we.

And make no mistake, when the Sisters of St. Joseph talk about caring for the “Dear Neighbor,” that is not a gentle statement. It reminds me more of Jesus’ provocative words in Luke’s Gospel: “I have come to set the world on fire and how I wish it were already blazing.” Our founders, the sisters from 1650 forward, right to this very day, call us forward to reject despair and get to the work of real justice.

We chose this theme for today’s convocation because **Now is the time**. It is the time to do our part in creating a just world where all are valued and supported. **Now is the time. This is the place.**

We are of the Sisters of St. Joseph. They are the DNA of this University and they have gifted us with their passion and their commitment that “all may be one.” Each of us is marked by

this charism; each of is graced by this conviction. Now is the time. Now is the time to ensure that we live and act in real community with each other. Now is the time to ensure that we care for each and every student who entrusts us with her dreams. Now is the time to prepare our students to be the strong, resilient and formidable leaders this world needs. Now is the time for us to look closely **at** each other and to listen closely **to** each other to understand more fully that we may not all experience our community in the same way; we need to ensure that all are at the table and that all are empowered to speak. We must neither give into despair nor inoculate ourselves against the horror of the violence in cities across the world; we need to listen to the pain many communities are feeling; we need to be to open to the fear and frustration of the black community, the gay community, the Muslim community, our undocumented sisters and brothers. We need to support each other. We need to care for each other. Now is the time for us to truly move forward to learn what it means to be in community, to model what it means to be a true community and to prepare our students to become leaders that will be satisfied with nothing less.

As I think of the possibilities and the responsibilities of the year ahead, both at our universities and in our communities, the wisdom of a statement attributed to the Hopi Tribe Elders continues to center me. Perhaps it will be helpful to you as well. The Hopi Elders state:

**"You have been telling people that this is the eleventh hour.  
Now you must go back and tell people that this is the hour!  
And there are things to be considered:  
Where are you living?  
What are you doing?  
What are your relationships?  
Are you in right relation?  
Where is your water?  
Know your Garden.  
It is time to speak your truth.  
Create your community.  
Be good to yourself.  
And not look outside of yourself for a leader.  
This could be a good time!  
There is a river flowing very fast.  
It is so great and fast that there are those who will be afraid.  
They will hold on to the shore.  
They will feel that they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.  
Know that the river has its destination.  
The elders say that we must let go of the shore,  
push off into the middle of the river,**

**keep our eyes open,  
 and our heads above the water.  
 See who is in there with you and celebrate.  
 At this time we are to take nothing personally,  
 least of all, ourselves.  
 For the moment that we do,  
 our spiritual growth comes to a halt.  
 The time of the lone wolf is over.  
 Gather yourselves!  
 Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary.  
 All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.  
 We are the ones that we have been waiting for."**

*- The Elders, Oraibi, Arizona Hopi Nation*

There is much we have to discuss - but today we will focus on two of our priorities that address issues of incredible import to our world and to the Mount community: Health and Wellness being one; Diversity and Inclusion being the other. Now interestingly, these two are intrinsically linked in our society. Good health and wellness is an issue inherently tied to social and economic justice. But for our conversation today, we will separate the two as we think about how to first ensure the health and wellbeing of our students, and also of our fuller community.

In the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph, we must be committed to respond to the needs of the time. Now we know that today, one out of two Americans is affected with a chronic health condition, most of which are preventable, and college campuses are not immune to these health issues. We know from our students that many of them do not consider themselves physically healthy. In fact, on a national survey of first year students, only one third of our students rate themselves as physically healthy. That means that 2 out of 3 of our own students tell us as they walk on our campuses that they do not feel healthy.

We also have read the research that demonstrates that health, energy, and resilience are deeply intertwined with strong academic performance (obviously our top priority) and successful leadership (a central part of our mission). Mount Saint Mary's graduates need to be academically prepared and they will need to be healthy to take on the leadership roles our world needs right now, for these times are calling for strong, confident and resilient leaders.

That is why we are launching a comprehensive Wellness Movement on both of our campuses that will provide resources, experts and inspiration to help our community become, and remain, healthier. I am excited by the possibilities ahead of us, and I assure you that this movement will be accessible, inclusive and actually fun.

To properly launch and sustain the initial phase of our Wellness Movement, we need an internal champion who can dedicate time to this initiative. I am delighted that Dr. Bryant Adibe, Assistant Professor in Physical Therapy, has been appointed as Mount Saint Mary's first Chief Wellness Officer. By releasing him from part of his current teaching and administrative responsibilities in physical therapy, he will be able to focus on the Wellness Movement for the next two years. During that time, Bryant will work with faculty, staff, students and external advisors to conduct a needs assessment and to develop, measure, and coordinate a comprehensive wellness program at Mount Saint Mary's.

Bryant received his medical doctorate from the University of Florida, and completed clinical clerkships in Emergency Medicine at Harvard Medical School's Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Stanford University Medical Center. He completed graduate coursework in Evidence-Based Healthcare and Research Methodology at Oxford University. Prior to joining the Mount, he served in the Obama Administration as a Fellow in Medical Education within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Please join me in a warm welcome for our Chief Wellness Officer, Dr. Bryant Adibe.

(Dr. Bryant Adibe remarks)

I ask now that we turn our focus to a second priority for this academic year: Diversity and Inclusion. You will remember that our university engaged in a campus climate assessment two years ago, a year-long quantitative and qualitative study of how we as faculty, staff and students experience community at Mount Saint Mary's. Last fall, we learned that we possess many strengths as a community. There was a shared conviction that we truly care about each other; we are kind to each other; that our faculty and staff are fully dedicated to the success and wellbeing of our students; that we empower women to be strong leaders and that we appreciate the rich diversity that defines our community. And we learned, ironically, that in our efforts to be kind,

we often avoid topics that matter around race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity. We learned as well that we hunger for the skills to engage in these conversations. We also acknowledged that we are still grappling with the complexity of two campuses and how they are perceived by members of our community and we articulated a desire for clearer and more effective means of addressing complaints and resolving our differences. Our consultants from Beyond Diversity provided *six* recommendations in their report, which remains available on our Portal and for those who have not had the opportunity to read the full report, I ask you to do so.

As a first step in addressing these recommendations and engaging the community in the work to which we aspire, I convened a Task Force of faculty and staff members who were identified by this community as possessing the needed expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion work. I am very grateful to the sixteen women and men who responded to this community invitation to come together and begin to plan how we would address the six recommendations. The group began its work in earnest in January, only seven months ago. We grappled with what could be done quickly and what needed time and deeper consideration. I so appreciate the thoughtful deliberation of this body for they were able to set short term goals – like creating opportunities for discussions around issues of race and ethnicity and longer term goals of envisioning an infrastructure that will better serve the needs of our university. I would like to ask that all members of the Task Force present stand and receive the thanks of this community. I also want to thank all of you who engaged in the Task Force’s first program featuring Lawrence Ross as well as our panel on immigration and how it has shaped the political narratives of the presidential campaign.

Finally, I thank the Task Force for their wisdom in recommending the creation of a position to help us stay focused on building a fully inclusive community. And to this end, it is my pleasure to introduce our new and first Associate VP for Diversity and Inclusion, Bernadette Robert.