

Opening Convocation
Doheny
August 17, 2017

Good morning and welcome to the 2017-2018 academic year. It is good to see you all back again and it is with particular pleasure that we welcome those who are new to our community. We look forward to meeting you all later on this morning. I hope you all had some rest over the past months and you come back to us renewed and excited about the possibilities of the new year.

Each year I have this opportunity to present a brief State of the University – and it is once again my privilege to affirm that the State of the University is strong. We finished last year with a healthy bottom line that allowed us to ameliorate numerous classrooms and conduct a significant and, as we all will agree, much needed wireless upgrade on both campuses. Since we were last together, we finished our renovations of the Amat House at 649 West Adams and I understand our Business and Psychology Departments are fully moved in and feeling at home in their new space. I hope you will take a moment to visit the building as we complete some finishing touches. We have also completed the renovation of the third floor of the Doheny Mansion, which will house the CSJ Institute, the Center for the Advancement of Women, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Title IX, Institutional Research, Institutional Advancement, VP for Strategic Initiatives and the Da Camera Society. We will be hosting an open house in October so stay tuned.

Enrollment is looking strong, with our traditional undergraduate, WEC, online and graduate populations tracking well in line with our budget projections. At this time, we have reached 100% occupancy in our residence halls, which is very good news. Our fundraising continues to go well. To date, we have raised \$66.8M in total (cash, pledges and fund for the future). \$23.2M of this total has been raised toward the \$35M goal for the Wellness Pavilion. Given this level of success, our Board of Trustees approved a fundraising goal of \$100M for the Move Mountains comprehensive fundraising campaign at our May Board meeting. A first in Mount history!

As you are aware, we are beginning the search process for our next Vice President of Administration and Finance. Chris McAlary, who served this institution well for over 14 years, transitioned out of his position at the close of our fiscal year. We have launched a national search with the assistance of the Turner Group, a search firm here in California, that has been hard at work this summer building a pool of strong candidates. In the coming week, I will establish a search committee that will begin reviewing applications in the next month. We hope to conduct campus interviews of our finalists at the end of September, giving all community members the opportunity to provide feedback to the Search Committee and to me. Our goal is to name the new VP in October. My thanks to Bob Perrins, Stephanie Cubba, Patricia Grajeda, Rick Torkelson, Dana Lopez, Andrew Loccissano, and Gerardo Palma for their assistance in ensuring a smooth transition over the course of this summer. They have been generous with their time and their expertise to keep things running smoothly and on schedule.

This year marks the final year of our five-year Strategic Plan, *Innovation for Excellence, Transforming Lives*, and we are on track to complete almost all of our strategic objectives supporting our three goals: Advancing Students, Advancing Community, and Advancing Mission and Identity. This is impressive as the plan, with over 100 objectives, was ambitious and aspirational! Thus the title of our Opening Convocation today – Fulfilling Aspirations. Through the work of this community, we have made incredible progress on our goals. Today’s Convocation provides us the opportunity to explore in greater detail the work we have accomplished in three particular areas: Our efforts to deeply and intentionally infuse the liberal arts across all academic programs through the reimagined core curriculum, LACE; our commitment to the health and wellness of the Mount community through our newly launched Wellness Movement; and the development and implementation of a strategic vision and plan to truly enhance equity and inclusion in our community. I am grateful to our speakers today, Bryant Adibe, Bernie Robert, Robin Bishop, Brandon Roberson, Elizabeth Sturgeon and Jen Chotiner, for their leadership on these key initiatives and their gracious willingness to speak today.

We are not done however – we have several initiatives before us that need further attention, deeper deliberation and broader input. Let me name just two projects that will continue through the fall. Last year we began critical work on the drafting of an admissions policy on transgender students in the context of a women’s college and sought a clearer understanding of the needs of transgender students in our

community. This year we will finalize a policy and we will ensure an infrastructure of support for trans students here at the Mount. We also began an exploration of perceived and real differences in the traditional undergraduate experience at Doheny and we learned much about our students' aspirations for a baccalaureate degree, whether they study at Doheny or Chalon. The taskforce led by Michele Starkey and Michelle French, has recommended further study of these issues; these discussions will be front and center this year. As we bring our five-year plan to closure, we will begin the process of crafting our next strategic plan, a process that will begin in the fall and take us into next year. We will take our time in our planning to ensure we include all voices and the evolving needs of our community.

This year, we continued the new tradition of a campus read with our faculty's selection of Angela Davis' book, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*. When I read this book in June, I found it powerful and thought-provoking and thought it would spur substantive discussion about racism, feminism, prison reform and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. I knew we might have differing views but hoped that this collection of essays would create opportunities for meaty conversation. This week, when I went back to Davis' essays, I had a different mindset. I found myself seeking answers to painful questions that rise out of recent events in our country. This past weekend's outpouring of hatred and violence in Charlottesville has chilled me, as I am sure it has you. The reenactment we witnessed of reprehensible acts and speech – and the suggestion that we might debate whether such acts and attitudes are

anything but unacceptable and evil continue to shake me. Angela Davis' words were illuminating as I continue to grapple with this. She reminds us, particularly those of us who live in great privilege, racism persists. As she says, "The problem is that it is too often assumed that the eradication of the legal apparatus is equivalent to the abolition of racism. But racism persists in a framework that is far more expansive, far vaster than the legal framework.... Racism can be discovered in every major institution... It's not easy to eradicate racism that is so deeply entrenched in the structures of our society... (16-17)" We have to talk, she reminds us again and again, "about systemic change." We have to address "racism in the larger sense (32)." These are not easy concepts. This is not easy work. As we know this takes time and vigilance.

A year ago, I spoke at this very gathering about the abhorrent violence that occurred across the summer of 2016 and in spring 2017 we reflected on the division, anger and hurt in our country and the need for real dialogue across our differences. And here we are still grappling with these questions and issues. In an interview, a reporter asked Angela Davis, "What keeps you going?" Do you think we should remain optimistic about the future?"

Her answer moved me deeply. She said, "Well, I don't think we have any alternative other than remaining optimistic. Optimism is an absolute necessity, even if it's only optimism of the will... and pessimism of the intellect." And then she continued with an even more profound statement, "What has kept me going has been the development of new

modes of community....It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism (49).”

It is in community “that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism.” This community, our University, has to be that kind of reservoir. We are of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet; we are called to care for each other and for our neighbors – all neighbors, without distinction. As a University founded by the CSJs, our purpose is to transform lives through teaching. Everyone in this room is part of this sacred work. Everyone in this room, whatever role we play in this community, is here because we believe that education changes lives, creates hope, and opens possibilities. We believe in the power of a community that comes together with a common and compelling mission. This year you will change lives. You will stir bold dreams. You will empower and inspire our future leaders, and you will do it within a community that cares deeply about her students and about each other. We must be that “reservoir of hope and optimism” for our students and for each other. That is our calling.

Thank you all.

Davis, Angela. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle. Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Ed. Frank Barat, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.