

## **Transforming Lives: It Takes a Community**

**August 16, 2012**

### **Campus Center, Chalon**

What a joy to stand before this august body to formally open the 2012-2013 academic year – a year of important anniversaries: 60 years of nursing, 50 years of serving students at our Doheny campus, 80 years of graduate programs, and 20 years of offering the Weekend College to our community. This is a special year and it is so good to see you all here. Welcome back to faculty and staff who were away this summer. Welcome to the newest members of the community who join us as we open the academic year. Welcome to our new chair of the Board of Trustees, Judith R. McDonald. Please join me in thanking her for taking on this critical leadership role on behalf of the College. Please also join me in acknowledging our Trustees and our Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet who are here with us. Would you all please stand so that we can express our appreciation to you? And a special word of welcome and thanks to all those who have been on our campuses this summer. I know that they will agree with me that although the summer months were very busy, there was a quiet in the air that never feels quite natural. A college community is at its best when it is buzzing with activity – and with the return of our faculty and staff and the anticipation of our students' arrival back on campus, there is an energy that is palpable.

And this is a good thing, for my colleagues, we have important work ahead of us. We will build on the impressive achievements of our last academic year as we prepare to craft the future of this great College. But before we turn the page and move firmly into the future that awaits us, I want to take a few minutes to acknowledge the incredible work of the 2011-12 academic year and to thank the faculty and staff of Mount St. Mary's College for your extraordinary commitment to the College and to our students. As our Convocation theme reminds us: It takes a community. I thank all of you who are here with us this morning, and I also extend my deep thanks to our colleagues who are not able to be with us in this hall, those who are busy preparing for our students' arrival, those who are covering the desks and the phones while we are here, those who are preparing our buildings, our grounds, and our food, those who are transporting us between the campuses, and those who are tending to our safekeeping – I have never seen a community that works harder or cares more deeply. We are planning a full community event for our faculty and staff and families to thank you for the work you do. Mark your calendars for a Fall Harvest Picnic on Sunday, October 14, at our Doheny campus. It will be our chance to come together as colleagues and friends. You all are what make the Mount the intellectual and spiritual oasis that our student experience each time they come through our gates.

Transforming lives: That is what you do. Please know that you have the profound gratitude of your president.

The 2011-2012 academic year has to be one of the fullest years a College should ever experience. We did a lot –and we did it together. Because of the great work of our undergraduate admissions, Weekend College and Graduate Studies, with the support of the faculty, staff and student body, we are expecting over 2700 students on our campuses for fall

classes. Congratulations to all those who worked to bring in and bring back the inspiring students who will be sitting in our classrooms or engaging through their devices. There are certain numbers that are key at every college and university: enrollment figures as I have just cited and, of course, fundraising dollars. I am so proud of our advancement office for their leadership in securing the funds we so dearly need to support our students and our dreams. In fall 2011 we set a two year fundraising goal of \$10 million dollars with a commitment to bring in \$4 million dollars in this new president's first year. It is my pleasure to announce that we cleared that goal and raised a total of \$4.7 million by close of our fiscal year. We are grateful for a strong start toward this year's goal with numerous foundation gifts I shared with you last week. This year I would like to add three other figures to our list of significant numbers: 1,200, 800, and 1,617. Last fall we agreed that Mount St. Mary's College should no longer be a "hidden gem" and we looked for ways to get the word out about who we are and what we do. With over 1,200 people in attendance for a party we threw on March 16 beginning with a convocation at St. Vincent's Church and concluding with an incredible feast on the south lawn of the Mansion, with 800 people in attendance at our public presentation of *The Report on the Status of Women and Girls in CA*<sup>TM</sup>, many of whom had never been to our campuses and some of whom had not even had the good fortune of knowing our name, the word started to get out.... And with the hard work of our PR team, Mount St. Mary's College had 1,617 media hits as compared to a more typical year when we would expect closer to 200. Now we all know that the number of attendees and the number of media hits are not important unto themselves. What matters is the understanding in the greater community of the transformative work we do. And now every time you speak to a neighbor, a business colleague, an associate in the community and hear these words: "I had no idea that the Mount was doing that" please respond with an enthusiastic, "Oh, yes, and that is just the beginning."

For we are doing great things! This past year we created new majors in Global Politics, and Journalism and New Media; we expanded our Weekend College program to include a major in psychology. We developed a Master of Fine Arts program to complement our other offerings at the graduate level and as we speak, our nursing faculty members are designing a curriculum for a post licensure RN to BSN completion program.

Our faculty and staff researched, wrote, published and presented the first ever *Report on the Status of Women and Girls in California*<sup>TM</sup>, establishing MSMC as a prominent resource on community issues concerning the women and girls of our state. We entered a partnership with the Seven Sister Colleges of the Northeast, the State Department, and the other California women's colleges to participate in the Women's Public Service Project (WPSP), launched with the support of Secretary of State Clinton. Wellesley College held the first WPSP institute this past June and Mount St. Mary's College and Scripps will co-host an institute for Latin American women leaders on our two campuses in March 2013. I am proud to announce that Dr. Lia Roberts has agreed to serve as academic director of the institute.

We were awarded prestigious grants from the federal government and from the National Endowment for the Humanities, grants that resulted in our first STEM summer Jumpstart Program and our Women in China Lecture Series that begins later this month. The list of achievements is extensive and demonstrates what we all know: Mount St. Mary's is a vibrant center of intellectual inquiry and energized teaching. But there is more:

This past year, we did something that is not every college would have the vision and courage to do: We forged a unique partnership with the MyCollege Foundation with a commitment to create an intensive online Associate degree program that will one day be offered to thousands of students at a very low cost. I am very proud of this community's willingness to take this new path. I believe fervently that our decision to join this project serves as a testimony to our abiding commitment to making quality education accessible to students from all backgrounds. We all know that higher education is changing before our eyes. And we at the Mount care deeply about access, affordability and quality. As members of the higher education community and educators of traditional and nontraditional learners, we are open to new ways of thinking, seeing and teaching. We want to understand how technology can enhance real learning and we are intrigued at the prospect of using technology to create intellectual communities locally and globally. There are many who say higher education is broken but I don't subscribe to that theory. I don't think it is broken but I think the models that have worked for a long time no longer suffice. As a country, we are failing a large portion of our population and at Mount St. Mary's College we see it as a matter of public trust to work to increase access, address affordability and ensure quality for students. In engaging in this initiative we acted on the courage of our convictions and agreed to do something very different and a little unsettling.

And we did it because it is the right thing to do.

This is a defining moment for Mount St. Mary's. By partnering with MyCollege, we are part of a new model that will help expand higher education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will learn much about how technology can change the way we teach and provide services, how it can help us to better support our students – both those who in front of us in our classrooms and offices and those who are at the other end of one of the many devices that are part and parcel of our lives. We will learn much from this partnership. The technology, entrepreneurial thinking, the training and development – we will be changed by this. And that takes courage and confidence; we have both because we know that by partnering with MyCollege we are doing the right thing for students. We are not replacing our traditional model for we believe that the ideal is the intensive face to face work we do with our students but through this program we expand our ability to reach new students who would not find their way to college if not for this mode of learning. We are transforming lives and that is what this community is all about. This spring the first cohort will begin their studies through this new program and by spring 2016, a potential 7,000 students will have entered our virtual gates and experienced the value of a Mount education. I thank you all in advance for exploring the unknown, for persevering through the discomfort, for working to change higher education and the Mount for the better. I thank you on behalf of the thousands of students who will be changed forever – because we cared enough to take this path.

Last year was a momentous year because of all of these accomplishments but perhaps most importantly because our work led to the articulation of a shared vision for the future. With our faculty leading us, we came together as a community to chart a strategic direction for the future: **We will build a culture of excellence and innovation at Mount St. Mary's College.** These are not just words. They are a call to something quite radical. We are committing to strive for excellence in all we do. We are committing to do our best always. This community

committed itself many years ago to the practice of Remarkable Service. What a lofty and difficult, and yet so worthy a goal! Our commitment to excellence must pervade all we do. I ask that we be painstakingly deliberate in this pursuit. After every class, every event, every lecture, every conversation with students, colleagues, parents and community partners, I challenge us to pose the question: Was that excellence? Could we have done better? And if we fail to meet the mark of true quality, let us resolve to reach higher the next time.

I ask that all of us who work with students resolve to set high standards that call our students to something beyond their wildest expectations of themselves. There is a wonderful story recounted in the work *We're Losing Our Minds, Rethinking American Higher Education* that reminds us of the power of high expectations. The authors Richard Keeling and Richard Hersh tell of a group of 15 students who left their liberal arts college to spend a semester at Oxford University. The president of their home college visited them at Oxford and when he asked how they liked it, they replied enthusiastically that they loved it and that they were learning so much. They talked about the long hours they spent in the library preparing for their tutorials, reading and writing and discussing new ideas. The president was a bit perplexed because he knew these students and he knew that they had spent little or no time in the new and very expensive library on their home campus and so he asked them: "Back home we can barely get you to use our library, much less study and spend so much time reading and writing for your classes, yet here you are saying you are enjoying this experience in which you are doing so much more work. What is going on?"

And our authors tell us: "Two students, almost in unison, responded (in that 'somewhat mocking tone of 'Duh!'), 'This is Oxford, and this is what they expect.'" <sup>1</sup>

We need to ask ourselves what our students would say in response to such a question. Would we hear from each our students in each of our programs, "This is Mount St. Mary's and this is what they expect."

On a survey we sent to our alums as part of our visioning process, one alumna cautioned me with some impatience that excellence is often just a word that sounds good in a vision statement. She implored us to make sure this was not the case for us. I commit to that alumna today and I commit to you that that the word "excellence" at Mount St. Mary's will not be an overused term devoid of meaning: It will be an aspiration that will drive and guide us. Let me turn to the second dimension of our vision: a commitment to innovation. Now, if you think excellence is challenging, think about innovation. By committing to innovation, we reject the notion of the status quo. We embrace the evolution of ideas and practices; indeed we revel in the constant flux that defines the changing world around us. This can be disconcerting. It can be downright terrifying for we agree to move always from a position of comfort and authority to explore the unknown. We are willing to change how we do things, but more important, we are willing to be changed. And that is challenging.

And yet it is exactly what our founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ), have done across time and ministries. Our CSJs boldly pledge in their mission statement "to continue the mission of Jesus, to share in the task of identifying and responding to spiritual and material needs." And they remind us that "the expression of these needs varies with the times,

cultures, and conditions of persons.”<sup>2</sup> We must be ready to respond to new expressions of need in this time of change.

In her moving speech last week to the Leadership Council of Women Religious, Sr. Pat Farrell eloquently spoke of a “very large and comprehensive paradigm shift of our day.” She suggested that the “philosophical underpinnings of the way we’ve organized reality no longer hold. The human family is not served by individualism, patriarchy, a scarcity mentality, or competition...Breaking through in their place are equality, communion, collaboration, synchronicity, expansiveness, abundance, wholeness, mutuality, intuitive knowing, and love.”<sup>3</sup> What a profound call for a new way of thinking, a new way of acting, a new way of living. We are called to be a community that is ever responsive to the needs of our students in the service of humanity.

And we will respond – for that is what this community does on behalf of students.

And so now we turn the page. Our most sacred work this year will be the development of our next Strategic Plan that will allow us to live out this vision. As I announced earlier this summer, this will be the responsibility of the full community. In keeping with our vision, we will use a collaborative process that builds on the work we accomplished together last year through faculty and board retreats, community forums, faculty discussion groups, students meetings, and student and alumnae surveys.

We will kick off this year’s process with a Strategic Planning Conference on September 26-27, 2012 that will focus on our vision of excellence and innovation and the five pillars of excellence that will be the focus of our efforts: Women, Innovative Teaching and Learning, Community, Global Awareness and Understanding, and the Spirit of our Founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

The conference will include representation from our full community of faculty, staff, students, Trustees, Regents, alumnae and community partners. Approximately 60-65 participants will engage in this two-day event, which will serve as a model for innovative, collaborative and effective planning. The task of these community representatives is to begin the process of moving us from dreaming big to creating a platform for how we will manifest our dreams. Once we have a final list of participants we will post this on the portal along with updates on the process.

In selecting representatives, we did not use a traditional model focusing on key leaders on campus to form a steering committee. Instead we sought to create a group that reflects our diversity across expertise, years of service, race, ethnicity, gender, and position. I am grateful to COSA and the Executive Council of the Faculty Assembly for helping us complete the slate of participants to ensure a true representational presence. Let me reiterate that our conference participants are not a steering committee for strategic planning but a mind trust for all of us as we begin this first phase of the process. Following the conference we will need the full community to engage in this year-long process of planning to make our vision a reality.

We have done great work that has brought us to this moment but there is much to do. Let me close with the words of playwright and former president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel who wrote: “Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps, we must step up the stairs.”

We will step up the stairs; we will forge up that Mount as our sisters and founders did before us, and as a community we will craft a brilliant future for Mount St. Mary’s.

**Transforming lives: It takes a community! Welcome to the 2012-2013 academic year!**

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<sup>1</sup> Richard P. Keeling and Richard H. Hersch, *We're Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 122-23.

<sup>2</sup> “Welcome.” Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. <http://www.csjla.org/> (accessed August 14, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Pat Farrell, “Navigating the Shifts,” LCWR, [https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/news/files/pat\\_farrell\\_osf\\_-\\_lcwr\\_presidential\\_address\\_2012.pdf](https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/news/files/pat_farrell_osf_-_lcwr_presidential_address_2012.pdf) (accessed August 14, 2012).