

Great Beginnings
Opening Convocation
August 18, 2011

Good morning. It is truly a pleasure to be here. This is an extraordinary community and I am thrilled to be a part of it. I have had the occasion to meet many of you since my arrival in July, and others when I was here in January and in February; now I look forward to getting to know you, to working with you as a member of this community.

Before I begin my more formal remarks, I would like this opportunity to thank the members of the cabinet: Dr. Stephanie Cubba, Dr. Jane Lingua, Mr. Chris McAlary, Dr. Eleanor Siebert, and Mr. Larry Smith for their assistance to me this summer. More importantly, I am grateful that each of these wonderful individuals has agreed to stay on in their role as vice-president. I also want to announce that Dr. Eleanor Siebert has graciously agreed to put off her retirement another year and will remain as provost through the 2012-2013 academic year. Next year we will launch a national search for her replacement. I thank you, Eleanor, for your continued service to this College. I also want to publicly thank Lucille Villegas for her continued service to the College as Assistant to the President and Coordinator of the Board of Trustees. I am grateful every day for her expertise, her wisdom and her wonderful spirit.

The theme of this year's convocation is Great Beginnings. I have always found that one of the greatest gifts of the academic life is the continuous cycle of beginnings, endings and new beginnings. We move from opening convocations to the arrival of new students to the beginning of classes to final exams, concluding each spring with the celebration of our graduates at commencement. Even the designation of that event bespeaks the cyclical rhythm of the academic year. I find this rhythm a blessing for it allows us, whether we are faculty, staff or students, to start afresh, to come back to our work with new eyes, new energy, and new resolve.

As we begin each academic year, and in particular, this the 2011-2012 academic year, I think to the words of Seneca who wrote: "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." For each beginning at the Mount represents another step, another moment in the journey that began 86 years ago. Our life today at Mount St. Mary's is born of the commitment of a group of visionary women, the sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, to provide women a superior education.

I think of the courage of conviction that Mother Margaret Mary Brady and her sisters must have possessed to imagine and then implement the plan for a campus high above the city of L.A., on the beautiful but I imagine seemingly impenetrable foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains. Thirty-seven years later, imbued with our founders' enterprising spirit, this community crafted another beginning in the form of a downtown campus. The beautiful Doheny mansion and surrounding homes became a vehicle for greater service of the Sisters' mission of "helping women become all they are capable of being" and "serving all persons without distinction." I think about these beginnings that put into motion a vision that has changed the life of thousands of women.

Such beginnings are marked by change that comes out of the imagination of a vision. New campuses, new students, new programs, expanded opportunities: these changes have

allowed us to live more fully Mount St. Mary's mission to provide a superior academic program enhanced by an emphasis on building leadership skills and fostering a spirit to serve others. The creation of the associate degree program, the weekend college, the accelerated nursing program and the graduate programs allows us to offer a premier education to an even larger audience. It allows us to educate women and men across their academic career in higher education. And it allows us to place our footprint in the center of this city we serve. When I was here in January, I was told by a faculty member that at the Mount we serve the "daughters of Los Angeles." That phrase has stayed with me for it represents our distinctive calling to service within our community – a commitment that never waivers but is lived out in new and different ways.

Eleven years ago, this College celebrated another new and great beginning when the Board of Trustees appointed the College's first lay president, Dr. Jacqueline Powers Doud. Under her leadership this community accomplished much: you created vibrant programs that respond to the needs of our local community and the community of higher education; you helped secure the financial viability of the College through aggressive fundraising efforts; you increased access to this premier educational program through the securing of grants to assist our students and preserve our beautiful facilities; and you increased our ability to provide scholarships to support these "daughters" of L.A. who could not be here without the extraordinary generosity of the friends of this College. Under Dr. Doud's leadership and through your efforts, this community has almost fully completed the 2007-2012 Strategic Plan- **A YEAR EARLY**. We have reached and exceeded our enrollment goal of 2,300 full-time equivalent students; last spring we reached our endowment goal of \$100 million dollars; we have enhanced the beauty of our campuses; we have made great strides in providing remarkable service to one another; we have strengthened our academic programs and we have improved our administrative services through more efficient and effective use of technology.

As I look at this particular moment in our history, it is even clearer that "every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." We gather here today in preparation for the 86th academic year of this College and we do so with confidence and excitement because of the work and accomplishments of those in this community and those who have come before us.

As we begin this new year, many people have asked me: What is your vision for the Mount? What are your plans for the College? These questions always accompany the arrival of a new president. Let me take this occasion to address these queries. First: I want to make it clear: I came to Mount St. Mary's College because of your vision, because of your mission.

It is your commitment to education, to leadership and service, to the community in which we reside that captured my imagination. It was your unwavering commitment to the transformative power of a liberal arts education in a community of learners that drew me in. It was your celebration of the diversity of this student body that moved me. And it was your innovative spirit in the service of this region that inspired me. I came here because of you. Mount St. Mary's College knows who it is and this community has resolved to live out its distinctive mission with integrity every day.

And yet, we are only successful if we refuse to stand still. We must always look to the future as we determine how we will continue to live out our mission with integrity. As we enter this year of new beginnings, we will plan for the future, not a future that I have designed in my

mind, but a future we will create together. It is as a community that we will envision and live out a shared dream.

I am sometimes asked about my philosophy for visioning and planning. I believe we do our best work when many gather at the table. The Talmud teaches us that “deep learning is only done in company;” I believe that the same holds true for deep thinking. We will seek the wisdom of the full community as we craft our vision.

This will be the work of this year. As we enter this conversation I ask that we do so as a true community. There are many voices of wisdom on this campus; there are those who know our history well and there are those who have been agents of change in this ever shifting world of higher education. There are guardians of the past and visionaries for the future. We all have a role here. We all can and should inform the conversation. And in this process I ask that we pay attention to the voices that are perhaps less often heard, less robust, voices of those who may not always feel invited to the table. We need these voices too. And we need the eyes and minds of our newest members of the community. The world is changing out there; our new colleagues will have insights that will be valuable to our discussion.

I am eager to hear your dreams for this great college. We stand on a firm foundation that allows us to be bold as we think about the future of Mount St. Mary’s. I am excited to dream with you the faculty about the academic vision you hold for our students. For all planning – all action – must spring from that which is central to our mission – the education of our students. You the faculty play a critical role in this work. I look forward to hearing your ideas for they will serve as the cornerstone of all that we do. Your academic vision will guide and drive our planning efforts. I look forward to meeting with each academic department over the course of the fall semester. I am excited to learn about the programs we have in place and your ideas for the future. In addition, my office will host gatherings to provide opportunities for more informal conversations about our future.

Our committed staff also has a vital role to play. I look forward to meeting with the different departments on campus and will work with COSA to facilitate gatherings to converse about our shared aspirations.

I also look to the wisdom of our Board of Trustees and our committed alumnae to share their ideas and hopes for this institution.

Now for those who seek a more precise answer to that question about the new president’s vision for this college – let me respond with my conviction that we are best served and we serve best if we remain faithful to our mission: Our core identity as a Catholic women’s college committed to providing our students a superb liberal arts experience is the rock upon which we build. As a women’s college, we are in the business of transforming the lives of women, and by extension, the lives of their families and their communities. We welcome our male students in many of our programs and in doing so, we give them a gift: the unique experience of being in a women centered community where the development of each of our students is at the heart of all we do.

We are a college that believes there is no better preparation than the liberal arts for the work of teachers, politicians, historians, attorneys, nurses, accountants, or entrepreneurs. How we live out this identity is the task we have in front of us. Like you, I have many ideas as I look

at this remarkable place. I dream of a future where we are not the “hidden gem” I have heard referenced, but a national presence. And I believe we are uniquely poised *to be a national presence* as a college that serves its students and its community in distinctive ways. I am excited by the many initiatives currently in place: the commitment to globalizing the curriculum as seen in a recent proposal submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am thrilled by the collaboration of faculty and staff in the development of the *Report on the Status of Girls and Women in California*, a report that explores policy and program implications on gender gaps in education, employment, leadership and health in our state. I am excited by our integration of technology into our pedagogies through programs like our Title V Grant emphasizing *High Touch, High Tech*, our plans for simulation labs in nursing, and discussion of a major focusing on emerging media in journalism. I am intrigued by discussions of women’s wellness, particularly in light of startling statistics on the state of women’s health in our state and in our country. The list of creative endeavors that spring from our mission is lengthy and inspiring.

There is great energy on this campus as we anticipate the future in front of us. How will our programs, our pedagogies, and our facilities support the preparation of students for a future that is hard for us to even envision? How will we grow? How will we change? How will we live out our mission? The one certainty in the world of higher education today is that it is in constant flux: New fields emerge, the demographic of students seeking a college degree shifts, technologies evolve. Dr. Gordon Gee, the president of the Ohio State University, challenged the status quo when he wrote several years ago that the “choice for higher education is either reinvention or extinction.” Although I think this may overstate our situation some, the point is well taken. In order to educate this generation and the generations to follow, we must always be willing to grow; we must be bold.

We are a Catholic college founded by and for women; we believe deeply in the relevance and the power of the liberal arts. We are committed to educating a diverse student body and we are steadfast in our desire to serve this community in which we live.

The future of this college depends absolutely on the work we do today. I can imagine no greater or more exciting task than which we have before us: the articulation of a shared vision for our future.

This is an exceptional community. You have accomplished so much and we have so much ahead of us. As we enter into the work of this year: as we engage in the articulation of the vision that will carry us forward as a community, let us follow the counsel of St. Francis of Assisi who wrote:

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

It is my privilege to serve as your president. I thank you for bringing me into this community and I look forward to this year of great beginnings.