

***Launching the 2013-2018 Mount St. Mary's College Strategic Plan
Innovation for Excellence: Transforming Lives***

Opening Convocation Fall 2013

August 22, 2013

Rose Hills Auditorium

Good morning! It is so good to stand here before you to welcome you to the 2013-2014 academic year. Whether you were teaching here at Doheny, running summer programs, planning fall programs, or engaging in scholarship, I hope that the summer brought you some relaxation, some gratification, some rejuvenation and some vacation - for the fall promises to be exciting and action-packed. Before I present to you the State of the College and issue my invitation to the work of this academic year, let me thank Campus Ministry for their moving opening prayer. I also want to acknowledge our Trustees who are here with us today: Judy McDonald, our chair, Sr. Barbara Anne Stowasser, Grace Wickersham, Sr. Annette Debs, Sr. Catherine Marie Kreta and one of our new trustees, Dr. Maria Ott. We truly appreciate your taking the time to be with us for the launch of this new academic year.

As we begin this fall, I am grateful to report that our enrollment continues to be robust. We anticipate a headcount of a little over 3000 students across all of our programs. As of Tuesday, our endowment weighed in at \$109.8 million. We exceeded last year's fundraising goal of \$5.1 million and raised \$5.5 million. I thank you all for your help in this for it is because of the great work of our faculty and staff that our friends and foundations support us as they do. I am also very happy to report that we have just been awarded a federal grant of \$1.2 million for our newest graduate program in education: the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Preparation Program in partnership with the John Tracy Clinic. Congratulations to all who worked on this grant.

I thank you for the creative programs and ideas that you have generated over the past year and am thrilled to announce several new programs: we now offer a major in Applied Psychology to our Weekend College students and several new majors in our traditional baccalaureate program including Global Politics and Ethics and Society. We have also opened an RN to BSN nursing program and have approved a new MFA in film, which is in the final planning stages. I am hearing ideas about other new majors and graduate programs, travel trips, summer language institutes, cultural events and speakers' series to name just a few. I will speak in a few minutes about how we will build a structure that will not only allow for this kind of continued creativity but will support it in sustainable ways.

Before that I do want to announce some new and growing partnerships. I am delighted to announce officially that the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media will now be housed at Mount St. Mary's College. The Institute will provide faculty and

students research opportunities and programs that will complement our film majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. We continue to explore partnerships abroad and have signed an MOU with Gannon Normal University in Ganzhou, China and have expanded agreements with Nanjing University and China Women's University to allow for faculty and student exchanges, collaborative research opportunities and the creation of pathways for recruitment for undergraduate and graduate study at the Mount. We have just received an invitation to travel to Peru to discuss similar arrangements with several Peruvian universities.

I also want to remind you that this is the year for our review for reaffirmation of our accreditation through WASC. The WASC team will be on our campuses for our on-site review September 25-27. This the third stage in the reaccreditation process. Last year we completed the first two phases with the submission of our formal report and the completion of our off-site review. During that review, the team informed us that they want to know more about our curriculum and our assessment of student learning. They are also interested in our new strategic plan - and they are eager to meet the Mount community. Some of you will be asked to join our reviewers for formal meetings that will include chairs of departments, the provost council, the Executive Council of the Faculty Assembly, among other groups, and all of you will be invited to an open session on each campus. You are all also invited to our exit meeting at 11:30 a.m. on Sept. 27 at Chalon to hear the team's feedback and any recommendations they may have.

I cannot overstate the importance of this review. We are in very good shape but our reviewers will come with questions for us. We have already prepared responses to the questions regarding the curriculum and assessment of student learning and we welcome their exploration into other areas as they see appropriate. We look forward to helping them get to know the Mount better. This is an important visit as we all know the essentiality of accreditation. It is what positions us as a quality institution in higher education; it is what opens the doors to our accreditation in specific programs for without WASC approval, those doors would be closed to us – and it allows our students access to financial aid from our State and the Federal government. Please welcome our guests warmly. Let's show them the remarkable place that is Mount St. Mary's. Are we perfect? No? Are we strong? Absolutely. And I for one am looking to the opportunity to showcase how this faculty and staff transforms the lives of students.

I want to return now to a question that I posed at our opening convocation last spring regarding the potential advantages and disadvantages of changing the name of Mount St. Mary's College to reflect our current Carnegie classification as a university. You will remember that we conducted a portal discussion and I received around 50 responses to this preliminary query. Most of these responses encouraged continued deliberation of the question - a few did not - but all raised important issues to consider in the exploration of a name change.

I told you then that this would not be a quick decision and that we would need time to discuss this in depth. Now is that time. This year we will consider the question: Should Mount St. Mary's rename itself as a university? Such a change would rest on the assumption that Mount St. Mary's College would be preserved as the liberal arts college for women. Let me say up front that I do not have an answer to this question. Our Strategic Plan, which we will discuss in a few moments, does not in any way depend on the Mount's name. Whatever we decide, we will succeed in our efforts to meet our goals and thrive as an institution. I have no doubt of that. This has to be a community discussion; it must be inclusive and we need to do serious research to determine what is best for our College. So here is the process I will institute beginning next week.

I will appoint a task force with representatives from the faculty, staff, student bodies, CSJs, alumnae, trustees and regents to conduct the necessary research for us to understand fully the implications of such a change. I will ask that committee to seek the wisdom of all of the groups represented in its membership and I will ask them to research colleges that considered this very question. The committee will begin its work in September and will submit a preliminary report to my office in mid-February. I will ask the committee to then share its findings with our community and with our Board of Trustees. This will allow us the opportunity to see if there is anything we have missed, if there are any other questions to consider. The Task Force will submit its final report to me in April, after which I will take my recommendation to the Board for its consideration. My hope is that following deep deliberation, we will come to a decision by the close of the fiscal year, June 30, 2014. So stay tuned. We have some meaty discussions ahead.

Now let me switch gears and move our attention to the focus of our work over the next five years: this community's *2013-2018 Strategic Plan – Innovation for Excellence: Transforming Lives*. By mid-September, our web page will include a description of the process that generated this plan: it will document the time that we spent as a community in retreats, forums, a conference, surveys and in portal discussions to help us put on paper the aspirations of this community for our College and for our students.

This Plan with its three overarching goals: advancing students, advancing community and advancing mission and identity, and the accompanying 13 strategies can only succeed if we all engage in living it fully. You will remember that we created a design that allows for fluidity and creativity, a design whose reach should impact every division, every office, and every function on our campuses. And so every area of the College is now called to create measurable objectives that will forward us in the realization of the Plan. Many of you have already begun or even completed the articulation of objectives for the 2013-14 academic year. Others are just beginning that task. The faculty will hold a retreat tomorrow to begin their work in the creation of an academic plan, which will be central to our whole enterprise. The participation of our

full community is what will give life and substance to the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. I am excited to see just how far we go as we make *Innovation for Excellence* a reality.

Over the course of our discussions these past two years, I have heard a common concern that I want to raise today. Members of our community have asked how we will ensure that the Five Pillars of Distinction remain visible, relevant, and dynamic. How will we ensure that they do not become empty or forgotten words that made for great copy but have no roots? I have thought a lot about this – how we could position our Pillars in a way that their centrality would continue to both keep us focused and challenge us to be excellent? - And how might we do this in a way that would encourage, advance and support our commitment to innovation for excellence without creating more layers of work and no sufficient structure?

And then it came to me. Actually, it came from you, from our many discussions over the past two years when you suggested concrete ways to live out our aspirations. It seemed premature back then to actualize such ideas, but it not too early now. And so I asked myself, what if our pillars became the organizing structure? What if our pillars became the organizing entities that would bring together our work across these five areas? And so, my colleagues, today I bring back to you what you first began to suggest in our conferences and forums. To ensure that the work you already do and the aspirations that you have articulated find real homes on our campuses, I propose the following:

MSMC will live out the legacy of our pillars of distinction through the creation of five Centers and Institutes on our campuses.

Our commitment to innovative teaching and learning will be the focus of *The Center for Academic Excellence and Innovation*. *The Center for Academic Excellence and Innovation* will ensure that Mount St. Mary's College faculty, staff and students have access to innovative pedagogies and learning tools to foster student success and to support faculty development. Through the Center, faculty will explore and share effective teaching strategies, and engage in the scholarly examination of emerging and best practices in the teaching and learning process. The Center also will provide students a broad range of opportunities to support their success in their quest for academic excellence.

Our commitment to women will be made even more visible through *The Center for the Advancement of Women*. *The Center for the Advancement of Women* will focus on preparing women to be confident and effective leaders and serve as a resource on issues affecting girls and women, locally and globally. The Center will offer programs for faculty, staff, students, and the greater community to support the advancement of girls and women. The Center will remain responsive to emerging issues affecting women.

Our commitment to global awareness and understanding will be the essence of *The Center for Global Initiatives*. *The Center for Global Initiatives* will provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff to engage in the global community, both locally and internationally. The Center will facilitate academic and co-curricular emphases on cross-national dynamics and perspectives through international exchanges, off-campus study opportunities, curricular enhancements, cultural programs, visiting scholars, and development opportunities around cultural literacy and fluency.

Our commitment to meaningful community will be manifest in *The Community Bridges Institute*. *The Community Bridges Institute* will embody the College's commitment to service of the common good through innovative collaborations both within and beyond the Mount community. Led by the College's Academic division and Student Affairs, the Institute will build and sustain strong connections between the College and our local, regional, and global communities through the development of service programs, service learning courses, experiential academic opportunities, workshops, projects and a film and speaker series.

And our commitment to and appreciation of the spirit of the founders will be expressed, shared and celebrated through *The CSJ Institute*. *The CSJ Institute* will celebrate the Charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ) to care for the "dear neighbor" and to serve all "without distinction." The Institute will honor the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph and embrace the CSJ heritage of dynamic and innovative service to the Church and the world. The Institute will offer the Mount community a variety of programs including workshops on the Charism and history of the CSJs, retreats, and service-learning opportunities, and will serve as a resource for past CSJ contributions and current CSJ sponsored opportunities.

Please note that the descriptions you see before you are initial thoughts encapsulating the many ideas that were shared last year. We have much work to do to give flesh to these bones. You will be key in this. But note also these are not faraway dreams. They will become reality over these next five years. I am sure that you, like I, can see how many of our current programs fit perfectly under the umbrella of these concrete manifestations of our Pillars but these centers also provide us the space to respond to emerging needs and create new programs. The development of these centers and institutes, whether physical spaces or virtual realities or a combination of the two, will be supported by our master planning process, a process that is beginning this fall, and our comprehensive campaign that we will kick off in the next few years. In fact, this year we will begin to identify our large funding needs to make the goals of our strategic plan a reality.

This opening convocation marks the official launch of our Plan and the work of this academic year. We wish the faculty well in their retreat tomorrow as they begin the

development of the academic plan that will be the underpinning of all of our work. We thank our staff across our campuses who are creating measurable objectives that will move us forward in achievement of our goals. As a community, we will engage together in a discussion about a name change to university; we will work together on Master Planning and Campaign preparation. This truly is the electric moment you have heard me reference before. The future of this extraordinary place is in our hands – and I could not be prouder to serve as your president as we do the sacred work entrusted to us by our founders the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

In preparation for this day, I found myself repeating the words of Mark Twain who said:

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

Thank you.