

Opening Convocation

August 21, 2014

Good morning and welcome to the 2014-2015 academic year. For those who have been away for most of the summer, we welcome you back. It is so good to see you again. For those who are new to Mount St. Mary's, we are so happy and grateful that you have joined this community. And for those who have been here all summer, we thank you for caring for our students, our buildings, our grounds, and each other throughout these summer months. Let me offer a special welcome to our Trustees who are with us today: our chair, Judy McDonald, and Janne Shirley. I also want to acknowledge the Sisters of St. Joseph who were able to join us this morning. We are always better when you are among us!

This year's Convocation theme, **Innovation and Collaboration**, is a fitting one. It describes well how we have lived and worked over the past several years as this community came together to envision our future and to chart our course. That work culminated in a dynamic and aspirational strategic plan that we launched last fall. Although Heather Brown, assistant V.P. for Institutional Planning and Research, will provide an update on our progress in meeting the objectives and goals of our plan, I would like to take a few minutes this morning to reflect on several key initiatives that are moving us forward in exciting ways.

First, it is my duty and my pleasure to provide you with some significant numbers that set the stage for the year ahead. We will continue this fall to serve an FTE of over 3000 students across our campuses and programs. I am grateful to all of you for your part in attracting, enrolling and retaining quality students who understand the value of a superior education.

You will remember at the close of the last academic year, I reported that we had a record-breaking year in fundraising. I am happy to share that under the leadership of Institutional Advancement and with all of your help, we raised \$6,179,228, exceeding our ambitious goal of \$5,200,000 by a healthy margin. That is more than we have ever raised in any year outside of a capital campaign. Our endowment continues to grow and as of Monday, we are at a record \$126 million.

Last year we forged ahead in our commitment to increase the visibility of the College as a leading liberal arts institution of the 21st century. To assist us, we brought in experts to guide us in a clear articulation of who we are as an institution, a College ready to rename itself as a university. This process known more familiarly as “branding” was to probe our own understanding of the Mount experience and to create visual and written messages that would tell our story in a clearer manner and to a much, much broader audience. Through this process we identified our “brand” essence: The Mount St. Mary’s experience is “inspirational,” “motivating,” “uplifting,” and presents “unlimited possibilities.” Our values are “academic quality,” “service,” empowerment,” “leadership,” “social justice” and “spirituality.” And with the help of our partners at MindPower, we defined our personality as “spirited,” “determined,” “smart,” “confident” and “responsible.” These are not mere words for a marketing campaign; this is who we are. This is the Mount experience. Through focus groups and surveys we began to gather stories and testimonies to the transformative nature of this experience –statements that would stir even the most cynical. Let me share just a few with you:

Students put it this way: “This school changed my life!” “I’ve discovered my voice. Being surrounded by powerful women – I want that for myself.” “Professors push you because they know you can it. They set the bar high, challenge you.” “Friends at other schools are struggling and want to give up.

That's not an option here. There's always someone who is going to push you." "I came here with nothing and I leave here with everything."

From among the faculty, we heard: "The students keep me here... they're hungry, appreciative, generous, life-affirming."

What an honor for me to stand here before this assembly for the work you do is indeed changing lives. You are what make this institution the treasured jewel it is. And my job now is to shine the brightest spotlight possible on what has often been referred to as "the hidden gem." We have already started this effort and I know you share my enthusiasm at the recognitions we have received of late: Money Magazine rated Mount St. Mary's as the number one school in the nation for "Colleges that add the most value;" the Hollywood Reporter named us as "one of the five schools to watch" for our growing undergraduate and graduate film programs, and we were named number nine in the top ten Colleges for nursing. But this is just the beginning. This year we will launch a campaign that will reveal the essence of the Mount experience to our community. In January we will go public with our new name and we will spread the news of our entrepreneurial spirit, our deep commitment to women, and our relentless pursuit of a more just world, as well as the many, many contributions that our faculty, staff and students make to the greater community. We will spread the word about the "unlimited possibilities" that are at the heart of a Mount education.

For they are truly limitless. During this second year of our strategic plan, we open our new Center for Academic Innovation and Creativity. We are launching searches for the Director of our Center for Global Initiatives and the Center for the Advancement of Women. Both will open their doors this year. We begin the planning of our CSJ Institute, which will open in 2015 in honor of our 90th anniversary. I can't imagine a more fitting way to honor the vision and courage of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This summer I had the privilege and

joy of travelling to Le Puy to participate in a CSJ pilgrimage. The experience was incredibly moving and underscored in a profound way the importance of both the history and the future of the CSJ charism at Mount St. Mary's and across the globe. How gifted we are to be to be of and with the Sisters of St. Joseph!

This year our faculty will continue and complete a revisioning of our general studies curriculum to ensure that every Mount student is prepared for the future she designs. We will create a comprehensive wellness program that will impact the lives of every student, and we hope, every faculty and staff member in our community. We will complete our Campus Master Plan and we will prepare for a comprehensive fundraising campaign to provide the resources necessary to achieve our goals and to support the financial needs of our students. And we will focus on community and collaboration as called for in our convocation today. This fall, we have engaged diversity experts to come to our campuses to conduct a campus climate assessment to help us see where we are strong as a community and where we falter.

We will also see the completion of the Chalon entrance project and the Doheny student quad. I am also happy to announce that we have concluded negotiations for a long term lease of the Vincentian house 649 W. Adams beginning January 2015.

And with your leadership we will educate over 3000 students who entrust their dreams to us. This year promises to be a year of action and inspiration. I thank you for your energy, your resolve and your commitment to this community. Welcome back!