The Next Five Years: Playing for Real

University Convocation September 19, 2007 Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

### Welcome

Welcome to the University Convocation for the start of the 2007-2008 academic year. It does not seem like a year since we were all together and freezing under the big tent on "The Green". "The Green" has recovered and so have we and we are ready for another year.

More than anything else this Convocation day is the chance for all of us to be together again, to greet one another, catch up on one another's lives, welcome new colleagues and future friends, and feel the buzz of beginning a new year. Of course there are things that need to be heard, and said, and discussed, but what most of all abides from this day is the experience and sense of support about being engaged in our educational mission together.

### **Two Personal Stories**

Two little stories of my summer that ask me about what my attitude in coming into this year should be.

As I think you've been told all too many times, I have been appointed to a third 5-year term as president and am hoping—God willing—to surpass that. I'm now 64, feel great, and love what I'm doing with you, with students and with university friends. The Board of Trustees gave me a "two-week European getaway" in thanks for my first 10 years of service. I'm planning on Greece in the second half of December. The Board of Regents gave me two nights at the Inn-at-Langley on Whidbey Island—two nights for one person of course! I booked it for July 13 and 14 and called friends named Ken and Tasia, who live near Langley to say I'd be in the region and could we get together. About two weeks before I was to go I got a call from Ken and he said: "Tasia and I have been talking and we've decided we'd like to do something really nice for you while you're here in Langley. So we'd like to pay for you to have a massage at the spa at the Inn-at-Langley". Long silence! I say "A massage!" More silence from me. "Well", I said, "I've never had a massage." Pause. "I suppose a massage would be good for me." Ken, "Yes. It would be very good; we'll make all the arrangements." Contemplating that imminent massage felt like awaiting a root canal. One night I mentioned the upcoming massage and how it was offered among the Jesuits. Silence for a bit. Then one said, "Couldn't you have just said 'No'!?" I'd mention it to women friends and donors and they'd exclaim "How lucky you are, you'll love it." Well when the day came and I slunk down to the spa and for some reason had to keep telling everyone there I was a priest, and this was my first time, and I was the president of Seattle University—which I think was code for "Go easy on me!"—the women were right, I did love the massage. In fact it was wonderful. So an old dog can learn new tricks, and old presidents can try and enjoy new things, and maybe, but maybe my anticipatory anxieties contrasted to the view of women and to the actual experience may say more about why we need to be and what it may mean for Seattle U to be "Jesuit in a new way".

The second story of the summer that helps loosen me up a bit and ask some questions about my attitude as president (and perhaps as Jesuit) occurred at my sister's summer home

on a lake in New Hampshire. Her three grandchildren were there, four and two years old and four months, the whole time. I am not around young kids much. To them with my big voice and being the priest I'm like Moses on the mountain with the tablets of the law. Anyhow one day I was standing outside the house and heard something behind me. I turned around to see four-year-old Maria whopping her two-year-old brother Nate over the head with her flip-flops. I pointed my finger at her and yelled: "Maria, what are you doing!? I never want to see you do that again!" I thought nothing more of it and just turned back around but in 10 seconds heard from where she had retreated behind a car this inconsolable howl of pure pain. Her Dad, my nephew, came rushing out of the house, picked her up and asked her whether she was physically hurt or whether her feelings were hurt. Clearly the latter and clearly quite traumatically. I can tell you it took her several days to warm up at all to old Uncle Father Steve. What she was used to—rather than my treatment—when something like this behavior of hitting her brother occurred was, "Maria, I want you to go into your bedroom for a 'time out'; I want you to think about what you have done; and when you are ready to apologize to Nate for what you have done, you can come out." (By the way, my sister sent me an e-mail the other day that said, "Maria is not scarred!") I really didn't know you didn't point at, yell at and scold, shame young children. That has made me think—what would the equivalents of "time outs" for us at Seattle U be like where we establish our own internal principles, and ways of being with one another rather than conform to or resist what is imposed. Again this has made me wonder whether our university—and especially its president—becoming "Jesuit in a new way" isn't more needed than I knew and harder than I'd imagined. Perhaps the scolding maniac needs more massages.

By the way this convocation will be "Jesuit in a new way" in that we will not be taking a break. Perhaps Jesuits don't need them! Whenever you want to refill your coffee or step out in the hall, just do it.

# **Dedicating the Year to Dr. John Eshelman**

As we begin this year and gather in this University Convocation I take note that it is the last one in which Dr. John Eshelman, the Provost, gathers and welcomes us. I want to pay tribute to him and to dedicate this year to him. We'll have special occasions later to recognize and honor John for his literally unparalleled service to Seattle University. His record of 31 years of service in a row as Dean, Executive Vice President, Provost, Acting President, Provost, Executive Vice President, Acting Vice President for Finance and Business, Provost, etc, surpasses the record of service of leadership of anyone in our Seattle University history. He is the last survivor of the Cabinet or Executive Team that I inherited ten years ago. I don't know what it is like to address any issues, make any decisions, care for the people of the university, promote the mission of the university without the calm advice, deliberateness, knowing care, passionate commitment, common sense, unsurpassed experience, exceptional good judgment of John. He has got just this year to lead us as Provost. I've got just this year to learn from him; we all have just this year to enjoy his extraordinary gift and presence as Provost and true heart of the best of what we are about and aspire to. So I'm dedicating this year to John—and doing so already evokes so much inspiration and hopefulness and commitment. Let's make this the best year ever of Seattle University dedicated to the best person ever of Seattle University. Please join me in this... And also please join me in a firm, unretractable commitment to enjoy his puns and laugh at his dry humor. I don't know what a "swan's song" is like—but verging on an Eshelman pun—I look forward in this year to listening to "John's song".

## **Playing Poker Last Year**

Last year at the University Convocation I played a little phony-money poker with you in a game called "If I could have anything I wanted for Seattle U what would be the five things I'd most want?" I showed you my hand. My five cards of what I would want were:

- 1. 2000 additional students from economic classes of society we do not reach;
- 2. a new campus axis running from the new Library/Learning Commons to the new Sports Center;
- 3. a platform for opportunistically developing new, responsive educational programs;
- 4. Seattle U Redhawks winning in NCAA D-I intercollegiate competition;
- 5. and that old favorite of mine, SU as "Jesuit in a new way", more inclusive, more creative.

The poor, the facilities, the entrepreneurial platform, D-I, and truly, but newly, differently Jesuit. A good hand—for poker with play money. I was just trying to stir the pot. And I did.

You, in overwhelming numbers, filled out and played your own five cards of what you would want if you could have anything you wanted. Yours turned into almost a game of monopoly rather than poker. Here's a recap in order of frequency of what your five cards were:

- 1. facilities, facilities as your ace of spades, trump card, your winning card: library, laboratories, classrooms, offices, residence halls, conference center, campus entrance... and that's why we invested \$15 million in new facilities this summer, raised that much more for facilities, and spent more than that purchasing new properties and buildings around us;
- 2. stronger academic programs (and you asked where was the president's card on academics!): international, Core, graduate, cross disciplinary academic programs;
- 3. surprise, surprise your third card (again not one of mine!) was compensation, compensation, compensation (and real money not play money) and merit pay, and housing subsidy, and faculty and staff development funds, and—guess where it came from—early Friday out in the summer;
- 4. your fourth card was mission with focus on service, soul, forming leaders, global solidarity, Jesuitness, faith, and the poor;
- 5. your last card ran from one end of the alphabet to the other: Athletics, Benefits, Community, Diversity, Enrollment, and Faculty concerns to Reputation, Student services, Technology.

So overwhelming was your response that we did not get a full accounting back to you of how you played the game of "If I could have anything..." till January. What you gave the university was the best and most comprehensive articulation of what the whole university really wants, and it revealed remarkably an overall coherence about what we collectively want. It is the horizon against which we have been and must do all planning and all decision-making. It may have been play money, phony money, monopoly money, fantasy

baseball money, but it helped us all learn to play the game for when we might need to play for real.

### **Playing for Real**

What today is about is playing for real, launching the planning during the next few months that will lead to the hard decisions and priority choices and allocation of limited resources for the next five years. It is no longer the game of "If I could have anything..." but the real life game of "These are the things, the most important among all others—that we will do."

The Board of Trustees, acting in their responsibility to oversee the university, has determined and is communicating to us today the five things it sees as most important for the university to face, to make plans for, and to shape the decisions and financial commitments for the next five years. The Trustees want me, involving and consulting all of you, to refresh the current strategic plan by bringing them a renewed plan with clear financial consequences for their approval on February 22<sup>nd</sup> at the same time they set next year's tuition, enrollment, compensation, and budget. They believe the university has so much momentum at the present time that it needs to capture this momentum and channel it in an updated plan and set of focused proposals. When things are going so well, but also so fast, it is best to check the direction you are headed. You might call this a midcourse correction. Because we are not starting over on strategic planning and because our sense of mission is so clear, they are confident—as am I—that we can do this in five months. We should not take more time than that because we have so much else to do. I have appointed Bob Dullea to carry forward and lead this whole strategic planning process. We have set up five task forces, one for each of five areas of planning.

### **Priorities for Strategic Planning**

You have at your places a letter with today's date from Phyllis Campbell, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, calling us to this strategic planning and outlining the issues to be addressed. The Trustees too have five cards, the ones they have chosen for us to focus on as the most important and the ones most needing planning. Here are the five cards of what they want in the real game of what we will do in the next five years. They are saying to us:

- 1. We want a limited set of concrete, achievable proposals on how you will develop faculty and the wider community of educators to achieve greater academic excellence for students.
- 2. We want a new comprehensive vision and action steps on how you will educate students for the new global reality.
- 3. We want to know what measures you will take to assure in an appropriate, respectful, and inclusive way the Catholic character of a Seattle U education.
- 4. We want to see more concretely how you will in practice go about building a D-I intercollegiate athletic program that is both affordable and that advances the values of the university.
- 5. We want to know how you will make formation in leadership an essential part of every student's education.

### Wild Cards

Just to make it more interesting, the Trustees, in addition to giving us these five cards, have indicated that in the game we are asked to play for real there are four wild cards that make the playing of any single card much more challenging. They ask that in each of the five areas of planning we look for the wild cards: technology, diversity, sustainability, and creative enrollment strategies.

- 1. How the "Net Generation" learns and how we keep apace with technology must impact all we propose to do; so it is a wild card.
- 2. How we engage one of the greatest blessings of this university, our diversity, for the sake of our education and the quality of our community touches on everything.
- 3. So too sustainability, for which we are famous as a campus but which must permeate everything we do, must find a place in all our plans.
- 4. Our very ability to deliver on everything we want to do will rely pragmatically on creative enrollment strategies as well as great retention ability. It is our life blood.

So let's keep these four wild cards in mind as we play for real about academic excellence, global education, Catholic character, D-I within our identity, and leadership formation.

These are the five cards we have been given to play by those who have overall responsibility for the university. Their hand today becomes our hand; the money becomes real; the clock starts ticking in coming up by February with a set of proposals that meets these challenges and that are tied to finances. What an opportunity we have before us! I welcome it and am grateful for the clarity of focus it gives us all. This is why we need the help of all, starting today and in the months ahead. Who wanted an easy year anyhow?!

### Winning: An Integrated Jesuit Education for Leadership

Before we jump into the game of playing for real with these five cards that have been dealt us and before we get a chance to write down and to talk about and to tell one another what issues we want to have considered within each of the five areas of planning, we must ask one big question. Here's the question: "What does winning in this game look like?" If we are successful in making a coherent set of proposals, in funding them, in making the decisions they require, what will be the outcome? Let's answer that question before we jump into the game.

I propose to you today that winning the game will mean: "Every Seattle University student will experience an integrated Jesuit education for leadership." You have at your places a two-page take away called "An Integrated Jesuit Education for Leadership" which is my own fuller explanation of this overarching goal. Let me highlight some aspects of what I mean by it. By "every" student I mean every undergraduate, transfer, graduate, Law, and special-certificate student. By "experience" I mean that for every student it will be inescapable that he or she is presented with, encouraged in, given the means for, shown how to, coaxed, coached, called—but left in his or her freedom which we must never violate or infringe—to bring together, make the connections, find out what it feels like and what difference it makes to actually live, feel, and experience the intersection in themselves of three rich dimensions: the academic, the personal and the spiritual. You can never integrate someone else, but you can provide all the means, insist on the importance, open the

possibilities for, witness to it in yourself, and create a community that supports the student's own personal integration of the academic, the personal, and the spiritual.

That is what "Jesuit" is about and that's why I call it "an integrated Jesuit education for leadership". In my view an "integrated Jesuit education" is in itself, inherently, for all students, an education "for leadership". It is not that we carry out our education and then add on something else that is formation in leadership. Any true Jesuit education, authentically carried out, creates powerful, free leaders by the way in which the academic, the personal, and the spiritual come together in the student and in the alumnus. Bring these together in any student and you have a leader, a powerful one, a unique kind of one, a leader for good in whatever career or context of life, an "empowered leader for a just and humane world". Anything less than "integrated education for leadership" is less than Jesuit education, is less than what we aim for, is less than what all our planning is ultimately about, is failing to win the real game we have been given.

In my view a Jesuit education facilitates the student's own integration of these dimensions: the academic, the personal, and the spiritual. They are shorthand for a richer reality:

- 1. By the "academic" I mean the intellectual, professional, artistic, ethical, cultural, competent and skillful, reflective, communicative, global education of the person.
- 2. By the "personal" I intend the developmental, social, communitarian, physical, healthy, diverse, vocationally discerning, service and leadership formation of the student.
- 3. By the "spiritual" I point to the realization in the student of his or her free, sacred, perhaps religious and faith-inspired, committed to justice, deepest values whether informed by our Catholic and Jesuit character or in other ways.

Can we dare to have a greater openness to the personal and the spiritual in all of our classrooms, even in the harder ones of business, science and engineering and math, and Law and much more intentionally on graduate levels than we have ever imagined? Can there be a more academic and spiritual depth to all of our student activities and all forms of service? Can our spiritual programs connect with and promote and be informed by what happens in the classrooms, in internships, in the residence halls, the athletic fields, in work situations? Students—even the best—will not make those connections or achieve this integration unless we show them how and make it inescapable that they confront the opportunity of this kind of integration, this Jesuit kind of education and formation. Can we rise to the challenge, whoever we are in the university and whatever we do, to reach out and collaborate across divisional lines, for example between academics, student development, mission and ministry, enrollment, athletics, facilities, university advancement, etc, so that we seize the opportunity of an integrated education for leadership, a truly Jesuit education?

Why would we want anything less than this all-important integration in each of our students, whether undergraduate, transfer, graduate, or Law? Why would we want to aim for any other kind of educational goal, any other standard for winning? Can we make this happen? How do we need to collaborate among ourselves and across all parts of the university to win in this way in the education and lives of students? All that we do in the five areas of strategic planning—in academic excellence, global education, deepening our Catholic character, D-I within our identity, and formation for leadership—must further the educational goal: "Every Seattle University student will experience an integrated Jesuit education for leadership."

## **Our Conversation on What Is Most Important**

Now may I turn our attention to a discussion among us of thinking strategically into the future. In effect what I am asking you to do is to play among one another at your tables these five cards we have been dealt as the priorities for strategic planning for the next five years. Think of this as your first opportunity among many that will be provided to you over the coming months to be consulted about and to have an opportunity to express your voice about these five issues.

We start today as the entire convocation of educational colleagues gathered together. We then move over the coming months with the help of five task forces working on these priorities and consulting everyone in perhaps a hundred smaller venues, with ongoing opportunities for all to be plugged into and respond to the development of this strategic plan. Then we will formulate our plan and seek its approval by the Trustees in February. Finally we will come back again in April on Mission Day to this same entire convocation of educational colleagues to discuss how we will live out what we have determined.

Today what is most needed is to get as much of a sense from the whole university as possible about which of these five priorities you are most passionate about and most invested in and what more particular issues you want to make sure are dealt with under your key priority or any of the other priorities. Today by what you write, what you discuss among yourselves, and what you say to this convocation, you give guidance to, help shape, and give focus to the work of how we will think strategically into the future in these coming months of engagement.

I indicated before what are the five priorities, the five cards, we are asked to respond. Here they are again in their fuller, more accurate articulation as questions and with a clearer indication in each of how they will help bring about an overall educational goal of an integrated Jesuit education for leadership:

Academic Excellence: What are the most strategically important things Seattle University can do in the next five years in order to further its integrated Jesuit education by enhancing academic excellence and bringing students to achieve more than they had thought possible?

Global Education: What are the most strategically important things Seattle University can do in the next five years, as part of an integrated Jesuit education, to best prepare its students to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and interconnected world?

Catholic Character: What are the most strategically important things Seattle University can do in the next five years in order to clarify and deepen the Catholic character of its integrated Jesuit education?

Division I Athletics: What are the most strategically important things Seattle University can do in the next five years in order to develop Division I intercollegiate athletics consistent with an integrated Jesuit education?

Formation for Leadership: What are the most strategically important things Seattle University can do in the next five years in order to make formation for leadership an essential and unifying characteristic of an integrated Jesuit education?

You have five cards that are color-coded to these on the screen. To make it clear write the corresponding abbreviation as here on the screen on the back of each of the five cards.

Now choose one you are more passionate about and write on it what issues you want to make sure are considered in planning about that priority. Then with what time remains write down on any of the other cards any issues you want considered in those areas. Let me give you a few minutes to do this. All you write down will be summarized and communicated to the task force working on that priority as well as publicly communicated to all of you on the technology platform that is set up for communicating about and contributing to this whole process. So what you think is most important among those five priorities or cards, and what issues you think need to be considered in each will be captured, used, and communicated to you. Once you have had a moment for writing, I ask you to have a conversation among yourselves. Let someone propose a key card for them and the issues needed to be treated, discuss it, then let someone else propose his or her most vital card and issues. I ask that at each table someone keeps notes on the newsprint about the flow of the conversation as we want to capture that as well. You won't be asked to report on the discussion. Rather when we open the convocation-wide discussion I'll ask someone to highlight a priority and an issue, we'll see what others have said about that, and then turn to other priority cards as much as time allows. So now take your time for writing.

To conclude our morning let me invite Bob Dullea to join me. I've appointed Bob as the Associate Vice President for Planning. He will lead this whole process of the university as we move forward. He has joined the Executive Team to keep this plan on our agenda, has organized and coordinated task forces, a technology platform, and a time frame, for the process. He brings great gifts, extensive experience of the university, an open creative spirit, and a collaborative style to this challenge. As you welcome Bob Dullea please join me in thanking him for taking on this new level of leadership.