

## Faculty/Staff Convocation 2016

- *September 16, 2016*

- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

Welcome to all of you to this new academic year, this 125<sup>th</sup> year of our history as a college and university. Thank you for gathering on this morning to be together with one another, to greet colleagues we may not have seen for a while, to get our bearings as we start the year, and to become aware of the opportunities and challenges of carrying forth together our educational mission this year. My thanks to all of you. It is a privilege and it is humbling to be your president. Please pray that I carry out my responsibilities faithfully, creatively, and collaboratively with you. I pray for you daily.

I start my remarks this morning with some special thanks. Thanks Bob Dullea for stepping up to serve as our Interim Provost this year. You are doing a great job! Thanks Jan Hartley for accepting to be Interim Librarian. Thanks, Shawn Farrell, for being our Interim Athletic Director, following on Bill Hogan whom we all thank for now taking on new responsibilities for supporting our athletic programs. Thanks in a very special way on behalf of all of us Paulette Kidder, for bringing your experience and your care as Interim Dean of Matteo Ricci College and working together with Christina Roberts, Emily Liebe, other faculty, MRC Coalition and other students to give MRC a creative future through developing a strategic plan touching especially upon curriculum, culture, and collaboration.

I join with all of you in thanking Natasha Martin, Professor in the School of Law, for accepting to be our first Chief Diversity Officer, as Associate Vice President for Intuitional Inclusion. As we all make sure that inclusive excellence, diversity, and equity are at the heart of our mission and strategic purposes, we thank you, Natasha, for how you will help us to understand, to implement, and to coordinate what we all clearly recognize is a central value of our Jesuit Catholic educational mission. I am personally so grateful that you said “yes” to this big responsibility after significant consideration of what it calls for and of how this affects your professional life. We have great confidence in you for helping us as we carry out our common responsibility to make our education and our university itself diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

It takes so much to start a year. Thanks to Enrollment Services, deans, faculty and staff for another great year of recruiting, financing, and scheduling our new students. Thanks to Student Development and Residence Living, and faculty for preparing for, welcoming, orienting, and devising new programs and courses for helping our students succeed and find meaning in their university experience. Our campus was not quiet over the summer. In addition to Summer School, Conference and Event Services had a banner summer in welcoming and making arrangements for so many programs, conferences, and summer camps. Thanks. Every summer Facilities and Construction work at full throttle to develop, repair, and enhance this campus for our use and mission. Thanks. The campus looks great and we are ready to go forward into the year on an improved campus. Thanks from all of us to those many people across the divisions of the university who are now dedicating the bulk of their time and expertise to the complex and critical endeavor of putting in place the new Enterprise Resource Planning System, which we call “RevSU”, which will transform how we carry out our processes and work with greater

effectiveness and efficiency. Thanks to all of you and to your units filling in for you as you do this work for all of us. It is no small challenge. It is good to start the year with thanks for one another and it is good to start each day being aware of who we are thankful for among our colleagues and students and in our university community.

As we go into this year together after however we experienced last year and the summer, could I suggest that we ask ourselves individually, “How am I?” Am I rested or worn; am I hopeful or fearful; am I confident or unsure; am I self-possessed or scattered; am I eager or reluctant; am I courageous or tentative? How do I feel about our students; how much do I believe in them and welcome their concerns, their growth, their challenges; how much do I believe in what I personally have to offer to students academically, inspirationally, as a mentor and guide, as one who listens and seeks to understand? How am I with my colleagues: experiencing common purpose and support, welcoming community and collaboration, trusting or skeptical, proud of who I am with them and they with me, accepting and respecting and being grateful for the different responsibilities and contributions of faculty, staff, and administration, and pulling for one another, encouraged by new colleagues and what they bring to us?

I ask you these questions because how each of us is and how we are with our students and with one another has come more to the forefront for us. I know that I need to know who I am, where I am, and how I am as I start this year as I begin my 20<sup>th</sup> year as president, as we launch this 125<sup>th</sup> year of our history looking to the next 25 years, as we come to the midpoint of a great capital campaign for our future, as we try to understand and serve our students in a new way required by who they are and what are their primary commitments and concerns, as we seek to find the appropriate ways of a new shared governance among ourselves, as I need to make the right decision to honor our faculty in seeking just working conditions while assuring the right of our university to uphold its way of being a genuinely, Jesuit, religious kind of university of our choosing rather than by determination by the government, and as we do all this with all the societal pressures and realities we all experience—during a most unusual and hostile presidential campaign. The moment and our mission calls for deep discernment and exceptional clarity. As I need this, I am sure that you do too.

Two experiences are of great help and give me hope at this time. The first is the simple and fundamental one of the strength that is felt in working together. I have experienced this in a profound way in a far more collaborative Cabinet, helped by the new members. It is a new day among us with a reaching out to engage, to listen, to learn, to ask for help, to admit when we make mistakes, to be advised, to respond, to share the way we guide the university. I believe we have learned that we cannot succeed, no matter how professional we are as an administration, if we are too contained among ourselves. I have experienced the same thing even more powerfully by meeting several times with all of the deans both as a group and with each individually, experiencing a broader, better-informed, better connected, more shared leadership. The challenge we faced in the Spring with the sit-in and the issues behind it showed very clearly how we must work far more together both among ourselves as administrators, faculty, and staff and with our students and that we must find the ways to listen much better and to communicate more openly among ourselves. This invitation to work together extends to all challenges and across the whole university in a significantly new way more than before because of the complexities of a university today and because of the need to listen and include so many more views and voices and hopes by the nature of our challenges and opportunities. I am committed to this new way of

working together, to finding new ways of shared governance, and I will give all my efforts to help bring about this growth in collaboration so that it can really be a new day at Seattle U in which all of us experience a greater voice and a share in fulfilling our mission.

The second experience which I have found so helpful and so hope-giving comes from preparing for our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I have plunged into our history: the people, the times, the students, the crises, the successes, the setbacks, the courageous actions to survive, the growth, the development of a campus, the leadership of generations of generous lay educational leaders, the undaunted support, inspiration, and prayer of the Jesuits, the changes in curriculum and programs, the ever-present and every-evolving Core Curriculum, the engagement with the City, the support of the families and friends who have stood with us, always Jesuit education, always an educating community based on a common mission, always a creative opening to the future. I am profoundly humbled knowing our 125-year history and inheriting the legacy of the people who have given their lives to this school, college, and university. We inherit not an institution but the legacy of the very lives, hopes, and loves of women and men who look to us to carry forward with our lives, loves and hopes this living reality which they have given us and which we now hold. Our history humbles us but even more it gives us hope. We are living what others who have gone before us could not have imagined or dreamed. We may be daunted by the challenges of our day, but they faced more critical ones and they came through them by perseverance, by sacrifice, by generosity, by pulling together, and by enjoying companionship of one another as colleagues and friends. This anniversary is a bridge between heritage and hope. We need to know and honor our heritage; we can confidently experience the fullness of hope.

My two fondest wishes for all of us this year is to engage this new year together and with hope. What is it that we shall do together this year and with this hopefulness?

Our first opportunity is to develop a greater mission alignment among ourselves, with our students, and in how we project ourselves to the public and to prospective students. Our primary need is to realize among ourselves and to make known our academic quality. We are not only good academically; we are excellent. We need to recognize this academic excellence more, speak more about it, take pride in it, award it, provide resources and support for it. Academic excellence is the center of our Jesuit educational mission; an academic excellence which informs our commitments and practices of justice and service. It is not one or the other but academic excellence which gives shape to works of social justice. That is Jesuit educational mission alignment. This year we also have an opportunity, which we welcome, to be among the five Jesuit universities in the country which will take their turn to do a self-study of their Jesuit mission priorities, welcome a visiting team from other Jesuit schools, and receive reaffirmation as a Jesuit university while learning of what are the ways in which we can improve in our Jesuit mission priorities. I want to express my thanks to Fr. Peter Ely, who has agreed to chair this year-long process for us. The first initiative we have for this year to do together and with hopefulness is to seek greater mission alignment and clarity.

The second thing we must do together this year is part of the same mission alignment. It is to place inclusive excellence, diversity, and equity at the center of our strategic purposes. We have already dedicated two years in a more explicit way to this endeavor. We have taken it as seriously and even more seriously than most universities because it is so integral to our Jesuit mission of “empowering leaders for a just and human world” as well as of “the education of the

whole person”. In our university and based on our religious foundations we hold the person to be sacred. Inclusion, racial justice, and equity flow from our core Jesuit and Catholic identity. This is not something new to us, but it is a new challenge because of the culture in which we live, because of the identities of our students, and because of the evolving consciousness of what inclusion, diversity, and equity call for in the context of our education, in how we go about forming students, and in what it requires of us as a community and an institution.

I think we could sum up last year by saying we learned by survey, by forums, by key recommendations of our taskforce, and by the demands of some of our students in the MRC sit-in and the support of their coalition by many others of our community how big is the challenge we all face across the university to make inclusion, diversity, and equity a reality among us. We cannot deny that this was for many of us a painful learning. This year we must make it a central opportunity to become a better Jesuit university for our students and for ourselves. We welcome the help of Dr. Natasha Martin, our Chief Diversity Officer; we welcome the help of a university-wide Diversity Council which will be formed; we welcome what each college, school, and division will do in its own listening, learning, and action; we welcome the help of Academic Assembly, we welcome the help of the Office of Multicultural Affairs; and we welcome the help of our students in their affinity groups and in their elected student government. We welcome all of these because assuring and guaranteeing inclusive excellence is the invitation and the opportunity of all of us. This is the year to advance it significantly and concretely. Let’s see this as our great opportunity.

Our first two goals of the year of mission alignment and placing inclusive excellent at the center of our strategic purposes—as well as much else we have to accomplish as a university of quality and integrity—will depend on our making progress this year on a third endeavor: that is, developing the structures of greater shared governance. Academic Assembly has been considering proposals for how to have effective shared governance through a Faculty Senate and connected committees. I endorse the furtherance of these proposals. Staff are considering how a Staff Council, parallel to a Faculty Senate, would better provide voice and inclusion of staff in the steps the university takes as it changes and advances its mission of which they are an essential, contributing part. I also endorse this development and promise that the administration will work constructively with what staff propose in regard to a Staff Council.

Shared governance requires of all of us a greater investment in and commitment to professional development. It is increasingly difficult, complex and requires special expertise and skilled communication to assure that Seattle University delivers on its educational and formational promises and creates the collaborative community which makes this possible. I am committed to supporting and seeking the resources for the professional development we need and which can make us a better university.

The fourth common endeavor for this year needs to be that we change the paradigm on the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of students making it a common commitment and work of us all rather than primarily the responsibility of the division of Enrollment Services. Our 125 year history shows convincingly that the health, vitality, creativity, the quality and the self-confidence of our university depend overwhelmingly on the success of our enrollment and retention and graduation of the numbers and the kind of students we want and know how to educate according to our mission. The efforts of our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary to expand our reputation

is aimed significantly at supporting enrollment. We will do all we can to make our Jesuit academic quality which is our defining character speak loudly, be more visible, and be more distinctive. That quality, that character, and that distinction depends on all of us doing what we do better and taking every action to win the students we want to come to us and we want to keep and to help succeed. Let's make enrollment our common commitment.

These are the four great things we can do this year, do together, and do with hopefulness: 1) develop greater mission alignment, 2) make inclusive excellence concrete and at the center of what we are about, 3) build new structures of shared governance, and 4) make enrollment and student success a common commitment. I believe the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary will motivate and support us in these endeavors and that the success of the capital campaign for our future will show us how many people believe in us and take pride in us. We don't need a capital campaign but rather a candid assessment of the quality of our Jesuit education and of the quality of the commitment among us to take pride in ourselves, in who we are, where we are, what we do, and what we want.

Before I end my remarks let me say something about our current situation in regard to the possible unionization of some of our faculty. There are two values at stake. First of all our faculty as well as our staff have a right to just and fair compensation, benefits, working conditions, voice in regard to these matters, and a right to organize for these purposes. This is a value and right we support and try our best to assure.

The second value is that Seattle University was founded as, developed in accord with, and is a religiously based university within the Catholic tradition and carries out its religious purpose in a way that is proper to the Society of Jesus. We are religious in a genuinely Jesuit way, and should be allowed to carry out our mission as a religious institution without government interference. This is a constitutional right and principle which we should uphold. These two values and rights should be honored. We recognize and accept the vote of 73-63 by some adjunct and contingent faculty from among five out of our nine colleges and schools in favor of the union. We have considered the matter further with our Board of Trustees and will communicate our decisions when they have been finalized. In all of this I wish to express my respect for those who have been and are involved in this process. I am confident that in one way or another we will make this challenge also an opportunity for building a better university.

I return to the kind of questions I asked at the beginning of my remarks. How are we indeed at the start of this year? How much in truth do we believe in our students? How open-eyed and courageous are we in facing our challenges and in making of them our opportunities? How much do we feel grateful for those who have gone before us in our 125-year history of committed people? How much do we feel blessed in this moment and hopeful for the future? These questions are important and I leave you with them because what our year will be will depend on how we answer them for ourselves and share our responses with one another.

Welcome to a hopeful year together as the educational community of Seattle University.