

## President's Welcome 2019

- September 20, 2019
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Welcome all to this academic year 2019-2020. How good it is that we begin it on this day of the Global Climate Strike, uniting ourselves worldwide with all who are committed to care for our common home, and especially uniting ourselves with our students for whom this is their greatest issue, cause, and commitment. Thank you Jeanette for starting us off this morning with a prayer to inspire us in our own commitment as a university, proud of our decision of a year ago to divest fully from fossil fuel extraction, the leading university in our state and among Jesuit universities for environmental action and education, ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation by Sierra Magazine among all universities for sustainability practices and initiatives. In another rating we rated 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in our sustainability curriculum and 4<sup>th</sup> nationally, overall for our kind of university. But there is much more than we can, need, and will do, not for our reputation but for our integrity as a Jesuit university and for the sake of the urgent issue itself. As we begin on this day of the Global Climate Strike, let's make this year an advancement of what we can do with those we serve in educating about and tackling this challenge and opportunity for the whole of the lives of our students. Some Seattle U. faculty and staff are gathering at 11:40 today at the reflection pool to join a march from Cal Anderson Park to City Hall. We applaud them.

It seems like such a short time since we gathered in this very room in appreciation of our faculty and staff colleagues and their service over so many years to our educational mission. Here we are again. There has been a summer in between—at least so they say—and we are now ready to welcome our students starting tomorrow following the lead of our School of Law colleagues who have pioneered the way into the year.

Things happen over the summer. The photos at the beginning of our gathering and video that followed showed some of them. Things happen to me too. You may remember the Italian woman in the hilltop village who, when I asked her the way to go down the hill, told me, “Anche una zucca può trovare la strada giu.” “Even a squash can find the way down.” I still hope that's just a common Italian phrase used for anyone and not especially for me. Or you may remember the four-year-old niece I scolded by yelling at her and her howl. She is now a sophomore in high school. She didn't cringe or cower in my presence this summer. But I did wonder, in that she has one uncle whose nickname is “Uncle Greenie”, whether in her mind I just might be “Uncle Meanie”!

The only stupid thing I did this summer was a little, but perhaps telltale, moment. I was driving alone and stopped at a station to get gas. After filling up the tank, closing the cap, and coming around the back of the car, I grasped the door handle, got into the car, slammed the door, and looked up to see I was sitting in the back seat! Some interpret this as God saying to me that it is time to take a back seat as president in these final two years. I interpret it as God telling me I should have a chauffeur!

Let's think of today as a pivot both from last year to this one and a pivot of our university from the past we and others have created to the future that is in the hands of all of us and which we are together envisioning and choosing.

Last year was a remarkable year in many ways. I've already mentioned the divestment, which was more than anything else listening to the voices of our students. The whole year can, most importantly, be seen as a great hearing and heeding of the voices of all of us. What a very rich year, led by Vice President Natasha Martin, of hearing and centering the voices of persons of color, of women, of all of us, of individuals in their unique identities and learning to listen to our own voices, to acknowledge our own biases and privileges and our need to know and respect others. Weren't the Red Talks and Mission Day really special!?

It was also an amazing year of the voices of the faculty in the extraordinary first year of our academic leader, Provost Shane Martin, who shows he really listens and acts upon what he hears whether in the Academic Assembly led by Professor Frank Shih, or our colleagues in all of the colleges and schools where he is present and attentive so that he can be the champion of the voices of the faculty.

How about the staff who drafted for the first time a charter for a Staff Council, held elections for leaders on the council, and are now in full operation, bringing in a new and needed way the voices of the staff to the important issues of our collaborative educational mission.

Perhaps all of these exceptional ways that made last year special and able to be characterized by the emergence and hearing of the voices of more and more people was epitomized and brought together in a concerted way by how the Strategic Planning Steering Committee repeatedly and deeply engaged the whole university of faculty, staff, students, administration, and trustees to hear their voices about what they want our university to be, what is most important for us to change and develop, and what will distinguish us for the sake of a more student-centered future education and formation. More of this later, and more of the voices of our friends and Seattle partners who came forward and with their very clear voices said by their generosity that they wanted to support our comprehensive campaign, that they believe in us and are committed to our future as they help make it possible.

I don't believe there has ever been any other academic year in Seattle U's 128-year history in which voice has been more advanced among us. Let's keep it going, increase it, listen to one another, and take collective action with one another in serving and shaping our future for the sake of the future of our students' lives and for the sake of the fulfillment and legacy of us all.

It is time now to look together at the coming year. Most importantly, we look to welcoming approximately 945 new freshmen or first-time-college students, 400 new transfer students, 500 new graduate students, and 227 new Law students. That means that we welcome to Seattle University and to our educational mission over 2,000 students. Just as importantly, let's intensify our efforts to retain all the students who come to us with such high hopes. We have recruited them. They had many choices; they chose us. We are responsible for fulfilling the Seattle U. Promise we have made to them so that they find our university, their fellow students, us in our dedication to them, our academic, formation, service, and leadership programs, and

their experience of belonging to be what they chose, what they hoped for, and what they are critically basing much of their future lives, careers and impact on. Let's fulfill the promise.

I have spoken about the pivot this day represents from last year, a year of heeding many voices to this year, which we might call a year of making many choices. It is a pivot not only from one year to the next, but in very significant ways a pivot from our past to our future, to the future of Seattle University we are choosing this year above all years.

Let me use as an image for this the tall building crane at the site of the new Center of Science and Engineering, a crane firmly anchored and with a high and wide sweeping arm which pivots on a fixed tower to construct the Center.

We are building, are constructing the future of Seattle University in many ways this year: through our Strategic Plan, through the public phase of our comprehensive campaign, through a new focus on student learning and engagement, and by a repositioning of Seattle University for the future in our academic programs, our inclusive excellence, and our financial stability and wellbeing. All of these are necessary both for the capturing of the tremendous potential we have and because of major external factors beyond our control pressing on us from the state of higher education, the economy, and the affordability of our education. Let me speak about these pivots of the university which will construct our future.

We should recognize that the crane itself, the fulcrum upon which all pivots in building the future of Seattle U. has a solid foundation in two things: our Jesuit education and our location in Seattle. Jesuit education plus Seattle equals Seattle University and especially Seattle University's future. They are our two greatest strengths which make us distinctive, strong, attractive, and confident. Everything turns around these foundational and structural endowments. We should explore ever more deeply and creatively in choosing our distinctive future what Jesuit education today means and asks of us and what the opportunities of Seattle offer to us. There's the foundation upon which we will build the future.

The most important thing for this year to turn our university toward the future, to make it distinctive, to give us the edge in competitive attractiveness for students is the Strategic Plan. Our thanks to Bob Dullea and Jen Marrone and to all of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee for their leadership in repeatedly consulting the whole university and giving shape to the emerging plan. It is moving toward finalization. You will recognize yourself in the plan and you will be excited about the future it opens up. The plan is the architect of our future. The plan will address our need for a clear and compelling vision for the university. It will elaborate a set of goals which will allow us to attain that vision, with priorities within each goal. It will make clear what are the measures we need to take to build the capacity among us for fulfilling the goals and attaining the vision. It will also delineate a set of more specific action, their timeline and financial dimensions, which we will need to work on over the course of the rest of the year in order to see their feasibility. The Steering Committee will soon be ready to bring forward to you a draft of the plan to receive your review and suggestions as we move closer to the Board of Trustees meeting in November in which I will present the Strategic Plan, asking that by their authority the Board approve it as the Strategic Plan for the next five years. Indeed this is a year of choice; the choice of our future.

The second major way in which we pivot this year to our future is that we will bring forward to the public and especially to our alumni for their support our comprehensive campaign called “The Campaign for the Uncommon Good”. We, as a university, are not seeking only the common good, but believe our graduates can bring about an uncommon good by their impact. This campaign has already raised \$250 million to fuel our future. We are not slowing down in these final two, more public years of the campaign, having already raised over \$14 million since June 30<sup>th</sup>. We ask for your advocacy, your personal support, and your encouragement of our alumni. Please join me in thanking Michael Podlin, Aly Vander Stoep, Jonathan Brown and their Development and Alumni Team who have led the way and will take us to and beyond our campaign goal.

Our third choice of the year in the pivot of the university is a new approach and effort in student learning and engagement. We will place all students at the center of our collaborative efforts and planning. Let’s all challenge ourselves to be student-centric every day and in everything we do. This will mean everything to our students and to ourselves in fulfilling our mission. We have already begun this in our efforts which are proving successful in the retention and greater belonging of our students. We have now integrated Student Development and Academics, with the Vice President of Student Development reporting to the Provost, so that through this integration of the whole of the learning and engagement experience of students we may be more fully a Jesuit university which believes in and is based on this integration and mutual impact of all aspects of students for the sake of their education and formation. We can better serve our mission of “educating the whole person” if the full range of the students’ learning and engagement is whole, is integrated. This year we will carry out this significant advancement of our Jesuit way of working with students.

Our final pivot of the university is the repositioning of the university in its academic programs, its inclusive excellence, and its financial stability. This repositioning depends upon the implementation of the strategic plan, the success of the capital campaign, and the new initiatives in student learning and engagement such that they drive better enrollment outcomes upon which we all depend. What this repositioning means is that we must review all of our colleges and schools, all of our academic programs, all of our centers, institutes, and initiatives to responsibly decide how to update them for a new epoch in higher education, what to invest in, and what to trim back or to reconfigure. It is a new epoch in higher education: the students are different, ever more diverse, which requires that we take much further our inclusive excellence, their future needs in careers are changing, the digital era comprehensively impacts our education and how we do everything, the competition among universities is much greater and more varied, a shift in the demographics of potential students is imminent, and the challenge of enrollment at all levels of the university are ever greater and more determinative of our overall wellbeing and our future. Our repositioning in academic programs, in inclusive excellence, requires and needs to be built upon a financial repositioning of the university. We will move away from working primarily on an annual budget cycle to developing a multi-year financial plan which will give us greater predictability and remove annual, painful budget adjustments. We cannot wait to do this because the need and situation is urgent. The biggest factor in all of this is what will drive enrollment in a new way with a new strategy, and as the responsibility and lifeblood of us all.

The crane with its pivoting arm will be functioning for the whole academic year and into the next one in constructing our new building. That is about the same timeframe for the pivot of the university in constructing its future. We have done so much to build the university of the present, all of us have, and so many who have gone before us. There are certain times when the changes needed for the university accumulate and coalesce. We are in one of those times. In our Strategic Plan we are the architects of our future and the choices to construct that future are at hand, and in all our hands. As we move through and lead significant change in our university, it will be so important that we treat one another with patience, respect, and kindness for change is difficult for all of us.

With what spirit will we go about this? An experience a friend told me about gives me a suggestion of one aspect of what our spirit might be. The friend attended a Zen-Christian meditation week. He told me that on a particular day the Zen Master instructed them to sit in a meditative posture in silence for an hour facing the wall and then after some movement instructed them to do another hour of the same sitting meditation facing the wall. Again there was a pause. Once again the Zen Master instructed them to do a third hour, but now he added in his instruction, "This time enjoy it!" My friend realized, and so have I so frequently realized, that enjoying doing what one does is significantly dependent on choosing to enjoy it. Enjoying is an inside job. We must do everything we can in the infrastructure, systems supports, resources, relationships and ways of collaboration to make the environment of working together at Seattle University as enjoyable as we can make it, and then we must choose each day to enjoy doing what we do together with one another and with our students. I hope that this important year of making the choices which will pivot the university to the future will not only be successful but will also be enjoyable, or perhaps because it will be enjoyable it will be successful. Welcome to the year; let's enjoy it.