

Welcome to a Community with a Common Purpose

- September 18, 2015

- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Good morning. Welcome to the 124th year in Seattle University's history. Thank you for coming in order to welcome into our community our new colleagues and to gather with one another as we go into this academic year together as colleagues with a common purpose. I have a few remarks as president this morning. I hope what is most important to you and the takeaway from this morning is the warmth of our relationships with one another, our common commitments, our finding joy in what we do together for our students but also for one another.

I hope you have enjoyed the summer whether in hot and sunny Seattle or elsewhere. I inflicted myself again on my sister Sarah's family at their lakeside house in New Hampshire. There are now eight grandchildren, so more little ones for me to scare with my big voice and presidential scolding gestures. It was the ideal arrangement of 16 of those families in the big house and in the small nearby cabin me with Meryl Streep. I read fewer books than usual this summer. You can blame that on Meryl.

You may have noticed that I have taken off some weight. Last year I went into the new academic year saying I was going to lose the weight of a turkey by Thanksgiving. Didn't happen. So I lowered my sights... a ham by Easter. Didn't happen. I began to think I'd settle for a hot dog by the 4th of July. But then I went to my doctor who happens to be Jesuit-educated and takes no prisoners, especially fat Jesuit ones. He took one look at me and said, "There is a name for the condition you have; it's called "Centripetal Obesity! Men your age gain pounds around the middle." "There is a cure." he said, "Eat less!" That did it. No one is going to get away with calling me "Centripetally Obese". So I followed this very complex diet. I am publishing a book on it called, "Fr. Steve's Secret Sauce for Looking Good to Meryl Streep". It is a book of few words. "Eat less." Amazing. It works! This is the product: a 28 lbs trimmer Jesuit presidential hunk! Toned for the long term.

I am looking forward to the year ahead of us, which has already been pioneered by our colleagues in Law and in Executive Leadership. In this year we will gear up for next year's 125th anniversary. We are launching and are already receiving applicants for our first new school in 19 years, the School of New and Continuing Studies.

Although final numbers are not in, we expect to welcome 1,000 new freshmen or first time in college students, 425 new transfers, 203 new Law students, and 525 new graduate students for a total of about 2,150. Think of that: their first experience at Seattle University, of our programs, our care for and interest in them, our mission and their encounter with us their professors and mentors. Think of the fact that with all of their possible choices and with the price of higher education and its cost to them, they chose us for an irreplaceable and impactful, significant part of their lives. It's good to be chosen; and it's also good to do all we can to live up to their choice and their hopes. I want to thank you, all of you, for your extra efforts this past year, when we needed to make it happen, to improve the retention rate of students at Seattle U., to help them in multiple ways to continue to choose us and to show them how to succeed here.

I look forward to what the impact will be on our Jesuit university of the visit to the United States next week of Pope Francis, the Jesuit pope. I'm sure he will inspire and also challenge all of us. Look out Donald Trump! It should be much easier, because of experiencing him, for us to know our Jesuit commitments, to make known to others and to recruit students and supporters to our university because it is Jesuit. What I most like about having a Jesuit pope is that he puts to rest the barb, "I didn't know Jesuits were Catholic!" The last time I looked, the Pope was a Catholic! Please, do take the following as a joke. Perhaps the challenge now is not how Jesuits can be more Catholic but how Catholics can be more Jesuit! There, with just a touch of Jesuit arrogance, is a soundbite for you. Next Thursday come and have "Lunch with Pope Francis". He's not coming here; but at 12:30 you are invited to join with others to watch his address to the joint session of congress, to have a bite to eat, and to have some discussion.

Also, coming to Seattle U. this year are Ben Bernanke, the Federal Chairman; Ursula Le Guin from Oregon, the science fiction author of our common book; Alan Mulally, who led Boeing Commercial and saved the Ford Motor Company; a series of speakers on environmental justice; the mother of Trayvon Martin; and to top it off, Geoffrey Canada at Commencement, the founder of the Harlem Children's Zone and the subject of the movie Waiting for Superman.

We look forward to the issues we will face both among ourselves and more widely. We are proud that we start this year as a tobacco-free campus under the leadership and provocation of our own students. We look forward to learning the results of the Climate Survey on Diversity and Inclusion so we can take practical steps to build on what we learn is strong and remedy or improve on what needs attention. Please take note and attend open forums when the results will first be made known to the campus community on October 22. I was going to have a President's Forum on that day but I am rescheduling it so that I can be with you in one of the open forums and learn with you what the real climate of our campus is. In December we look forward to seeing the revamped Connolly Center for the sake of facilities of equal quality for men and women athletes. Because of others' belief in us, we look forward this year to secure additional donations like the three we have recently received, which are larger than any in our previous 120 years. This support is a tribute to all of us and what we do to make this a university worth investing in. Look for new academic programs, strengthened academic and career advisory, and critically important new technological platforms.

I realize that there are some very significant other issues we must face as a community of colleagues with a common purpose. In meeting the challenges last year which the university encountered—as all universities are facing their own challenges—we were not able to provide a compensation increase this year even though we did fulfill our pledge of the multi-year market equity adjustments for both faculty and staff. We need to do better in regard to compensation, and we will do all we can to accomplish that. We will continue to be engaged in the issue of the unionization of some of our faculty. We are committed as a Catholic university—as we should be—to fair wages, to proper working conditions, and to the voice of all of our faculty in shared academic governance. At the same time, we are also committed to uphold our Catholic and Jesuit character as a university, will insist that we have the right to carry out that mission in our own way of being religious without government interference, and that our faculty—all of our faculty—are the most critical agents in making our Catholic and Jesuit mission real. Certainly we will continue the deliberations about what is the proper way for a university to make a

difference in regard to the use of fossil fuels. I am sure the national realities of discrimination and violence against blacks will be more important and more confronting for us at Seattle U. The refugees from the Middle East and Africa, the combinations of their migration and resettlement, and our own country's needed responsibility calls for our response in justice and compassion. The national presidential election process will surely find its expressions and excitements on our campus. This will not be a quiet year, but it will be a great year for what a university can and should be.

Let me close my remarks at this welcome of faculty and staff to the academic year with some personal remarks. Perhaps where I am as I enter my 19th year is best made known by six books and another I read this summer. I didn't intend to engage these subjects, but I was drawn to them. Our Kids by Robert Putnam opened me to the end of the American dream, especially in the opportunity for education for the kids of our poorest families... and it questioned me about how we can provide opportunity to them here. Missoula by Jon Krakauer shattered any illusions I had about the extent and the viciousness of sexual assault on college campuses... forcing me to be doubly sure we are doing everything we possibly can to protect our students and to provide them every resource and help. Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson showed me what we are really doing in the unjust systems of our country of incarceration and punishment... and it asks me how Juvenile Detention and the King County Jail, which bracket us, should impact us more consciously. Fareed Zakaria's A Defense of Liberal Education gave me an even greater rationale and language for upholding the foundations of our education. Reading Ursula Le Guin's The Lathe of Heaven—our common book for new freshmen and transfers—makes me intrigued about how the students in the group I will join will see the tension between what we can do by technology and what we must do ethically to assure our humanity. Perhaps the most surprising and most disturbing book I've read is Claudia Rankine's Citizen: An American Lyric, which conveys in poetry and prose what is the dehumanizing accumulation in the body of a black person from the never-ending felt experiences of being invisible, being erased, being perceived as angry or threatening, being treated as a category rather than as a self... and this reveals to me unmistakably and unavoidably my own personal racism. It was my best examination of my conscience.

Finally, the “another”, Pope Francis' encyclical “The Care for Our Common Home”—all 173 pages of it—convinces me how everything we do in our university, all our academic subjects and our programs, all of our activities, our campus, our finances, our community and global outreach, all of us in how we relate to and treat one another is connected, is a unity, is part of the integral ecology at the heart of the Pope's message and plea. It's not only about climate change and global warming, it's about us and our fundamental attitudes, our care, our justice, our mercy, our truth.

I come into the year with you, my colleagues with a common purpose, more assured and more inspired about how important, how good, and how impactful a work we are about in this university, in precisely the kind of university we are, and how much it deserves our very best efforts and the best of our truth as persons and as a committed community.