

President's Welcome Convocation 2018

- September 21, 2018
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Welcome friends, colleagues, faculty, staff, all contributing to the education of our students and the forming of our alumni according to our mission.

First of all, let me make a couple of personal remarks. In 22 starts of the academic year as president I have never so looked forward to getting about it than this year. I have loved having the law students and the athletes and the resident assistants and the orientation advisors already here. This campus just does not feel right without students when there are more dogs on the Union Green—which our students now call “The Dog Park”—than there are students on the whole campus. I am glad tomorrow is move-in day for our numerous new first-year students for I feel it is time to move on and to get about it.

As I start this year I am highly aware that it is the start of my last three years as president. I appreciate the trustees allowing me to serve these years—thanks Nicole—and I am eager to be about several things. I see three things I want to advance this year. I hope all of you are similarly committed to these: 1) to develop better and wider shared governance among us and to document what this will be so that there is a proper role and voice in decision-making, 2) to carry forward our significant developments in inclusive excellence, diversity, and equity with the leadership and catalyst of vice president Dr. Natasha Martin, and 3) to continue to address the issues of campus culture which became more evident and better understood last year.

I am particularly eager for the year because all three of these—shared government, inclusive excellence, and campus culture—will be part of both how we go about and what the outcomes need to be of the largest common endeavor of the whole university, which will be deliberating about and making the choices for our future in a new strategy plan for the five years beyond this one. As I welcome us to the year I welcome us into these opportunities to be what we really want to and can be. Let me say more about strategic planning in a moment.

There is one other thing I must speak about in a personal manner. It is the scandal in the Catholic Church of the revealed widespread sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by Catholic priests and the failure of oversight, even cover-up, of this by bishops. The morning I read the report of the Grand Jury of Pennsylvania I was changed. I could feel it in myself, in my feelings, and it has persisted. More than before this reality felt part of me as a Catholic priest as were these Catholic priests who abused and what in the church allowed this to happen was a reality about my church of which I am a part and for which I have a responsibility. Innocent people have suffered and are suffering greatly because of Catholic priests and the structure of the Catholic Church. I feel shame and sorrow, and I express apology, but I know we must do more. Seattle University as a Catholic university cannot think of this as someone else's issue. We are Catholic and we must take on this reality and we seek to be a resource for the healing, the protection of persons, and the reform of the Church. As we start the year I am asking leaders among us to help me know what—from who we are as a university as the one Catholic university of Seattle—we can do to face this reality and to help contribute to reform. I am quite sure this

will be an ongoing and critical issue of our university this year. I am not afraid of it and I hope you are not too.

As Catholic priests who are Jesuits, we Jesuits repeat frankly and publicly to you what has already been made known that several Jesuits of the Northwest many years ago, particularly in indigenous peoples' territories, sexually abused minors. In addition, two Jesuits of Seattle University—Fr. Michael Toulouse and Fr. Engelbert Axer—also sexually abused minors. We know this; we have made it known before; but it needs to be repeated so that all are now aware of this as part of our Catholic and Jesuit reality, and as a motivation to engage the challenge of today more fully and realistically. Thank you for listening to me speak frankly on this matter.

We all can begin this year with gratitude for how we approach the year in a fresh way:

- The installation of Shane Martin as provost represents for all of us a most promising opportunity as we go into the year in having an experienced and clearly collaborative provost who can help us together achieve the academic quality and goals of which we are capable. We are grateful to Shane and we commit to him our support.
- Similarly, we are grateful to begin the year with a strong enrollment of new students and an improved continuation of current students. This makes all the difference to us and lifts our collective spirits. It is good to be chosen. Our gratitude to all of Enrollment Services and hundreds of others who have brought about this very positive result.
- We can all be grateful for the work that began last year and has continued over the summer and at the present time to form the Staff Council. It is much needed as an aspect of shared governance, has been much needed, and I and the Cabinet fully endorse it and look for its voice in what we commonly choose to be about. Our thanks to vice president Michelle Clements, who has been the champion of the evolution and shaping of this Staff Council.
- Though I mentioned how eerie our campus is with fewer students over the summer, it was made up for by 57 conferences for 4,702 guests, 85% of them staying overnight in our residences. Thanks Conference and Event Services and Residence Life and the organizers of these conference by our faculty, deans, directors, and vice presidents.
- The campus itself is ready with new office spaces in Casey and the former law annex which we now call the John and Judy Harding Building, with Vi Hilbert Hall for 300 students and Enrollment Services, the Indigenous Peoples Institute in Xavier, the new Bottom Line in the PACCAR Atrium, multiple upgrades everywhere, new campus map boards and banners, and perimeter signage so people know where we are and who we are. Our gratitude to Facilities, Construction, and Grounds. We are an ever better campus because of you.
- Behind the scenes your University Advancement colleagues and volunteers have been consistently moving forward in the capital campaign and have now crossed the \$200 million mark. The campaign is already providing resources for the university in

multiple ways and is closing in on being able to give the green light for beginning the construction of the transformational Center for Science and Innovation by the end of this academic year. Our thanks to all of them and all of their volunteers. It bolsters the confidence of all of us to be supported so generously by those who believe in who we are and what we are becoming.

- I am especially grateful as we begin the year for a very important decision this week. Having worked with our students, learned from our faculty, received advice from a special advisory group on social responsible investments, having deliberated in depth on the issue, our Board of Trustees made the bold decision to commit the university to divest from fossil fuels. In the end the board, through a conscientious and morally-grounded discussion, saw that the future required us to take an unusual step in accord with our students' greatest concern and to send a signal that unusual measures need to be taken to do what we can to awaken other universities and the public at large to what might be called the terminal illness of the planet. We are the first in Washington State and the first Jesuit university to take this action. We invite other universities—especially Jesuit ones—to join us in this decision with hope that collectively we can accelerate change. I again thank our chairperson, Nicole Piasecki, for her leadership of the board in this matter so important to our mission.

Before I move into speaking about strategic planning, let me pause here and direct your attention to the cards at your table. It would be very helpful for how we go about the year if you would write down both what you are grateful for which has prepared us for this year and what you most hope for or look forward to in the year ahead. As you do that I would welcome any who would wish to voice their thanks or hopes going into the year to stand and tell us about them. Let this be both my welcome to you into the year but also your welcome to one another.

This morning is a welcome, a welcome to new colleagues and a welcome back to the rest of us. But it is also a welcome forward, a welcome into the future, not just for this year, but for many years. I welcome and invite all of you this year in the shaping of the future at Seattle University, well beyond my time, to participate in the strategic planning process that will make the key choices about who we will become and where we will go as a university.

I welcome your voice not only throughout the course of the year as the developing of the plan reaches out to you at many points for your views and your help, but even and literally today. When I go back to my office after this convocation I will send you a brief letter about the strategic planning process and will provide a link for you to participate in a Qualtrix online survey in response to three questions.

1. What in your view are Seattle University's greatest strengths?
2. What are the greatest challenges facing Seattle University?
3. What do you hope for as outcomes from the strategic plan?

We'll keep the online survey open for three weeks so that it extends also beyond the Provost's Convocation. Your responses will be a significant help in giving the university a starting point to know better how all of us as colleagues view where we stand and what we most want. This will put fuel into the launching of the strategic planning process. I hope to hear from you.

I hear often, "As a university we are doing so many things, perhaps too many things, but we don't know where we are going." This is what the strategic plan for the five years beyond this current year must tell us, tell us clearly, tell us in a motivating and uniting way, tell us responsibly in regard to persons, programs, resources, and finances, tell us in a way that is true to our Jesuit character and Seattle location, and tell us in a renewing and forward-thinking way, all for the sake of the education and formation of our students and their lives and impact as alumni. The time has come to set more clearly the direction for Seattle University, the time for the development of the 5-year strategic plan over the whole of this year. It is a time that calls for your help. It is your time, starting today.

After serving the university well for the last two years as Interim Provost, Bob Dullea, once again as vice president for planning, is eager to take on now the responsibility of organizing and helping to keep this process on track. No rest for the weary or generous, Bob! Thanks. From discussions with and nominations from key groups—e.g., the Academic Assembly, the Staff Council Steering Committee, Student Government—I will name a steering committee and its co-chairs. Their role will not be to be representative of the whole university or to write the strategic plan, but to facilitate the process, to reach out to the whole university to form working groups on different issues, and to co-ordinate, synthesize, and make consistent what emerges from the broad-based determination of key goals and concrete action plans.

The first phase of this process will be to understand our context. You will begin to help with that by your responses to the survey. Then we want to be clear about our values and to make the hard choice about what are the limited number of strategic goals we want to pursue which will make a difference for the future and that we have the resources to act on. Working groups will be formed to develop action plans on each of these goals. From there we will bring the plan together—all the way along the line consulting with you and keeping in touch with our trustees.

This is no small endeavor either in what is needed in its outcomes to direct the future of Seattle University, nor is it small in terms of how many people it will seek to involve in shaping this future. I ask for your help and your generosity. I commit myself to hearing and honoring your voices, to developing better shared governance through this process, to put in practice inclusive excellence in how we go about this, and to foster a culture in the university in this collective endeavor which can stand us in good stead for the future we will devise together.

As one contribution to this planning process I have prepared some remarks from my experience as a Jesuit and a president of a Jesuit university on how I see the Jesuit character of our university informing our planning for the future. I will send them to you shortly. Please accept them as my contribution to this process as we enter into it together.

Ultimately, it is the Board of Trustees who must consider, and approve, and own, and hold the university accountable for the strategic plan we devise. Let me invite Nicole Piasecki to speak

on her own behalf and as chairperson on behalf of the Board of Trustees about what she and they look for in a strategic plan.

Again, as I hand this back to you, Tim, to conclude, I thank you Tim for the organizing and leading this gathering. Again, welcome in new colleagues, welcome back the rest, and welcome forward all.