Mount Aloysius College  
2013 Orientation  
August 22, 2013  
Remarks of Tom Foley

Welcome to Mount Aloysius College, a place where hope and history are forged into opportunity—opportunity for every one of you, for your families, and someday for the communities where you will build your adult lives.

Welcome to this jewel in the Alleghenies, where it is 160 years since seven Sisters of Mercy first came from Dublin Ireland to the Laurel Highlands, and welcomed 22 young girls to what was then Saint Aloysius Academy in Loretto. It is 116 years since the Main Building—the one that I heard someone through my window compare to Harry Potter’s school—116 years since we opened our doors as Mount Aloysius here in Cresson.

A great deal has changed in the physical plant of the college in the last 50 years, but the core values of mercy and justice, hospitality and service, still rule on these grounds. Mount Aloysius is a place where you will get a first-rate education in the three R’s and in job specific skill sets, but it is also a place where you will get some lessons in how to lead a productive life...

--a life where you understand that the most important things in life aren’t things,

--a life that is engaged in community wherever you choose to live and

--a life where many of you will become leaders in your communities.

At Mount Aloysius, you will find that the motto you saw emblazoned on all your Admissions materials got it right—“the horizon really is just your beginning.”

Let me say a few things to all the parents and grandparents, big sisters and little brothers, and all the loved ones who came with you today.
Parents, brothers and sisters and grandmoms and grandpops, aunts and uncles and for a few of you your children—we thank you all for getting them to this point. You should all be very, very proud. We thank you for the roles that each of you have played in the lives of our newest Mount Aloysius College students—whether it was building up their confidence or knocking it down sometimes, showing them how to tie a slip knot or rig a fishing line, how to catch a fly ball or handle a sly insult, how to play *Knuckles O’Toole* on the piano or make the perfect pumpkin pie.

You who came with them today came with them for a reason and it wasn’t just to drive the car. It was to carry all their possessions into the room for them. No—just kidding!! You came with them because you made them, because you love them and because now you are brave enough to let them go. They say courage is the first virtue, and we thank you all for showing that in abundance here today.

**Now let me say something about our students in phrases with which we can all identify** (and with thanks to a Kansas newspaper writer who first conceived such a list). These new students will certainly know it’s not high school anymore when they wake up tomorrow and there is no one there to tell them

- To wake up and I mean now
- To stand up straight
- To speak up and stop mumbling
- To stop texting at the dinner table
- To stop texting under the dinner table
- To look both ways
- To wipe your nose
- But not on your sleeve
- To wipe your hands
- But not on your shirt
- To grow up
- To not grow up so fast
- To look at your mother when she talks to you
To not look at your father that way
To go ask your father
To kiss your mother good bye
To say you’re sorry
To say thank you
Because I said so.

Any of those phrases sound familiar? See what you’re going to miss? Six months from now, you might really miss some of those reminders.

So, to all the parents and loved ones with us today. We thank you—

for all the things we can count: lunches made, homework reviewed, and miles driven...

and for all the things we can’t count: personal sacrifices you’ve made, life lessons you work hard every day to impart.

Someone once said that the universe is not made up of atoms, it is made up of stories. And we know there are 300 different stories under this tent. We thank each you for the special story of your family, the story that led you to bring your children here to us today. And we applaud you, parents and family, as you have the courage to leave your children with us so they can write the next chapter in the story of your family.

Now let me say just a few things to all our incoming students.

First, we are in awe of you. You are the largest entering class in the history of the college, and you were selected from the largest pool of applicants in the history of Mount Aloysius College. You come from 18 states and 5 foreign countries on three continents. You include among your number 30 Mercy presidential scholars, 120 Mercy Service grant recipients, 21 honors fellows, 17 Biology Fellows, 5 History and Political Science Fellows, 4 English Fellows. You were stars in high schools musicals, athletes on varsity teams, honor society members, some of you are sons and daughters of Mount Aloysius alums. And more than 60% of you share at least one trait in common with me—you are the first generation in your family to have the chance to go to college. Congratulations.
We, on this side of the podium, stand in awe of you for some other reasons as well. It occurs to us that you are all so young that the country my generation grew up in fear of—the USSR—no longer even existed by the time most of you were born. It occurs to us that most of you have never even seen a rotary phone, a typewriter (manual or electric) or a black and white TV (unless you watch the Turner Classic Movie channel). And it occurs to us that vinyl records, eight track tapes and even cassettes are just fictions of our imaginations—as far as you are concerned. Heck, you even think email is old fashioned and too slow!! You are the only generation for whom the first association you make with the word Web is not to spiders, but to a worldwide communications technology. If your favorite communication device Facebook, were a country, it would be the third largest in the world.

So we are in awe of you—the generation of iPhones and iPad’s--whose personal cell phones have more brain power than the computer on the Apollo rocket that landed a man on the moon. Yes, we certainly are in awe of you.

Second, we expect a lot from you. Five things—go to class, take good notes, do your reading, turn in assignments on time, ask questions. Let me say those again. Go to class, take good notes, do your reading, turn in assignments on time, ask questions. Do these, you will succeed here. More on this topic from Dean Fulop in just a few minutes.

Third, we have great hopes for you. We hope that you will apply yourself to your studies, that you will profit from the special talents of your classmates, and that you will engage with this extraordinarily committed faculty and staff.

We also hope that you will take some chances while you are here. In the movie “Julia”, based on a short story by Lillian Hellman, the title character sends her best friend off to college with the words, “Have fun. Take chances.” Take chances.

Taking chances isn’t always easy--it can be quite scary sometimes. Try out for a singing group while you are here, get some friends together and perform in the Madrigal at Christmas, at a Friday night open mike in Cosgrave or try your hand at MAC’s Got Talent or “A Minute to Win it” in a couple of weeks. Join a team, organize your own intramural team or better
yet, invent your own club activity or sport. Join Sister Nancy and Sister Helen for a spring break in a community service project a thousand miles away. Or take a course in forensic science, or in the literature of crime and detection.

There are a hundred other chances out there waiting for you on this campus that has tomorrow written all over it. It is our hope that you will each take a few of these chances. And don’t worry if you fail once in a while when you take those chances. It’s baseball season now, softball just over. Best hitter ever in baseball was Ted Williams, and even when he hit .406, that means he still failed 6 out of 10 times he came to the plate. I like that other philosopher of life, Dolly Parton, on the subject. She says she “never tried quitting and never quit trying.” Pretty good recipe both for your time here at Mount Aloysius and when you move on from here.

Now when you take those chances, we want you to do it with energy, with enthusiasm. We’re at a college founded by a religious order of remarkable Mercy sisters who have that quality—enthusiasm—in abundance. And though there are just two of them left here on staff, we still count on their “spirit” to drive us. Someone once said that “enthusiasm is the greatest asset in the world. It beats money, it beats power, it beats influence.” I think that’s right, and many of you are already walking proof of that postulate.

Whatever chances you take, whatever choices you make here, give it everything you got, give it as my father liked to say, 110%.

Whatever chances you take, give it your all, go for it.

**Last comment is about community.** You are all very fortunate; you are coming not just to a college but to a community—in every meaningful sense of the word. You will never be just a number here. You are coming to a place founded on principles of justice and mercy, hospitality and service. You will be encouraged while you are here to synthesize faith with learning, to develop competence with compassion, to develop your skills to a state of the art level—so that the day you leave here, you are ready to work in your field and live as a productive citizen in your community.

And then you will be taught to “pay it forward” and use your skills, somewhere, sometime on behalf of a community and not just on behalf of yourself. People won’t *pick up after* you at Mount Aloysius, but they will *look*
after you. And then expect you to do the same for others while you are here...and after you graduate.

So take some chances while you are here, and remember that you are part of a community that cares for you and for everyone else in this “awesome” Class.

Now let’s end this properly—could all our new Mount Aloysius College students stand up, turn around and let’s give your parents and loved ones who got you here a standing ovation.