Scholarship Appreciation Dinner
Mount Aloysius College
October 28, 2014
Remarks: President Tom Foley

I have three assignments here tonight, and let me get to it. First, some thanks; second, a bit of history; and third, a few words about hope.

Thanks.

First, to our faculty and staff—could you please stand up? We have an extraordinarily dedicated faculty and staff at Mount Aloysius College. They display an almost fiduciary sense of responsibility about the enterprise we call Mount Aloysius.

Didn’t want to go any further this evening without acknowledging the scholarship and commitment of our faculty and the dedication and work ethic of our staff—both are central to fulfilling the full mission of this college. We thank you.

Second, to the President’s Executive Council (PEC), would they please stand, as I introduce you. Our Senior Vice President for Administration, Suzanne Campbell. Our Vice Presidents, Frank Crouse for Enrollment, Dr. Jane Grassadonia for Student Affairs, Sister Dr. Helen Marie Burns for Mission Integration, Donna Yoder our CFO, Jack Coyle, our Director of Communications and our Master of Ceremonies this evening, Jennifer Dubuque for Institutional Development.

These folks really are the institutional glue on this campus, holding us all together through the challenges of new construction, old sewers and so much more. We thank you.

Third, to Community leaders with us today. We are joined
• by current and former members of the President’s Advisory and the Alumni Councils Donna and Pat Gildea, Adam Pernelli, Rene Damin, Becky Skolarski and Helen Boyko
• by long-time friends of the College Ray Walker (whose generosity with his wife Louise gave birth to our athletic fields), Jack and Jenny Calandra (who received honorary doctorates two years ago) and Bill and Kim Wilkinson (who never miss this event) and Pat Cuthbert (still the favorite daughter in the nursing program here).
• by people who have been named distinguished and honorary alums of the College by our Alumni Council Renee Martin Nagle, Dan Rullo, Mauvette Kiel O’Dowd and the daughter of two honorary alums, Megan McLanahan, who came all the way from Harrisburg to stand in for her parents who are overseas.

We are fortunate to have this group here —they represent well the highest echelons of leadership in our region—from the private, public and non-profit sectors. We thank them.

Fourth, to our Trustees. We are also extraordinarily lucky to have as Trustees of the College people who truly understand and support the mission of this unique institution.

Our emeritus Board Chair Dan Rullo—who was just named an honorary alum; the Godmother of our board and alum of the academy Adele Kupchella, our new Board Chair Philip Devorris, our youngest board member Derek Walker (who is the third generation in his family to step up and help this college and the students we serve) and three absolute stars in our Board firmament, Bill Polacek, Ann Benzel and Mark Barnhart.

It has been a real pleasure for Michele and I to visit with many of these folks at their own worksites, in their homes and here at the College. Their personal commitment to this institution, their genuine understanding of our history, their deep passion for our mission and their willingness to go the extra mile speak directly to their passion for our students.

Could you all please stand. It takes a village to run a College, and these are some of the residents of that village.

Finally, there are some extraordinary women represented in this room tonight. Sally Polacek is here with us in spirit as ten of her family members join us. Sally and her
husband raised 9 children, and after the youngest was born, she came to Mount Aloysius to get her nursing degree.

She did that, practiced as a nurse and a nursing educator, and her children are pillars of the community all over this region, but especially in Cambria County.

We learned at her funeral service that Sally’s favorite expression was “it is what it is”, no matter what the challenge placed in front of her. And she met every one of those challenges in her eight decades on this earth.

Bill, I hope you don’t mind but every time I see this expression now the rest of my life, I will be bringing it back to you. Michele and I found this one at the antiques barn at the Bedford Fall Foliage Days.

Speaking of extraordinary women, my own mother Angela came all the way from Philadelphia. With our Dad, she encouraged all of her 12 children to seek higher education. 11 of them marched in the procession at the Inauguration four years ago, each one first generation to college in our family.

Mom is here with my brother jimmy and sister in law Mary Jo and with three students who benefit from scholarships in Jack Foley’s name. He never got the chance to go to college, but he would be just delighted to know that some students do have that chance, in part because of scholarships in his name.

**Second topic, history.** In a real sense we commemorate history tonight—the memories and history with this institution of our scholarship donors, and the “history in the making” in the person of these young students. I want to take a moment to describe the seminal part that the Sisters of Mercy have played in the history of this place.

The story of this college, and of the women who literally dug it out of the side of these mountains, is, frankly, remarkable. Aristotle argued that courage is the first virtue, and these Sisters of Mercy—with birth names like Amelia Ihmsen, Emma Cosgrave, the two Marys, Farley and Shields, Mary Ann Dillon and Virginia Birchy—showed plenty of courage—both moral and physical—through long dark 19th century winters, short tight 20th century budgets and even a great fire—109 years ago—that destroyed much of what they had built. If you know anything about the Mercys, you know that they didn’t whine, they just rebuilt.
There is a toughness there that undergirds the deep spirituality, and both qualities are central to the history of this place. It is hard in this day to match the perseverance of these daughters of pilgrims and poets and poteen makers—pioneers and protagonists, scholars and scolders that they were, and are.

But that history of strength and forbearance—of courage really—is the history of all who are in this room tonight—of all who help to write the modern day story of Mount Aloysius, by your scholarships for our students and by your service to the College.

That shared history is also hope—for all of us—which St. Paul said in his letter to the Hebrews, “is the anchor of the soul.”

We are grateful that these women chose to build their lives and legacy here at Mount Aloysius College, in Cresson, in these Southern Allegheny Mountains of PA. And tonight, as we honor donors and scholars, benefactors and beneficiaries, we remember what brought now well over 14,000 students here in the first place—beginning over 160 years ago.

And we give our thanks to you, founders, builders, protectors, teachers, cooks and bottle washers—the Sisters of Mercy. Would the four sisters who are with us tonight please stand and let us show you our appreciation—Sister Helen Marie Burns, Sister Eric Marie Setlock, Sister Charlene Kelly, Sister Benedict Joseph.

It is an extraordinary history, one that deserves our praise, our adulation, our emulation.

**My last assignment, a word or two on the subject of “hope.”**

Jennifer has given me some statistics on giving from the 2012-13 fiscal year that ended June 30th. They include:

- more than $575,000 in new dollars for the Mount Aloysius annual fund to support scholarships and operating expenses;
- total giving for fiscal year 2013-14 that surpassed $3 million; and
- almost $40,000 raised by our student callers from Alums during last year’s MacConnect phonathon.
- And seven brand new scholarships that we awarded for the first time this year.

Science tells us that you can live for about 40 days without food, that you can live for about three days without water and that you can live for about eight minutes without air. But it is very hard to live even one second without hope. Every one of these new scholarship dollars represents hope—for one student, one day at a time.
Hope for the 94% of our students who are eligible for financial aid and get it from Mount Aloysius

Hope for the 82% of our students who work at least a part time job to supplement that aid

Hope for the 59% of our students who are the first generation in their family to attend college, almost double any four year institution in a 100 mile radius

Hope for the 55% of our students eligible for the need-based Pell Grant, again the highest in this region by over 50%, and

Hope for one if five of our students who make college work on total family incomes are below $21k.

This year, we have new reasons for hope in the form of these seven brand new endowed scholarships that Jennifer will shortly announce and that I would like to acknowledge here publicly—adding to the over 100 we have on record.

Nobel Laureate Elie Weisel likes to say that “God made man because he loves stories.” When you hear the stories from three of our students in just a few minutes, you will appreciate Weisel’s insight, and you will also understand the hope that your gifts bring to this College.

Thank you for your gifts of time, of talent, of treasure and most of all—of hope.