Alumni Weekend Dinner
July 20, 2013
Remarks of Tom Foley

Thank you, Jennifer. And thank you to all our staff that helped put this weekend together--from panel discussions to nursing education, from the Mountie fiesta to the Mountie Jam Session, from nature walks to campus tours to zumba. I am exhausted just reciting the list activities for which you all signed up! I hope you found it interesting and even occasionally inspiring. Special thanks to our team here at the College who worked on all the fine points and gave up their weekends to be here with you.

Let me congratulate (the about to be anointed) distinguished and honorary alums who are with us tonight. The “distinguished” alums are nurses and educators, artists and successful business owners. They come from Scranton and Chambersburg, Georgia and Maryland, and right down the road in Altoona. We are proud to be in your company and we congratulate Patricia Mutch Watson, Sister Ruth Neely, Steven Franke, Michael Shank and Eleanor “Honey” Corbin.

Last year, we welcomed Father Jim Coveney and Astride and Michael McLanahan into the ranks of “honorary” alums—this year it is Montessori pioneer Sister Mary Giuseppe DaBella and long-time nursing professor Patricia Cuthbert. We are honored to be in your company.

And special blessings on all the Sisters of Mercy who are here with us again this evening—despite ever dwindling numbers, they remain the heart and soul of Mount Aloysius, helping us to stay focused on the fundamental mission, to “synthesize faith with learning, to develop competence with compassion, to put talents and gifts at the service of others, and to begin to assume leadership in the world community.” In practice, that means producing graduates who are job ready, technology ready and community ready—prepared to engage in the life of the community—wherever it is that their work and families take them.

In her edition of The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Mary C. Sullivan opens her introduction with these four lines from Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney’s poem Sunlight:

And here is love
Like a tinsmith’s scoop
Sunk past its gleam
In the meal bin
It is 160 years since that love—“like a tinsmith’s scoop sunk past its gleam in the meal bin”—first showed itself in the Allegheny Mountains, at the very moment when seven Sisters of Mercy welcomed 22 young girls to Saint Aloysius Academy. It is 115 years since the Main Building opened its doors as Mount Aloysius here in Cresson, over a 100 years since Charles Schwab financed the construction of Alumni Hall, and over 90 years since Pittsburgh architect John Theodore Comes drew up plans for the striking, Lombardy-Romanesque Chapel Building. I would describe all of that activity as the first metamorphosis of Mount Aloysius College, a time for planting both spiritual roots and red brick buildings.

It was 50 years ago now that the second metamorphosis took place, when the original McAuley Hall appeared as the first free standing structure on the campus, quickly followed by Ihmsen and the old original Cosgrave—all precipitated by the move from “academy” to “junior college” status.

And I feel that I arrived here smack in the middle of the third metamorphosis at Mount Aloysius College—a free standing, comprehensive two and four-year degree granting institution of higher education.

Jennifer asked me to give you an update of activity at the college in the midst of this third metamorphosis, and let me see if I can do that with two comments and a couple of videos. The first comment is about Mount Aloysius as a place of action, and the second concerns Mount Aloysius as a place of mission.

**First, Mount Aloysius is a place of action.** Certainly, by the numbers alone, your alma mater is a happening place. Let me give you some examples—

- **On Curriculum**, programs of study have grown to over 70.
- **On Faculty**, almost double the number of full-time faculty holding doctorates.
- **On Enrollment**, up 25% (in a period of declining enrollments nationwide over the last decade); and a literal tripling of the residential population in the last six years.
- **On Student Life**, over 100 separate programs—from a Canadian comedian to serious drama—in the spring semester alone.

The most recent entering class was our ...

- highest number of applications ever
- highest number of acceptances
- highest number of traditional-aged students
- highest number of students-in-residence on campus

That’s a lot of numbers, but they only begin to capture the highlights of all the action at the College. **Let’s watch our Commencement Video**—conceived, filmed, photographed and edited right here in our own Digital Grotto...

I hope you see what I mean when I say that Mount Aloysius is a place of action.

**Second, the sense of mission is alive and well here at Mount Aloysius.** 30 students went on out-of-state mission trips this year—to places like Guyana and New Orleans. They are in addition to the almost 1,000 students who worked on 366 projects with 217 different local non-profit partners in just this academic year—building shelves at food banks, organizing blood drives, collecting hats and coats and shoes thru the winter—all for people who live within our fifty mile radius here and some for people as far away as Haiti and Honduras.
There is an infectious energy about this place—yes, 99% of our nursing students got good paying jobs last year and our NCLEX pass rate competes with any nursing class from here to Pittsburgh—but 100% of those students are not just job ready but they are community ready. That is the special magic of Mount Aloysius—our intent is not just to produce job-ready graduates but community ready citizens—who understand that those to whom much is given much is expected.

Again, pictures speak louder. This video was produced for “The Profile Series,” and moderated by the old actor Lou Gossett Jr.—they “profile” schools whom they believe are innovative and special. Mount Aloysius is only the second school in PA to be portrayed on their national cable program.

So, your alma mater remains a place of action with a real sense of mission, and that’s not just our opinion.

Finally, I want you to know that the Mount Aloysius you attended remains a place where personal stories are nurtured and encouraged and preserved—perhaps til they can be told at gatherings such as this one. Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Weisel likes to say that the universe is made up not of atoms but of stories. And in truth, it was not the “atoms” or the numbers in this case, that brought Michele and me to this part of Pennsylvania and to Mount Aloysius. It was the stories that brought us. And they happen every day here.

And we want to hear more of those stories from the Mount Aloysius of yesterday, today and tomorrow. We will need your help to tell those stories, as we prepare to finish the last step in our Campus Master Plan, the state-of-the-art Athletic, Convocation and Wellness Center out west of the library. It is a $25 million project, the largest in the 160-year history of Mount Aloysius, it will increase the floor space of the college by 30%, all on its own.

40% of it has been financed by a single grant—a donation comes from an unusual source—at least for this college—that source is the Commonwealth of PA—whose leaders heard the story of this college—its commitment to value and values, its promotion of job-ready and community-ready students—and decided that Mount Aloysius, after 160 years of service to over 16,000 students, deserved a little help from its friends. We will need more help to finish this project but we are off to a great start and hope that some of you will want to be part of this project as well. And if you want to help, see Mike or Jennifer or Sally or Sister Eric Marie before you leave!

Last night, at the opening reception for the Golden Grads—the Class of 1963 here for their fiftieth reunion, I cited a famous writer who likes to say that, and I am quoting, “we all write poems, it is simply that poets are the ones who write in words.” I hope that this weekend has allowed each one of you to write some poems and, better yet, to remember the ones you wrote 10, 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years ago.

Poems about friendship and faith, poems about literature and landscapes, poems from the heart and poems about hope. And if by chance you wrote any of them down, send them to us. We’d love to add your own story to the Mount Aloysius collection.

Have a great night and enjoy the rest of this perfect weekend at your Mount Aloysius.