Alumni Weekend Dinner
June 23, 2012
Remarks of President Tom Foley

Thank you, Jack, for that thorough introduction, and for reading every detail exactly as my mother wrote them!! And thank you to all our staff who helped put this weekend together—from millennial updates to nursing education, from Elvis to Hawaiian Luau (didn’t Elvis make a movie about that)–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.

And special blessings on the Sisters of Mercy who are here with us again this evening—despite ever dwindling numbers, they remain the heart and soul of Mt 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 not only job ready but community ready—prepared to engage in the life of the community—wherever it is that their work and families take them.

In Mary C. Sullivan’s edition of The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, she 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 159 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 114 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 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 Mt 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 Mt Aloysius College—a free standing, comprehensive two and four year degree granting institution of higher education. Jack 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 videos—the first about Mt Aloysius as a place of action, and the second about Mt Aloysius as place of mission.

**First, Mt 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); including a four-fold increase in the number of those entering right out of high school (from under 70 to more than 300); and a literal tripling of the residential population.
- **On Student Life**, over 100 separate programs—from a Canadian comedian to an Olympic women’s basketball coach—in the spring semester alone.

The most recent entering class was...

- Our highest number of applications ever
- Our highest number of acceptances
- Our highest number of traditional aged students
- Our 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 Year in Review Video**—conceived, filmed, photographed and edited right here in our own Digital Grotto.
I hope you see what I mean when I say that Mt Aloysius is a place of action.

**Second, the sense of mission is alive and well at Mt Aloysius here.** 40 students went on mission trips this year—to Guyana, to Biloxi, MS, and to China. They are in addition to the over 1,000 students who performed acts of community service with 141 local non-profit partners 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 Mt 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 who they believe are innovative and special. Mt Aloysius is only the second school in PA to be portrayed on their national cable program.

So your alma mater is a place of action, it is a place where mission is still paramount, and a place where creativity and excellence are highly valued.

So, your alma mater remains a place of action with a real sense of mission. Finally, I want you to know that the Mt 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 I to this part of Pennsylvania and to Mt Aloysius. It was the stories that brought us. And they happen every day here.

But let me finish with the story of one student who spoke at commencement this year—Amber Lenhard...
And we want to hear more of those stories from the Mount Aloysius of tomorrow. We will need your help to tell those stories, as we prepare to finish last step in our ten part Campus Master Plan, a state of the art athletic, convocation and wellness center out behind the library. It is a $25 million project, the largest in the 159 year history of Mt Aloysius, and one for which we have already secured a $10M lead grant, the largest single donation in the history of the College.

That 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 Mt Aloysius, after 159 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 are off to a great start and hope that some of you will want to be part of this project as well.

Last night, at the opening reception for the Golden Jubilee alums, 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 Mt Aloysius collection.

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