President’s Scholarship Dinner
Mt Aloysius College
October 22, 2013
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 Mt Aloysius College. They display an almost fiduciary sense of responsibility about the enterprise we call Mt Aloysius. They look after our students—whether they need help on a concept in the classroom or with a personal challenge outside it. These people are the heart and mind of Mt 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 two Senior Vice Presidents—for Academics, Dr. Tim Fulop; and 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 Tyler Pine, Pat Gildea, Marina Morey-Sell, Howard Hawkins and Rene Damin, and by long-time friends of the College Ray Walker (whose generosity with his wife Louise gave birth to our athletic fields), Mary “Tim” Sheedy (whose husband was both long-time chairman and champion for the College), Marie and John Little (who are responsible for our Wolf Kuhn Gallery), Astride McLanahan (one of the single most avid fans of our students and our student athletes), Donald Devorris (whose wife received the last honorary doctorate awarded during Sister Mary Ann’s tenure), Jane Hite and Richard Fiore (whose families run two of the largest businesses in the region) and Kit Benzel (whose mother in law chairs our trustees committee when she is not running Benzels Bretzels, and winning statewide Service to the Arts awards, as she is tonight in Harrisburg). 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 model Board Chair Dan Rullo—who may as well be on the PEC because he commits that much time to the College; the Godmother of our board and alum of the academy Adele Kupchella, our Board Vice Chair Philip Devorris, our longest serving member and co-chair of both College fundraising campaigns Mike McLanahan, Jim Lyons (one of our newest members) and 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).

It has been a real pleasure for Michele and me 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’s an extraordinary trio of women in this room tonight. They’re not Sisters of Mercy but they all are “mothers” of mercy and service and justice and hospitality. Their names are Sarah Polacek Mihalaki, Esther Rullo and Angela Foley. Between them, these three women raised 25 children. Between them, they prepared something in excess of 112,500 sandwiches for school lunches (and they all worked outside the home as well). And between them they partnered with three fine men to raise families whose children are now community contributors all across this commonwealth.

These women are special to us because each of them has brought in service to Mount Aloysius one of their sons. Sarah’s son Bill is the CEO of JPL Industries, but more importantly he’s a board member here at Mount Aloysius and was our Commencement speaker at the December 2012 graduation. Esther Rullo is mother to our Board Chair Dan, who is also the leading attorney in Somerset County (I don’t think Esther will mind me saying) and whose recent appearance before the State Supreme Court I had the chance to observe in the past week. And it is Esther’s son who will have to take the blame for bringing Michele and I to Mount Aloysius—he chaired the search committee.

The last of these extraordinary women is my own mother Angela who with her husband Jack encouraged all of her 12 children to seek higher education. 11 of them marched in the procession at the Inauguration two years ago, each one first generation to college in our family.

We thank these women for making the journey to Mount Aloysius tonight; we thank them for the scholarships which have been created here in their honor; and we thank each of them for sharing one of their children with our students here at Mount Aloysius.

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.

Michele and I are often struck in our walks around campus by the little bits of history, the new discoveries that we find around every corner—another piece of stained glass we hadn’t noticed before (St. Joe’s stairway), Our
Lady “of the Pipes”—a six-foot statue hiding (of all places) under some pipes down in the basement of Old Main, new benches down by the cemetery, the 700 lb. brass “Mountie Stallion” donated by the McLanahans in front of the ACWC, or another piece of Mount Aloysius history from the bottomless trove of Sister Benedict Joseph or Sister Charlene Kelly.

Most importantly on history, I want to take a moment to describe the seminal part that the Sisters of Mercy have played in the history of this place.

You know, there are almost 10,000 Sisters of Mercy in the world today, serving in 47 countries, in over 1000 cities and towns and villages across the globe, in places like Guyana and Guatemala, Panama and Peru, Chile and China, Uganda and the United States, and of course where it all started on Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland.

In America alone, there are 3,684 Sisters of Mercy, another 3,264 associates and over a thousand Mercy Volunteer corps alums who live out the gospel. The Sisters of Mercy do that by founding and operating over 100 schools from Australia to Belize and from Ireland to the United States, including our own College—and 17 others like it in this country. They also live out today’s gospel by founding and operating more than 50 full service health care systems, more than 60 homeless shelters and orphanages, and dozens of long term care facilities and other social service networks that tend to the needs of the “least” of our brothers and sisters.

We in this college are among the most fortunate beneficiaries of these extraordinary examples of how to “live a life.” 202 women have entered the Sisters of Mercy since the community in Cresson was founded more than 150 years ago. More than two thirds of those spent some part of their ministry with us on these grounds. And we have had over 240 students receive Mercy Service Grants at Mt. Aloysius, and 156 of our students have won Mercy Presidential Scholarships, about 40 of whom are in the audience today.

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 Mt 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 Mt 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 160 years ago. And we give our thanks to you, founders, builders, protectors, teachers, cooks and bottle washers—the Sisters of Mercy. Would the three 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.

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 2012-13 that surpassed $1.24 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 Mt Aloysius
- Hope for the 76% of our students who work at least a part time job to supplement that aid
- Hope for the 62% 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 the 43% of our students who make college work even though their total family incomes are below $38k.

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.