Mount Aloysius College
STATE OF THE COLLEGE
August 16, 2010
President Thomas P. Foley

Thank you and welcome to this 71st academic year at Mt Aloysius College. It is my honor and privilege to be among you today, and it is my hope that in the weeks, months and years ahead, you will all feel that the Conference on Mercy Higher Education, the Mt Aloysius Board of Trustees (led by Joe Sheetz), and the Presidential Search Committee (led by Dan Rullo and on which at least 5 of you sat) made the right choice.

I want you to know that I haven’t been poked and prodded that much since I lived in Belfast, Northern Ireland in the midst of its troubles in the late 70s. But at least this time the prodding was all intellectual and all in good form—though at times I still felt like I was back in the moot court competition in law school. Your search committees scoured my resume, read up on my writings, tracked down my associates going back 35 years (thank goodness they didn’t call any of my brothers or sisters), and in general put my brain, my bio, and even my bloodlines to the test. Let’s hope they continue to hold up.

I have wrestled for some time with this challenge of delivering a State of the College Address to all of you—who have invested so much in the success of this very special institution for so many years—on what is for me the 16th day on the job. I can imagine that a few of you are already thinking “some presumptuous fellow that Foley.” But never worry, this isn’t going to be like the graduation speaker who stood up, announced that quote “we have given you a perfect world, now don’t screw it up” unquote and then proceeded to sit down. I am going to use my time, some of it anyway!!

I finally decided that I might usefully offer some comments in three areas—carefully chosen so as to protect my ignorance and preserve your patience:

First, a few words about the recent past, and the enormous legacy of Sister Mary Ann Dillon and all of you who worked so closely with her.
Second, some comments about the present, a sort of nuts and bolts update on change and challenge over these last few months at the College.

And finally, a few thoughts about the future, what brought me here and what I find most compelling about higher education and Mt Aloysius College—here at the summit of the Alleghenies.

*And here is love*
*Like a tinsmith's scoop*
*Sunk past its gleam*
*In the meal bin*

**A look at the Recent Past: The Dillon Years**

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

It is 157 years since that love—“like a tinsmith’s scoop sunk past its gleam in the meal bin”—first showed itself in the Laurel Highlands, at the very moment when seven Sisters of Mercy welcomed 22 young girls to Saint Aloysius Academy in Loretto. It is 113 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 almost 90 years since Pittsburgh architect John Theodore Comes drew up plans for the striking, Lombardy-Romanesque Chapel Building. All of that we might describe as the first metamorphosis of the College, a time for planting both spiritual roots and red brick buildings.

It was almost 50 years later 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 college status.

Though it is too early to comprehensively assign her legacy, this much is for sure: Sister Mary Ann Dillon, Sister Ginny Bertshi and all of you who were their partners here these last 13 years surely ushered in another metamorphosis of Mt Aloysius College. Let me see if I can describe that metamorphosis, roughly over the last decade, with some numbers, some prose and finally some pictures.

First, the numbers--
• **On Curriculum**, programs of study have grown from just under 40 to over 70, including the Bachelor of Arts in English, and the Bachelor of Science in History/Political Science, in General Science, in Biology and in Early Childhood Education, as well as five new graduate programs.

• **On Faculty**, you have almost doubled the number of full time faculty holding doctorate or terminal degrees, with a number of others working on their doctorates. Thank you to Ron Cromwell and our associate deans for their leadership role in all this important progress.

• **On Enrollment**, total full time equivalents has grown about 25% (in a period of declining enrollments nationwide); you have increased four-fold the number of those entering right out of high school (from under 70 to more than 300); and the percentage of residential students has also more than tripled in the ten year time frame. Thank you to Frank Crouse and his team for their pioneering work on enrollment and to Stacy Schenk and her team for taking the mystery out of financial aid for parents and students.

• **On Mission Integration**, you have incorporated two annual lecture series (on ecumenism and moral choices) and occasional “Cottage Conversations”; you’ve initiated a substantial ecumenical library collection, worked to institutionalize Mercy values in everything from student orientation to spring break and integrated opportunities for service from an on campus Mercy Week to off campus community service in places nearby and as far away as Jamaica and Mississippi. Thank you to Sister Helen Marie for her foresight and diligence in literally creating this office and initiating this substantial program of work.

• **On Student Affairs**, 40 clubs are in operation this year, fall orientation is now a multi day series of events; and 145 student athletes—up from 33 a decade ago—now compete in 13 Division III sports in a competitive well organized full service conference. Thanks to Dr. Jane Grassadonia and Athletic Director Ryan Smith and so many others for picking up the challenge here.

• **On Institutional Advancement**, you completed the first capital campaign in the history of the College, and brought it in just about 10% above the goal at $8.3M. And with the growth in enrollment, residential life and curricular and extracurricular activities, so too has grown the financial base of the college, with an annual operating budget nearly double its rate just ten years ago. Thank you to Jack Anderson and Donna Yoder for their sensitive leadership in these areas.

That’s a lot of numbers, and they only begin to capture the highlights of the last thirteen years. Perhaps the most significant metamorphosis has been in the physical plant itself, and I want to show you quickly a few before and after shots. The before shots are, in almost every case, pre-Sister Mary Ann and her team; the after shots show the work that was done during her tenure (with some of it still on-going):

• Entrance to campus
• Whalley Plaza
• Academic Hall Walkway
• Cosgrave Student Center
• Misciagna Residence Hall
• Pedestrian Mall
• Calandra Smith Baseball Field
• McAuley Hall (old and new)
• Library—Learning Commons
It is perhaps too early to assign a legacy to Sister Mary Ann (she’s too young for one thing), and the majority of you who know her well understand that she would oppose to the nines putting her name in the same sentence as the word “legacy”, let alone putting her name up on the pedestal with the co-founders of the Cresson Community—Mother Mary Gertrude Cosgrave and Mother Mary DeSales Ihmsen, and the co-founders of the college—Sister deSales Farley and Sister Silverius Shields. But I suspect that is exactly where we will find her name when the history of this period is written. And I would like to say thank you for the example of public leadership and private humility (traits not often found together), for the model transition she effected on my behalf, and for the record she has written here at Mt Aloysius College these last 13 years. Thank you Sister President Mary Ann Dillon.

**Up to the Present: Progress and Prospects at the College**

So much has happened in the last thirteen years. Well, I want to tell you a lot has happened in the last six months as well, since you last received one of these formal reports. Let me see if I can break this update into ten nuts and bolts highlights:

1. **Enrollment**—Fall 2010, we expect 1,310 full time undergraduate students as compared to 1,215 one year ago at this time, with the largest ever freshman class and over 500 students in residence everywhere (except hopefully in your offices). There were lots of last minute adjustments to accommodate these numbers, including purchase of a twelve student house in Cresson, and the re-conversion of St. Gert’s and part of St. Joe’s as well as some adjustments in the other residence halls. Though the last months were hectic times for Frank, Jane, Acting President Dr. Cromwell and many others, these are the kind of problems that any college in America would like to have. Special thanks to our folks in student affairs, facilities, maintenance, housekeeping and IT—all of whom went the extra mile to meet these extraordinary enrollments.

2. **Orientation**—is in full swing and is full time. For the first time, freshman will arrive a full four days before the start of classes and engage in a range of activities organized by our VP for Student Affairs, Campus Ministry and others—barbecues, game nights, a formal matriculation ceremony, and campfires, among other events. The MAAPP students are already here, as are the MAAPP mentors, the resident advisors, and some fall athletes. Adult students had several orientation opportunities this summer, and I was pleased to be here for at least one of them, where I met a grandmother, her daughter and the 1 year old grandson—two out of three of them are matriculating.

3. **Teaching Evaluations**—this is the fourth year for the IDEA course evaluation process, and the results continue to be very impressive. 220 courses/sections were evaluated, and the conclusion from the IDEA folks is that the MT Aloysius instructional effectiveness is “unusually high”, and I am quoting. Kudos to all faculty and instructors involved in the teaching and the evaluating. Congratulations.
4. Academic Certifications and Licensure Exams—the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) granted initial accreditation to the Medical Laboratory Technician program effective April 8. Pass rates overall on licensure exams continue to be very positive—96 to 100% in each of the last six years for Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences, all six students passed the new ultrasound qualifications, 100% of early childhood/elementary ed students passed various PRAXIS exams, and our first secondary ed students all passed, though there are some not yet significant certification issues with our middle school teaching program and with the day care center. The sign language students all passed the first part of their required testing, and the CPA students are winning awards and scholarships as well. The August Nursing Licensure Exam for Registered Nurses results showed an 82.8% yearly pass rate—slightly higher than state wide associate program results and slightly below the state average for all programs. We have a new nursing student who confessed to the admissions counselor that he chose Mt Aloysius, because all the nurses he most admired at the hospital where he currently works were graduates of Mt Aloysius. Can’t get a better endorsement than that.

5. Sports—the women’s softball team finished in first place in the conference, and the men’s baseball and basketball teams made the playoffs as well. Sold out summer camps brought more than 300 young basketballers to the campus in July. There are new scoreboards in place for baseball, softball and soccer. And 55 Mt Aloysius student athletes made the Academic All-Conference teams this year, with an overall student-athlete grade point average of 3.0. Congratulations to our student athletes and to their coaches for getting it done on the field of play and in the classroom.

6. Campus Symposia—the Fifth Undergraduate Research Symposium was held in April, with 166 student presenters, 14 faculty/staff mentors, and at least four students turning their research into summer internship and scholarship opportunities. The Third Service Learning Exposition was held on March 30, with 75 students and 11 faculty mentors. Thank you to all the faculty and staff who stepped up to mentor these projects, students and careers. The Office of Mission Integration also hosted the Third Annual Moral Choices Lecture (with Dr. Ron Hamel, from the Catholic Health Association), the Seventh Annual Ecumenical Luncheon and Lecture (with highest participation ever) and the third Annual Summer Contemplative Workshop (which Sister Helen tells me actually turned a profit this year—we may need to up our “Zen contemplation” quotient next year, Helen). Thank you for all your work on these and other fronts.

7. Learning Commons—is open for business. I had the chance to share pizza with all the folks who made the conversion happen and got the work done on time. Combined with the renewed emphasis on retention, I think we will see good results from this coordinated careful approach to individual student learning needs. Thanks to IT, facilities, our retention team, and the library staff who all pitched in and helped out.

8. Construction—there is still lots of it on the campus. The front walk and entrance to McAuley is being adjusted to avoid dangling icicles poised like Damocles’ swords over students’ heads (loved writing that phrase)!! I mentioned the changes at St. Gert’s and St. Joes, and also some accommodations at the new off campus student residence. The largest project at the moment is at Alumni Hall, and I did have the chance
to sit in on the bidding and late design phases there. It’s a mess right now, but will be a quality entertainment venue when it reopens January 10, not quite in time for this year’s Madrigal. Finally on construction, the College was one of 48 grantees of state funded RCAP moneys, the same funds that helped finance $1M for the Alumni Hall project. This grant is for $10M and it is for the Convocation/Athletic Center, and we are holding the public hosannas until we can get the money in the bank. The good news is that the project list is much smaller than usual (48 vs. 300 plus), and has already been vetted by both the Governor and the legislative leadership. Very good news indeed.

9. Leadership—in Nursing, Rita Trofino will now lead our nursing programs giving us the benefit of her years of experience and productive relationships in the community. Dr. Nickole George will remain at the College but has stepped down as Chair to spend more time with her young family. Dr. Garland Young, the Director of Graduate and Continuing Ed, resigned to care for sick parents back home in Tennessee. Dr. Paul Farcus stepped to the plate as so often in his 30 plus years here at the college, and has been serving as Interim Director. We are hopefully in the last stages of that search. And I am pleased to report that Jack Anderson has returned to the College as Vice President for Institutional Advancement, a post he previously filled with distinction for six years.

10. Middle States Five year Review—this is the midterm report on which some of you have been working very hard. The reviewers’ comments arrived in the mail just about ten days ago, and they are excellent—I will let their report speak for itself. After encouraging the college to continue to improve in the area of faculty credentials and student retention, they opine:

On Enrollment and Finance (an area of widespread concern in higher ed): “Mount Aloysius is clearly a fundamentally sound institution.”

On Assessment (an area of some concern in the initial MSCHE report): “Mt Aloysius has to an impressive extent become an assessment-rich institution, governed by systematic planning. Assessment at Mt Aloysius is now a model of how it should be done, proving that small private colleges can indeed attain the standards established by the MSCHE.”

The MSCHE panel’s overall conclusion is equally affirmative: “The recommendations of the 2004 Evaluation team have been met. Mount Aloysius College is in good shape. It is well managed, purposeful, resourceful and poised for greater success in the future.”

And finally, “A new President has now assumed leadership of a stable, even improving, institution with a viable plan to carry the college forward in the years ahead.”
Let me thank personally the key players in preparing the response—Virginia Gonsman, Brian Pearson, Dave Haschak, Linda Gaston, Donna Yoder, Drew Tatusako, and Ron Cromwell—and applaud all of you in the audience for the record you have written here in the Dillon years.

That concludes my summary of progress and prospects—recent activity at the College. Let me conclude with a few remarks about my experience here so far, and what drew me in the first place.

**Looking to the Future**

When I first interviewed for this post, I found myself reverting to two words—those words were value and values. I was struck by how this College has managed the inflation in higher education costs—the value—and equally impressed by all the indicators that something larger than just education was going on here—the values.

Nothing I have seen or read or experienced since that first conversation almost six months ago has changed my view. You are doing something extraordinary at Mt Aloysius College, producing graduates who are “job-ready” on day one and what I call “community-ready” as well. Going the extra mile to help students overcome their challenges, and succeed beyond their parents’ expectations or sometimes their own dreams. You are not only teaching them how to earn a living, you are teaching them how to live a life. And I found and find that tremendously appealing and I hope that you all find it tremendously rewarding. Let me elaborate.

It begins with the original mission statement of the College—“to respond to individual and community needs with quality post-secondary programs of education in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy.” Students at Mt Aloysius are encouraged (this is right off the website) 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.” Those are strong statements, heady words, powerful and somewhat unique in the field of higher education—and they are all over the website and every document that attempts to describe or strategically plan for the future of Mt Aloysius College. So the “something special” begins with the mission.

And it continues with the Sisters—the foundresses, the leaders of the Academy, then of the first women’s Junior College, down to those who carry the mission and the history around with them every day in these corridors. I had the pleasure of six separate visits from Sisters of Mercy on my first official day here—Sister BJ, Sister Eric Marie, Sister Charlene, Sister Nancy, Sister Giuseppe, and of course Sister Helen Marie. Every one of them told me that they were praying for me, Sister Giuseppe even said she had done a novena for me to St. Ann. And of course I responded to all that prayer the way any red-blooded young Catholic man who had spent a fair amount of time doing penance after Saturday afternoon youthful confessions would—I started wondering what I had done to need all these prayers!
So it extends down through these marvelous Sisters of Mercy with their brave history and their focus on mercy and justice, hospitality and service. That plays out in this institution today through the Mount Aloysius Advanced Academic Preparation Program (MAAPP), through an office dedicated to Retention efforts, through a Vice President whose job title is VP for Mission Integration. Don’t just talk about the mission and trot it out on noble occasions. Integrate it, make it integral. Institutionalize it in the daily work, in and outside the classroom, in the very curriculum. And you have.

And in the end, it only works because you all here endorse it as well. There are a few of these Sisters left in the area—Sisters whose lifetime of self-sacrifice is so evident—and their numbers aren’t increasing. But I have already encountered several examples of people who work here every day living out the mission—in the way faculty department chairs gave up one of their very last Fridays in the summer to come in and meet individually with a nervous group of adult learners; in the way the student mentors and RAs responded so quickly to the first call for help; in the words Kristen Scott spoke to you in her graduation speech just three months ago, and in the way so many of you offered help to Michele and I with housing suggestions, restaurant suggestions, shopping suggestions, even where to flyfish.

Like you, I come from a long line of hard workers and I don’t plan on changing now. My Irish grandfather was a bartender for 50 years—worked in only two places all that time—back in the days when bartenders worked 70 hours, six days a week. My other grandfather was a night watchman at a wire factory, and both my grandmothers cooked dinner for other people’s families, and took care of other people’s homes for a living. None of them had the benefit of a high school education; my grandfather’s birth certificate is marked with an X. My parents are high school grads, both probably smarter than most of the 12 children they raised, all of whom at their insistence went for higher education. No prouder place in my parents’ home than the wall with all the framed diplomas—not all the sports trophies or other awards—it’s the diplomas that share the spotlight on their family room wall.

At Mt Aloysius, we are all about hard work and hard-working people, about building careers in nursing and the allied health professions, in cutting edge technology and criminal justice, in public service and private markets. Today, as your new President, I share with all of you at this college a responsibility to educate, train, support, place and improve the lives of our students and help them to build legacies that extend to their families and their communities. I relish the opportunity and the challenge.

Let me finish where I started—with the letters of Catherine McAuley. The editor of that compilation writes that

“What is most moving about the letters of Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, is not any gleam of overt or expected virtue, but everyday love immersed deep in the human grain of her friend’s and coworkers’ lives.”
She goes on to say that

“Catherine wrote not from a script but from her heart—to offer affection, to give encouragement, to
cheer, to affirm the demands of justice, to console, to incite laughter, to express gratitude, to keep
playfulness alive.”

I have seen a bit of each of those attributes in my first 16 days, and in several visits before, gifts of time and
unblemished affection, laughter, some discussion about justice, gratitude, even playfulness from the Sisters
of Mercy and from so many others on this campus who endorse these core values of justice, hospitality,
mercy and service.

I feel very at home here. And I thank you for that.