Mt Aloysius College
STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS
March 29, 2011
President Tom Foley

A great deal has happened at the college, in our country and in the world since our last State of the College on August 16. Most recently, the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the escalating engagement in Libya, and the challenges for education in federal and state budgets all compete for our attention. I am grateful to be part of such a well informed and caring community.

I have also been focused in the last few months on a different topic, but one that undergirds the debates on all three of the topics above—and that is the simple issue of “civil” discourse.

We all recall the recent shootings in Tucson--where a Congresswoman, a nine year old girl, a federal judge, a social worker, a great grandmother, a retired construction worker turned church volunteer and a woman celebrating 55 years of marriage to her high school sweetheart were all gunned down in front of a supermarket during a “Congress on the Corner” event.

There has been a furious and occasionally uncivil debate over whom, if anyone, contributed to the actions of the madman who shot them, contributed by their exhortations, their rhetoric, their characterizations in blogs, tweets, public speeches, campaign fliers and other postings. Whatever be the conclusion to that on-going debate, at the end of the day, these people got shot for expressing their political views—in some cases just for choosing to listen to someone else’s political views--in a public marketplace.

That sounds like something that you might hear about in the Middle East, or maybe in a country in sub-Saharan Africa that didn’t exist when most of us were born, or maybe in Belfast a generation ago. But it all happened right here in the United States. And we move so fast sometimes—24 hour news cycle—that we are onto the next issue, the next tragedy, the next disaster, before we have had time to sift for the meaning in the last.

If you look up “civility” in the dictionary, you will find that it derives from the same root as the word “city.” Presidents Kennedy and Reagan both characterized America as “like a shining city on the hill,” a simile right out of the Book of Matthew. But though cities have grown exponentially, civility doesn’t seem to have kept up the pace. We are bombarded on our airwaves and by daily blog with diatribes that portray those who have different ideas as lacking any redeeming virtues. One commentator puts it this way
“There has never been a more pervasive level of intellectual dishonesty in society. A political opponent never has a thought worth considering. It is not enough to dismiss the opponent's ideas. Anyone on the other side must also be characterized as the epitome of evil. If the argument continues to fail, a variety of ad hominem labels are available to end the discussion without any resolution except hate. Confidence in government at all levels is abysmally low for good reason.”

I am not sure about all the conclusions in those lines from former Duquesne President Dr. John Murray, but I am confident that Dr. Murray would agree with President Obama’s challenge after Tucson. He called on Americans to

“expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy and remind ourselves all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together.”

I believe there is a role that we in education play in the march to a more civil society. Critical thinking, the ability to listen, to analyze, to form ideas and to communicate them—these are all skills fundamental to education and to democracy. For many, the university is where we learn these skills,

• By providing a safe, respectful environment that allows for opinions to be shared
• By creating an atmosphere where the holder of an opinion can feel safe
• By teaching critical thinking skills
• By encouraging the dispassionate consideration of issues
• By, in effect, giving students a nurturing environment to test their democratic skills.

Mt Aloysius College is like an incubator for democracy where all the skills are taught, all the behaviors are modeled so that when students become “citizens,” they will have the tools needed to make democracy work.

Thank you for the role you each play in creating and nurturing this incubator for civil discourse. I want you to know that I look forward to working with you to teach and exemplify these skills, to provide opportunities for our students to use and model these skills, skills which are as essential to education as they are to democracy and to civil society.

Okay, off the bandbox. On to the detail.

I am approaching this State of the College address as though it were a Report to Stakeholders, the kind that CEOs deliver to Fortune 500 companies, not because we are a corporation or “like a business” (I think the phrase itself is often misapplied), but because that is who we all are—stakeholders in this evolving mosaic we call Mt Aloysius College. Each of us has a real stake in Mt Aloysius College, and not just because we work here. Many of you are graduates, some of you mentors, most of you multiply involved in campus activity. I think it is pretty hard to work at a place like this and not have some element of passion in one’s connection to it.

So please allow me to break this mid-term report into three sections. First, some updates on the issues that we work on daily—the “current affairs” of enrollment, academic rigor, strategic planning, mission integration, student affairs and the like. Second, a few minutes on some of the challenges that lay ahead “on the horizon,” and what steps we are putting in place to deal with those challenges. Finally, some time on brief “first impressions” that Michele and I have enjoyed since we arrived.
Current Affairs

Let me try to be succinct here.

On Enrollment: Our VP for enrollment and his team continue to focus on both the art and the science of enrollment management, as they extend the personal touch to each and every perspective student and their family, and still manage not to miss a beat on the metrics that drive the enrollment process.

- Applications are at 1445 compared to 1330 last year, up by 115
- Accepts are at 1001 compared to 865, up by 136
- Deposits are at 353 compared to 315, up by 38

These numbers follow 8 years with increased enrollment in seven of them (and the exception hit the same number as the year before), equivalent to a 25% overall increase in the last decade. Anyone who attended either the Mercy Presidential Scholars Dinner last Friday, or the accepted Student Day last Saturday cannot help but be excited about our next class. And 20 of the 26 Mercy Scholars who joined us in Cosgrave have since signaled their intention to matriculate at Mt Aloysius—an excellent “yield,” to use Frank’s term of art.

On Faculty: three more faculty have joined the ranks of the terminally degreed (that sounds ominous)—Dr. Patricio Torres, Dr. Donald Talbot, and Dr. Louis Garzarelli. Four of our nursing faculty began pursuit of their doctorates in collaboration with colleagues at Carlow and Waynesburgh, Department Co-Chair Rita Trofino, Patricia Meintel, Bonnie Noll, and Margaret Boyce. And eight members of our faculty were promoted this year, all eight of them garnering a unanimous vote from the Promotions Committee—a first. The elite eight are Associate Professors Dr. Anthony Dragani, Dr. Laura Lansing, Dr. Sara Rutledge, and Dr. Don Talbot and Assistant Professors Kimberly Asonevich, Joseph Boback, Felicia Holliday and Patricia Meintel. Congratulations to each of you—well earned. Thank you to the Committee and special thanks to our Associate Deans for their leadership role in all this important progress.

On Academic Certifications and Licensure Exams: The College continued its perfect record in accreditation as our Middle School Education teaching program achieved certification from the state Department of Education in February of this year. In addition, the Surg Tech program had a recent (by all accounts) successful site visit just a month ago, and we expect to hear the results of that review shortly. Pass rates overall on licensure exams continue to trend positive—93% in Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences, 79% (6% above the ten year average) in PTA, 69% in Surg Tech (continuing the upward trend since 2005), and a 100% pass rate by our Early Childhood and Elementary Education students in the most recent Praxis exams. 83% of our sign language students qualified for both the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and for the National Interpreters Certification (NIC) (down from 100% last year), and the accounting students and SIFE members continue to win what looks to be a disproportionate share of the competitive awards in the region.

The latest Nursing Licensure Exam for Registered Nurses results showed an 88% pass rate—a pass rate that is competitive with every nursing program from State College to Pittsburgh and our highest in several years. We also received National League of Nursing approval to take our RN to BSN program on line and I am told that you can’t get a better endorsement than that. Finally, our Biology Department Chair let me know recently that one of her Biology majors has two paid teaching assistance ships in hand already (one at Texas and the other Duquesne) and one of our prelaw students just got her acceptance to Boston College Law School. Congratulations to all.
On Retention: We saw our first improvement in about five years in the latest data, and though it is too early to call it a trend, it is clear that all the recent initiatives in this area are beginning to impact. Those initiatives include: the creation of an office of retention services, the ramping up of the MAAPP program, the completion of the library commons, the early and mid semester offerings of short courses in time management, study techniques, etc., and the standard application of academic probation requirements.

At the end of the day, improved retention is all about early identification and decisive action. The personal meetings between every student and our director of retention, the increased collaboration between the offices of retention, campus ministry, academic affairs and counseling, and the early and increased use of the Academic Intervention Forms (AIFs) have all been key, and I thank you for that. We had occasion recently to compare our retention rates with other similar institutions, and the results were, if not everything we want them to be, still heartening by comparison.

Today’s Gospel is from Matthew, Chapter 18, and concerns the “measure of what we should give.” When Peter came up and asked the Lord “how often am I to forgive my brother if he goes on wronging me? As many as seven times?” Jesus replies “I do not say seven times, I say seventy times seven,” and sometimes—that is the best answer on retention as well.

On Strategic Planning: The Mount Aloysius College community deserves congratulations and thanks for carefree focus on the six themes and many tasks of the Strategic Operational Plan. The Strategic Planning Committee at their most recent meeting (Thursday, February 10) celebrated the completion of the work contained in the Operational Plan--2008-2011. More than 80% of the tasks delineated in the plan have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented, with most of the remainder rendered moot by policy decision or alternate action.

A new strategic planning process will kick off in the fall of 2012. Meanwhile, the three priorities and nine objectives of our Strategic Plan remain active as guideline and direction for college activities. And we will continue the excellent work on assessment that received high praise in our most recent Middle States review.

On the Campus Master Plan: we are now just about a decade into the plan and it is roughly 90% complete. Alumni Hall was step nine essentially, and I will report separately on the work on the Athletic and Convocation Center. All the work to date—at a cost of over $30M--has expanded the interior square footage by 41% (three new buildings, expansion of existing space, etc.), grown our overall footprint to 214 acres, doubled our residential capacity and changed dramatically the physiognomy of the campus—the new entrance and the now clear view of Old Main, the picturesque walk that connects Old Main and the Library and helps unify the campus, and the modern and consistent architectural face of Pierce, McAuley and Misciagna.

It’s not all good news. We spent half the winter trying to get relatively new boiler systems to cooperate, had significant leakage in newer parts of both Cosgrave and the library, and spent a lot of money to correct a design flaw in McAuley. Needless to say, we are building longer contractor liability clauses into new work here—one advantage of having a lawyer President.

On Mission Integration: We just held our Fourth Annual Mt Aloysius Moral Choices lecture, with Dr. Donna Freitas delivering five talks on “Sex and the Soul” during her whirlwind visit to our campus. Her research is captivating for anyone engaged in work with teens and twenties, and her book on the topic is an easy read actually. Sister Helen both managed to fit an absolutely appropriate Mae West quote into her formal introduction of our speaker—and no, it wasn’t the “happy to see me” line—and moderated a fascinating dinner conversation on the subject with our guest. That follows previous Moral Choices lectures on “Death and Dying,” “Ecology and the Environment” and last year’s topic “Health Care Reform.” We are hoping to focus on the topic “Civil Discourse” for next year’s lecture.
This year, we celebrated the 8th Annual Mt Aloysius Lecture and Luncheon Program on Ecumenism, and also just completed a dialogue on the “Seven Deadly Sins”—thank you Drs. Dragani, Rohlf, and Jost Costenza, for your careful thinking and research on these topics—and if anyone is interested, Anthony is an expert on Gluttony and Lust, Jess on Greed and Sloth, and Fran on Wrath and Envy! And Sister Nancy, who organized and hosted the discussions, is an expert on all of them now (I think that is because she comes from Boston!). I think the most important message here is that these activities have now become institutional parts of our academic year, and we are already working on the themes for Moral Choices lectures down the road and maybe even a new “Seven” series.

Campus Ministry’s program—spiritual renewal and planned retreats, formal liturgies and informal prayer breaks, “mid-month pauses” and service opportunities—is substantial. Frankly, when I read the spring Campus Ministry poster I am exhausted—so I don’t know how you do it all. But thank you.

On Student Affairs: 40 plus clubs and organizations were in operation this year, and there is a much ramped up level of student activity—in the dorms, in Cosgrave, in the gym—that are keeping more and more students on campus nights and weekends. If you haven’t been to a “MAC’s Got Talent” yet, you are missing both talent and fun—200 plus students will be there tonight at 9 along with occasional surprise guest judges (who sometimes have no idea what they are talking about—which of course is the same as the TV show we are imitating). What I find especially compelling in Student Affairs generally is the way our students leaders, both of the SGA and the CAB, have really taken charge in some instances, actually designing and carrying out all this activity and holding their fellow club members accountable to the letter of their charters—which each include a commitment to service.

On the intercollegiate sports front, we are up to 155 student athletes—up from 33 a decade ago—in 13 Division III sports in a competitive well organized full service conference. These student athletes carried a collective 3.0 GPA out of the last semester. Our brand new men’s and women’s tennis teams brought home their first wins this year, the men just last weekend. Our basketball teams both made the playoffs, our women’s soccer are really on the move, volleyball is competitive, golf and softball won or shared league titles, both cross country teams won the Mt Aloysius Homecoming Invitational and baseball produced the first Mt Aloysius All American (in a sport with over 400 teams at the D-III level, and only 27 players selected). We are especially grateful to all our part-time coaches who, in their own very real way, live out the mission.

On the Horizon

Let me say a few words about a few projects on our immediate horizon. These are all projects on which we will be working hard in the next month and through the summer.

First, the Athletic Convocation Center. When I reported to you on August 16, we had just confirmed legislative authorization 2010-047—a $10M RACP Grant to Mt Aloysius, the largest single grant in the history of our college (by a factor of 10). As our CFO can tell you, we have been poked, prodded, audited and then some by at least two different state agencies, and now two successive Governors of this Commonwealth. We now await the final executed contract for that grant, and are optimistic that will be forthcoming soon. We are determined to finish construction within two years, so we will be on a very fact track for a $25M project. This is a long time coming—initial plans were conceived by Sisters Mary Ann and Ginny ten years ago, put on paper almost four years ago, and last first voted on by the BOT in 2008 (when they voted to suspend the project in light of the economic downturn).

Second, Graduation, Continuing and On Line Education. We just had our third resignation from that Deanship in four years. The Associate Deans and I spent some time looking at the model here, and finally decided that the model is itself at least part of the problem. Going forward, we will not be putting a Ph.D. Associate Dean to fill the all three roles. Instead, we will be filling two positions, in a revenue neutral way.
First, we will shortly announce a Director for Graduate and Continuing Education (first round interviews done). That person will report formally to the VP for Enrollment, will handle all recruiting and admissions (which is the major work on the Graduate and Continuing Ed side), and will work with an Associate Dean on issues involving teaching contracts, off site locations etc.

Second, we will shortly advertise for a College-wide Director of On-Line Education. That person will be fundamentally responsible for keeping the college—students and faculty—at warp speed on the web and up to date on all issues in the mushrooming on-line education field. We want to make the best use of available technology in our classrooms (61% of which are already wired “smart”), and we want our students to graduate fully conversant in the applications of on-line pedagogy to their professional growth. This person will report to the Senior VP for Academic Affairs. And I will be personally interested in the person and the progress—because the issues surrounding on-line education have meaning for every single one of us in this room.

Third, the Speaker Series. We have had some terrific speakers on our campus this year. They include

- The lead witness in the Dover School District case—who happens also to be a distinguished Biology Ph.D.—for Convocation
- An Oklahoma City Bombing prosecutor for Constitution Day
- The CEO of a $3B insurance firm for a Business Symposium
- Drs. Freitas and others for the moral choices and ecumenism programs
- Diversity speaker Marvin Worthy in a joint Campus Ministry/Student Affairs program and others and
- A Huffington Post blogger arriving today for the Spring Honors program

We have tried to follow a model for each of these appearances that includes

- student and faculty engagement at several small lunches and dinners
- lectures/discussions in relevant classes and
- at least one campus wide lecture.

Tomorrow’s Honors Program speaker will have meals with three different student/faculty groups (pre law group and our mock trial award winning team, a political science/history group and a writers group later tonight). He will also appear in two different classes (an English class studying Jonathan Swift and other writers of parody and a government class studying the legislative process)—all this before he actually delivers his main lecture tomorrow late afternoon, when he will address the George Santayana topic “those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

I have been working with a college committee so that we can continue to bring the outside world to our campus and to coordinate both the themes and the visits for maximum exposure to both our students and the larger Mt Aloysius community. We will keep you informed on that progress in the coming months.

Fourth, a perhaps overdue space study. We did the last one 11 years ago, I recently had a chance to look at the documents from that time and it is time to do a new one. We will RFP for it soon, and hope to complete it this summer, and it will include an analysis of our space usage on the whole of the 214 acres, and will take a look at our use of square footage in places like Old Main, Cosgrave, Academic Hall, the current gym and the Library. For example, we probably do not have our nurses office, our counseling office or our communications office in the right location—they all require either quiet or confidentiality but all currently sit in heavily
trafficked, almost thruway-type locations. Some of you will be asked for your views during this survey, please let them know what your experience tells you.

**Fifth, the employee satisfaction survey.** There is a new one in your in-box now. The recommendation to do the salary equalization survey (done for staff, in process for faculty) and the recommendation to do a new space study both came out of the last survey. I promise you that it is compiled in an anonymous way by an outside vendor, and that I and the PEC will look closely at the results. You know a lot more about these issues than I do—I am still a freshman after all.

**Sixth, on institutional advancement.** We have been working with outside counsel on two priorities—one, to bring us up to speed on our internal processes; and two, to give us a sense of how we are positioned in the larger community for a capital and endowment campaign. Some of you participated in a visioning session with the Whelan Group and that session and thirty two individual interviews with opinion shapers in the region produced five areas of emphasis going forward: the ACC, faculty advancement, centers for health excellence, high school partnerships, and the Center for Civic Engagement. The conclusion so far is that the College will have a successful capital and endowment campaign if we focus on these five areas.

Not unrelated to this work, Jack has been running Michele and I ragged—in a good way—with

- meetings with board members, donors, community leaders and elected officials,
- speeches to Rotary clubs, business groups, and others
- receptions for potential new partners
- visits to key players in surrounding counties.

We will continue work on this initiative through the summer, and prepare to kick off a new campaign sometime next year.

**Seventh, commencement.** Jesuit priest and Ph.D. Bill Byron will deliver our commencement address and receive the honorary degree, Doctor of Social Justice. Father Byron has been President of three universities, is author of 15 books, and spent a lifetime fighting for some of the principles that frame the heritage of this college—mercy and justice, service and hospitality.

Phyllis Bonano and Don Zucco will receive Honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters. Phyllis is a 1962 graduate of the Junior College who went on to a BA in her home state at UConn, then worked as an executive assistant to LBJ, as a Director of the Office of the US Trade Representative, as president of Colombia College in North Carolina, and as founder and principal of her own international trade business.

Donato Zucco is a first generation American who went from Vo-Tech in high school all the way to a Ph.D. and who served as Head of the Johnstown Vo-Tech program, then as Superintendent of Schools, then as CAO at Crown America (reporting directly to Frank Pasquerilla), and finally as Mayor of Johnstown. These are three very worthy recipients.

I think you will also enjoy our student speakers. They were chosen by a faculty staff committee that included me—someone had to break the tie. The candidates were all first rate so we broke with precedent and chose three—one to announce the formal welcome, one to lead the prayer, and one to deliver a valedictory. **Camette Hobernay** is a Portage High grad, with a 4.0 average, on track to graduate in three years, an editor of the school
paper, a commuter involved in numerous activities on campus and I would put her writing up against any graduate of any of college in this state. The second speaker is Nikita Jonas, from Singapore, a real slacker with “only” a 3.95 GPA, who sings like a bird in Vox Nova—just a beautiful voice. She will say (and we hope sing some of) her prayer on behalf of her class. The third speaker is 81 year old Charlie Mastervich who put off his education after service in the Korean War to raise and educate three sons—two with degrees from Pitt and one from Michigan. It is Charlie’s turn now, and he will welcome everyone to the graduation and talk about how welcome he has been made to feel since he came to the Mount. These three well represent the Mount Aloysius of today—we are proud of them and they are very proud of their school. They represent well the breadth and diversity of our student body.

**Finally, the installation of the new guy as President.** I am not I guess officially the President until some formal symbol of the College is turned over to me on September 16. I am sure that my mother will enjoy that part of the ceremony. Much more important than the formal inauguration however is our opportunity to shine some light on all the good work at Mt Aloysius. We are planning three days of activity and have intentionally selected a time frame that

- replaces the normal Convocation ceremony
- leads into Mercy Week
- coincides with home sports events
- motivates a series of arts and entertainment exhibits and performances
- offers an opportunity for the annual “all college liturgy”
- allows us to host two singular panel discussions—one on the “University’s Role in the Social Fabric,” and the other on the “University’s Role in Civil Discourse.”

The first panel is already filled out, with three panelists including Penn VP and Campus Compact guru Ira Harkavy, International Special Olympics President Dr. Tim Shriver and College of St. Mary’s President Dr. Maryann Stevens. Dr. Helen Marie Burns will coordinate and moderate.

The second panel has provoked even wider interest. Though commentator Bill Moyers, our first choice, cannot join us for this discussion, he expressed real interest in our efforts in the area and we are guardedly hopeful of a later visit. US Circuit Court of Appeals Justice D. Brooks Smith, who knew the Judge murdered in the Tucson shooting, will speak and moderate that discussion.

We hope to make this second topic a subject of sustained application at the College. Civil discourse materials in the CLS curriculum, an Honors Societies faculty symposium on the topic, and August student orientation exercises on civility have each already been the subject of discussion with some of you in this audience.

We want the focus of the installation to be on the College, on our students, faculty, staff and the community at large. We see this as an opportunity to tell the Mt Aloysius story to a wider audience. You will hear more on this shortly, and will be anxious for volunteers to join the eight committees we think it will take to pull this off.

**Brief Impressions**

Finally, a few words on some impressions during these first “not quite a full “year.

**First impression—there are a lot of stories here at Mt Aloysius.** Elie Weisel likes to say that the universe is not made up 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.
Michele and I feel lucky to be here—with all these young people and all these stories at Mt Aloysius. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote that “to teach is to learn again.” I never fully understood the phrase until I got here. And though we don’t all of us stand in front of a classroom every day, we are all of us in this room who work on behalf of Mt Aloysius—in very tangible ways—teachers, who are “learning again.” Allow me to share three recent examples.

First, on funerals and family. I tried to go to three wakes one day before break—one in Gallitzen for a mature student who excelled on our award-winning Mock Trial team, then died of heart failure a few weeks later. Most of her much younger teammates and two of her teachers were there. The second funeral was in Ebensburg for a faculty member’s father, and the response from the College was equally impressive—so many of you stopped by to wish Nancy and her family well. The third one—a member of our cleaning staff lost her brother, this time not unexpectedly. I couldn’t find the third funeral home over in Ashville and never got there, but I needn’t have worried—so many of you did. Three very different parts of our college community—a student family, a faculty family, a staff family—and the response from the Mt Aloysius family was the same in all three. Great story that says a lot about this place.

Second, on persistence and gratitude. I sent the Chair of the Board of Trustees a note I received from a student who lost her 39 year old sister to a sudden and fatal illness only a few days after bringing her own four year old daughter home from the hospital from “out of the blue” brain surgery. She made it thru the semester and her letter to me was to thank the college—and so many of you—for all the support she continues to receive. Chairman Dan Rullo called me after I forwarded the note to him, said that notes like this are the reason he serves on this Board. I had to tell him that wasn’t even the only remarkable story of that day. But here is what she said:

“I also wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the wonderful staff and the professors there...all were very caring and concerned. Each one offered time if I needed it and completely understood my situation. I only missed 2 days of class and surprisingly returned and have held things together. I have never had as much support as I had during this past month and just wanted to extend my gratitude to you as well for having such a wonderful group of professors. The Mount family has made it easier for me to cope during this difficult time. If my training makes me half of the person that my professors are, I will be a great success and a wonderful asset to society.”

Third, about “all hands on deck.” This morning at breakfast I ran into our first ever All American, a baseball player. He is a good student who has had to learn about field maintenance as our Athletic Department deals with the peculiar effect of freezing rain and frost on infields. That’s the reality of D-III sports—one day you get named to the All American team, the next day you are spreading bags of sand on the infield.

Speaking of stories, 25 faculty members were honored by the men’s and women’s basketball teams for making a difference for individual players on the team. You will be happy to know that the athletic director and coaches made each player write essays of nomination, and then read parts of them aloud to the crowd at halftime.

So, first impression, there are a lot of stories at Mt Aloysius.

Second impression, the Mercy mission is safe and well and even thriving at Mt Aloysius. 34 students and six faculty and staff members went on mission trips this year—

- to Mississippi to work for the fifth straight year with ecumenical rebuilding groups,
- to Jamaica to work in an elementary school and an orphanage both run by Sisters of Mercy, and
- to Guyana to work on a new Mercy community project
They are in addition to the 600 plus students who have performed acts of community service just this academic year--building shelves at food banks, organizing blood drives, collecting hats and coats and shoes through the winter—much of it for people who live within a fifty mile radius here and some for people as far away as Haiti and Honduras.

Faith with knowledge, competence with compassion, mercy, justice, service and hospitality. I see something of each of these values almost every day and certainly in the photos up on the screen.

Finally, I have learned a lot about who our students are in the past seven months. There is a lot of data in the College Fact Book, and most of it I consumed before I ever set foot on the campus. But a recent college exercise with the Standard and Poor’s folks found me plumbing new data depths—even for me. Here is a quick picture of our student body by the numbers

- 70% of our students are the first generation in their families to go to college
- 90% of our students are eligible for and receive average gifts from the College of $10,000
- Almost 2 of 3 Mt Aloysius students are eligible for means-tested federal Pell Grants
- More than 1 in 3 of our students come from families with incomes under $36k
- 1 in 5 come from families with total income under $30k

I had a chance a few weeks ago to spend a few minutes with Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. As I said to her then, I am one of the 8,000 people who now tells all their friends that I sat next to her in Torts 101. Let me confess up front that she didn’t invite me to the event, my little sister did, who in reverse or order of importance, is the chair of the Philadelphia Bar Association, the other lawyer in our family, the 12th of our 12 siblings, and my Godchild (we ran out by then)—in reverse order of importance!! In any event, Judge Sotomayor said two things that have meaning for us here at Mt Aloysius.

First, she shared her background, one not dissimilar from many of our students—daughter of a single parent who worked three jobs to get her through a private catholic high school, in this case in the South Bronx. Second, she shared her personal answer to problems of inequality, and it sounded very like the mission of this College. A young woman asked the Judge what in the end was the “most pressing diversity issue in our country.” And without missing a beat she answered “inequality in education.” She went on to say that “until we fix structural inequities in public and private education, we will not reach true diversity in our country.”

Well, a quick review of the economic backgrounds of our student body—the data I just cited—certainly indicates a continued and strong effort to educate those denied access in a previous generation, and those for whom completing an education is an incredible financial challenge. And if we remember nothing else of this State of the College address, let’s remember that we come here every day for students who are depending on us to get them thru, to lift them up, to give them hope and in some cases to make them whole. We are all of us better off for having been here in these halls.

Let me finish with a few lines of poetry that speak to our mission at Mt Aloysius. They are from William Butler Yeats--
“Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”

At Mt Aloysius, it is our students who spread their dreams at our feet, and you not only tread softly, you give them help and you give them hope. On behalf of all those who benefit from your gifts of time and talent in this academic year, I thank you.

Now let me open up for some questions.