Sister Helen Marie Burns
Retirement Reception
Office of the President
Remarks—Tom Foley
December 9, 2014

Sister Helen Marie let me know two years ago what her plans were, and extended her stay beyond her original intended date at my request.

After more than fifty years of service (the last eight here at Mt Aloysius), Sister Helen Marie will hang up her faculty textbooks/prayer books/class curricula/student calendar/mentor schedule—look I am not sure what Helen Marie is hanging up by retiring—let’s just say she is hanging up her cleats, even though they still have plenty of “tooth” on them—that’s a technical term for many more years of useful service!!!.

I asked her if she was "retiring retiring" (hard to imagine with Sister Helen) and she said yes and no. "Yes"--she is officially retiring; but "no"--she expects to be volunteering somewhere in the Detroit area, where she spent many years in service at the high school and college level. No surprise there.

Now, knowing Helen will still be “working” (by any definition), I came up with a 10 new job titles that will fit any and all of her new preoccupations:

- Helen Marie, you can tell them you are becoming a **Freelance Sociologist**, or an **Urban Anthropologist**, out in the field in Detroit.

- Or better yet, tell them you are now a **Professional Participant-Observer (a PPO)**—that opens the door to a life as social or cultural or media or corporate or advertising critic—again in the field and that works whether you are in Cresson or Detroit or even Iowa.

- Or that you are an **Independent Scholar** (because you always have been), or better yet a **Post-Doc Scholar** (somehow, that sounds even more serious).

- Or if you think that sounds too time consuming, how about just being an **Occasional Columnist**, or a **Global Correspondent** (if you get over the Mercy International), or even a **Mild-Mannered Satirist on the Daily Planet**

- Finally, Helen, and in tune with one aspect of your continuing work, you might just tell them that you are an **Ecumenical Enthusiast** or a **Visionary-in-Place** (VIP)
Before she takes up her new post (from among those ten!), let me remind everyone about the impact that Sister Helen Marie Burns has had here at the College. Sister Helen Marie Burns:

- created and engineered 16 biannual ecumenical and 8 Moral Choices Lectures
- initiated and oversaw our first Mercy Spirit awards
- designed, recruited, advertised and sometimes led close to ten summer institutes, on Merton, on Women and Scripture and on a host of other topics.
- led the great volume of work on both Community Engagement and Campus Ministry
- mentored dozens of staff and faculty (and even more students)
- co-chaired our 2012-15 strategic plan
- oversaw our Carnegie Community Service submission
- taught every semester
- led our very successful Conference on Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) re-certification
- and is a major Mercy and intellectual force in the life of the College.

In effect, Sister Helen Marie created and then institutionalized the Office for Mission Integration at Mt. Aloysius and literally, set in place a model for our sister institutions to follow. And they are--following her example.

Sister Helen Marie Burns will be very, very difficult to replace.

Robert Frost, in his poem “Reluctance,” says:

Ah when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than treason  
To go with the drift of things  
And yield with a grace to reason  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season.

Helen Marie in her whole life probably never went with the “drift of things,” and that includes if it was me who was doing the drifting. She was never afraid to offer her wise counsel, never one to “yield” to reason or emotion if it was misplaced, never one to just “accept” the way that things are.
Helen Marie, we thank you

- for these 8 seasons of grace and reason
- for serving as our beacon of Mercy and intellect
- for sharing your big heart and our small hopes
- for standing up against windmills when prevailing winds required that of you
- for synthesizing faith with learning
- for developing competence with compassion, and
- for putting your talents and gifts at the service of others.

She always prays for us. Let’s finish by all saying a prayer for her--an Irish prayer, shocking as that seems!!

An Irish Blessing

I wish you not a path devoid of clouds,
Nor a life on a bed of roses,
Nor that you might never need regret,
Nor that you should never feel pain.
No, this is not my wish for you,
No, my wish for you is:

That you might be brave in times of trial
When other’s lay crosses upon your shoulders
When mountains must be climbed and chasms are to be crossed,

That every gift God gave you may grow along with them
And let you give the gift of joy to all who care for you.

That you may always have a friend worthy of that name
Whom you can trust and helps you in times of sadness
Who will defy the storms of daily life at your side.

And that in every hour of joy and pain
You may have God close to you.

That is my hope now and forever,
This is my wish for you and all who care for you.