

# Altoona Mirror

## Students encouraged to be active

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Mirror photo by J.D. Cavrich  
*Incoming freshmen at Mount Aloysius College were dared to be active citizens during Thursday's convocation.*

CRESSON - Though young people are traditionally less politically and civically involved, college freshmen at Mount Aloysius College were dared by speakers at Thursday's 64th convocation to debate and understand the year's academic theme: "The Common Good - Citizenship in the 21st Century."

Wind whipped banners displaying the college's divisions as Francis Crouse, enrollment management vice president, addressed the largest incoming class in college history at Whalley Plaza in front of the campus' Main Building.

"This class stems from many walks of life," he said, including from 18 states, five foreign countries and three continents.

Echoing the school's motto that "the horizon is just your starting line," Crouse told the students important decisions are ahead of them and they need to look to their horizons, and beyond.

College President Thomas Foley spoke next, joking with the students that he was aware of the inverse relationship between the students' attention span and the proximity of the dinner hour.

For some, a formal convocation ceremony might seem stuffy and rigid, he said, but it's a continuation of a tradition hundreds of years old first began at medieval European colleges.

Touching on the year's theme, Foley told the students that there is a direct link between education and citizenship, noting that founding father Thomas Jefferson understood that when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, smudging out the word "subject" to replace it with "citizen."

What was under the smudge kept historians talking for decades, he told them, until scientific advancements allowed Library of Congress research scientists to uncover the original word.

Rather than using the term subjects, like under King George III, Jefferson used a term that would be essential to the American way.

"It's not 'Tell me what to do,'" Foley said, "but, 'Let me participate.'"

He also reminded them of the important role their professors, sitting in the front rows during the convocation in full academic regalia, will play in shaping their experiences.

"They won't pick up after you, but they will look after you," he joked.

Convocation keynote speaker Judge David C. Klementik, one of Somerset County's Court of Common Pleas judges and a college board of trustees member, said he bugged Foley to include citizenship as part of this year's theme.

"Local elected positions go unfulfilled for lack of candidates, qualified or unqualified. Voter turnout is low," he said, and 100 of every 200 people requested for jury duty ask to be excused; only about 80 of the rest will appear for the summons.

And there could be many reasons why people are uninvolved, he said.

They could lack personal responsibility at a time when government rewards them with handouts. They could believe that one person out of 300 million can't make a difference. Without military or civil service requirements, they could believe they don't have a stake in the country's future.

In his 20-minute address, Klementik told the students that citizens working toward the common good need to be personally responsible, participate in their communities and work to correct injustices.

And with important issues like immigration reform, universal health care and "10 percent of Americans paying 93 percent of the cost of government," students are at a time in their lives when they need to debate what good citizenship and common good means.

Luckily, he said, as a convocation speaker he doesn't need to have the answers to all the questions.

"I just pose them," he said.