

## Convocation Speech, August 20, 2019

Again, welcome to all and thanks for joining us today. I want to give a big shout out to all those who helped the Class of 2023 move into the residence halls last Thursday. It was inspiring to see all the students, teams, ROTC contingent, coaches, faculty and staff who greeted families as they arrived and moved their belongings into the buildings. The sight I will remember in particular was Professor Bob Keifer taking charge of the traffic flow for drop off at Sheridan. No one was going to mess with Bob that morning – well done Bob! The spirit of cooperation and selfless service demonstrated is just part of the magic here at the Mount – thank you all for welcoming our new students and their families. This is just one example of the Mount as a community who cares for each other.

I believe this caring is just part of our ethos as a university and is implicit in our mission statement – as a Catholic university, Mount St. Mary's graduates ethical leaders who are inspired by a passion for learning and lead lives of significance in service to God and others.

Last year as a community you lived this mission out and met with much success. Our students excelled in the classroom, on internships, in service work and on the fields of friendly strife. Seven students won prestigious scholarships or fellowships through our Mount Fellows program under the tutelage of our terrific faculty. We also had five students selected for the prestigious National Security Scholars program among many other achievements. Eighty students attended the national FOCUS SEEK religious conference in addition to leading many inspirational spiritual retreats. Our seminarians again ran an awesome Mount 2000 retreat for hundreds of young people from across the country with support from our students. Our faculty developed hundreds of teachers and staff from the Archdiocese of Baltimore Schools while hosting the Teach Significantly conference here. They also organized and led our Social Justice teach-in and a fun Cyber Day to introduce high school students to cybersecurity.

In athletics, our students and coaches achieved greatness on and off the field. Women's Rugby, Men's Cross Country, Women's Indoor Track & Field, and Men's and Women's Lacrosse all won championships last year. Five, count five of our coaches were recognized as Northeast Conference Coach of the Year. And our Track & Field team earned the NCAA Division 1 public recognition award for being in the top 10 percent of all track & field teams in the country in academics.

While our students, seminarians, faculty and staff here at our Emmitsburg campus earn many accolades, I also want to recognize our incredible team at our Frederick campus who day in and day out help people complete their bachelor's degree or attain a graduate degree while often working at a full time job. Our staff and faculty at the Frederick campus make possible what some thought they would never be able to achieve and help make dreams come true.

Another essential part of the Mount is Our National Shrine Grotto of our Lady of Lourdes. The Grotto continues to serve as a beacon of hope and place of devotion to our Blessed Mother for so many faithful. We get over 400,000 visitors a year to the Grotto and this year will be no

different. I hope this year you all spend some time in quiet reflection and prayer as you walk the grounds that two saints and a martyr also walked.

As a university, we are doing well. Our strategic plan is working as we focus on our relentless pursuit of student success. We are growing our enrollments because we continue to innovate our program offerings in academics, athletics and student life programs. And because of this growth and the success others see our university attaining, people are investing in the Mount. Last year we raised close to \$12 million dollars, a record year, from alumni and other donors who believe in what we are doing for our students and seminarians.

And so we are investing in improving our facilities and our systems. We just renovated Rooney Tower apartments in the second year of our residence halls improvement project. We built a new Campus Activities Center that will feature many exciting large scale student and other events this year. We started renovating Knott Academic Center and I urge you to see the changes and additional space now on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors. Work to renovate and expand that building will continue over the next three years. And we are poised to break ground next year on a new athletic performance center and do some needed renovation and expansion of space for student-athlete health and wellness here in the ARCC. So the university is growing as we continue to innovate for the future to provide the best learning, living and developmental environment we can to ensure the success of our students.

As we look forward to this coming year, let's take care of each other. I am committed to the Mount having an environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and all believe they are valued members of our community. All God's children deserve this. Treating others with dignity and respect includes your personal relationships. Sexual assault is a problem on college campuses nationwide and we all must be part of the solution. No means no, and someone who is incapacitated by alcohol or drugs cannot provide consent! In the Army, we commit to never leaving a fallen comrade. Likewise, I ask you not to be bystanders when you think something is wrong. Listen to your 'spidy' senses and look for ways to intervene before a situation goes bad. Thank you for your support and vigilance in caring for each and every member of our community.

As a community, I know we are also committed to all of our students, faculty and staff feeling welcomed and included here. This happens when model and live out Catholic virtues in which love, respect, honesty and compassion are paramount. We made excellent strides last year in the implementation of our Mount Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan and I see continued growth for our community this year. I am confident that all of us together can continue to have the loving and respectful environment that serves as a beacon of hope for other communities to emulate. Hospitality to all, or as Dr. Paula Whetsel-Ribeau and Leon Dixon coined the phrase this weekend with the Class of 2023, Mount-spitality!

As we embark on this year, I know you are excited as am I. Students, embrace this exciting opportunity you have to become the best version of yourself by taking ownership of your

learning. We have wonderful and caring faculty here who want you to succeed: they teach, guide and mentor you towards becoming ethical leaders armed with the critical thinking, AND creative problem solving skills needed to lead lives of significance. We have tremendous learning support programs to help you sharpen your skills in certain areas; you have fellow students who can help you broaden your perspective and grasp difficult material. Seek what our Provost calls ‘the Mount Magic’.

Mount Magic happens when a student meets academic challenges. It happens when students find their voice and discover a cause to which to dedicate themselves. Mount Magic happens when students star both in the classroom and in athletic competition. It happens when students strengthen their faith and develop a moral compass that will guide them the rest of their lives. It happens when students complete internships that lead to their first jobs. It happens when our faculty and staff both challenge you to do your best but support you if you struggle. It happens when students travel to a distant land and learn about other cultures. Mount magic happens when students help someone in need. Mount magic happens when students imagine possibilities for their lives that they had never considered before. To our new students, if you work hard and participate fully, I know that Mount magic will happen to you.

So I am excited for this year, and I hope you are too. Together we will succeed and advance this institution into the future while respecting the foundation of faith and values upon which we rest.

Tomorrow we will celebrate our opening Mass of the Holy Spirit at 10:30 am in IC Chapel with overflow in the Seminary Dining Room. Classes are not in session during Mass, so please join us to start the year in the joy and spirituality of our Catholic faith. Even if you are not Catholic, please join us and learn about the Mass. We will have booklets available to describe the wonders that are happening during the celebration of the Eucharist and all parts of the Mass. I am looking forward to masses being packed with students on Sunday evenings this year, and I encourage all to get involved with our vibrant Campus Ministry programs.

The Convocation today is a way for us to ceremonially begin the new academic year. The convocation is a coming together of our entire academic community to launch our new beginnings, welcome new members to the community and inaugurate the final year for our seniors. So let’s seek excellence and have fun this year – every Friday, I encourage you to wear your favorite Mount spirit attire as we get fired up! Go Mount!

Now, I am happy to introduce you to the Provost of Mount St. Mary’s University, Dr. Boyd Creasman. Please join me in welcoming Provost Creasman to the podium.