



Convocation 2020
Remarks Delivered by Interim Provost Salma Ghanem
September 3, 2020

Good morning, and welcome to DePaul's 123rd Academic Year.

I always love the thrill of gathering as a community at the start of DePaul's academic year, and I very much wish we could have been gathering in the Quad in our regalia and walking together through the streets of Lincoln Park to the church. For those new to DePaul, I am sad that you are missing a great tradition but I welcome you to a great university. Even though we can't be physically together, we can connect in spirit to kick off DePaul's academic year.

Last spring, our world turned upside down. COVID-19 forced us to pivot, and we responded the way that we do everything at DePaul. We looked to our Catholic, Vincentian, urban mission and asked ourselves: what must be done?

Then we rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for the faculty who converted MORE THAN 4,000 classes to an online format in less than a week, as well as ALL the staff members who provided academic support.

Every day, I witnessed your creativity, compassion and patience.

I am especially appreciative for Information Services. Throughout the spring quarter, IS provided technical assistance, and staff have spent the summer months ensuring our classrooms are Zoom enabled.

I also would like to thank the Center for Teaching and Learning. In March alone, CTL provided one-on-one support to nearly 1,000 faculty members. Between April and June, CTL staff hosted more than 3,000 consultation sessions on course design and online teaching. This summer, participation was seven times higher than usual in the DePaul Online Teaching Series program, making it our largest cohort ever.

I applaud and thank all of you. Each and every one of you has played a very important role in addressing the crisis.

When the world turns upside down, it gives you the chance to see things differently. It has also made us personally question what is important and what isn't.

The spring quarter gave us the opportunity to reevaluate how our university operates. We adapted with flexibility and nimbleness that we never thought could be possible. Policies and structures have been re-examined to make sure they align with the new reality.

We have programs that we thought could NEVER be taught online. Now they can. This pandemic has made us reevaluate our concepts of time and space. It has made us more creative in the ways we connected with each other and with our students.

We also learned Zoom has its advantages. From regular meetings to town halls to admissions events, we saw record participation numbers. Plus, I got to meet a lot of your spouses, partners and kiddos, not to mention your pets who decided to sit on your lap in the middle of a meeting.

While COVID-19 continues to frame much of our work, we will continue to move the university forward.

As we move into this next academic year, our commitment to social justice remains a top priority. We are committed to enhancing and strengthening our diversity, equity and inclusion programs both centrally and at the unit levels. Thank you all for all the work you have done in this area from reaching out to students, being flexible with your classes, and addressing individual needs. There is much work to be done, and the pandemic has only exacerbated the inequities that exist in our society. Together we will continue our efforts. Sometimes we will disagree, sometime we will argue, but together we will make a difference.

I would like to thank Ruben Parra for his leadership as the interim associate provost for diversity and inclusion. More than 120 faculty members participated in diversity and inclusion training this past year. We also launched the Diversity and Inclusion Initiative Grant program, awarding 15 grants to faculty members. I am delighted to extend a warm welcome to Cynthia Pickett, who recently joined DePaul to serve as the associate provost for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Over the last few months, we welcomed several new academic leaders:

- Soumitra Ghosh, vice president for Enrollment Management
- Stephanie Dance-Barnes, dean for the College of Science and Health
- Tatum Thomas, dean for the School of Continuing and Professional Studies

I also would like to recognize Thomas Donley who is serving as interim dean for the Driehaus College of Business.

My sincere thanks to the outgoing leadership:

- Paula Luff and Jane McGrath, interim leaders in Enrollment Management
- Dorothy Kozlowski, interim dean for the College of Science and Health
- Don Opitz, interim dean for the School of Continuing and Professional Studies
- Misty Johanson, dean for the College of Business

Since last year's convocation, the DePaul community also gained 48 new faculty members.

Welcome to everyone who is new to DePaul. And welcome back to all of you.

As we move forward, uncertainty surrounds us. I know it's hard. As an academic institution, we know how to deal with ambiguity. We know how to navigate obstacles. I know YOU will rise above and continue to deliver the best learning experience possible to our students. I know you will persevere.

Keep our Catholic, Vincentian mission to serve the public good close to your heart.

Be kind to others, and remember to be kind to yourself.

Thank you for all that you do for DePaul.