

Convocation 2018

Remarks from Provost Marten denBoer

August 30, 2018

It is my honor to welcome you to DePaul's 121st academic year and our 31st Academic Convocation.

I would first like to recognize the deans of our colleges and schools here on stage. Our deans nurture the intellectual life of their colleges. They represent you, our faculty and staff, in support of academic programs and student learning. I thank them for their ongoing work and dedication. I want in particular to express my thanks to Gerry Koocher, dean of our College of Science and Health, who has led CSH for the last five years. We all wish him all the best as he embarks on new adventures, closer to his family. And . . . I'd like to welcome our newest dean, Dr. Dorothy Kozlowski, the new interim dean of CSH.

Thank you, Dorothy, for taking on this challenge.

We start this academic year with our new strategic plan:

Grounded in Mission.

That mission references the work and *values* of Vincent DePaul and Louise DeMarillac. We remember these two great figures today, not *just* as saints . . . but because *they* were “grounded in mission.” Vincent and Louise were steadfast in their commitment to serving their brothers and sisters in need. As Fr. Ed Udovic, Secretary of the University, wrote of Vincent, “He felt a personal responsibility to do something that would make a difference in their lives; to do something that would change a world in which suffering and poverty were so taken for granted.” It is grounded in, guided by, this mission that we at DePaul *educate, transform, and empower* our students to change the world. You, our faculty and staff, do this good and necessary work each day. *You* are grounded in mission. All of us at DePaul have suffered the disruption of the recent reorganizations, which have resulted in the loss of staff and increased work for many others. As the new central services come up to speed, that *extra* workload should diminish. In the meantime, you’ve stepped up to fill the gap and ensure that students do not feel the impact of these changes. You are grounded in mission.

I am *optimistic* about our future.

The reorganization has put us on a more *sustainable* financial footing. Our new strategic plan captures ideas and perspectives to lead us into the future, setting goals and priorities to *guide* decision making. It is indeed '*grounded in our mission*' to serve the disadvantaged and the marginalized, confirming our commitment to our Catholic and Vincentian identity and providing a welcoming environment for all, regardless of ethnicity, race, or creed.

The plan commits us to developing and providing academic programs that are high quality and meet the needs of our students *and of* society. It emphasizes academic rigor and a culture of creativity.

And, thanks to the reorganization, we have funds to invest in new initiatives and new programs so we can actually operationalize the strategic plan. We're already on our way. Let me share an example: A new initiative on student success, *supported* by a generous grant from a trustee and *matched* by DePaul funds, will focus on improving student retention and

degree completion. As you've heard us boast, our four-year graduation rate is now an *all-time* high of 60%, far exceeding the "expected" rate calculated by US News and the 50% average rate of 4-year private colleges and universities. And, new transfer students have a four-year graduation rate of 60-64%.

All of you, congratulate yourselves for your work in achieving this.

The new initiative will do even more. We'll create a university-wide Peer Support Network, extending the Chicago Quarter Mentor program from fall through the entire first year, providing every first-year student with an upper class mentor-coach. We'll have a similar model for new transfer students. The Career Center will expand the use of peer advisors in the EDGE program. We'll coordinate outreach to targeted student communities to increase engagement in populations that historically have lower rates of academic progress.

We've set several goals for this initiative:

#1 -- Increase our first-to-second year persistence to 90%.

#2 -- Ensure that 70% of freshmen can start their second year as full sophomores, because the strongest predictor of timely degree completion is first year success.

And, #3 -- Narrow the achievement gaps between various student groups.

These goals are ambitious, but with your help, we can achieve.

The strategic plan also calls for ways to help you help our students. So, today I'm proud to announce the new *Center for Teaching and Learning*. Under the direction of Sharon Guan, this new Center merges the Office for Teaching, Learning and Assessment with Faculty Instructional Technology Services, or FITS, creating a comprehensive approach for faculty developing their teaching. Your email has the launch announcement.

These initiatives are all great, but what really makes me confident about the future of DePaul is you, all our faculty and staff. You are committed, you are creative, you are innovative, YOU are DePaul.

I saw this again as I read the 50-plus proposals for the Academic Growth and Innovation Fund. It's been an *energizing* exercise. Well over 100 faculty and staff prepared thoughtful new ideas. Many were interdisciplinary, from teams of faculty and staff from various disciplines, departments, and colleges. This energy shows your commitment to our students and to DePaul. Thank you very much! The total amount requested exceeds the budget, but many proposals can be funded and I look forward to seeing their impact. And I look forward to seeing more of your ideas and initiatives as this program continues.

Your creativity will be needed in some projects to start this fall. I'll mention two.

One: a follow up to the review of our academic structure carried out this spring. That review produced a report offering several scenarios for facilitating collaboration across academic units and supporting entrepreneurialism and efficiency in the development and delivery of programs. The academic structure task force will be reviewing and discussing scenarios with you in the coming year.

Two: academic program prioritization. A faculty-led task force will undertake to review all our academic programs -- undergraduate and graduate. It'll develop the method for evaluation, and collect the needed data, guided by our strategic plan and mission. It'll then work with departments and colleges to determine which programs should be prioritized. This is challenging work, but it'll help strengthen the university for the future, enabling us to put our finite resources where they will be most effective.

I'm confident the innovative and collaborative spirit in our faculty and staff will continue as we embark on these challenging tasks.

I must mention the opening of the Holtschneider Performance Center, the new music building. This magnificent facility opens in November with performances by major artists including Itzhak Perlman, jazz musicians Brandee Younger and Courtney Bryan, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at these exciting events.

Teilhard de Chardin, a Catholic (Jesuit, not Vincentian) said, “Whatever rises, converges.” So for us, if we together elevate our minds and lift our hearts, we will converge around a sense of what’s good for all of us, what’s good for the future of DePaul. We can do that together, grounded in our mission.

The image of Vincent DePaul on McCabe Hall, a composite of many faces of faculty and students and staff, reminds us all why we’re at DePaul – to work together keeping the mission alive. Together we begin the 2018-2019 academic year as partners, grounded in mission.

Best wishes for a rewarding academic year.

Thank you again for all you do.