Convocation  
September 1, 2016

Remarks delivered by Provost Marten denBoer

It is my honor to welcome you to the Academic Convocation of 2016 – the 29th ceremony since the tradition started in 1987.

I have been at DePaul for a year now. I have learned so much from all of you.

I gained wisdom from DePaul’s talented faculty and staff. I gained a deeper appreciation of what it means to be Vincentian and our commitment to that mission. I gained renewed pride in the transformative work you do for our students and for Chicago.

As we embark on the 119th academic year at DePaul, we must embrace our strength as a community. To quote St Vincent de Paul’s close collaborator, St Louise de Marillac, “We must learn to ask, not to command and to teach by example, rather than precept.”

This past year we accomplished many things together, through your hard work:

- Hired two great new deans to lead the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and the School of Music
- Reorganized the Office of Academic Affairs, combining several responsibilities into a new position, associate provost for academic programs and faculty. Lucy Rinehart is transitioning into this new role now.
- Completed the faculty handbook
- The general education task force produced a thoughtful report on liberal studies, finding it is effective, especially in how it incorporates high impact practices like freshmen seminars and experiential learning. We will continue this effort in the year ahead.

We also struggled. In the coming year, we must and will work together to address issues of race and free speech. The events on our campus last spring were an important wake-up call. Our community experienced the pain of those events. We must learn and grow from them. I know Father Holtschneider will say a bit more about this in a few minutes. Let me just say now there’ll be many opportunities to participate in conversations about race and free speech and how we can work together for positive change. I urge you to actively participate in those conversations and initiatives.
You know, something else Louise de Marillac said was, “You are well aware that changes are always difficult.” Well, we’ve proved her wrong. Change comes more easily for us. In fact, last year, “U.S. News & World Report” recognized DePaul as one of the most innovative universities in the country.

Why did we earn that distinction? There are many reasons:

- Our CEO program’s success in recruiting into grad programs – almost 450 students this fall alone
- Lacking a medical school, we went ahead and developed the alliance with Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, which is expanding health profession opportunities for our students

Our focus on student learning and success through the Foundations for Success project has yielded great results. For example:

- BlueStar connects students to their advisors and faculty. The feedback students receive through this system enables them to improve academically and make progress toward graduation.
- The Learning Commons provides a central place for students to access instructional services such as tutoring.
- The enhanced orientation program for transfer students helps them transition to life at DePaul. That’s important: we had 1,400 transfer students last year. We’re by far the largest private transfer destination in Illinois.

Everyone in the DePaul community – all of you – has been involved in these initiatives. You have strengthened coordination across campus and assisted students in their academic programs. The results of your work are outstanding:

- Ten years ago, DePaul’s six-year graduation rate was 63.5 percent. Today it is 72.8 percent.
- Ten years ago, DePaul’s four-year graduation rate was 39 percent. Today it is 58.5 percent, well above the national average for four-year private universities, which has been static at 48 - 50 percent for the past decade.
We’ve made much progress in this area, and you should be very proud. And we can do more. It’s great that almost 60 percent of our students graduate in four years, but that means 40 percent do not. In the words of St. Vincent de Paul, what must be done? Well, here’s a few things we’ll be doing.

- With Civitas Learning, we will maximize course scheduling so students get the courses they need when they need them, yielding further efficiencies so they stay on track to graduate.

- There are high impact practices that increase student success. One is learning communities. Last year, CDM and CSH implemented pilots, grouping first-year students together in a Chicago Quarter section with a course required for their program, helping them build relationships and increasing persistence. We will expand this model this year.

- Another high impact practice is study abroad. We will expand access to those programs.

We’re innovative not only in teaching and learning. We’re also innovative in the support we offer all faculty, including term and adjunct faculty.

With new university initiatives, adjunct faculty will have more opportunities to participate in DePaul’s academic life and to resolve workplace concerns. Changes include:

- The course cancellation fee increased to 25 percent of the agreed-upon salary if the course is cancelled a month before the first day of class. This improves on the previous rates of 10 percent or 20 percent depending on when the course was cancelled.

- I’m very grateful to the Adjunct Task Force for their recommendations for improvement. As a result, we’re creating a new Workplace Environment Committee, the WEC, which will serve as a conduit for voicing and resolving adjunct faculty workplace concerns.

- Faculty Council has moved to add adjunct faculty to its Committee on Contingent Faculty.

- Faculty Council will also consider including the adjunct faculty voice in it and in academic units.

Efforts to further integrate adjunct faculty into the life of the university will continue.
This year the Higher Learning Commission will be visiting as part of our reaccreditation. Thanks to your good work, we are in fine shape for this review, but let’s use this chance to evaluate and reflect on our programs.

We have many ambitions for this academic year, and this work involves all of us – both in the classroom and beyond. I ask you to engage with students and urge them to take advantage of their time here. We all know how quickly it will go by. Encourage them to go to music and theatre performances, cheer on classmates at athletic events, attend lectures, and actively participate in the intellectual life we all value so much at DePaul.

And we must remember the words of Louise de Marillac to be role models. Ask, don’t command. Teach by example. I will certainly be out there.

Thanks to all your involvement and hard work, the university is in a very strong position. Our visibility and impact have grown in the last decade or two. We’re all aware of the coming presidential transition. What gives me confidence during that transition is precisely the strong institution you have built. Your accomplishments make us a highly attractive institution. Because of your work, top candidates will want to serve as the next leader of DePaul.

Best wishes for a successful and rewarding academic year. I look forward to continuing our magnificent mission of transforming lives together with all of you. Thank you for all that you do.