

President Cimboric's Inauguration Address:

Introduction

Bishop Campbell, Prioress Ormond, Representative Weddington, Members of our Board of Trustees, members of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of Peace, Alumni, honored guests, faculty, staff, students, friends and family, I thank you for your presence here today. I am deeply touched and appreciative that so many people have joined us on this day of celebration. While it is true that this ceremony today marks my official inauguration as the 15th president of Ohio Dominican University, it is much more than that. It marks the beginning of our year-long Centennial Celebration: The celebration of a Century of Transforming Lives. But let me first speak to my role as president. I am deeply honored to have been chosen by the Ohio Dominican University Board of Trustees to serve in this role. I hope to fulfill the daunting challenges that this office brings. While the Board holds me to certain criteria for success, I am fully aware that any success that the University enjoys during my tenure as president will be as a result of the efforts of all who surround me whether they be students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni or friends of the University. It is the work of others, not the president, that will define and shape our future. In some ways it reminds me of a truism I experienced during my years as a practicing psychologist. Namely, the patient is the problem, the patient is the solution, God cures, and I collect the bills. In this tongue-in-cheek example I don't suffer any false sense of humility but rather I recognize that my role as a psychologist was, and is, to be a catalyst for change, a bridge between problems and solutions.

I bring with me from my past, a similar understanding of the presidency. A successful president can at best be a catalyst for change. However for change to take place, those around the president must embrace change and be partners in it, as stakeholders in a common vision for the future. We must all be on the same path with the same hoped-for destination. This address gives me the opportunity to share with you, my vision for our university's future. It is not intended to be a prescriptive roadmap but rather, a stimulus for continued dialogue to further hone among us an agreed-upon vision for the future. In the end, for a vision to be successful, it must be a shared vision with a clear understanding that is embraced by all and has as its foundation the common good.

Legacy and History

We start this journey together drawing inspiration from a strong tradition whose history we celebrate this year. This tradition honors a foundation built upon the faith and perseverance of a group of religious women of unparalleled strength and determination. After a fire in 1866 destroyed a Dominican academy for girls in Somerset, Ohio, the Sisters accepted a gift of land, a former brickyard in Columbus, Ohio, upon which they built their new academy. In 1911, the institution was chartered by the State of Ohio to offer college classes. It formally opened as a four-year liberal arts college for women in 1924 with ten students and five faculty members¹

¹ Sister Camilla Mullay, OP, "Ohio Dominican University: Its Mission and Identity," in *Cradles of Conscience: Ohio's Independent Colleges and Universities*, Oliver, Hodges, and O'Donnell, Eds. (Kent State University Press, 2003): 366.

and eventually became known as St. Mary of the Springs College, sponsored by the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs.

Until 1941 the position of president of the university was a part-time job, because the Dominican Sister who held the position of president also served as the religious superior of the motherhouse. The Sisters who held these positions over the years oversaw periods of prosperity but more often periods of great financial stress that challenged the ongoing future of the University. In 1927, on the brink of the Great Depression, construction began on three major buildings—Hamilton Hall, the dining facility; Erskine Hall, the administration and classroom building; and Sansbury Hall, a dormitory. The buildings were completed in 1929; the Depression being an unforeseen event when their construction had originally been planned. To the astonishment of many, the Sisters had financed the construction of these buildings using the Congregation's property as collateral and managed only with great difficulty, prayer and perseverance to get the debt refinanced.

Then, in 1932 when enrollment had dropped drastically because of the Depression, in order to have the minimum number of one hundred students required for North Central accreditation, Mother Stephanie Mohun and Sister Jane de Chantal, (the Academic Dean) arranged for qualified postulants entering the Congregation to be enrolled as full-time students in the College—a clever ploy, to reach the minimum number required for accreditation. As a result, St. Mary of the Springs College attained accreditation from North Central in 1934.

Through the '40s and '50s, St. Mary of the Springs College developed programs that would mark it as a fine liberal arts college for women. In 1964 the college became co-educational; and the name was changed in 1967 to Ohio Dominican College.² Sisters served in the role of President for the first 90 years of its history, until 2001. The longest-serving Sister-President of Ohio Dominican, Sister Mary Andrew Matesich, took office during the '70s and led the college for 23 years, bringing it into the 21st century. In 2002, during the administration of the first lay President, graduate programs were added and our name was changed to Ohio Dominican University.

A testament to our Centennial Celebration is the History Wall located in the Bishop James A. Griffin Student Center. A dedicated Centennial History Subcommittee comprised of staff, faculty emeriti and Sisters combed through the University's archives, sorted through countless photographs, and worked diligently over the course of a year to research, chronicle, design and produce this display. If you haven't already seen it, I invite you to view the History Wall during the reception following today's Installation Ceremony.

I can give countless examples of the legacies of the many administrators, faculty, staff, alumni and benefactors whose contributions have allowed this university to grow and prosper. But clearly, without the sacrifice, dedication, and determination of the Dominican Sisters, we would not be standing here today. When I was asked to provide input to the pageantry for today's liturgical celebration and the inauguration itself, I made only one request – Namely, I asked that

² Ibid, 379. This decision led to protests by the men who were enrolled at Ohio Dominican that year.

the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Peace (a new Religious Institute of which the Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs are a founding member) be invited to lead the procession at both the Mass and the inauguration. This is their rightful place. They represent the foundation upon which Ohio Dominican was built and we are charged with carrying on their legacy both today and into the future. I would now ask the members of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of Peace to please rise so that we may recognize them.

Catholic and Dominican Charism

I come to this position deeply grateful for the legacy and tradition of this institution. Together with my colleagues in administration, faculty, staff and the Board of Trustees, I acknowledge our joint responsibility to carry forward the Dominican and Catholic heritage which is at the core of who we are, of what we do now, and hope to do in the future. To guide us in achieving this end, we have the Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, offered by Pope John Paul II in 1990.³

Let me state at the outset: We are unapologetically Catholic and because of that we welcome diversity of opinion, faith traditions, and cultures. We are rooted in the Catholic tradition, and draw strength from all that is best in what it means to be Catholic. We take pride in the tradition which gave birth to the first universities in the Western world; which modeled brisk inquiry into Truth, drawing from all parts of the world, all religions and cultures. These universities, the crown jewels—along with the Cathedrals—of the Middle Ages, were truly born *ex corde ecclesiae*, from the heart of the Church.

In these universities, and here in our own, the Search for Truth was passionate and athletic: the Saturday competitions were not on a football field, but in a lecture room, where well-trained scholars engaged in *disputatio*. In the best sense, here was modeled faith seeking understanding. If we are true to these roots, we will set no limits, and demonstrate for our students that there is no conflict between faith and reason, when both are in the service of Truth. This tradition of inquiry gives us a sound basis for academic freedom, and for the hospitality of ideas that admits the expression of disparate positions in the process of arriving at sound conclusions. Pope John Paul II's *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* makes this point clear: [The Catholic University] possesses that institutional autonomy necessary to perform its functions effectively and guarantees its members academic freedom, so long as the rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good.⁴

Our tradition is not only Catholic, but also Dominican. It was to these medieval universities that St. Dominic sent his first friars; and it was there that they met and attracted to their Order many of the first Dominicans. St. Thomas Aquinas was one of these, and his genius continues to inform our curriculum, particularly in philosophy and theology. At a time when, in some quarters of the Church, Aristotle was suspect as a “pagan” philosopher, Thomas embraced and

³ John Paul II, On Catholic Universities: *Ex corde ecclesiae* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1990.)

⁴ *Ex corde ecclesiae*, Part I, A, 1, 12.

shared his wisdom, accepting into his own synthesis of faith and reason whatever he found compatible and true. Into the model of discussion that prevailed at Paris, the *disputatio*, Thomas also welcomed the insights of Muslims and Jews, whose positions were debated alongside those of the Church Fathers and the sacred Scriptures.

And it is from Thomas that we have the motto engraved in stone on the front steps of Erskine Hall: To contemplate, and to share with others the fruits of our contemplation. Clearly, there is nothing more central to the role of the teacher, than to contemplate, or study, and then to share with students the fruits of that study. But this responsibility to share what has been studied goes beyond the classroom. The university is itself a community of Truth seekers; it must model for all constituencies this hospitality in the service of Truth. It is expected that our faculty share with one another and with their colleagues the fruits of their own research and study. This is why the “Academy” expects them to publish, and why it should be such an incentive to engage in the spirited camaraderie that provokes new ideas and leads to publication.

Vision for the Future

The Dominican historian, Simon Tugwell, encourages me as I embark on the task of crafting my vision for the future of the University. Referring to the Order of Preachers, he writes: The Order, if it is to be true to its calling, has always to be re-inventing itself. It cannot cope with all eventualities in advance; it must...learn how to respond to unforeseen excitements, which it may well not feel very competent to handle, in a spirit of confidence to God.”¹⁵ It is in that spirit that I express my vision for the future of Ohio Dominican...

- I want Ohio Dominican to be known regionally as a highly selective and truly outstanding comprehensive liberal arts university with a blend of strong traditional and adult undergraduate and graduate programs, and yes, including a few selective applied doctoral programs.
- I would hope to see a combined student body of over four thousand with a doubling of the current number of full-time faculty.
- I would hope that we will be continually vigilant to the economic and workforce development needs of the region as we seize opportunities to develop and offer new degree programs.
- I would like to see our residence halls filled to capacity, spurring us to build townhouse-style residences for our advanced undergraduate and graduate students.
- I would hope to double the size of our endowment while we take our rightful place in becoming highly competitive in extramural funding, particularly research grants for our faculty.

- I would like to see a high percentage of our undergraduates go on to pursue graduate and professional degrees and become competitive for national fellowships such as the Woodrow Wilson, Danforth, Fulbright, and Rhodes Scholarship.
- I would like to see the complete renovation of some of our more 'senior' buildings including Erskine, its theatre, the library, our chapel, St. Albert, and Wehrle.
- I want ODU to be the first choice school for the very best students in this region of the country.

I want all of this to be accomplished with a clear understanding of who we are and will continue to be—a great Dominican, Catholic liberal arts university. Providence College move over, you ain't seen nothing yet! I want all of this to be accomplished by men and women who represent our global society and a cross-section of all of the peoples of our great country. We currently celebrate our diversity in all of its forms, and we will continue to do so. All of this will be accomplished in an environment and climate of trust, support and respect, recognizing that our most valuable asset is our people. And finally, those who leave ODU will not only have been transformed but will take the seeds of their ODU transformation and plant them wherever they may go... to help transform our society for the good of all people or the common good.

As I began my comments this afternoon, I noted that a president cannot accomplish any of these things alone, but can only hope that he or she may inspire others and be a catalyst for change. Let me once again hearken back to my days as a psychologist by asking this important question: How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but it has to want to change! Like the light bulb, I hope my vision captures the sentiments of most if not all in the ODU community and I hope it inspires us all to want to change. There is a natural resistance to change but every university -- if it is to succeed and endure -- must constantly be in a dynamic state of change; (or as Tugwell said, "re-inventing itself"); change that is inspired by vision but fulfilled by the effort of all.

Finally, there is not a day through prayer that I do not humbly ask for God's help in the daunting challenge of serving as your president. I ask then, not only for your support, but also for your prayers so that my actions are guided by His hand in whatever I do, and that our collective actions will help Ohio Dominican University fulfill our dreams of promise. Thank you for your participation today and may God bless us all.

References:

John Paul II, *On Catholic Universities: Ex corde ecclesiae*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1990.

Mullay, Camilla, O.P. Chapter on Ohio Dominican in *Cradles of Conscience: Ohio's Independent Colleges and Universities*, Ed. John Oliver et al. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003.

Mullay, Camilla, O.P., Ed. Ruth Caspar, OP. *A Place of Springs: History of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs 1830-1970*. Columbus, Ohio: Dominican Sisters, St. Mary of the Springs, 2005.

Newman, John Henry. *The Idea of a University*. Doubleday, Image Books, 1959.

Tugwell, Simon (Ed). *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*. Paulist Press, 1999.
