

Faculty and Staff Convocation

I am thrilled and humbled to greet you on this, my very first day as Loyola's president.

We gather together at a crucial moment for Loyola – a time to shift from having to think about survival to dreaming big about the future, a time to regroup and focus on our mission. This is our turning point – our moment to do right by this institution we all love so much.

The reason I am here is because of how much all of you love Loyola and Loyola students. I have never seen an institution so full of commitment, such a sense of higher purpose.

I am here because Jesuit universities have been doing extraordinary teaching and scholarship for 500 years, because we are part of the largest consortium of universities in the world.

And I am here because after my own journey, both outside higher ed and in other academic institutions – a journey where I gained some valuable insights and perspectives – I have finally come home.

Many of you know that I have deep connections to Loyola – let me talk about just one of them.

My father taught psychology here at City College. His students were mostly nurses and cops, coming to classes at night after long hard days at work. He loved to push them, to blow their minds about human nature and the workings of the mind.

My father was a Jesuit himself for 17 years. And so I learned every day of my childhood the meaning of Jesuit education.

For him, it was about finding promise and talent in *every single* student – not just letting them fall on a bell curve.

It was about instilling in them a love of learning for its own sake – the magic of nature, the story-telling of history, the music of poetry. And understanding that all of these grand understandings of humanity are evidence of the creator.

(I never quite understood the stereotype of religion as anti-intellectual, because for my mother, being religious meant learning Latin, Greek, Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew to understand the bible without need of translation. There is no distance between faith and reason. The Jesuit order, after all, is rooted in the Renaissance and in humanism.)

My father taught me that Jesuit education is about challenging assumptions, about questioning the way things are, and pushing for them to be more *just*.

(Something he demonstrated by being as ornery as possible in faculty meetings.... If you notice some folks laughing harder, it's because they remember.)

Most of all, the Jesuit mission is to teach students to live for others – that the entire point of honing your gifts to a fine steel is to fight to make the world a better place. He believed that living for others would make students better people. And as a psychologist, he also believed it would make them happier people.

He taught me to love Loyola. To understand how committed you all are to the mission, to the students, to each other.

What I know from growing up on this campus and from watching you from next door, is the strength of that commitment.

You brag constantly about these extraordinary students – their excitement and gratitude, their commitment and hard work.

And here is what I know – you are the ones who help make them into that kind of community.

Every one of you – whether you feed them or offer them counseling or take care of this stunning campus, you are all part of crafting that kind of community. You set the tone of compassion and care, discipline and hard work.

For those of you on the faculty, you transform student lives with the passion of your teaching, both in the classroom and outside, with long hours of mentoring and advising.

And let me just say — I am proud to be at an institution that prioritizes teaching unabashedly, because too many institutions prove their status by abandoning that focus. But I think there is often a false dichotomy between research and teaching, as if they are necessarily a distraction from each other. Research enriches teaching. For me, my own teaching stayed more relevant when I was at the table and part of the conversation. I only really knew whether my ideas made sense when I was forced to actually prove them. And when our students watch us work to solve the burning problems of the world, we embody for them the endless search for answers.

These are our Jesuit values (whether they are rooted in your particular faith or in your core beliefs): Instilling a lifelong love of learning. Teaching students a willingness to ask constant questions of the world. And helping them understand that happiness and fulfillment lies in living for others.

You – all of you – teach our students those values best by modeling them. And for the last many years, that has included sticking by this university even when it's been really tough.

You know, in the years since Katrina I have started to lose it every time I heard the word resilient. (We need to invent a word for people really tired of being called resilient.) In the ups and downs of these last 13 years for New Orleans, we've had the hurricanes, the flood, the

economic crisis, political upheaval, oil spills, the locusts, the plagues... we have suffered a toxic mix of bad luck and bad decisions.

And all of that comes on top of a moment for higher education when institutions are cleaving into the haves and have nots. When universities like Loyola that provide *real* opportunity and meritocracy, struggle. It has gotten harder and harder to balance access and affordability with quality and excellence.

And as a result of all of that, I know that you have suffered through years of uncertainty and wrenching change.

You have lost beloved colleagues who left, or were let go.

You have gone through hardship that has brought you together as a determined community, but threatened to steal the joy from your work.

You have picked up the work of those who are gone. You have stopped asking whose responsibility things are and just done them yourselves.

And it has mattered. You have collectively turned things around, in admissions, in retention, in finding creative ways to do more with less, and in growing new programs that will make us sustainable.

The first thing I have to say to you is this ... Thank you. For all of it. Thank you. I am so sorry that you have had to endure so much and intensely grateful to you for remaining strong.

Here is what I know. As with New Orleans after the storm, we will not let all of this hardship go to waste. We have the opportunity rooted in pain to begin again – to allow ourselves to dream about what Loyola should be.

Where do we go from here?

We are already working hard to create better financial systems – to arm those of you who keep our accounts and manage our finances with technology a little farther removed from the abacus.

Because it was time to end the death by a thousand cuts, I am grateful that the university has worked quickly to balance the budget, as difficult as that has been.

We will have to keep controlling expenses tightly – to live frugally and carefully within our means. I can't describe how important that will be.

But I also know that some of these cuts, so necessary in the short term, are not sustainable in the long-term. They spread us too thin and create false economies.

Our job together is to grow revenues so that we can make Loyola sustainable and get back to a place where we can reinvest in our mission – we need to do more to enrich the lives of our students, to support the teaching and research of our faculty, to let all of our staff focus on the core of their work.

How do we do that?

Here is what you don't want. You don't want me to come to you on my first day with a cookie-cutter vision of what we should be. We have to find the solutions together.

I will bring the same discipline, hard work and problem-solving ability that my parents drilled into me, with the personal Jesuit education I have received since birth. But I need your knowledge of this institution. I need the insights and ideas you've had over decades of working here. I need the fresh perspectives of those of you who have come more recently.

We have to find the ways to provide both the substance and branding to attract more students. We do that by building on our strengths and bragging about them in a way that delights fickle 17-year-olds.

We have to expand our reach and explore the markets of the future. We have to discover where Loyola's strengths match an untapped need. I need to know where you see those opportunities, using your individual expertise in your own fields.

I hate to even use the words strategic planning, because it gives me PTSD – the tyranny of meetings and wasted time talking in endless circles. (I come from a law school faculty, where we liked to spend all of our time arguing about the process by which we would plan instead of actually planning.)

But we will need to structure a way by which we can collect your knowledge, insights and ideas and plan Loyola's future. Good planning is transformative, it gives everyone a voice, makes them understand their role in the greater mission, and it is the only way to find the answers. But all of you know how hard it is to get that process perfect, particularly in a complex organization like this. So I ask for your help, your patience, and your empathy, because we need to act quickly and not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

And this goes without saying, in addition to a strategic planning process, I will be spending my first few months intensely listening to you: individually, in small groups, at town halls. I want your ideas – both the carefully planned and practical ideas, and your out-of-the box, crazy-sounding ideas.

Now is our time to keep fixing our systems and make them more efficient,

to engage our students even more creatively,

and to make the world understand what we already know about Loyola. This is an extraordinary place. This is where I want my children to go to college, to learn, to grow, to be the people they are meant to be.

And so together we move forward.

We move forward because we are inspired by the students we teach – driven to do right by them.

We move forward to do right by each other, to work through the hardship and to return to a more exciting, joyful community.

We move forward because we love Loyola.

I promise to give you every ounce of my mind, heart and spirit. I am so excited to begin today with all of you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.