



"Shepherding Towards Growth"

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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9th President, Saint Louis College, City of San Fernando, La Union

(Investiture Rites, August 8, 2009)

(acknowledgement of guests on a separate sheet)

Some have said that the inauguration of school presidents is an outdated vestige of an age gone by. As a matter of fact, the robes we are wearing today were robes worn in the middle ages to protect students and professors from the harsh winters of Europe. Wear this in San Fernando, La Union, in a 32-degree centigrade weather, and surely, the fats melt like snow in springtime. Having said that however, we choose to view this as a time to remember that, even in the 21st century, we are a part of a tradition that dates back hundreds of years. I also think that it is a wonderful time for us to pause and bring together many of our stakeholders; students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, members of the Board of Trustees and communities and colleagues from around the country in order to celebrate our school.

What a privilege it is for me to be standing before you as the 9th president of this storied institution. At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the investiture committee and to everyone who worked so hard to make this event so perfect; you truly represent the SLC spirit. I am grateful to all of you.





Although we have tried to keep this ceremony simple, I suppose, still, that there is an inevitable amount of pomp and circumstance that surrounds the Investiture of a College President.

It is humbling to stand before you today following the eight presidents who have served Saint Louis College so well in the past - standing in the presence of two of them, Dr. Josefa Baladad, fourth and sixth President and Dr. Remedios Mariñas, seventh President of Saint Louis College. I would like to express my gratitude to those who have led this institution. The institution's achievements and present distinction are the results of the vision of these leaders, and I take very seriously the obligation of living up to the standard they have set.

A higher education institution is one engaged with and aspiring to make a difference in its community -- especially through the contributions of its students. We could not accomplish this task, without the support of all of you offering learning opportunities, wisdom, and advice to our students, as well as to me. I am grateful for your presence here today, and by your presence, your affirmation of this important mission.





Friends, one thing I learned early in my administrative training is that while one may be in authority that does not necessarily mean that you are an authority. That is why I am grateful that my fellow administrators and representatives of the faculty and staff are present today because the ministry that has been entrusted to me is not mine alone. It is ours. And while I may be in authority and have to carry this mace and wear this collar, I am very much aware that I am not an authority in all the various dimensions of running as diverse and creative a College as Saint Louis College. I ask you, then, to join hands with me in transforming our noble Vision and Mission statements into concrete daily actions, in the classrooms, laboratories, offices and corridors of SLC.

SLC envisions the integral human formation of the youth to become mature Christian leaders of the church and society. I firmly believe that genuine national development can never be achieved unless the youth is intellectually and spiritually matured.

War and violence, hate and misunderstanding continue to scar our planet. All of us dream of the day when our country will at last be liberated from the clutches of poverty, when everybody will have a decent shelter to live, have food to eat, water to drink and cloth to wear, when every child will receive proper education, when every breadwinner will be able to find stable and secured employment, when no one trades his vote, in other words, when every Filipino will be able to live with integrity and dignity in his own native land. I firmly believe that there is only but one way of making those dreams a reality. EDUCATION.





And by education, I do not mean only the development of the mind or the honing of critical thinking or the acquisition of relevant skills, essential as these may be. Above and beyond these is the fostering of human and Christian values. There is, therefore, every reason to place renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education. This finds support in the present-day language of the Mission Statement of the CICM Schools which in general provides, and I quote:

The Church maintains that education is far more than just a method of imparting knowledge; of preparing the student to make a living. Intellectual education must not be separated from religious and moral values, for growth in the Christian faith is the first essential of the right ordering of human life.

The CICM schools have been established to help students attain their spiritual, mental and physical development. CICM Schools do not merely dispense knowledge, they inculcate Christian values. They raise not only the standard of living of their graduates but their very own standard of being.

The Word of Christ revealed in the Gospel must be in the forefront of our educational program. Inspired and compelled by the attitude of Jesus, it gives special attention to the oppressed, the disadvantaged and the handicapped.

Catholic schools are privileged venue to do all these. Unquote.





Pope John Paul II once wrote that our proper activity in the academe is (and I quote): “Learning to think rigorously, so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better.” (unquote).

The duty is timeless, yet its challenge is new in each age, and particularly pressing in this age. The struggle to be a good Catholic college in a world that has become both increasingly secular and more radically religious has placed St. Louis College in a unique position at the heart of the most complex issues facing our society. We have not just an opportunity, but a duty to think and speak and act in ways that will guide, inspire, and heal – not just for the followers of the Catholic faith, but for all our neighbors whose faith is not the same as ours.

We need a school that can address issues of faith with reverence and respect.

We need a school – grounded in a commitment to love one’s neighbor – debate how we will respond to the grinding and dehumanizing poverty in which so much of our people live.

This province and the country needs a college that graduates men and women who are not only capable and knowledgeable, but who accept their responsibility to serve others – especially those in greatest need.

The Catholic Church needs a school whose scholars can help pass on its intellectual tradition, even as they address the challenges and the opportunities the Church faces today.





There are certainly other truly great institutions of learning in this country. Many of them began as religious, faith-inspired institutions, but some have left that founding character behind. One finds among them a disconnection between the academic enterprise and an over-arching religious and moral framework that orients academic activity and defines a good human life.

I pray that in SLC, we will seek worldly knowledge, confident that the world exhibits coherence that reflects the Creator. We will train the intellects of our students, cultivate their faith and instill the virtues necessary for living a good life. We will strive to build a community generous to those in need and responsive to the demands of justice – strengthened by grace and guided by the command to love God and neighbor.

This is no easy mission. But its difficulty is not our concern; we did not create the mission, and we cannot change it. The word “mission” derives from the Latin root “missus” – which means “sent.” We have been sent – to seek God, study the world, and serve humanity. If we are clear in our purpose, we will excel in our ideals. We have to excel. We have to be excellent. Were he to be asked the reason why a school should be excellent, I believe that our Founder, Fr. Theophiel Verbist, would simply say, “we need to be excellent because every student who comes to us is a CHILD OF GOD, and as a child of God, that young person deserves the best from us. We owe that young person the best of ourselves.” It is for this reason that we speak of teaching as a ministry, and not simply as a profession. And the ground on which we carry out that ministry is holy. Saint Louis College is a holy ground. It is a holy ground because it is a place of encounter between human beings who try to bring out the best in each other, who help each other probe deeply into the meaning of life, who mediate God to one another, and who try to lead each other to become fuller, better persons.





I need not emphasize that all of us—not just the administrators, or those in the religious and values education department, or in campus ministry—all of us bear the responsibility for ensuring that the College succeeds in forming men and women who value faith and fatherland, builders and believers who are socially responsible, creative and competent.

My presidency will be driven by a whole-hearted commitment to uniting and integrating these two indispensable and wholly compatible strands of higher learning: academic excellence and religious faith. So that in the end, students will say, when asked why they study in SLC, all they want is a line in their curriculum vitae that says – graduated from Saint Louis College, La Union – what that line represents can change their entire life.

In the spirit of the Gospel that not a single sheep of the flock be lost, we will try to ensure that every student who enrolls in Saint Louis College completes his or her course with dignity and pride. To do this, we must continue creating the kind of school climate and put in place those structures that will help us to achieve this goal. Among other things, we need to maintain an effective counseling program, with both adult and peer counselors, who can assist floundering students in their academic as well as personal difficulties. Most importantly, faculty members will need to adopt this goal as their own and actively seek the success of all their students. This does not mean coddling or babying the students. Academic standards cannot and will not be compromised, nor will behavioral parameters be sacrificed. Students must continue to be challenged to be the best persons that they can become. But of course, if they consistently manifest through their behavior or their attitude that they don't really care to stay at SLC, well, then, that is their decision.





As questions are posed on how we wish to formulate our program of leadership for the College in the next decade to come, all we can offer is an image of stewardship and shepherding along the lines of the greatest Teacher who ever lived. My invitation to each member of the academic community, whether student or faculty, staff or administrator, is to join in the challenge of unfolding within each academic department, service unit or administrative level, what the Kingdom of God means for Saint Louis College.

The College President, more than any other academic unit, is tasked to lead those who come to these halls of learning to the source of truth – about human life, in this world, as a family, in its many nuances. It is in light of this entrustment that I respectfully accept the task of leading so that the Lord can become our way, our truth and our life. At root, this is the mission of Saint Louis College, then, now and tomorrow. I can only make it also my own. To be joined with you in this mission of shepherding the flock towards growth.

We thank all of you who are here today to share in our joy at the many fruitful years behind us. Thanks to the towering pioneers and nameless contributors. We thank all of you too for wishing us well as we face the future challenge of our beloved college.

Today, I stand before you with pride. I was summoned to serve a great college. I pledge that I will work with you to assure that it is an even greater institution when I depart.

Thank you.

