

Inauguration Comments (FINAL)

November 14, 2014

Founding Spirit, Inspired Future

“Assalam Alaikum” (Ah Sahlam, Ah lay khum)

“Ni Hao Ma” (Knee how ma)

“Ola” (Oh-La)

“Hola” (Oh – La)

“Xin Chao” (Sin – Chow)

“Swasdi - Krup” (Sa-wat-dee-krup)

“Anyoungsayoh” (Ann-young-ha-say-oh)

“Konnichiwa” (Cone – E –Chee – Wha)

“Bonjour”

“Shalom Aleikhem” (Shah-lome All-lay-khem)

“Shupu Shondha” (Shoe-Poo-Shawnd-Ha)

“Sain baina uu” (Sahn-ban-uhh)

“Merhaba” (Mare-ha-bah)

“Namaste” (Nah-mahs-stay)

“Selamat Siang” (Sell-ah-maht See-Angh)

“Dia Dhuit” (Dee-ah Guit)

Good afternoon. I bring you greetings in the many languages of our students from around the globe and here at home. Faculty, staff, trustees, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, regents, FCC members, members of the alumni board, alumni, honored guests and delegates, family, friends and students, Archbishop Carlson and members of the platform party; thank you all very much for joining us on this special day. A day the likes of which has not been witnessed at Fontbonne University for nearly 20 years, thanks to the long tenure and dedicated service of President Denny Golden and his wife Monica. Denny, you honor me by your presence. I cannot begin without first expressing my thanks to you for your assistance during this transition. You have graciously shared your experiences and insights and you have also allowed me to make my own way without intrusion. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Denny and Monica Golden back to Fontbonne. Denny and I were fortunate to follow a long line of great women presidents. We are most fortunate that Sr. Jane Hasset CSJ, our 11<sup>th</sup> president, is with us today. Sr. Jane,

you are a frequent and welcome visitor to Fontbonne, and I look to your enduring history of Fontbonne, *As Strong as the Granite*, for useful information and guidance. You, too, honor us with your presence.

So many members of the Fontbonne community have worked diligently to make this day and my ongoing transition to the presidency possible. Please indulge a few personal and heartfelt thanks.

First I thank the search committee and the Board of Trustees for their faith in me as the candidate chosen to lead Fontbonne. I also thank the Board and, in particular, board chair Gary Krosch, for unwavering support as we have begun our work together. We are also joined by former board chairs Dan Ferry, Joe McGlynn and Tom Gunn. Thank you, gentlemen, for your continued interest in and devotion to Fontbonne.

Next, I would like to thank my transition team, led by alumna and chair of the council of regents Karen Gedera,

for their valuable insights as I set my agenda for the first several months of my presidency.

I would like to thank the inauguration committee, the physical plant and housekeeping crews and the many volunteers, all led by retired vice president of student affairs Randi Wilson, for their creative and thorough organization, planning and execution of this event. Randi, I cannot thank you enough for your leadership in this effort. Please accept this gift as a small token of my appreciation. (Maddie delivers flowers).

My senior team has been indispensable during this transition, and I am most grateful. This has been a time of transition for them as well. It has also been a time of transition for Patricia Etter having made the switch from managing Denny Golden to managing me, no small feat to be sure. Thank you, Patricia, for your flexibility while maintaining a professional, warm and welcoming office.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all of the members of the Fontbonne community who have extended the kind hand of welcome to me, Cathy and our family. We could not have planned for nor anticipated a smoother transition. We feel very much at home here.

I was privileged to serve Alvernia University in Reading, Pennsylvania for 8 and ½ years, and I am so pleased to have some friends and colleagues from Alvernia with us today including trustees ElSayed Elmarzouky and Deanna Reuben. I served under three board chairs, two of whom are with us, Kathy Herbein and Joanne Judge. The Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, sponsors of Alvernia, are represented by Sr. Madonna Harvath. Thank you sister for sharing this day. I welcome also my friends and colleagues Karen Schroder and Tom Minick. I am pleased to have all of you here to represent Alvernia, a place dear to my heart. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Alvernia President Tom Flynn, who both challenged me to complete my graduate education and who supported me during that pursuit.

I also welcome some friends and colleagues from my days at Elizabethtown College. Your enduring friendship, Zane and Dan, has been a source of great joy and sustenance.

We and others grieve for our dear friend Pat Hall who worked with me at Elizabethtown and who followed me to Belmont Abbey and Alvernia. Pat, you and Mary were to join us today, but you were called home to be with the Irish saints in heaven. We will raise a glass in your honor later tonight old friend. Sláinte!

Cathy and I are fortunate that my father and her mother are still with us and are here to celebrate today. I would like to ask Cass Wissman and Sonny Pressimone to stand and be acknowledged.

During the months since my election, I have had many moments of reflection on how my journey led to St. Louis and Fontbonne University. Others perhaps may be able to recall a single mentor or person of influence who threw a friendly arm around the shoulder and who painted a beautiful picture of the future's promise and potential.

There was no single person who played that role in my professional life. Rather, my formation, aspirations, imagination and achievements were the results of gentle nudges along the way. These actions often pointed to a clearer path or challenged me to do more or “be better,” a desire I share with my colleague Suzanne Stoelting.

I think back to the Marianist priests and brothers who taught at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Baltimore.

They invited me to participate in a special summer retreat where I first began to develop my own personal exploration of faith. I would like to acknowledge Bro. Frank O’Donnell who served as principal at Cardinal Gibbons, and who also served as one of those retreat leaders. I am here because of that early moment of formation.

As a young man struggling to find his way as a first generation college student, friends at Catonsville Community College directed me to academic advisor Bob Lynch. He sat with me and gave me hope that I could

indeed complete my college education and he helped create

a road map by which I could do so. I am here because of his caring attention and advice.

As a senior at Catholic University, I was in need of assistance and support in order to complete my education. I made an appointment to see faculty member and department chair Bill Graham, and he responded immediately with the assistance that met my need and gave me hope. I am here because he cared enough to respond and act.

And so it goes, a nudge here and a shove there, and one makes a life. And as we grow, we play that role in the lives of others. My new friends and colleagues who make up the Fontbonne faculty, staff and administration, let this be a call and reminder to you. Never underestimate the impact you have on the lives of the women and men in your classrooms and offices, and on fields and courts of play. The student before you may pose a query you have heard more times than you can count, but for the student, the query is current, relevant and sometimes urgent. Your

response may give direction and clarity and, someday, that student will recall your good advice or kind word or offered assistance and thank you, perhaps in the silence of her or his heart or in a public forum such as this.

But isn't that one of the hallmarks of a Fontbonne experience? Faculty and staff, as you look around at the students assembled here, can you recall such exchanges? We are compelled by our founding spirit to serve these dear neighbors, our students, in a way that is different from other institutions of higher education. That is our brand promise. We engage the learner in a process of discovery, understanding that each learner is unique. Commit yourselves to that work and to the mission begun by the Sisters of St. Joseph. We must carry on with the journey begun by the Sisters hundreds of years ago which eventually led to the banks of the Mississippi. Fontbonne's founding spirit is deeply rooted in and springs forth from the fertile soil of Carondelet. Plantings from that stem appeared throughout the country and took hold here in

Clayton where it blossomed into this venerable tree of learning, exploration and service.

How is it that I find myself near that same riverbank today as the 14<sup>th</sup> president of Fontbonne University? Is it merely the happy circumstance that my qualifications seemed to fit your needs and we happened to be in the process of searching at the same time, or is this a part of God's plan? Let's explore the latter. Exhibit A (hold up baseball glove), the baseball glove purchased when I was in the sixth grade at St. Benedict's School in Baltimore, Maryland. A left-handed, Montgomery Ward fielder's glove that happens to feature the signature of Stan Musial. Coincidence? I think not. Stan the Man had a hand in this! In keeping with the baseball metaphor, I offer this. My beloved Baltimore Orioles were formerly the St. Louis Browns. Perhaps I was the player to be named later in that trade.

The path that brought the Pressimone family to St. Louis and Fontbonne University is not linear. It was not an orderly progression with one step neatly following the

other. Rather, our path resembles little Billy's circuitous dotted line often seen in a Family Circus cartoon. Perhaps that dotted line is a thread.

I was blessed to meet Cathy Wissman in 1977. Cathy, I cannot think of anyone with whom I would have wanted to share this journey more than you. It has been a great ride and I love you. Cathy and I dated for many years and were wed on a beautiful, February, snowy day in 1982. Her thread was joined with mine and we became stronger and more colorful. From 1983 to 1994 we were blessed to welcome Cassy, Joanna, Jon, Allison, Clare, Becca and Abby as part of our family. Each brought something special to our lives, and their threads joined ours to make a beautiful and strong cord. Some years later Stephanie joined our family adding yet another dimension to our family fabric. Our oldest adopted son, Brother Manny, added his rich black Benedictine fiber to the mix. I joined the Alvernia community and the rich brown cord of the Franciscans became a part of our tapestry. We then met two other extraordinary Franciscan women, the grannies,

Srs. Eileen and Kathleen, who had been caring for the children who would join our family. Grace, David, Dominic and later Maddie would round out the Pressimone clan with their beautiful threads and our fabric had taken on many colors and textures. We are made stronger still by two fine sons in law, Shawn and Dwayne, grandson Jackson and will be again strengthened when we welcome grandchildren in December and January. Now we serve with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and their ancient threads from bobbins used to make lace are now a part of the fiber of our family as we are a part of their fabric.

Each of us is called to follow our own threads even as our lives become interwoven. Together we are strong and we must be strong for the work ahead. The work we undertake is not easy. Today, small, private, colleges and universities are subjected to criticism and scrutiny by pundits, government agencies and accrediting bodies. Competition has been increased by those who have commoditized higher education seeking profits over values. The liberal arts and

humanities are under attack. We must be strong in order to defend ourselves against these attacks. We must proclaim the value of a Fontbonne education. We must hold up exemplars of this education who can be found in our successful and committed alumni, many of whom are with us today. Our light will not be kept under a bushel. We will hold it aloft from Wydown Blvd. so that it shines throughout our region. We will tell our story and I will gladly serve as a champion to lead this charge. Fontbonne is a most valuable regional resource. The majority of our students enroll from the surrounding area and they remain. These women and men who were taught “to think critically, to act ethically and to assume responsibility as citizens and leaders” strengthen our communities and our economy.

At the same time, we must look inwardly to critically assess what we must keep, what we must fix and what must go. We will address administrative deficiencies and strengthen enrollment processes. We will develop pipelines for prospective students who will fit, thrive and succeed at Fontbonne. We will secure funding so that we

can attract qualified learners from underserved communities thereby enriching our overall student experience. We will continue to welcome learners from around the world.

We will champion the liberal arts and demonstrate how central liberal education is to innovation and the health of our society. We will encourage creativity and innovation. We will explore the use of the Brentwood campus as a Center for Creativity and Innovation which will bring together the creative mind of the artist and the inquisitive mind of the scientist. We will expand funding through our newly launched Philanthropic Venture Capital fund so that we can underwrite innovation and new ideas.

We will grow. We will set reasonable but challenging enrollment and retention targets for the next three years, targets that will strengthen our financial base and allow us to dream and plan for a brighter future. We will commence a new strategic planning process on July 1, 2015. We will revisit our campus master plan and strengthen the

partnerships which are important to our expansion. We will address the need for better and expanded residential opportunities for students and look for ways to address the need for recreational space near campus. We will develop a plan for a centennial campaign to secure the philanthropic support necessary to invest in our future. I will look to many of you here today for your moral, spiritual and financial support.

In order to accomplish much and meet our goals, we must be bold. We must go forward with confidence in the quality of our programs and with a clear understanding of the Fontbonne brand. We make a difference in our world and we see proof in the work of our faculty and the accomplishments of our students who beautifully animate exactly what “Learn More, Be More” means. Our faculty provide excellent academic preparation so that our students become exceptional practitioners in their fields, but they do so in the context of our mission which challenges us all to “be more.”

Our dietetics faculty prepare students for the world of work, and they prepare them to serve those in need at homeless shelters and food banks.



Our visual and performing artists master their crafts under the guidance of world class faculty, and they engage us in the exploration of difficult issues through their art and nurture in us an appreciation for the beauty of creative expression.

Our faculty in special education, speech pathology and deaf education are leaders in their fields and at the forefronts of their disciplines. They teach and research not simply for the sake of their disciplines, but rather because some members of our society are differently abled than others. These faculty and their students are passionate in their desire that these people should have opportunities to live lives as fully as possible.



The study of the sciences and in our new One Health certificate will help our students see the interconnectedness



of our ecosystems and prepare them for graduate study in the hope that they will find ways to heal the earth and prevent disease.

Our social workers learn to serve those in need and are formed by Catholic Social Teaching in a way that sets us apart from our competitors.

We have proven that we can be nimble and responsive to industry and society needs by preparing our students for advanced study in the sciences and technology as evidenced by new programs in cyber security and bioinformatics.

Faculty member Ben Moore does not study the Bosnian Genocide because of some idle academic curiosity. Rather, he does so because he passionately believes that through this study and the stories of survivors, we may somehow find a way to avert this tragedy for other people in another time.

I could go on. Examples like these abound at Fontbonne throughout our departments and programs. Learn More, Be More is a part of the fabric of our daily lives. We teach and learn not simply for the sake of the disciplines, but we do so because we are called by our faith and our mission to Be More for a world in need. Recent events in our community and our ongoing discussions during this dedicated semester call us to ‘be more’ in the fight to end racism in our city and our country. On Monday night, Fr. Bryan Massingale reminded us of John Paul II’s last homily delivered in the U.S. here in St. Louis where he called on us “to put an end to every form of racism, a plague which your Bishops have called one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation.” Fr. Massingale suggested that we need to enter into a “sustained encounter” with our brothers and sisters from other races in order to know their pain, their struggle, their hopes and their joys. We must make our University community a place where such encounters occur. I am committed to making this possible through our hiring and enrollment practices.

○ This is consistent with our mission as a Catholic University founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Like those gutsy women who travelled up the Mississippi, we must go forward free of fear and filled with joy. Pope John XXIII told us to “Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.” I am a man of faith, and I draw my faith from the Bonaventurian view that God is love and that we were created for God to love. So I begin each day knowing that, despite my many imperfections, that I am loved by God. While each of us may experience the divine in our lives in different ways, I am convinced that God wants us to be happy and that we are called to holiness.

○ The hallmarks of our community of faculty, students and staff must be those of respect and a joyful exploration of the beauty of creation and intellectual curiosity. Fontbonne must be a beacon of hope and a shining example of how our Gospel values challenge us to see each other as created

in the image and likeness of God and to be a people of peace.

Cathy and I see our work here as vocation. We have been called to serve this wonderful place, Fontbonne University in beautiful St. Louis in the town of Clayton. We have a moral obligation to do everything within in our power to make sure the university succeeds and thrives. We owe this to our faithful employees. We owe this to the generations of alumni who have passed through these halls. We owe this to our current and future generations of students. We owe this to a world in need of leadership grounded in the very values we espouse and integrate into the learning experience.

In the few short months I have been a newcomer to this community, I have been met with nothing but positive impressions of Fontbonne. I recently had a wonderful weekend with the class of 1964 and many other alumni. They are passionate about this place and will do whatever is necessary to see it thrive. We must do more to engage

our alumni to support Fontbonne as volunteers, recruiters and donors. Without prompting nearly six years ago, a group of women formed a giving circle which we now know as the Fontbonne Community Connection. This mighty group of women got together and said ‘we want to make a difference for Fontbonne’ and a difference they have made by giving over \$500,000 to support programs and spur innovation. I welcome their gifts and investments in the University and invite others to join them. The word on the street is overwhelmingly positive about Fontbonne, so yes, I have a great deal of hope in the future.

Let’s contemplate the future for a moment. In 2023, Fontbonne will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. By then, we will be larger, stronger and more firmly committed to our founding ideals. You current students will return to campus as young alumni for this centennial celebration and will recall that you were here at the dawn of a new day. You faculty and staff will look back with pride upon the work you have done and the role you played to create the Fontbonne of the future. You alumni will return in force

knowing that the heart of your institution still beats true to our heritage and our mission but knowing that the Fontbonne of 2023 is more relevant than ever. You, our foundresses, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, will have confidence that your charism is alive and well and engrained in the hearts and minds of those who serve this special ministry.

So come with me. As I humbly take up my mantle of leadership, join me knowing that there is an inspired future possible if we but have faith and joyfully greet the challenge of each new day.