

Provost's Convocation 2016

- September 28, 2016
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

As president of Seattle University I welcome you, the academic faculty and staff of the university, to this new academic year. Take note that the year is named after you because you are centrally what the university is about. Bob Dullea will be more specific in introducing you to the year. Let me start by thanking Bob for so generously serving as the Interim Provost, for bringing so much experience, and such a good mind and heart to it. Bob, you are doing a great job and we thank you.

You may have noticed that we are celebrating our 125th year! Last week I was interviewed for a local magazine about our anniversary and was asked, "If your founders, Frs. Garrand and Sweere, were to come back today to Seattle U, what would they be most surprised about?" I said three things. First, they would be in utter wonder, amazement, awe and would pinch themselves as they walked around campus, through quadrangles, into buildings, by gardens and fountains. How could this be their college when they were stuck in a single brick and stone building for 50 years? How could there be such a thing as an urban campus like this? Second, they would be utterly amazed at the students in more ways than one—the women students, the graduate and law students, the sheer number of 7,500 students. They had come back to this hill and to the Garrand Building in 1931, painting it cream in order for it to stand out and emblazoning it with huge letters announcing "Seattle College". They taught a total number of 46 college men, 40 years after the founding. Third, they would be amazed and would barely understand how and why the university is so connected with the city, the region, the neighborhood, the communities, the businesses, the issues of Seattle, for their college was more a refuge and an access for Catholics to get a college education apart in classroom, chapel, and laboratory. "What is all this engagement about?" they might ask.

Where they would find themselves at home and familiar would be with you, the faculty, for they would see you as carrying out the essential function of the university, living a vocation of education in classroom and lab and region with students. However many more you are than they would fathom, and however more varied you are in the areas of your expertise than theirs, and however, more qualified academically and in research you are than their colleagues were, they would see you as the abiding, the continuing, the unbroken thread through all the years.

They would be at home with you and share your convictions, or at least some of them. How far do you find yourself in agreement with the following statement from the Seattle College Catalogue of 1914, while forgiving them for non-inclusion language of 102 years ago?

Education, in its complete sense, is understood by us as the full and harmonious development of the intellectual, moral and physical powers of man. It is not, therefore, mere instruction or the acquisition of knowledge, although instruction and the acquiring of knowledge necessarily accompany any right system of education. Learning is an instrument of education, not its end. The end is culture, and mental and moral development.

The purpose of the mental training in education is not proximately to fit the student for some special employment or profession, but to give him such a general, rigorous and rounded development as will enable him to cope successfully even with the unforeseen emergencies of life. The studies, therefore, are so graded and classified as to be adapted to the mental growth of the student and to the scientific unfolding of knowledge. They are so chosen and communicated that the student shall gradually and harmoniously reach, as nearly as may be, the measure of culture of which he is capable.

It is fundamental to the educational system of the Society of Jesus that different studies have different and peculiar values. Mathematics, the Natural Sciences, the Language and History are complementary instruments of education. The specific training given by one cannot be supplied by another.

While conceding the effects of education in energizing and refining imagination, taste, understanding and powers of observation, we have always held that knowledge and intellectual development of themselves have no moral efficacy. Only religion can purify the heart, and guide and strengthen the will. Religion is, therefore, an essential part of true education; for to exclude religion from education is to cut off from the soul of the young the deepest and purest springs of intellectual and moral life.

I would contend that you likely agree with that statement and welcome it up to the point that it states that education in itself has no “moral efficacy” but that this is added by “religion” being included in education.

Haven't we come to a different view that our education is morally efficacious in itself, in the ways we educate and that religion is not something added on but that our religious character as a university as a whole informs and gives shape to our education and why and how we go about it. As a university we are like them in the purposes of education, the different values of disciplines, and the gradual development of the students' growth in learning, but we differ from them in that we see religion today in a Jesuit university not as a separate realm of life and not as the sole source of moral efficacy, but as integrated within both ourselves according to our freedom and integrated within our education. We are no less religious as a Jesuit university; we are differently religious according to today's Jesuit, educational principles and commitments. I believe that if the early professors of Seattle College did indeed come back and after walking around campus in disbelief sat down with our the faculty for dialogue in depth, they would say, “These are my successors; I trust their way of carrying out now what we started then. They are different, but they are true to what we at depth gave our lives to.”

Let me conclude my remarks at the start of this Provost's Convocation by telling you of one initiative of this year that fits with our anniversary. This year we have chosen with four other Jesuit universities in the country to be part of what is known as the “Jesuit Mission Priorities Examen”, which all 28 universities in the US sponsored by the Society of Jesus will do in various years. “Examen” is a Jesuit word meaning essentially “review”. So it is the “Jesuit Mission Priorities Review”. I thought it valuable for us to do it this year when we are at this milestone in our Jesuit educational mission, a good time to take stock of where we are as a Jesuit

university and how we might improve. We will do a self-study according to criteria of Jesuit mission priorities of our choosing, will welcome a site visit by peers from other Jesuit universities, will learn how they see us from their report, which with our input will be submitted to the Jesuit provincial of this region and through him to the Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome. This will lead to the concluding of the year-long process in a letter from the head of the Jesuits reaffirming our Jesuit character, our sponsorship by the Society of Jesus, and indicating our strengths as a Jesuit university as well as our areas for growth. Our 125th year is the right time to do this. I thank Fr. Peter Ely for chairing this Examen and ask for your assistance in it.

Again, welcome to this new academic year as the academic faculty and staff who together are at the center of what we are about as a university. Thank you for what you do and blessings on this year.