

Seattle University at 125 Years:  
Harvesting Hope from Our History

*- September 14, 2016*

*- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

This is a very special time for Seattle University. 125 years ago this month Fr Victor Garrand celebrated Mass in a makeshift chapel on the second floor of a Seattle downtown parish hall. The church was named The Church of the Immaculate Conception. That Mass marked the official opening of what has become Seattle University. That September 27<sup>th</sup> day of 1891 marked 351 years to the day since the formal approval by the pope of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. It was 50 years since the first Jesuits came to the Northwest at the invitation of the Native Americans in 1841, and 40 years since the founding of Seattle when the Arthur Denny party landed and settled on Alki Point. This month marks the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our university. It is a special occasion and it calls from the 20<sup>th</sup> successor of Fr. Garrand a special kind of State of the University.

Let me say from the start that I have been humbled to learn more deeply about the beginning, the sacrifices, the Jesuits, the great lay faculty, the students and supporting families, the near failures, the heroic advances, and through it all the spirit of this great endeavor which we have the privilege to guide at this moment. It is a precious heritage and I am humbled to join with you in carrying it forward to the best of our abilities and with our best insights and inspirations today. Let me try in this year's State of the University with you, the members of our boards, our friends, our alumni, and our donors to harvest the hope from our history at this 125<sup>th</sup> year juncture to see what it points to for the next 25 years. Let's together harvest that hope from our history.

A bit of a framework of that history might help:

- When Seattle College celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1916 it had so small a student body and was so depleted by the First World War that it abandoned its one building—the Garrand Building—and packed itself off to the present site of Seattle Prep where T.C. McHugh had purchased Adelpia College for the Jesuit endeavors of a high school and college. Seattle College had had its first college graduates—and then but three of them—only in 1909, 18 years after its founding. In its beginning it was far more a high school than a college.
  
- At its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1941 it was back at Broadway and Madison. It had not existed as a college at all for four years in between and then for some years only as a junior college. It had tried to sell Garrand, gutted by fire, and to move elsewhere, but no one would buy it. So it was back and making the most of the whitewashed building with the huge letters, “Seattle College”. In 1932 it became the first Jesuit college to have women as regularly matriculated students sharing classrooms with male students. In this 50<sup>th</sup> year for the very first time the college expanded beyond Garrand, purchasing for \$12,000 the streetcar building which would become Engineering and now Fine Arts. It began construction that year on its only new building since its foundation, what is now the

Administration Building. It had no student residences but was temporarily housing women students in a wing of the Sorrento Hotel. In this 50<sup>th</sup> year there were now 1,500 students; the college division was now really on its way.

- Fr Pedro Arrupe, the famous Superior General of the Jesuits, visited Seattle University on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1966, just after the magical 17 years of the leadership of Fr. Lemieux as president. What Fr Arrupe found was the largest Jesuit university on the West Coast, new buildings of Xavier, the Chieftain, Pigott, Bannan, Bellarmine, Campion, Loyola, Lemieux (and Connolly, approved and ready to be built). In the previous 25 years under a trio of extroverted great presidents, Corkery, Small and Lemieux, the school had doubled the student population with the G.I. Bill, the college had become the university, academic programs and schools had expanded, the student population had grown to 4,200, and Seattle U had established its place and reputation in the city and region—and nationally in basketball.
- Another great president, Fr Sullivan, energetically headed Seattle U at its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1991. He built the new Seattle U after it had nearly folded after its heyday of 25 years before. Before Sullivan there had been four presidents in ten years, failure at times to meet payroll, a ramshackle and overbuilt campus, a slump of 1,000 students, but fortunately an unsung hero, Fr Gaffney who rescued the university by tough decisions, great lay leadership in finances, and nothing more nor less on Fr Gaffney's part than a "contagious optimism". Sullivan's university of 1991 had a record enrollment of 4,640 students, an unprecedented endowment of \$40 million, and had become the independent university rather than the parochial Catholic college on the hill of which Seattle prided itself and by which it was served.
- Now we are at our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with a student enrollment of 7,500, three new schools since we celebrated our centennial—the School of Law, the School of Theology & Ministry, the School of New and Continuing Studies—a completely transformed campus, bursting at the seams with 2,300 students in our residences. How different we are now when of this year's first year class: two-thirds are from out of state, two-thirds are from public schools, and nearly two-thirds are women students. Now of nearly 1,500 faculty and staff only 17 are Jesuits—barely one in a hundred—but we have hundreds and hundreds of dedicated lay faculty and staff who have committed themselves to know and to carry forward our Jesuit way of education and service. What a changed student body, what a changed city and region, what a new world of technology and what an expanded horizon and opportunity.

This is a map with 25 year milestones of our 125 years of history in this very special year for Seattle U. It is anything but a straight line and quite other than a smooth, level road. We miss the real history, which is revealed by the lives of those who have served here if we look too much at the numbers, the buildings, and the programs. What we humbly inherit and the hope we must above all harvest from this history for our future, is found in the dedication, the spirit, the humor, the sacrifices, the sheer persistence, and the vision of the people who have written this history with their lives. Before I indicate how this history helps sketch the possibilities of the next 25 years, taking us to our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2041, let me give some of that personal side of our heritage. It comes out in stories. It is too rich, too colorful, too humorous to pass over. It

gives us some of the essential flavor of our heritage and hence also of our hope. I limit myself to just a few of the earlier stories.

I was interested to learn what used to happen on the very spot where my office is now located in the Administration Building. In the beginning and for 50 years there was only what we now call Garrand Building and a Women's Christian Temperance Union House—which was used for the elementary school boys. What the fledgling school clearly needed and was lacking was just one thing: a baseball field! And they got one, or at least, made do with one. Here's how the baseball diamond, which is now occupied by Admin and its garden, was described:

“The grounds were not yet graded. All bases were of irregular length and somewhat out of line. An outhouse toilet interfered with first base; a pine stump forced a detour where second should have been; and third base had to be moved in because of an embankment which sloped out into left field.”

I figure that my office is exactly where that outhouse interfered with first base! Don't you love the make-do spirit and the sense of priority?

For the first 40 years the Jesuits kept trying to get a real campus—and that meant one more like Gonzaga—as they could not imagine how a sliver of land at Broadway and Madison could ever work. When they were in what you might call exile at present-day Seattle Prep at Interlaken, they purchased 40 acres at Sandpoint but defaulted on the down payment. Then the Jesuit president persuaded William Pigott, the founder of what is now PACCAR, to give them \$65,000 to purchase a large piece of land up at 85<sup>th</sup>. He first gave them the \$1,000 needed for the down-payment, but then died unexpectedly before he could come through with the other \$64,000. The Jesuits had to give up on the larger campus and make do by returning to the unsellable Garrand, which had been previously abandoned and in the meantime was gutted by fire. It may have been William Pigott's last laugh on us however, because the Jesuit president had earlier reported to the provincial that while Mr Pigott did support high schools, he thought colleges were “useless”! This uncertainty of where to be and to build dogged the first 40 years of our history, yet they persevered until later Jesuits and lay leaders could imagine an urban Seattle U campus with all the advantages of being in the heart of this great city.

When five heroic Jesuits came back to this site in 1931 to take up educating 46 college students and to make the best go they could of this place, they had to commute together each morning and evening in one car from and to the Jesuit residence over at Seattle Prep. There's a great story about that, and I cite it from a book of reminiscences written by Archie Richardson.

Running late one morning, Fr Nichols ran a red light at Broadway and John. A police prowler pulled him over to the curb. Fr Nichols spluttered excuses. Frs McGoldrick and Peronteau did likewise. And Fr Reidy, as usual in cassock and biretta, sat calmly reading his breviary. Finally, the questioning officer went back to the prowler, where the fathers overhead him talking to his partner.

“Who are they?”

“They're the faculty at that college on Broadway and Madison.”

“Did you give them a ticket?”

“No, I couldn’t!”

Why not?”

“Couldn’t ‘cause one of them was in back saying Mass!”

The prayers of the Jesuits have supported this university for 125 years in all situations; even, perhaps, in this avoidance of a few traffic tickets. There is no way you can read our history without being certain that God has wanted this blessed initiative for good, has walked with and supported it, and continues to be with us as we pick up the living history of this endeavor and take it forward from its 125<sup>th</sup> to its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

What is the harvest from our history which gives us our hopes for the future? What from our past must shape our future if we are to honor the lives of those who have gone before us? What would our ancestors of Seattle College and University want us to make of the opportunities we have in our day as they did of the opportunities of their days?

My first hope for the future comes from our very beginning, from why Seattle College started at all. The straightforward and important fact is that we were invited to bring Catholic education, and in particular Jesuit education to Seattle. The Jesuits—who primarily worked with the Native Americans because of having been invited by them to come and minister among them—were not looking for the next thing to do. They were strapped for men. The leading priest of Seattle, Fr Prefontaine, went to all lengths to invite and to persuade and to promise help if the Jesuits—with their renowned and proven way of education—would come to Seattle and would, together with the Holy Names Sisters who were already here, make Catholic education available. In short, we are here as a Jesuit university because we were invited to be here by the Catholic Church: prized, wanted, and supported by the Church.

We and the Catholic Church of this region must always remember this key factor: we were invited and invited precisely to bring and be faithful to Jesuit education, the way we do it within the Catholic Church and as a ministry of the Catholic Church. Our hope for the next 25 years is that both the people and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as the university itself may live out more fully and truly this relationship of wanting and being wanted, inviting and responding, called by the Catholic Church and committed to it as a priority, sought after for not just any kind of education but Jesuit education and being confident and faithful and committed to this kind of education. As a first harvest of the hope from our history we want the next 25 years to be a deepening of the relationship between the local Catholic Church and the university. We need to and can be much stronger in this originating factor in the next quarter century than we currently are. It will be great to celebrate that realized relationship in 2041.

My second harvesting of hope from our history to shape our next quarter century comes from who has carried the charism and the character of the university. At first it was just the Jesuits—with, I must always add, the help of the Holy Names Sisters in the very first years; then it was the Jesuits and a few key others; then it was equally borne by the Jesuits and a cadre of long-

servicing, dedicated lay faculty and staff who made the modern university at great personal sacrifice; and it was a string of great Jesuit presidents—especially Corkery, Small, Lemieux, Gaffney, Sullivan. I hope I am worthy of them. Then at the most critical times it was community leaders—people like Bob O’Brien—who formed our boards and who took over responsibility, especially for the financial viability of the enterprise, while leaving the educational dimension to the Jesuits and their colleagues; and along the way it was and is the generous families: the Pigotts, the Bannans, the McHughs, the Bangassers, the Schaeferes, the Wrights, the Lees, and all of our new families. Now those who primarily carry the charism and the character of the university into the future are the hundreds of lay faculty, staff, administrators, and key community leaders who are deeply committed to Jesuit education and are ever more knowledgeable about and inspired by it.

Seattle University has a very bright and creative future in the next quarter century because there are now many more people and more deeply informed and experienced people who are carrying our charism. I am fully convinced that this is a God-inspired development of the university, giving it a more varied, creative, and appropriate-to-our-times purpose and way of education and service. Jesuits will always be here to be joyful and dedicated servants of these new bearers of the mission, but Jesuits will gladly and rightly let others lead and enliven. I can see already this new way of being Jesuit—while being faithful to the heritage—in its first stages. I am thrilled as I imagine what this new way of being vibrant and impactful as a Jesuit university will be twenty-five years from now. Frankly, I see it as the fullness of our Jesuit development, where we were always meant to go. The second harvest of hope from our history is becoming Jesuit in a new way, a fuller way, while being faithful to the charism.

The third hope for our future which comes from our history is that Seattle College and University has always developed in tandem with the City of Seattle. Our future as a university depends upon matching the momentum of our city, being equal to its needs, serving it and being served by it. From pioneer days, the gold rush times, to fires and setbacks, to the expansion of the city, to times of war, to Boeing booms and setbacks, to the World’s Fair and the Goodwill Games, to the recent massive innovation leap forward, to becoming a center for trade and international development, Seattle University has grown, prospered, changed, fallen back, retrenched, refocused, and been emboldened, together with the city. You could say, “As Seattle goes, so goes Seattle University!” or “Seattle University has proven itself truly to be Seattle’s university.” It took a very long time and extraordinary leadership of people like Lemieux and Sullivan, both Citizens of the Year, for Seattle University to become recognized, not as a parochial venture, but as belonging to the people of the city and region, essential to its development, part of its fabric, and an institution of civic and corporate pride.

All of us recognize the amazing momentum of our city at the present time—almost unparalleled in our country—its exceptional attractiveness for students, and its promise for careers and development. Because of where we are located, we are the envy of the vast majority of universities. Perhaps the biggest and most promising hope for Seattle University of the next quarter century is to become ever more essential to, part of the fabric of, serving and served by our city. We should ride the momentum of our metropolitan area. Of course, we need to be careful not to sell our soul to Seattle, but rather to seek to be ever more Seattle’s soul: morally, spiritually, educationally, and purposefully. To be the great, Jesuit, independent university at the heart of the dynamic metropolis of Seattle is our brightest hope built upon our history and on the

kind of university those who have gone before us and we ourselves have worked to become and have positioned ourselves to be. Our future hinges around this hope.

My fourth area of harvesting hope for our future from our 125-year history is more practical, a more fundamental one. History shows that we are a university which inevitably depends upon enrollment, tuition, financial management, and a solid and ever-renewed core curriculum around which the rest of our education pivots. I spoke a moment ago of the heyday of 1966, our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the ambitious university with a new building each year and served by 62 Jesuit priests. What could go wrong?! The underlying problem was that the tuition at Seattle U was the lowest of all 28 Jesuit universities in that year and the university had borrowed excessively to build what it thought was its assured future. It all fell apart in short order: tuition had to be sharply increased, enrollment plummeted, residences halls went empty, creditors came calling, and the turmoil of the late Sixties tore apart the fabric of the weakened university. Because of what we need to charge for tuition in order to deliver our level of education, and because we need to convince students and families of the superior quality of our education worth their investment and sacrifice, we will always be challenged to have the robust enrollment we want. There is no getting away from this. Because it affects the whole university and its wellbeing, enrollment needs to be a first responsibility of the whole university.

It is similarly a lesson from our history not to entrust financial matters to Jesuits! Jesuits did not save Seattle U financially; they got it into financial trouble. Lay board members had to step in, as did generous supporters, together with ever more highly qualified professional financial administrators to rescue us and put us on the track of our financial health.

The other practical, fundamental matter our history puts in relief is the core curriculum. It defines the university, both directly in undergraduate education, but also in making clear our values and how we engage with all students on all levels of education. The 125 year history of Seattle U is a history of its core curriculum, both as its most attractive, distinguishing feature educationally, and also because of how it adjusts to the needs and the students of the times. You can measure the success of Seattle University by how coherent its core curriculum was and how contemporaneous it was.

As we harvest from our history the hopes for our next quarter century, amid all that attracts our attention in what our Jesuit, Catholic identity will become, the excitement of who will bear our mission, and how we will match the momentum of Seattle, we must give a secure foundation to all our hopes with a stabilized and increasing enrollment, a professionally assured financial management, and a commitment to a self-defining and ever-evolving core curriculum. If we can do those three things we can do all else we hope to accomplish and we can flourish. We must always keep in mind these critically important lessons from our past 125 years.

My final hope for our future emerging at this 125<sup>th</sup> milestone and more aware as I am of what has been the energy behind our historical development, concerns the human side of our mission and our community. I repeat how humbled I am to learn just how much sacrifice, grit, prayer, pulling together, hope, good will, talent, belief, and amazing perseverance have been the inner source and engine of our history. We do not inherit an institution; we inherit the legacy of the lives of generations of Jesuits, students, faculty, staff, alumni, board members, donors, and friends. They have made us to be a university community with a mission, a people with a

passion which they have instilled in us, and have given us a future and an opportunity for which they have sacrificed. They are not gone; they look to us; we continue their commitments and we do so in a humbled way.

History shows that Seattle University works when people share a common commitment, when they form a community of willing and caring people focused on educating and developing students, when what they do together and how they do it together is more important than what they do individually, when there is a fundamental faith and kindness among them.

Perhaps this 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary comes at just the right time for us as a university to take stock of this human side, this community dimension, of carrying forward and living our mission. Everywhere—not only among us—this quality of human relationship in universities in their common endeavor and their care for one another and of their students is under pressure in stressful and contentious times. The response cannot be only institutional; it must be more personal, more relational, shown in care, willingness, listening to and learning from one another, shared purpose and enjoyed community, and perhaps above all in kindness. Our mission is a test of our humanity. A thriving shared human mission is my fondest hope for what will empower our next quarter century together in faithfulness to the legacy of the beloved persons of our past.

I indicated as I started that this is a very special time for Seattle University, this 125<sup>th</sup> milestone, and that it called for a different kind of State of the University for this year. It has called, this year, for me to speak more about the past, not for the value of reminiscing, but to learn how the past shapes our future. An anniversary, after all, is the bridge between heritage and hope. Join me in honoring that heritage. Join me, also, in hope inspired by that heritage as we build a new quarter century of a renewed Catholic affirmation, an exciting and creative Jesuit future under new lay leaders, a matching of and giving soul to the momentum of our metropolis, a grounding in healthy enrollment and finances and agile core curriculum, and empowered by the quality of our human relationships in an ever-deeper commitment to our mission and community.

I end by thanking God for the graces of his presence in our past, experiencing his help today, and asking for his blessing on his and our Seattle University of the future.