

OLLU Convocation Address

August 13, 2019

Good morning. Thank you, Dr. Alvarez for that gracious introduction and thank you Dr. Melby for inviting me to be the Convocation speaker. I'm honored to be here as we begin the 2019-2020 academic year. This gathering continues the mission of this University for you, the faculty and staff, for the students and for the Congregation of Divine Providence.

Our Congregation is proud of the achievements of this University. This past year, OLLU was recognized as being among the top 60 universities in the country and among the top 11 in Texas for granting master's degrees to Hispanics. Quite an accomplishment! U.S. News and World Report ranked OLLU second among San Antonio universities for its alumni giving rate. Graduates appreciate their education. Congratulations! No small achievement.

Education is in the DNA of our Congregation and ultimately OLLU. It is our passion. It is the fuel that gets us going. That passion started with our founder over 250 years ago. John Martin Moye was an ordinary young French priest with an extraordinary passion for the Scriptures. He believed that loving others meant loving as God loves – showing no partiality.

Not content to be simply a good parish priest, Moye went out into the French countryside, preaching retreats, missions, hearing confessions and teaching the people. He got to know them and their needs. It did not take long for him to realize the people's great lack of understanding of their faith. This was especially evident among the poor.

The poor lived in small hamlets, raising their children, and barely eking out a living with little or no access to education. Women and girls were the most uneducated with no prospects of anything improving. Father Moye showed no partiality. All were acceptable to him. He believed that all should be educated. He believed that meeting the physical, educational as well as the spiritual needs of all people was the essence of loving them.

Father Moye reflected and prayed over what he had experienced and how to address the huge needs he had seen. He gathered young women, prepared them in the basics of ministry, and sent them out by ones and twos into the villages. These young women not only taught the young children, they witnessed God's love to everyone in the villages. They were tireless in their work, unselfish in their generosity, caring and sacrificial in their simplicity of living.

Their commitment was so great and they were so self-giving that the people named them "Sisters of Providence." The people believed that God had come to them in the Sisters.

Our founder in this country, Mother St. Andrew, followed their example. In 1866, Bishop Dubuis went to St. Jean de Bassel in France to recruit Sisters to educate young immigrant children in the United States in their faith. Mother St. Andrew and Sister Alphonse immediately volunteered. During the 20 years Mother St. Andrew was Superior General in Castroville, Texas, she successfully established 24 schools throughout Texas.

In 1886, Mother Florence Walters was elected Superior General. Nine years later, in 1895, she moved the Motherhouse from Castroville to San Antonio. At that time, Mayor Elmendorf offered the Congregation 16 acres of land if they would construct buildings on these grounds within ten years. Mother Florence took the challenge, raised \$75,000 and on August 15, 1895, ground was broken for what is known today as Our Lady of the Lake University. In

today's currency, \$75,000 is \$2,242,000. (REPEAT) It took a lot of passion, boldness, and courage to raise that kind of money in 1895.

The institution was chartered as a two-year college in 1911 and as a four year college in 1919. By 1945, not only had the University flourished, but the Congregation had established over 150 schools and hospitals in TX, LA and OK.

Our Lady of the Lake University has taken many initiatives to ensure the accessibility of innovative programs and education for all. I would like to mention just a few.

- In 1923, OLLU became the first San Antonio institution of higher education to receive national accreditation, and in 1927, it became the third Texas school to be approved by the American Association of Universities.
- The Worden School of Social Service, established over 75 years ago, was the seventh Catholic school of social work in the country and the only social work school in the entire Southwest between the Mississippi River and California and between the TX-MX border and St. Louis and Denver.
- In 1939, the Congregation established Madonna Center, a Westside social service agency, whose mission is to serve families struggling with poverty.
- In 1955, OLLU established the first program in Communication Disorders in South Texas.
- In 2000, OLLU was the first organization in the U.S. to sponsor a Latino psychology conference, which addressed the state of research, training and knowledge of Latino mental health issues and culture.
- At OLLU, all undergraduate students have the opportunity to earn biliterate certification as a minor, demonstrating mastery of Spanish.
- Today, OLLU has the highest percentage of Hispanic enrollment of all U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Initially, this University was established to educate women because they were excluded from society. By 1969, OLLU became co-educational and focused on all those who did not access to higher education. Education for all was our Congregation's heritage, passion and purpose and quickly became OLLU's mission. You have done well in your achievements and accomplishments.

However, in light of today's realities, I propose that there are new challenges before us.

San Antonio has long been known as one of the most economically segregated cities among its Hispanics and African American residents. As a result, San Antonio's poverty has impacted citizens limiting their education and resulting in poor health conditions. This has also resulted in lower savings, and fewer business and home ownerships among non-Anglo residents.

There is a stark and persistent racial divide in wealth and opportunity. Nearly 20 percent of African-American residents live in poverty, despite making up 8 percent of the population. Hispanic residents account for 64 percent of the population – but 21 percent live at or below the poverty level.

More than 25% of workers in the San Antonio region are employed in jobs whose median wage falls below \$25,000. Two-thirds of the region's workers have jobs that pay less than

\$50,000. Today, the zip code of our University, 78207, is the poorest zip code in the city of San Antonio. Unfortunately, we have held that record for years. The poverty rate of this zip code is over 41%. You heard right. Over 41% of the people who live in the neighborhoods around this University live in poverty.

If Father Moye were working in this area today, what would he see? More important, what would he do? Who would he send?

And so I ask:

- Do we have the same passion as our early Sisters?
- Can we reinvent ourselves see with new eyes and address these issues?
- Do we know the neighborhoods in which we teach?
- Do we have the imagination and self-confidence not to imitate other universities and create “lazy rivers,” and large sports centers but instead be a beacon for those who are in need of a quality education in our society?
- Do we have the creativity, stamina and resourcefulness to educate those most in need in our neighborhood, in our city, in our society? This is our challenge.

Establishing OLLU was a dream that the Sisters had when they first began educating students in the United States. Because of their determination to turn it into a reality, we stand on the shoulders of others who have successfully graduated over 25,000 students from across the country who are making a difference in the world today.

The Sisters’ bravery and passion encourages our continuing success as an institution with the goal to educate and graduate students who lead and serve with faith and wisdom to improve the world.

Passion is what drove and fired the Sisters of Divine Providence to educate young women. Today, we see how their passion remains within the University to extend that education to students from all backgrounds. Like Father Moye, we show no partiality.

The passion that the Sisters have instilled in us remains within our community and OLLU.

Let us build on it.

Thank you for your dedication, your support and passion for education at Our Lady of the Lake University.