

Remarks by Father Michael J. Garanzini, S.J.
Faculty Convocation
September 14, 2014

I want to thank you for coming out on a Sunday to enjoy this time together. We welcome our new faculty each year and celebrate the achievements of our colleagues, recognizing their outstanding contributions to our University. I look forward to this each year because it signals for me an end to a long period of searching for new colleagues and bringing them on board. A special welcome to the new faculty today. If I can steal a reference from a novel about the academy I once read: The new professor sits down at the faculty convocation next to an old professor and introduces himself. They strike up a conversation. Eventually, the old professor says: We like to complain a lot around here, but it's actually quite nice." I suspect you will find this to be the case at Loyola!

I mentioned in my address last year how much we are being watched, how we are in an unusually long period of criticism and debate about higher education's worth and value, and the job we are doing for the nation. The debate hasn't let up. Disappointment, resentment, frustration, anxiety—deserved or undeserved—focus on the cost of an education, and also on the very direction and focus of the American university, and for some critics, even our usefulness has been put to question.

Just last Sunday, Frank Bruni, in the *New York Times* editorial section, began his piece with the line. "I am beginning to think that college exists mainly so that we can debate and deconstruct it." Among the more severe attacks he cited was a recent piece by Robert Reich, President Clinton's labor secretary. His criticisms of the cost and usefulness of a liberal arts education were so caustic that Salon's headline read: "College is a ludicrous waste of money." You may also have read or heard about a recent report from two sociologists, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, called "Aspiring Adults Adrift." These authors claim that fully two-thirds of college graduates are still depending on their parents to support them two years after graduation. (Pretty soon, we're going to feel that people don't like us anymore!)

I want to be sympathetic and I am not making light of the fact we in higher education are offering a commodity that is fast moving out of reach for the middle-income family. We do what we can here at Loyola to keep tuition affordable and our 42% freshmen discount rate, and 33% overall discount rate, is

keeping Loyola a truly diverse institution. More importantly, it is diverse in the way I think most critical for a good education: our student body is socio-economically diverse, as well as, ethnically, racially and religiously diverse.

We make every effort to help parents who truly want a Loyola education to afford it. When they come for Parent Orientation sessions, they ask about the courses their child will take, the job prospects for them when they complete their program--questions about what their money is paying for. And, they also ask questions about what will happen when their child encounters difficulty—and they don't mean academic difficulty. They are concerned about social difficulty. They have those White House reports on sexual violence and date-rape on campus on their minds. I can assure you, Loyola may not be perfect but our student support personnel in Student Development—in the Wellness Center, in conduct and mediation programs—is doing an excellent job. Several programs have been singled-out by the White House and others as models for other universities.

We remain attractive. We remain affordable. We continue to be seen as a way to advance socially and economically. But, we are also seen as a place from which they can expect a great deal more. Parents expect their son or daughter to develop a network of peers with values similar to their own. Whether Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, churched or unchurchd, practicing or not, they see us as a place that holds up certain values and one that will call forth the best from their son or daughter. They expect their child to develop a philosophy of life that will guide them and keep them from becoming cynical and self-absorbed.

They expect that the education received here will not be narrow, focused on technical skills that will lead to a single job or narrow set of employment opportunities. They expect it to stretch their son or daughter. Yes, they expect it to be challenging. And as one parent said to me when I asked what she was hoping for from us: "I am hoping my daughter will return a more confident adult and one with a conscience. I want her to do something for other people. She's so gifted." I thought that combination of expectations captured what we are capable of doing very nicely: we are forming men and women of competence, conscience, a desire to give back, capable of hard work.

To make their education truly a preparation for life, we know that the best way to do so is to ask the important questions—about the meaning of life, the purpose of life, ultimate values, the nature of truth, the good and beautiful-- in a variety of

ways and through the lens of a variety of disciplines. I think we are doing the right thing despite the criticisms leveled against higher education today. As Bruni states at the conclusion of his op-ed piece, “Now, more than ever, college needs to be an expansive adventure, yanking students toward unfamiliar horizons and untested identities rather than indulging and flattering who and where they already are.”

For an institution to be able to do that its faculty and its programs must be ready to help them stretch beyond their present comfort zone. We do that here in service-learning courses, in mentoring relationships, in assignments that bring them beyond the walls of our campuses.

We here at Loyola University Chicago have inherited a long tradition of serving the broader community and especially those within it who are new, marginalized, eager to improve their own and the conditions of their fellow citizens. We have been a place of access to opportunities, to professions, to the material and social benefits that this City has produced. And, today, given the stability of our programs, our enrollments and our institutional finances, it is important that we not waste the opportunity to deepen and advance that commitment.

For our new faculty colleagues, it is important that you know Loyola has for more than 140 years contributed to the improvement of both the social conditions and the social structures of our community, especially for the newly arrived, and the struggling working class. It has helped groom leaders in every profession.

In order to advance the mission of this institution, in order to send our students forth from here with something more than an education that equips them for a stable and secure future, but more importantly, with a dedication to changing the conditions that keep others from achieving their dreams, or making even a decent living for themselves and their children, it is critical that we put our energies behind an institutional commitment to making this a more just city and nation. We need to be about the business of demonstrating a commitment to transforming not just them, our students, but through them and with them the world that they will lead, by addressing the structures that maintain poverty, inequality and deteriorate our environment.

As our Provost has illustrated in his review of our accomplishments, our last five-year strategic plan has produced many of the results we had set ourselves to accomplish. We are more focused on student outcomes. We have made strides in

our professional programs. We have improved our facilities, recruited more talented faculty, and have become more capable of adjusting to changing times, without wavering on our conviction that the ultimate questions should drive our academic project. We know that faith must be open to and tempered by reason, that each individual matters, his or her dignity should be the basis for our judgments and actions. We know that the poor and marginalized have a claim on us who are better off. And we appreciate that we must allow our local reality to impact us, just as the conditions of our planet and our brothers and sisters around the world are bound to impact us locally. We do not inhabit a world of our own, nor by ourselves.

How do we become an even better university, better in ways that should matter to us, not necessarily in ways that others may want to judge us? Can we continue to improve the quality of education that we offer and the research and new knowledge we generate, while at the same time deepening our commitment to social justice? When I think of the resources we have among our faculty in the fields of health care, child and family, and the environment, I have no doubt we can be even more impactful. If our efforts are collaborative and multi-disciplinary in their approach, and consistent over time, we just might make a mark on this city (and even the nation) which is so badly scarred by injustice, especially in areas like health care disparities, unequal educational opportunity, a broken criminal justice system, and inadequate family services. We could focus a spotlight on and help alleviate conditions that menace children and families living in violent communities, communities with substandard housing, poor health care and education. We could inspire a generation of young people by preparing them to be leaders in environmental sustainability. In short, we could be a community that inspires hope and engenders hope.

Yes, we do a great deal now. The question our namesake, St. Ignatius Loyola, invites us to ask is the question of the “magis,” the more. Can we be doing more? Is there more being asked of us? Could we do this better than we are doing it now?

In the days ahead, as we roll out a planning process for our next five years, I’d like us to turn our attention to our social justice mission and ask these sorts of questions. They have the power to give us new energy and new purpose, a purpose that is fully consistent with where we came from and where we have been persistently laboring. If we think carefully and deeply, and plan well, we will be worthy of the talented young people that come to us for more than the skills

they will need to succeed. We will give them inspiration and vision. We will do the work of those who believe that a university education still matters, offering an education that is expansive, yanking students toward the unfamiliar and the challenging, and calling our students to be men and women for others. We need not worry about the charges of critics if we are doing right by our young people.

And, finally, I know I can thank you in anticipation of the good will and energy with which you will approach this institutional planning effort. God bless your hard work this year. I wish you much success in the days and weeks ahead.