

University Convocation

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In the Jewish tradition, bible stories are often explained by other stories called midrashim. I want to open this morning with a modern midrashim by Rabbi Marc Gellman. It is a commentary on the biblical story of creation; you know, the one about God creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. Rabbi Gellman's midrashim goes like this:

Before there was anything, there was God, a few angels and a huge swirling glob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, "Why don't you clean up this mess?"

So God collected rocks from the huge swirling glob and put them together in clumps and said, "Some of these clumps of rocks will be planets, and some will be stars, and some of these rocks will be ... just rocks."

Then God collected water from the huge swirling glob and put it together in pools of water and said, "Some of these pools of water will be oceans, and some will be clouds, and some of this water will be ... just water."

Then the angels said, "Well, God, it's neater now, but is the world finished?" And God answered...

"NOPE!"

On some of the rocks God placed growing things, and creeping things, and things that only God knows what they are, and when God had done all this, the angels asked God, "Is the world finished now?" and God answered...

"NOPE!"

God made a man and woman ... and said to them, "I am tired now. Please finish up the world for me ... really it's almost done." But the man and woman said, "We can't finish the world alone! You have the plans and we are too little."

"You are big enough," God answered them. "But I agree to this. If you keep trying to finish the world, I will be your partner."

They asked, "What's a partner?" and God answered, "A partner is someone you work with on a big thing that neither of you can do alone... On the days you think that I am not doing enough and on the days that I think you are not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal." And they all agreed to that deal.

Then the angels asked God, "Is the world finished yet?" and God answered, "I don't know. Go ask my partners." [Does God Have A Big Toe? pp. 1 - 3]

This story speaks to me because I like to think of the University as partnering with God to finish the world -- by educating persons who will make this world a more humane and just place for all, especially for the poor and the vulnerable. This way of thinking about the University is a specifically religious view, which I realize not everyone shares; that's why USF's statement of core values makes it clear that the University "welcomes persons of all faiths or no religious beliefs as fully contributing partners to the University." If not all of us understand the USF enterprise as a partnership with God, my hope is that we do acknowledge it as a partnership with like-minded colleagues who share a passion for offering students an academically rigorous education that is socially responsible. One of our partners, USF Trustee Joe Marshall, says it well and succinctly, "the more you know, the more you owe." A USF education aims to address both the "knowing" and the "owing" side of the equation.

USF's Jesuit Catholic tradition of education is second to none in emphasizing the centrality of communicating, discovering and applying knowledge. However, it is somewhat distinctive in situating the pursuit and application of knowledge in the larger context of developing fully human beings who understand, accept and fulfill their responsibilities for finishing the world. Providing such an education is the basis of our partnership. That is how we - faculty, staff, administrators, students, trustees, alums and friends of USF - finish the world. That is the "big thing" that no one of us can do alone.

In the context of our partnership, I want to talk with you now about a number of issues. First of all, finances and then campus construction. You all have a copy of the University's Mission, Vision and Values Statement. Notice that we have added the fourth strategic initiative, which I mentioned to you at last spring's town hall. In pursuit of that fourth initiative -- strengthening the University's financial position -- the Leadership Team and a small group of trustees are meeting this Thursday to begin working on strategies to develop our financial resources. Approximately 85% of our operating revenue comes from tuition. USF, like most private universities, is extremely dependent on tuition. As USF appears to be approaching capacity at the undergraduate level, the opportunity for increasing revenue through added undergraduate enrollments may not be a viable strategy. We will certainly look closely at the role of our graduate programs in strengthening our financial position.

If our revenue is largely tuition derived, our operating costs are driven mainly by total compensation [salary and benefits are approximately 67% of our budgeted costs]. We have little or no control over some of those costs: benefits, including health and pension, energy, insurance, debt service, library resources. So the major pieces of the financial puzzle are tuition on the revenue side and total compensation on the cost side.

The University continues to do well at increasing efficiencies and reducing costs in the ordinary conduct of its business; some recent examples include eliminating tuition payment by credit card, renegotiating our copy services, restructuring graduate loans. In

some cases, I know that personal convenience has been sacrificed for fiscal benefits to the University. I am grateful to all of you who are making those sacrifices. I ask for your continued understanding and cooperation as we keep looking for more efficient and less costly ways of doing business. I cannot underscore too boldly how important those qualities - understanding and cooperation - will be over the next five years of extensive remodeling and upgrading which is already underway.

Campus construction will produce noise, dislocations, crowding and general inconvenience, but the end result will be the realization of the third strategic priority that we set for ourselves four years ago: an attractive campus, up-to-date facilities, appropriate technology and resources to support learning. The campus will be transformed, but that transformation will not be painless. The next five years will test the strength of our commitment to one of USF's core values: "a common good that transcends the interests of particular individuals or groups." I think that keeping our eyes on the long-term prize will see us through the next few years.

Let me briefly review the tentative time-line for major construction projects. The telecom/networking upgrade is well underway. The trenching and cable work is finished; the new phone system will be installed after Christmas. Koret Law Center was dedicated last January. The newly expanded and remodeled School of Business will be dedicated on September 28 at 4 pm. [If you want some idea of the "growing pains" associated with new facilities, talk with your patient and long-suffering colleagues in law or business whom I thank now for their cooperation and understanding]. Campus remodeling will follow a fairly tight and closely interrelated schedule. When we finish with the ground level of Lone Mountain Residence Hall, we will begin the remodeling of the Center Wing of the main Lone Mountain building. That should begin in spring of this year. When the Center Wing is finished, construction will begin on Campion in January of 2006 for occupancy in Fall of 2007. Then we start the new science wing, presuming a successful fundraising campaign. The work on Fromm Hall [formerly Xavier] is scheduled for this spring. A remodel of the locker, training and office facilities in Memorial Gym has already begun and will proceed as funds become available. The upgrading and standardization of campus signage and overall campus landscape beautification will be ongoing.

This past spring the Board of Trustees conducted a formal evaluation of my performance as president. Some of you may have participated in that process which involved representative faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni and trustees. The evaluation findings were summarized in a report that was given to me and will be shared with the Board at its September meeting. At the chair's request, I responded in writing to the evaluation; I intend to make my response generally available after the September Board meeting. Now, I want to review with you two issues that were included in my response: diversity and holistic education.

One of the USF's distinguishing characteristics and a core value is the diversity of perspectives, experiences and backgrounds represented within the University community. For this demographic reality to become more of a "value" will require effort and

imagination on our part. I sometimes compare USF to a county with a number of self-contained villages. We lack a central market place where all of the villages can display their wares for popular consumption. USF needs to create structures in and out of the classroom that engage the wealth of differences represented within the University community. We need to metaphorically replicate the energy and interaction of the famous Sunday market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Our graduate and undergraduate students are a valuable learning resource for each other; we should supply the catalyst for that learning.

The voices and experiences of our diverse student population need to be more present in our curriculum and in the faces of our faculty. I would like to say that USF looks more like the world than any other private university. This characterization is confirmed in the most recent edition of the Princeton Review of the Country's Best Colleges: "USF is one of a handful of national-caliber universities in which white students aren't a majority. The university has made an exceptional use of its prized location in San Francisco and its Jesuit heritage to bring in students from a wide array of backgrounds and cultures." Unlike the world-at-large, life at USF should be characterized not by fear and suspicion of people who are different from me, but by an appreciation of differences rooted in experience and reflection that promotes understanding and respect. In the years ahead, more and more students should leave the Hilltop with sentiments similar to those expressed by some of our most recent graduates [2004 Graduating Student Survey]:

- I feel lucky to have met so many different people with such a wide range of interests.
- The fact that the USF student body is very international ... helped me become a lot more world conscious.
- Phelan Multicultural Community opened my mind to new ideas and learning about the struggles of other people.
- Meeting people from different ethnic backgrounds and learning more about different cultures gave me a great appreciation for the diversity at USF.
- The diversity of the students added to my appreciation of other cultures.
- The number of international students in classes helped me to understand first hand economics and culture from around the globe.
- The diversity at USF enriched my personality.

Diversity is only one area where life and learning overlap here. Whatever differences we may have about this or that issue, all of us agree that we are here to learn and that learning does not end when class does.

It is a challenge to support learning across the broad spectrum of experiences available to students on campus and in the city. Here on the Hilltop alone, the variety of guest lecturers, film series, literary readings, debates, plays, art exhibits, ethnic events and panel presentations offer rich supplementary materials for some of our courses. While the academic experience clearly remains the privileged locus for student learning and faculty attention, making a kairos retreat, editing the Foghorn, acting with College Players, competing in intercollegiate athletics, living in a residence hall, participating in an ethnic

club, singing for Sunday evening liturgies, going to the School of the Americas can also be "learning" and not just "doing" experiences. To situate the variety of student activities in the broader context of a holistic learning environment requires imagination and a close cooperation across the University; it requires the elimination of classic "turf" distinctions and a further leveling of the Berlin Wall that traditionally separates "academic programs" from "student life." We are all responsible for promoting and supporting student learning. Students do not leave their minds in the classroom, their bodies in Koret and their hearts in St. Ignatius Church, and neither should we who are responsible for educating persons with minds, hands and hearts.

Two further items of interest: our WASC accreditation and the Capital Campaign.

This year we will begin preparing for our WASC accreditation visit in the 2007 academic year. I hope that we approach accreditation not as a dry exercise in formal compliance with a set of external mandates but as an opportunity to show the public how good USF is. In the past four years, undergraduate applications have risen over 50%; this year for the first time we established a waiting list of 400 and our entering GPAs hit an all-time high of 3.44. The past few years have seen many improvements at USF: the implementation of a new undergraduate core curriculum, the establishment of the McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good and the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought, increasing external support for faculty research, more national recognition for our faculty, and dramatic improvements in campus facilities and technology resources. WASC accreditation is the moment for the University to provide the evidence that proves that our rhetoric accurately reflects the reality of a USF education.

The Campaign for USF enters the final, public phase on November 13 at an evening gala at the St. Francis hotel. Thus far the capital campaign has raised over \$105 million to support the priorities that were set four years ago through a university-wide process. Those priorities focus on:

- recruiting diverse and outstanding faculty and staff committed to USF's vision and mission
- recruiting and graduating a diverse student body of high academic achievement who reflect in their personal and professional lives the core values of USF
- providing the technology, facilities and resources necessary to advance learning and improve service
- strengthen USF's financial position

I believe that the proceeds of this capital campaign will take us a long way towards the recognition that we deserve "as a premier Jesuit Catholic, urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world." [Vision, Mission, Values Statement] You will be invited to participate in this campaign at whatever level you are capable of in support of projects that will impact our lives and those of our students on a daily basis. Support from faculty and staff sends a strong, unambiguous signal to foundations and donors about the depth of our

commitment to the partnership at the heart of USF. I want to gratefully acknowledge here the support and generosity of the USF Jesuit community which has made a \$2 million pledge to the campaign.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the University Task Force on Administrative Compensation who forwarded their recommendations to my office this summer. Their recommendations will be finalized later this week by the Leadership Team. Likewise, I thank the University Committee on the Status of Women for the survey that it conducted, which I think is available on-line, or will be very shortly. This committee has likewise made some recommendations that will also be reviewed by the Leadership Team.

By way of conclusion I want to return to that "big thing that neither of us can do alone" which is the basis for our partnership at USF. That "big thing" is nothing less than the whole world. We are working together to finish the world here on campus -- in the classrooms, laboratories, studios, stages, residence halls, playing fields, offices and activity centers. USF faculty, staff and students are also finishing the world with death row inmates in Mississippi; with the garbage dwellers of Payatas in Manila; with pregnant indigenous women in San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala; with street children in Durban, South Africa; with Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, India; with an activist theatre troupe in Peru; with the homeless in Tijuana and here in the Tenderloin; with indigent counselees in the Mission District. "Finishing the world" God has given us is, indeed, a project too vast for anyone of us to do alone, but, as a University, we are already doing a great deal and we are doing it well.

Educating leaders to fashion a more humane and just world is "a big deal" and a daunting challenge. "On the days you think that I am not doing enough and on the days that I think you are not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal." I hope you agree to that deal and that you find our USF partnership to be a satisfying and rewarding one. After four years in this position, I am even more grateful and admiring of your side of the partnership. The USF story is a great one that I am proud to tell to so many different groups in so many different circumstances. You are the authors of that story; you are writing that story now, and for that I thank you and I applaud you.