

University Convocation

Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco

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This summer I indulged my craving for fiction with our own Rob Elias' first whodunit, *The Deadly Tools of Ignorance*. The locus for this mystery novel is a Catholic university in San Francisco — sound familiar? The protagonist is Debs Kafka, a wanna-be major league baseball player and doctoral student in criminology; he is increasingly disillusioned by happenings on and off campus. While ruminating over the mindlessness of our criminal-justice policies and the quirkiness of academia, Debs wonders, “Do we academics have anything to contribute besides trivial department politics and backbiting? Shouldn't universities be solving public problems — not ignoring or compounding them? I see glimmers of hope. But not often enough.” [p. 9]

In this first part of my talk I want to highlight for you some “glimmers of hope” that I see quite clearly and very often from my vantage point atop Lone Mountain. As the touchstone for these reflections, I revisited my comments from five years ago when I was just starting here, so let me briefly contrast where USF stood *then* with where it is today.

*Then*, I spoke about our sharing more than cramped offices and the same signature on our pay checks. Today, I see clearly the resolve with which we worked together as a University community to articulate our vision and mission and then translate its rhetoric into the reality of the student experience here. At USF we are serious about educating people who will fashion a more humane and just world, and about showing the academy that this commitment strengthens academic quality rather than dilutes it. Over these intervening years, faculty have created a comprehensive undergraduate core curriculum with a service learning requirement that sends every student into the community as a learner, not a do-gooder. This is a distinctive curricular innovation within higher education. Our student immersion experiences in developing countries have expanded in recent years to include such countries as Mexico, South Africa, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Jamaica, Guatemala, East Timor, the Philippines, Honduras, Viet Nam and India. Let me give you a piece of anecdotal evidence that illustrates the power of a USF education. When the Leadership Team and I were in Tijuana this summer, we listened to a young, Mexican professor describe how our USF students had greater awareness and knowledge of issues like poverty and human rights than their Tijuana classmates. He told us that in the border course he taught, USF students had a great positive influence on their Mexican counterparts. We all felt very proud — and so should you — about this particular “glimmer of hope” that shined across a highly fortified border.

*Then*, I mentioned that the first Jesuit universities were situated in the center of great cities, and what an enviable location USF occupies within that originating tradition. During the past five years, USF has more closely associated itself with the City through accounting faculty and students in the Tenderloin and nursing placements with the homeless, through philosophy students taking their ethics course with inmates at San

Quentin Prison and law placements in clinics for child advocacy and for elders exploited by abusive predatory lending, through USF-credentialed teachers and school administrators well prepared for the difficult challenges of urban schools and our arts management students working in the City's many museums, through theater students collaborating on productions with day workers in the Mission and art and architecture students moving out into underserved communities for inspiration and focus, and through public forums on homelessness, environmental issues and the mayoral race sponsored by the McCarthy Center. These and other "glimmers of hope" shined across the entire City.

*Then*, I was impressed by a faculty so clearly committed to both teaching/learning and scholarship. *Now*, our graduate and undergraduate students leave no doubt about the impact of our faculty on their learning when an overwhelming 93% of recent graduates surveyed agreed that faculty here take an active interest in their learning. A 2005 graduate wrote, "The support — academic, mental, social — is incredible! Teachers go out of their way to make sure we are all going in the same direction." This dedication to student learning is complemented by high quality faculty research with national impact in such diverse areas as fiction writing, mathematics, an historic Supreme Court decision, the psychology of lying, intellectual property and sharks! *How* our faculty find the time and energy to be first rate teachers *and* do quality research I don't know; *that* they do so is undeniable, and perhaps the "glimmer of hope" that accounts for the 71% increase in undergraduate applications over the past five years and USF's increasing ability to recruit faculty who share our passion for both teaching/learning and scholarship from the finest graduate programs in the country.

*Then* I told you that USF was better at walking the walk than talking the talk and that USF should talk, even boast, more about itself. Indeed, the past five years have given us much to talk about. During that time we successfully recruited 171 full time faculty, 33 to entirely new positions. The University established the Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good, the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought and the John and Anna Lo Schiavo Chair for Catholic Thought, which is currently occupied by Steve Schloesser, S.J. USF passed its five-year WASC evaluation visitation in 2003 with flying colors, and our Reaccreditation Proposal was accepted without any changes this past spring. We brought the arts to campus with a new and flourishing department of Visual and Performing Arts; new leadership revitalized the St. Ignatius Institute, and our entrepreneurial program in the School of Business is numbered among the best in the nation by *Entrepreneur Magazine*; Teacher Education for the Advancement of Multicultural Society or TEAMS has recently secured outside funding in excess of \$6 million and is on the way to becoming a national model for teacher development and service learning; 30 new academic programs have been introduced across the University, while over 20 programs have been deleted or substantially restructured. The N-CLEX passage rate for our nursing graduates has gone from the low 60's to the mid 90's and our median LSAT scores have jumped from the 64th percentile to the 83rd.

The number of student retreats sponsored by University Ministry has more than doubled over the past five years, and student participation has increased so dramatically that wait

lists are often necessary. Immersion experiences sponsored by University Ministry during winter and spring breaks have multiplied fourfold. Through University Ministry's Community Action programs, USF students volunteered over 30,000 hours of work last year in a variety of service agencies; clearly, the faith of this University community does justice.

Intercollegiate athletics at USF boasts 15 new scholarships; a 94% graduation rate for those completing eligibility and movement from dead last to 4th place in this year's competition for the prestigious Commissioner's Cup, which recognizes overall excellence. Last year, 17 USF athletes were awarded "gold honors" on the WCC's academic honor role, which tied an all-time league record. Our student-athletes did this at the same time that USF won a league championships in men's soccer, an NCAA bid in women's golf, and the baseball team and women's cross country teams enjoyed their best seasons in history.

Since 2000, the University has invested \$115 million on new construction and upgrading current facilities: this includes Loyola Village, Malloy Hall and the new School of Business, Zief Law Library, the Kendrick remodel, the CPS Building, redoing the food court in University Center, the dance studio in Koret, remodeled classrooms on Lone Mountain and the makeover of locker rooms and training facilities in Memorial Gym. Since 2001, approximately \$22 million has been spent to strengthen technological support for teaching, research and service; this figure includes expenditures on the core infrastructure project.

USF is a more efficient organization now than it was five years ago. *Then*, we faced a \$5 million operating deficit; *now* we are safely in the black. The endowment has increased by over \$21 million since 2000, even as over \$30 million from endowment earnings supported operations. We closed our Oakland regional campus this year because it was no longer financially viable. You may anticipate that we will continue to make difficult decisions that more directly align University resources with our mission of offering Jesuit education to undergraduate, graduate and professional students.

Organizationally, we merged the Office of Labor Relations with Legal Affairs; created the Division of University Life; added the Office of Institutional Research to support planning and assessment, and the Office of Sponsored Projects, which in three years has helped secure \$5 million in research support for faculty. The Trustees mandated an independent Office of Internal Audit for the sole purpose of insuring that all our procedures, policies and practices are in compliance with federal and state law, and are adequately documented in this post-Sarbanes Oxley environment.

Like every other organization in the nation, the University worked hard and successfully to find an equitable way of sharing the exploding cost of health care. It is a credit to this community that self-interest did not prevail over the common good; we mutually agreed to a payment structure where those who earn more pay more. I don't know of any University where that principle is operative. I am very grateful to each of our unions and to our non-union colleagues for this accomplishment, and very proud of how well we

cooperated in resolving a difficult and potentially divisive issue. I want to pause here for a minute to acknowledge and thank Alan Heineman for his leadership of the Faculty Association my first five years; for the central role he played in developing an environment of trust and respect; in moving us towards transparency and openness and away from suspicion and mistrust; replacing the tired old rhetoric of “winners” and “losers” with language that spoke about a common good and acknowledged our mutual responsibilities to pursue that rather than the narrow self-interest of any one group.

It should be clear that USF has made amazing progress on the strategic priorities we set five years ago: recruiting diverse, high quality faculty and students who resonate with our mission; upgrading facilities and improving technology to support learning and service; strengthening the University’s financial position. If USF shines more brightly now in the firmament of American higher education than it did five years ago, we still face many challenges, which I want to review with you now.

These next three years, as you are well aware, we are rebuilding the campus to match the quality of our students and faculty. Over the next three years we will continue to experience a severe space crunch that demands much flexibility, good will and a solid sense of humor from each one of us. In order to maximize the use of available classrooms, the Office of the Registrar will spread classes throughout the day and across the week. This will result in schedules that are not ideal, but most effectively and efficiently use available space to support teaching and learning. There is no doubt that conditions will be challenging under some circumstances and that keeping our focus on serving students and fostering an active learning environment in the classroom will be crucial, albeit difficult, for USF to maintain its increasingly strong position in the market place. To paraphrase what the Red Queen told an exhausted Alice, *it will take all the running we can do, to keep USF in the same place. To get somewhere else we will have to run twice as fast.* (Through the Looking Glass, Chapter 2)

In the latest edition of *U.S. News and World Report*, I am told that USF moved from 16th to the 14th most diverse university in the nation. Making sure that diversity, in the broadest sense of that term, remains a defining characteristic of USF is the responsibility of us all: search committees insuring that candidate pools are diverse; faculty creatively and appropriately incorporating diversity into the curriculum; service offices evidencing sensitivity to different styles and idioms; all of us creating a University environment that is welcoming and supportive of one another.

USF is in the final phase of the largest capital campaign in its history. Thus far, we have raised \$125 million. \$500,000 or half a million of that comes from your gifts and pledges, for which I am most grateful. Your generosity gives me great bragging rights on those occasions when I schmooze with my counterparts from other institutions that enjoy less support from staff and faculty. These next two years of the campaign will be most challenging, as we raise an additional \$50 million to reach our goal of \$175 million.

As you know, from a previous communication, the University discovered a data security lapse this summer. A task force is at work assessing the status of overall data security and

will recommend steps to insure that only the appropriate individuals have access to confidential information and that such information is as secure as possible these days. Many of you are involved in the time-consuming process of selecting a vendor to replace our entire administrative computing system. We expect to conclude this process within the next few weeks and then begin the negotiation, planning and implementation phases of this most challenging project, which we hope to complete by Spring 2009. My previous and entirely unpleasant experience with a systems migration at another university is countered by our outstanding IT staff, who give some “glimmer of hope” that we can accomplish this massive change-over with minimal disruption, frustration and confusion and within budget. And that’s about as good as it gets with these undertakings. I take this occasion to announce the appointment of Tracy Schroeder as Vice President for Information Technology. This change of title more adequately represents the extent of her current responsibilities, which will remain exactly the same. She will report directly to the President. This is the moment for me to acknowledge the terrific job that Tracy and the IT staff have done for the University.

In May, the University contracted the services of an outside planning and architectural firm that specializes in theater facilities to help us determine the best site for a studio theater facility. Their initial recommendation is that we consider remodeling the Pacific Rim conference room for this use. We are now exploring that option with those departments that would be most affected by such a move. Simultaneously, Project Management will be working with the School of Education and the Performing Arts and Social Justice program to insure that Presentation Theater is adequately equipped and supported to be the University’s dedicated theater. Some noise abatement measures and traffic pattern redirection are necessary so that these two units of the University both flourish under the same roof well into the future.

The Gleeson Library staff will continue to work closely with faculty in the face of rapidly escalating costs for resources in its ongoing effort to find the right balance of electronic and print materials to support the teaching/learning and research needs of the University.

Let me now descend to that issue which generates not even a glimmer of light but a great deal of heat: parking. With extensive campus construction, plans to eliminate internal parking on the lower campus and the relocation to Lone Mountain this December of all student services currently located in Campion — including Admissions — to Lone Mountain, our 800 parking spaces will be even more carefully monitored. Parking enforcement will be more stringent in order to protect and preserve the common good of all. Abuses related to second permits, day passes, PAN 7 permits and so on will meet with prompt action and stiff fines. The commuter subsidy by the University will increase 75%; only the price of daily permits will increase, though not at the same rate as oil. The introduction of valet parking on Lone Mountain will accommodate more cars in that space. Please spare yourself much grief and Public Safety officers added stress by carefully reading and complying with the newly revised parking regulations. In the course of my evaluation last year, one participant wrote that the most significant legacy that I could leave USF would be a six-tiered parking structure. I am afraid that is not in the cards.

Let me conclude by reminding you that on Saturday, October 15, USF celebrates 150 years of Jesuit Catholic education in San Francisco. USF was and still is the City's first University. In 1855, Fr. Anthony Maraschi opened St. Ignatius Academy in a 45' by 25' room amidst the sand dunes at what is now Fourth and Market Streets. Less than twenty years later, on April 9, 1874, the remarkable Jesuit scientist and college faculty member, Fr. Joseph Neri, conducted the City's first exhibition of electricity from 8 o'clock until 10 o'clock in the evening, on top of the tower of St. Ignatius Church. The energy source was a large electro-magnetic machine, the first of its kind in America. A contemporary chronicler wrote, "The light is such as to be seen at a distance of two hundred miles."

Let me suggest that it is our responsibility, one hundred and fifty years later, to build on that tradition by ensuring that the light from USF shines far beyond two hundred miles. Our challenge is to make of this Jesuit Catholic university a beacon of light in a world darkened by thickening clouds of poverty, ignorance, hunger, disease, repression, war and violence. We — not some machine — are the energy source of this light. May our efforts to educate leaders who will fashion a more just and humane world send "glimmers of hope" across the globe to all those who, for whatever reasons, share our faith-filled hunger and thirst for truth and justice.