

## University Convocation

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

August 20, 2009 | Presentation Theater

Thank you being here this morning to begin the University's 154th academic year. USF has come a long way from that one-room shack in the sand dunes of what is now 4th and Market Streets that first opened its doors to a mere three students on October 15, 1855. It was unimaginable then that the disappointing and inauspicious beginning of St. Ignatius Academy was, in fact, the harbinger of future growth and development into an institution that has since changed its name three times and hop-scotched across the City to this, the fourth and presumably final site of the University of San Francisco. Our tradition of nimbleness and adaptability to changing circumstances will serve us well through a future that will see more change in a decade than has taken place during the entire six thousand years of recorded history.

Three weeks ago, some USF faculty and staff trekked south to another Jesuit university for the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of the California Province of the Jesuit order. We were reminded there that the Jesuits first arrived from Oregon in San Francisco Bay on December 8, 1849 in the person of two Italian Jesuit priests, Michael Accolti and John Nobili. Amidst the frenzy of the gold rush, these gentlemen came to California, "not pursuing gold but to do a little good." That "little good" includes the University of San Francisco as well as six high schools, two other universities and many diverse works across five states. This University — all of those works — are a tribute to the vision, dedication and hard work of those who began USF's one hundred and fifty-four year old tradition of "doing a little good" in the City and the world.

My remarks at last year's convocation traced the University's progress on the four strategic priorities set in 2001. It was an occasion for us to celebrate our successes and relish the more than "little good" that we have done together here on the Hilltop. That moment passed quickly, as we rallied to face an increasingly steep economic downturn. The University responded to the impending fiscal crisis with alacrity and decisiveness. Thus far, it appears that our strategies are working; but the economic picture remains dark and cloudy at best. You know about the lay-offs, furloughs, pay cuts, class reductions and similarly harsh measures taken at other universities, public and private, in response to the financial maelstrom. Our reacting early, quickly and effectively allowed us to avoid the dramatic and drastic steps that others were forced to take. In fact, the Executive Officers of the University are the only members of the University community who did not receive some salary increase; I ask them to stand and you to join me in applauding their generosity and commitment to USF.

In the course of the past year, we sent out a number of communications to inform everyone informed about our efforts to deal with the collapsing economy, we brought faculty and staff into the leadership team discussions, we introduced *USF Cares* to address the anxieties of our students and their families, and we launched the "Keeping Faith with Students" campaign, which generated an additional \$900,000 to supplement

student financial aid and to which many of you contributed. Today, I will not review in detail last year's thus-far successful response to the challenges of the recession; I want to look to the future in anticipation of what we have only begun to accomplish. While we trimmed our sails and adjusted our course in response to the economic turmoil; we did not go below, batten down the hatches and ride out the storm. If we altered our course, we never lost sight of where we were headed, nor did we compromise the quality of a USF education. This morning, I want to acknowledge and highlight some of the innovations and new programs that were initiated at the same time that we were battling those gale force financial head winds in a highly volatile situation.

Among the most noteworthy advances conceived, designed and implemented during the past year was on-line registration for incoming students. Peter Novak, an associate dean in art and sciences, oversaw this gargantuan university-wide effort from the drawing board to a successful June launch. I thank Peter, ITS and all you faculty and staff who participated in this Herculean effort, which got USF's "hooks" deep into prospective students early in the summer and allowed us to completely revamp our on-campus, new student orientation because we no longer had to devote a disproportionate amount of their time and ours to getting them into classes.

Our summer introductory program for new students was strikingly different from that of previous years. No longer were the days filled with tests and trials of registration processes and procedures. This summer, students were divided up into small groups, given Muni cards and cell phones, which texted clues that took them around the city via public transportation to visit one historical site, one cultural site and one service site in San Francisco. At those sites, actors greeted them. For example, Fr. Accolti met them at Mission Dolores and recalled the intertwined histories of the City and its first university. What a great way to learn about the City and the University and make friends in the process! This highly imaginative approach is cutting-edge; some of us skeptics felt that Peter and his merry band had bitten off more than they could possibly chew with the introduction of on-line registration; an extremely imaginative, high-tech-dependent summer program; and this weekend's totally redesigned new student and parent orientation. These ambitious efforts mirrored the daring of Obama's simultaneously attacking the economy, two wars and health care. "Yes we can;" and yes, we did, thanks to the dozens of people who made all this happen in a remarkably short time span. I especially want to thank Dena Davis, Greg Wolcott, Charlene Lobo-Soriano and Keegan Mills. The dedication, vision and hard work of these individuals and the thirteen subcommittee chairs argue persuasively that USF's "golden age" lies ahead of us.

Our new, sharply focused orientation program begins this weekend. It intentionally created an opportunity for parents to familiarize themselves with the University's strongest asset and most valuable resource, you faculty and staff. I, along with the Steering Committee, invite those of you who are able, to meet with family members of our incoming students at a reception in McLaren this Saturday from 5:45 to 7:00 p.m. Your presence and participation telegraphs a warm welcome to the newest members of the University community. Julie Orio has a one page hand-out that preps you to provide parents with our *New Avenues Family Guidebook*. This booklet contains

additional resources for parents that help them feel part of the University community. I strongly encourage those who can make it on Saturday to see Julie after the convocation so that we will know how many of you to expect. Thank you for considering this request to help welcome new students and their families to the Hilltop.

You may be surprised to know that over the last year we designed and this year will roll out a number of new academic degree programs. USF will offer, for the first time, master's degrees in International Studies, Risk Management, Investor Relations and Global Entrepreneurship and Management. We have new undergraduate degree programs in advertising, health services and business and global entrepreneurship, and the School of Education is offering a leadership program for educators in Asia that has drawn more participants than anticipated. Stanley Nel continues his work on several exciting new joint degree programs with prestigious Chinese universities that should add significantly to our international student population over the next few years. You are well aware, and Jim has already commented on, the creation of the new School of Business and Professional Studies. I thank Jim for his leadership of this promising new enterprise, as well as the faculty and staff of both schools and Dean Mike Duffy for the time and effort they are expending to merge these two entities into one enterprise.

Those of you with smart phones — whether iPhone, Blackberry or Treo — may now access USF mobile through your phone at: [mobile.usfca.edu](http://mobile.usfca.edu). There you may view a campus map, browse the class schedule, search the library catalogue, map public transportation to campus or check USF's newly designed calendar of events. This newest user-friendly mobile resource went active in July. ITS effected this innovation while simultaneously working successfully and tirelessly with Human Resources to complete on-time and on-budget the new Banner system across the entire University.

Academic Support Services developed a number of new on-line resources that are now available to families faced with the challenge of financing a USF education. A low visibility but important innovation is the newly managed payment plan that offers students more payment options, accurate current account information in a user-friendly format and a streamlined federal financial aid refund process. Our colleagues in Academic Support Services have done an amazing job in a most stressful context at upgrading and increasing the services we provide and the quality of information now easily accessible on-line. My congratulations and thanks to all of them.

A quick review of these many promising initiatives evokes our legacy of nimbleness and adaptability and recalls what the Queen of Hearts told Alice, "It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!" [*Through the Looking Glass*]. Last year we really ran at least twice as fast, and the University is much improved for those efforts.

Some of you participated in the recent Trustee evaluation of my performance as president; I thank you for that and I want you to know that your feedback and suggestions provided solid food for thought in the Board's deliberations and for my own ruminations about my final term in this position. Overall, your assessment matched-up with my own

thoughts about what we need to do together to project the University well into the 21st Century. The two most prominently highlighted priorities were: 1) using [USF 2028](#) as the basis for a comprehensive strategic planning-action effort; and 2) generating a stronger resource base to support the University's continued growth and development into a premier Jesuit Catholic, urban and diverse university that educates leaders to fashion a more humane and just world.

With regard to planning, the Leadership Team spent two days together last week laying the foundation for a revitalized strategic planning effort that will advance the University as effectively as our 2001 effort. Once again I cite the Queen of Hearts who, apropos of planning, told Alice, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there" [*ibid.*]. [USF 2028](#) spells out where we are going and marks the pathway to heightened academic quality within our Jesuit Catholic tradition of humanizing education in San Francisco with a diverse university community and a strong commitment to educating from and for a global perspective that embraces that half of the world who struggle to survive on \$2 a day or less.

To shepherd this university-wide planning/action effort, I am chairing a University Planning Council comprised of Salvador Aceves, Steve Gallagher, BJ Johnson, Mike London and Gerardo Marin. The Council's responsibility is coordinating, communicating and advancing planning across the University. Major responsibility for actual planning and implementation rests with the leadership team and even more directly with the deans and faculty of our five schools. The Planning Council will work to ensure that the many moving parts stay in play throughout our strategic thinking, planning and acting; these components include academic planning, marketing and branding efforts, enrollment planning, financial planning, campus master planning, development planning and the alignment of each school and unit's efforts with the University's overarching goals.

We are clearly advantaged by knowing where we are going. It remains for us to chart the surest course by the five points of our internal compass: Jesuit Catholic tradition, academic excellence, San Francisco location, diverse community and global perspective. These are the qualities that taken together distinguish us from other schools and that we must make ever more evident and operative across the University in all of our programming, academic and non-curricular. These five characteristics must permeate and shape all aspects of the campus culture for us to fully impact our students and increase our "draw power" in a very competitive market place. Our strategic planning and acting exercise should direct our resources and focus on energy on these five cardinal qualities that constitute the core of our identity.

Some of you may have seen an article entitled "School Rankings" in the August 17 edition of *Time* magazine. That article discusses the controversial criterion to rank universities that was employed by the latest entry into this national game: the median mid-career salary of undergraduate alums. While the sponsoring organization, PayScale, defends this criterion for measuring the worth of a college, the reporter asks what this ranking really says about American higher education. "Is it true," she writes, "That every student's goal should be to make as much money as possible, betterment of the world be

damned?” The answer to that question and concluding sentence of the article comes from a prestigious college guidance professional, who flatly declares, “This is the only way to judge success.”

That crass assertion is a long way — and not just chronologically — from “not pursuing gold but to do a little good.” I suggest to you that “good as gold” has an almost counter-cultural flavor in a context that defines virtually everything in material or instrumental terms, even truth, knowledge, beauty and learning. Let me further suggest that for those of us committed to an education that opens the minds and hearts of students to the immense good that they may accomplish with the knowledge, skills and sensitivities they acquire here, the “gold” they earn will reflect the “good” that they do. “Good as gold” has a subtlety that is not apparent to all those who invoke this aphorism. The pursuit of gold can never be the defining purpose of a fully human life. Good is the gold that ultimately fills our lives with purpose and meaning. Let us stand with those who pursue “good” with same vigor and focus that others do “gold.”

Last Sunday morning, USF lost one of its most beloved alums as Burl Toller passed from his family’s hands into God’s. He was a quiet, gentle giant who always wore a smile and spoke a kind word. In the course of his life, Burl opened doors that others have since walked through. He was the first African American to officiate in the NFL and the first Black high school principal in San Francisco. Burl is most fondly and proudly remembered here at USF as one of two African American players — the other was Ollie Matson — on USF’s legendary 1951 football team, arguably the best college team ever. The ’51 Dons went unbeaten, untied and ultimately uninvited to the bowl game that their perfect record entitled them to. The Orange Bowl wanted the Dons to play Clemson, presumably for a national championship, but only if they left their two black players behind in San Francisco. The team voted unanimously not to go anywhere without their African American teammates. That vote cost them a likely national championship and the gate receipts that would have kept football alive for them at USF — the program died that very year for lack of funds. Those USF student-athletes literally chose “good” over “gold”; solidarity over glitz; integrity over glory. They saw “good” as “gold” and went for it. This is who we are and who we want to be. Let us strengthen our resolve to advance USF’s tradition of nimbleness and adaptability at the service of our Jesuit Catholic mission of good scholarship, good teaching and good people for a better world.

Thank you.