2011 Convocation Address
We can be thankful for the many factors that unite us. For example, we all share the history that has shaped Duquesne for 133 years."

Charles J. Dougherty, Ph.D.
President, Duquesne University

2011 Convocation Address
Though none of us knows all that has gone before us—the generations of work, the individual hopes and frustrations, the collective disappointments and achievements—we are all heirs of it. Our history brings us together even when we are unaware of it.

We also share a unique sense of place on this remarkable Bluff. A model urban campus within walking distance from the center of a major American city, we are also here a world apart. On our Bluff there is protection from the drumbeat of urban life and a contemplative atmosphere more akin to a college in the countryside.

We are also united by time, by the simple fact that our work here intersects in the here and now. Some of us are veterans nearing the end of our contributions; others are newly arrived anticipating a long career ahead. But for the present, our fate is contemporaneous. This means we work together. Sometimes this is literal as in our office work or in an interdisciplinary program or a university-wide committee. Sometimes it is figurative as in the manner in which we all share in the good work of our maintenance and landscaping crews.

But of all the things that unite us, the most important is our purpose for being here together at this time and place, doing the special things we do. We call that purpose our mission, and it is linked inextricably to our institutional identity as a Spiritan, Catholic university. Because it is the bond that unites us most deeply, I want to spend some time today reflecting on our mission and identity. I will do so in reverse order, considering our nature as university, Catholic and then Spiritan.
We are a university. We teach. We conduct research. We contribute service. All of these activities are suffused with our overarching self-understanding that we are serving God by serving students. So in the classroom, our teaching is motivated by a concern for the development of the whole person. With notable exceptions, our students are young men and women at the start of their higher studies and careers. This affects our teaching as we are conscious of the role we play in shaping their lifelong attitudes toward learning and toward their own commitments to serving others. At the same time, our concern for person-centered teaching is also expressed in the highest possible standards of performance. It serves no one’s long-term interests to water down the demands of the classroom experience or to assign easy grades. Our students are served best by the highest standards and when they are challenged most fully. Our students also need the latest classrooms, labs, and other facilities in which to learn. The University has already made great progress in this arena and is committed to continuously upgrading our learning spaces.

Research may be the aspect of our life together that is most distinctive of who we are as a university community and least appreciated by members of the general public. As teachers, our role is passing on the highest understandings and achievements of our culture. As researchers, our role is to create newer understandings and achievements to build on and enhance the culture we have received. This is true in the science lab, in social science and humanities research, in music performance and throughout the professions. Admittedly, this commitment has not always been central at Duquesne. Earlier generations did not, perhaps could not, accept its full importance. But our maturity as a university is now measured by the public contributions our faculty make to their disciplines’ and their professions’ advancements. Our national standing as one of America’s leading Catholic universities depends in large part on our faculty’s truly impressive research productivity. The University has greatly improved support for faculty research and will continue to do so.
Service
Service is a longer part of who we are and deeply linked to our Catholic and Spiritan heritage. The University itself arises out of the impulse of service—in our case of the Spiritans to the children of poor and exploited German and Irish immigrants who were building Pittsburgh’s industrial infrastructure in the late nineteenth century. That founding intent was channeled throughout Pittsburgh by generations of undergraduate service clubs and professional organizations. Large numbers of hours of service are now donated annually not only by students, but by faculty and staff as well; so many that we have recently been named among the top fifteen universities in the country for community service. We have also become leaders in service learning, the integration of service with academic reflection. And our current Strategic Plan represents a twofold commitment that is distinctively our own. On the one hand, there is a focus on Africa, long a field of missionary work for the Spiritans and now a leader in the Congregation’s future. On the other hand, there is a new, more focused commitment to our neighbors in the Hill District, where the African-American community endures a Pittsburgh poverty rate that is twice as high among blacks as it is among whites.

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INTEGRITY OF
Creation
We must also be aware of our physical environment, in both senses. We are properly proud of the recognitions we have received for our energy efficiency on campus—our LEED-certified construction and renovation, our co-generation power plant at the Student Union circle, our ice storage facility under our parking garage, our multiple efforts to install energy-saving roofs, windows, and light bulbs. This is a task that is never ending. It calls for constant vigilance to find new ways of respecting our natural environment because, in mission terms, we are stewards of this piece of God’s creation.

Also related to our physical environment is the attractiveness of campus. It is an important value to us for two reasons. One is inherent. We want to live, work, and educate in a place of beauty. Such an environment lifts and sustains the spirit. But there is another practical reason. Every year, our campus must attract new students; everything we do depends on the income from their new tuition. And part of the attractiveness of Duquesne lies in the appearance of campus, particularly to those visiting for the first time.

One of the most important issues for our sense of mission as a university is to appropriately understand our sense of place. We are in Pittsburgh. This city is our home, our roots. It has and will continue to shape our history. But at the same time, we are not bound by the limitations of Pittsburgh. Once we were largely the university of choice for commuters among Pittsburgh’s Catholic college population. Now we are a national university. Our norms and our achievements are the same as all of America’s leading universities. Our Board, our faculty, staff, and students are from all across the United States, and many from other nations. We must always be proud of our hometown and how the City and the University have helped to shape—and will continue to shape—one another. But we can never allow a spirit of provincialism to set limits on our aspirations as a university.
A Community of Faith
Duquesne is a Catholic university, one of the leading Catholic universities in this nation. We are not all Catholics, of course. We must always be mindful of this and of the many contributions made by our colleagues of all faiths here. But we are a Catholic institution. As such, we have an opportunity and an obligation to help define the meaning of a Catholic university for our age. In the past the meaning was unambiguous. The Spiritan priests were the founders; they led the University administration and the Board. The faculty, students, and staff were overwhelmingly Catholic. The meaning of “Catholic” itself was clear in terms of Church teaching, sacramental life and interaction with the larger American culture. That interaction was shaped by an historic anti-Catholicism in American politics and society—making us a self-conscious minority irrespective of our numbers or our wishes. When the land for the construction of “Old Main” was purchased, for example, it had to be done surreptitiously through a third party since the owner would not sell his land to Catholics.

Catholicism, even in its darkest days, has been a favorable seed bed for the life of the mind. The great medieval universities of Europe, for example, grew out of the Church’s monastic traditions and its general respect for intellectual inquiry. That respect is grounded in a metaphysical confidence that the truths of faith and the truths of reason are ultimately compatible. If they appear incompatible at any moment, it is not due to real incompatibility but to an inadequate grasp of either or both by us at that time. This may seem a small point, but its implications are world-historic. It has allowed believers over time to accommodate new data from science and culture without loss of faith and to develop new interpretations of faith without the strictures of literal interpretations of Scripture or tradition.

No one person or any given time in history will fully understand the fruits of reason or the gifts of faith. This point about faith is often made with the observation that even when we can grasp some of the essentials of our faith from a rational point of view other elements remain a mystery. The heart of the Catholic faith and the core of its mystery is the Trinity, that God is three Persons in an essential unity. Our belief, beyond full understanding, is that God is at once a loving Creator, a self-sacrificing Redeemer, and a Spirit that guides our lives. As a Catholic university, we must remain true to these beliefs even as our understandings of them—and our rational knowledge of the world—evolve.
MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES
These core beliefs give rise to an array of spiritual and moral values. Chief among them are those values relating to the nature of the person and the community. Because of his or her creation and spiritual destiny, every person has an incalculably great dignity that is to be respected. This is the foundation for human rights. It is also the grounds for our assertion that we serve God by serving students—and for the associated result that we also serve God by serving one another.

Although one might suppose that a strong American-style individualism would follow from this requirement to respect persons, Catholicism’s position is that the concrete realization of personal dignity occurs only in communities. Persons can achieve the respect their dignity deserves or have it compromised or even lost depending on the nature of the communities they live in. This is why social justice is so important; it is how the community shapes human dignity. Community here is the whole complex of human relations beginning with the family, extending through the multiple occupational and voluntary organizations that bind and shape us and reaching finally to the character of the state. In our case, this means that the ethos of our University community and its ability to support the dignity of all our members is a profound spiritual and moral value. In our support of one another, we should strive to be of “one heart and one soul.” In particular, we must ensure that we realize and maintain the community of civility and mutual respect that is called for in our Strategic Plan.

Our Catholic character means a great deal more than I have time to outline today, but the last element I want to highlight is the sacramental and liturgical life on campus. It is of great symbolic importance to us and our future that we begin each year with the Mass of the Holy Spirit celebrated by our bishop, that we have an active schedule of Masses, baptisms, and weddings in our chapel, that important gatherings begin and end with prayer, and that there are crucifixes and other signs of belief throughout our campus. These and related phenomena provide moments that turn our minds, hearts, and spirits to the larger religious mission that we serve.

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It Is The Spirit Who Gives Life

Spiritan MISSION AND GOALS
Our Spiritan mission began in Paris in 1703 when Claude Poullart Des Places gave up a life of nobility and privilege and, with a few contemporaries, formed the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Their focus was on service to the poor—among them chimney sweeps, the homeless boys of his age—as well as education for poor seminarians. The seminary he founded adopted exceptionally high academic standards for the education of priests. The Congregation spread its good works throughout the French colonies, particularly among Native Americans in Canada. In the later part of the eighteenth century, Spiritans were working in Baltimore and, for the first time, in Africa.

After the French Revolution, the Congregation waned. It was renewed, however, in the mid-nineteenth century by Francis Libermann, regarded as the second founder of the order. Libermann was the son of an Alsatian rabbi and a convert to Catholicism. He was a man of deep practical spirituality. He rededicated the Spiritans to missionary work in Africa and among the poor around the world.

Three aspects of Libermann’s leadership are of enduring significance for us. First, everywhere he sent missionaries, he asked them to bring education as an essential part of their efforts to lift up the poor. Second, he counseled his missionaries to respect the local cultures they encountered and to attempt to change nothing except what was in direct opposition to Christian faith. Finally, when faced with new opportunities or obstacles, he relied not on rules or precedents, but on “openness to the Spirit” in trying to read the needs of peoples and their times. These three themes—stress on education, cultural sensitivity, and spiritual openness—may well reflect Libermann’s Jewish heritage. In any event, they represent a rich and distinctive asset for the Spiritan Congregation and for Duquesne University.

Today Spiritans are working around the world in a wide variety of educational, health care, and humanitarian efforts. Wherever they are, their focus is on liberating people from poverty and injustice and working for greater respect for the integrity of God’s created environment.
SERVING GOD BY Serving STUDENTS
The Spiritans came to Pittsburgh at the request of the local bishop to found a Catholic college for the benefit of poor immigrants, Germans and Irish, working in the beginnings of the city’s major industries. Several previous attempts by other religious congregations had failed but the Spiritans succeeded. In later years, the University was in the lead in serving other populations at the margins who faced discrimination elsewhere—among them newer European immigrants, Jews, and African Americans. The first woman to be admitted to an American Catholic university was a Duquesne student. The history of our University is full of challenges and of periods of great peril to the institution. But from 1878 to this day, Spiritans and the six generations of lay people working with them have built and preserved this great institution, the only comprehensive Spiritan university in the world.

Des Places is memorialized here in the new residence hall we are constructing; Libermann in our new academic building by the crosstown highway. Two other Spiritans of note are named on campus. Our apartment building for seniors is named for Daniel Brottier who was a heroic French chaplain in World War I and the founder of a major orphanage outside Paris. The Spiritan student residence on Academic Walk is named for Jacques Laval who was a medical doctor and beloved missionary to the island nation of Mauritius.

The challenge for Duquesne University implied in even this briefest of histories of the Spiritans and of our own founding is how to remain faithful to the core mission insight of service to the poor. Because of our very success and that of the early generations
of students that we served, our student body is no longer poor. In order to sustain the highest standards in the classroom and in our research and to maintain a complex contemporary campus, our tuition is high. Compared with other Spiritan educational efforts in Africa and the Caribbean, for example, Duquesne University is a wealthy institution in service of the affluent.

This is a serious challenge and we must be forthright about it so that we never become complacent about our fundamental values. There are, however, several avenues for response. First, in the midst of American affluence there is clearly a rising impoverishment of the spirit—a deep relativism, skepticism, even nihilism about moral and spiritual values. Too often the only apparent value in our culture is an unreflective selfishness. This is not physical poverty but a real spiritual poverty. We have the resources to liberate our students and one another from this truly debilitating condition.

Second, although we are not a school for the poor in a worldwide sense, many of our students can only afford the cost of Duquesne because of financial aid. More than 85% of our students receive some kind of support. Last year, 9,500 of our students received institutionally funded financial aid totaling a record $72 million, representing 28% of the University’s operating budget. The number of students we have from lower income families is so large that we were recently recognized as being in the top ten universities for our contribution to the nation’s social mobility—just what we were founded to do. Moreover, the largest part of our current capital campaign is dedicated to the building of a scholarship endowment, the Legacy Fund, to provide perpetual support for needy students.

Third, the mission section of our current Strategic Plan is an attempt to address this issue by indirection. Though we may not be on the front lines in fighting poverty and injustice, we can make our own important contributions in ways that only a university can. In particular, our Strategic Plan calls for strengthening our links with Spiritan works around the world, making service to others a consistent theme, increasing our students’ awareness of poverty and injustice, highlighting these themes in faculty research, and focusing on our links to Africa and to the Hill District. All of these efforts make us partners in the struggle against poverty and for justice.

Duquesne University is not now the university envisioned in 1878, or the one realized in the 1920s or the 1960s. The path before us is unlike
any of those of the past. Discerning the application of our Spiritan mission to the future we face requires a constant “openness to the Spirit.” One of those applications—one for which we are uniquely suited—is the Center for Spiritan Studies, which publishes the journal *Spiritan Horizons,* and is digitizing major works in Spiritan history. Another is our annual Holy Spirit Lecture and Colloquium, in which leading theologians give original scholarly papers that are distributed around the world. Yet another is the spread of ethics throughout our curricula and the leadership we have assumed in community service and in service learning. All of these and so many other efforts across the University show the importance we all attach to living out our mission in meaningful ways.

This then is an overview of our mission and identity, the purpose that unites us so closely and that animates the important work we conduct. Thank you to every member of the university community for your contributions to our success as a Spiritan Catholic university. And for all of us, I thank God for the grace of being part of the mission of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit.