

**Remarks by Father James Shea
at the press conference announcing his appointment as president of The University of Mary
5 December 2008
Butler Hall – The Gary Tharaldson School of Business**

Thank you very much, Sister Nancy, for your gracious words. It's a great comfort to know that we'll be neighbors in a few short months. I look forward to working with you and the community of sisters in the years to come. And to Martin White, chairman of the Board of Trustees, know how grateful I am to you and to the entire board for your confidence in me and for all your support.

I'm deeply honored and humbled to have been chosen to serve as the sixth president of the University of Mary. My sense of wonder at the whole thing only deepens when I remember whom it is that I succeed. Do we know anybody so well loved, so beautiful in spirit, or so inspiring as Sister Thomas Welder? Sister, your living witness of servant leadership and Benedictine values these past 30 years have left a deep and precious imprint upon this university and, indeed, upon our whole region. I was three years old, Sister, when you assumed the presidency of Mary College, and since that day you've poured your very life into this community of learning. What a gift the Lord has given us in you!

My bishop, the Most Reverend Paul Zipfel, is with us this morning. I'm glad you're here, Bishop Zipfel, for it gives me the chance to thank you for your fatherly guidance to me through all of this and for your tremendous generosity in releasing me to the service of the University of Mary. I'm not your best priest, I know it, but there's not an abundance of us either. This magnanimous gesture is yet more evidence of your steadfast commitment to Catholic education and also of your hopes for the vibrant and dynamic fidelity of this university. You know I share that commitment and those hopes. And I pray that my service here may also benefit, in its own fashion, our people in the Diocese of Bismarck. Finally, Bishop Zipfel, I ask for the prayers and fraternal support of you and all my brother priests of the diocese as I embark on this new mission.

It's good to see Dr. Harold Miller, past president of the University and Chairman Emeritus of the Board. I'm also very honored by the presence of Dr. John Warford, the honorable mayor of Bismarck and his wife Jennifer, dear friends to me. Thanks for being here.

It would be ungrateful for me not to speak to you with warmth and gratitude of the people who are currently under my pastoral care, as it's certainly not to escape from them that I am accepting this position. On the contrary, I have deep affection for the parishioners of the Church of St. Joseph in Killdeer and the Church of St. Paul in Halliday, as well as for my students at Trinity High School in Dickinson. Indeed, I'd like to thank all of the people I've been privileged to serve in the course of my work thus far as a diocesan priest. I feel a strong tenderness especially for all the young women and men who came into my classroom and into my life when I was a teacher and the chaplain at St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck. I had loved education before I went to St. Mary's, but I had always been a student. Something

came alive in me at St. Mary's, and I became an educator. My life as a priest has been blessed beyond the telling of it.

Could I take just a moment to introduce to you my family? My dad & mom, Joseph and Patricia Shea, are with us this morning. And my brother Samuel & his wife Jennifer have come from Phoenix, braving the winter cold! My brother Thomas & his wife Adriann are both alumni of the University of Mary and live in Hazelton, my hometown, and have brought with them my two little nephews, Jacob & Aidan. My brother Neal is here all the way from Mandan ... he used to be shorter than me. And my little sister Maria started 7th grade this year down in Hazelton. She's excited because she thinks now she's going to get an automatic tuition discount. You have to study, Maria – academic excellence all the way! I also have two brothers who can't join us today. One of them, Captain Steven Shea, is a medical evacuation nurse at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, charged with caring for wounded soldiers as they are transported back to the States for treatment. The other, Robert, is a seminarian studying for the priesthood at the North American College in Rome. Of course, we're very proud of them both and we wish they could have been here today. I've been blessed with a wonderful family and a good, North Dakota upbringing. The only reason I didn't come to the University of Mary as an undergraduate was because this campus is exactly 38 miles from our dairy farm, and I had already contributed plenty to the world-wide milk supply. But now the milk cows are all sold, and so look: I've come to the University of Mary!

I've come to the University of Mary in a moment of Providence, for we've just begun the celebration of our 50th year. The University of Mary was founded and sponsored 50 years ago by the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, whose faith and courage continue to inspire the life of the university. It is a moment, then, for us to look behind us with gratitude ... and to look ahead of us with much, much hope for our future. As America's Leadership University, the University of Mary has a unique, enduring commitment to providing leadership development for every student. For the servant leader, thoughtful reflection and meaningful action go hand in hand. And there are everywhere to be seen signs of growth and progress:

- the new Tharaldson School of Business, in which we gather today;
- the growth in the number of students accepted into our Harold Schafer Leadership Center;
- the recent move to the NCAA Division II status in our athletics;
- and the encouraging growth in on-site and online programs for the working adult which, of course, places us at the service of the wider community.

Right now we're engaged in a planning process with the hope of announcing a new strategic plan for the University of Mary in 2009. Included among our goals:

- to make the University of Mary the premier university in leadership development;
- to increase our endowment substantially;
- and to continue the focus on making the University of Mary a great place to learn to lead.

With all that's happening now and with all the dreams we have for the future, it's a beautiful moment for us to pause and give thanks for the 50 good years the Lord has given to us since this university was born in the hearts of a band of faithful and courageous women. The Sisters established a college firmly rooted in its Christian, Catholic, and Benedictine tradition, core values which are central to student learning here at Mary.

I am deeply committed to the Christian, Catholic, and Benedictine identity of the University of Mary, and I'd like the chance to speak to you for a moment about how deeply these core values resonate within me:

The University of Mary is Christian. It's not simply that I'm a Catholic priest. I'm a convinced believer. I believe in Jesus Christ and in His saving promises. And so I look forward to working with anyone who calls Him Lord to do our part on this patch of prairie to build up a civilization of love, based on Gospel-values. The circumstances of our present time call urgently for collaboration and fellowship between faithful Catholics and other believing Christians. My brothers and sisters, we all need each other, and so I will work to deepen the Christian identity of this community.

The University of Mary is Catholic. I have dedicated all of my priesthood to the promotion of Catholic education, because I believe that the Catholic intellectual tradition is uniquely suited to a beautiful and comprehensive vision of total learning. The Catholic faith proposes an integrated spiritual and philosophical approach to the most enduring questions of human life. From the overture of the Benedictine wisdom tradition to the first great universities of the Middle Ages, from Cardinal Newman's *Idea of a University* and down to our present day, our rich cultural and theological heritage has proven fertile ground through the centuries for both the education of the mind and the formation of the soul. A central project of our tradition, the harmonious synthesis of Faith and Reason, is as urgent in our time as it ever was. And so institutions of learning born out of this heritage, institutions like our own, are best served by vigorous yet dynamic fidelity to their Catholic identity and the teachings of the Church. And as I said to the search committee, and to the Sisters' sponsorship group, and yesterday to the Board of Trustees before they hired me, Catholic identity in education is the motivating passion of my life. I am committed to the deepening and the invigoration of the Catholic identity of the University of Mary.

The University of Mary is Benedictine. Having grown up in western North Dakota, I understand the profound impact of the Benedictine presence in our region. It was the dream of the Sisters which got us started: their conviction that they were doing God's will, building a college here on the wind-swept prairie. And it is Benedictine values which animate us still, those precious values which rise up out of the monastic life of prayer and union with Almighty God: love, stability, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community. I pledge myself to be an ongoing disciple and advocate of these great hallmarks of Benedictine education. And my mind rests a bit this morning upon that great figure of St. Benedict, and I beg his prayers today for me and for all of us. For he appeared upon this earth at a time shaken

by violence, greed, widespread hopelessness, and the rumors of war. But by God's grace and the special wisdom which he had been given, Benedict and his spiritual children set about transforming the culture of the Western world – renewing the Church, preserving learning, fostering worship and prayer, and opening the eyes of many to the irresistible beauty of justice and peace. Yes, my heart is with the Benedictine values upon which the University of Mary was built.

I think, too, of one other figure, a person whose tremendous beauty and goodness have captured my imagination and filled my heart. I was speaking of her quietly last night with Sister Thomas. Sister told me about how the Sisters had received approval from Rome for a community of their own on the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation, when we remember how all time and history trembled as it awaited the word of a young girl. And so when they themselves wished to build a place for the education of the young, the Sisters placed their college under the patronage of Mary, the Mother of God. She is the great Advent figure, a woman of hope and trust, a servant leader who willingly said yes to the Word of God. I think of her kindness in my life, how she has always been here with me. I remember, as a young boy, speaking to her across a bank of flickering candles at the little Church of St. Paul in Hazelton, laying flowers from the pasture at her feet. And just some weeks back, I was in Lourdes, France, and knelt at her grotto there and placed this whole journey firmly in her hands. This is the University of Mary; she is our patroness and the most important of our many benefactors. And so I entrust my presidency to her care, too. May she lead us all into deeper friendship with her Son.

I'm thankful for all of your prayers and your support this day. May God bless you!