

Honoring Tradition, Embracing Innovation
Inauguration Address
by
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Thank you, John. Well, many of you know that I received my doctorate in music composition and that I am a classical guitarist, but I'm going to turn to the "classics" of a different variety for my first quote of the day that comes straight from those preeminent philosophers, yes, the Rolling Stones, who said, "You Can't Always Get What You Want." With all due respect to Mick Jagger and his mates, I would counter and say that being at Molloy for me and my family is just about everything we could want. I am overwhelmed with gratitude to the Board of Trustees, our faculty, staff, students, and administration, and to our alumni and friends who are with us today for this occasion. I am honored and humbled and give a special "thank you" to Bishop Barres for celebrating our mass and to Fr. Duffy and everyone at St. Agnes Cathedral for collaborating on this auspicious day. Thanks, also, to our student and faculty performers for the beautiful music, and my sincere gratitude to the wonderful teams of faculty, staff, administration and students that helped to organize this event. (If you don't mind, could we give them all a hand?)

I am also grateful for the presence of so many friends and colleagues who have traveled from near and far, including Drew Bogner, who masterfully led Molloy College as President for 20 years, and who is here with his wife Karen. Seeing the faces of my former colleagues and mentors, I am reminded of my indebtedness to the generosity and wisdom so many of you have shared with me over the years, and I also thank my colleagues in the Molloy community for your very kind greetings.

The journey that led me to standing here today has not been taken alone. I am blessed to have my wife, Dana, who on top of being a successful teacher, author, and artist in her own right, has been willing to go on this amazing ride with me. I thank you, dear, for your love and support, and send it right back to you. Dana and I have been blessed with three wonderful children who are here today, Luke, Noah, and Evalina. You inspire your mom and dad with your creativity, and you are the bright lights in our lives. I am also grateful that two of my three brothers are here today—thank you Marty and Matt for making the trip from Michigan along with

my niece and nephew, Allyssa and Jacob, and thanks to my brother-in law Brad Gribble and his wife, Thu Ngyen, for being here today from California. My mother, Mary Lou, I know is here with us in spirit. As the devout Catholic woman she was, I know she would be beaming with pride today in this beautiful cathedral.

Speaking of family, when I was a young boy, my world was shaped by experiences in a modest working-class neighborhood on the East Side of Detroit, where we left the doors open, played with our neighbor friends until mom called us for dinner, you know, like the old Prince Spaghetti commercial where an Italian mother screams out of her window, “Anthony, Anthony,” signaling it was time for dinner. This really happened. I am the oldest of four boys, and we were called in to dinner, including my brother Anthony (who couldn’t be here today), just like that commercial. We played pickup sports of all kinds, like baseball on a local diamond, basketball in a driveway with a net attached to a garage, ice hockey in winter, where we’d make home-made ice rinks in driveways and yards, and tackle football with no equipment, which by the way, is why I needed braces on my teeth in 7th grade—a story for another time. The music influence was huge in my home. Our Grandmother, Lena, had a beautiful singing voice, and she would love to sing while toiling every day making homemade Italian dishes, and our mom played the piano and loved to sing.

An indelible memory I have is sitting around the television watching the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show in 1964. That’s when I decided my career would be “rock star”—looked good to me. Things turned out slightly differently, but my passion for music led to places I never imagined, including composing and recording with musicians and orchestras around the world and eventually becoming a college music professor. We all learn that things often turn out differently than we anticipate, from career choices to the changes that are thrust upon us. I will tell you that College President wasn’t anywhere on my list of career choices back then!

While this day and this moment seem to be focused on a change of leadership, I know that this occasion is not about me. Instead, it is an inflection point for Molloy College, where we look back on our traditions and accomplishments, and envision our future, where we must embrace the changes occurring before our eyes requiring innovation to go beyond our tried-and-true methods.

During the past year, I have learned much about the traditions of Molloy, a College founded by the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Amityville, that began with a dream of establishing a Catholic College for women on Long Island. The Sisters acquired 25 acres of land in Rockville Centre in 1941,

and with the support of Bishop Thomas E. Molloy and Monsignor Peter Quealy, the Molloy Catholic College for Women opened its doors on September 12, 1955, with Mother Anselma Ruth, the first president of Molloy College welcoming a freshman class of 44 women.

The College has grown and transformed over the years, becoming coeducational in 1982, and eventually adding graduate and doctoral programs with teaching sites in Manhattan and Suffolk County. One thing that hasn't changed is the commitment to Molloy's values set by the Sisters of St. Dominic, serving as a solid foundation which sustains to this day.

The Dominican order founded in the year 1216 adopted as its motto "Veritas" or "Truth," which is at the core of our philosophy at Molloy College. Dominicans are known as outstanding scholars, epitomized by Thomas Aquinas, who is universally acclaimed as the patron Saint of teachers and students. In this rich tradition, it is humbling to be named as the 7th President of Molloy College. I was immediately attracted to Molloy's high-quality academic programs, nationally competitive retention and graduation rates, and to the Catholic tradition of the College in the Dominican Charism. I was also intrigued that I was becoming the 7th President, as the number seven is important in both the physical and spiritual world and has always held special meaning to me. For example, there are seven days in a week, there are seven wonders of the world, God created the world in seven days, and let's not forget the world's favorite secret agent, double-o-seven. There are Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, and oh yeah, my birthday happens to be on February 7th. So, it was fate that I'd be the 7th President.

I am cognizant of the responsibility I have inherited and realize that with all of Molloy's remarkable success to date, we are in a time of great change in the world, and we must change with it. To continue our trajectory, we must be innovative as we create a new future for the College and our students. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged higher education and the world in ways not seen in modern history. With that said, the truth is that the challenges were already afoot predating the pandemic. Never in my lifetime has the value of higher education been questioned as in recent years. Critics point to the high cost of college, mounting student debt, and even perceptions of political bias.

Standing here in this beautiful cathedral I am likely preaching to the choir, but I am here to say that the value of a college education has never been higher. It is our job to tell the truth about the incontrovertible benefits of a four-year degree to the individual, society, and the world. At a time when dubious social media feeds

would have you believe that the difference between fact and fiction is a mere matter of opinion, we need more people than ever who can think critically and act with empathy toward fellow human beings. These are the traits that college-educated individuals bring to our society.

Research from the U.S. Department of Labor and the Lumina Foundation show that the link between a four-year degree and higher wages is as strong as ever. But besides much better pay and better jobs, we must look beyond individual benefits to understand the full value of higher education. There are, in fact, extensive societal benefits that college-educated residents and citizens bring to their communities. For example, college graduates are 3.5 times less likely to be impoverished, five times less likely to be imprisoned, and have a life expectancy that is, incredibly, a decade longer than those with only a high school diploma.

So, what does all of this tell us? I believe it clearly shows that in addition to improving the lives of individuals, higher education is a public good. A better educated society allows individuals to flourish and to care for their communities, leading to better health care, better schools, and improved job opportunities.

And what is Molloy College's role in our community, region, and world? I believe that Molloy is uniquely positioned to educate students who are not only prepared for careers, but to embody that education with the core values that allow individuals to succeed and communities to flourish.

What the Sisters of St. Dominic started 66 years ago has taken root, and in retrospect, they were prescient in establishing not only a fine liberal arts college, but one focused on the professional practice areas of nursing and education. Those roots grew to now having one of the largest nursing schools in the country, and Molloy has long been known as a leading institution for teacher education.

Expanding with new degree areas and growing enrollment, Molloy restructured to match its breadth and size by forming four schools, including Arts and Sciences, Business, Education and Human Services, and Nursing and Health Sciences. We are now at a critical stage in building the future of Molloy College, and I would like to take a moment to outline a vision for the future.

First, we have a strong base from which to expand our reach. Health-related professions will remain in high demand for years to come, and Molloy's stellar reputation in this domain provides us opportunities to grow our programming in allied health and related fields. Our School of Business received its first

accreditation this past year, and its executive-based instructional model is an advantage that can help us to grow enrollment. Our School of Education and Human Services has expanded its reach with impactful programs such as Social Work and Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and Arts and Sciences is the backbone of a full education at Molloy, with majors ranging from biology to humanities and the performing arts.

With the academic programs at Molloy and at our current student population of over 4800 students, the College has evolved to fit the definition of a comprehensive university, rather than a small liberal arts college. We continue to work with the State of New York on the definition of university status, and we expect that Molloy will, in fact, become Molloy University in the near future. This title will better reflect who we have become as a community of scholars, artists, teachers, and practitioners. It is now our time to take the next steps in our evolution.

As we evolve, we must anticipate the needs of our society, building on the traditions that have brought us to where we are today. We can look around us to see the staggering and quick changes that have affected our world and upended those things we have taken for granted. The newspaper business and retail shopping are just two examples of industries that have been changed forever by digital technology, and electric vehicles are now the future of the auto industry.

What about higher education? All we need to do is look around us to see the writing on the wall. Declining birthrates are leading to fewer numbers of college-going students, and student debt, primarily from those who begin but do not complete degrees, are negatively affecting enrollments nationwide. We are seeing smaller liberal arts colleges closing for good, while others are merging with larger institutions. Not worried yet? Consider that Google is disrupting higher education by offering certificates in areas like data analytics and project management that take 6 months to complete and cost a fraction of a college degree. The push for “free college” is also complicating matters. Don’t be fooled by thinking that COVID-19 is the root cause of the challenges to higher ed. All the pandemic did was speed up the hardships for many colleges.

Another profound change is happening right here on Long Island, where our population is becoming rapidly more diverse. The 2020 Census showed that Black, Indigenous and people of color, identified by the acronym BIPOC, represent over 40 percent of Long Island’s population, up from 31 percent in 2010.

The largest increase is within the Hispanic population, who now account for 20 percent of Long Island’s population, up from 16 percent in 2010.

We have seen similar diversification of our student population at Molloy, where Black, Indigenous and people of color comprise 38 percent of our population, with the largest representation from the Hispanic community.

So, what does this mean for Molloy College? It is time for us to innovate and diversify in ways that build on our strengths, expanding our access to a wider and changing population through new academic programs and varied methods of course delivery models. We will continue to welcome students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds and faiths, united by our values rooted in the Dominican Order that include the pursuit of truth, integration of study and contemplation, seeing God in all things, compassion and justice, and engaged scholarship.

Our core strength has been and will continue to be our undergraduate in-person experience at Molloy, where our traditions as a Catholic college in the Dominican Charism uniquely positions us in our region to educate the whole student. It is now time to build on top of our core strengths to expand the way we teach and what we teach to serve the needs of our students and communities.

Our innovations will occur through curriculum development at all levels, including an expansion of post-graduate and graduate programs for adult learners. Census data shows that in New York there are 3.2 million people with some college, but no degree. With the right programs in place for degree completion, Molloy will be able to serve these individuals to complete their studies and be better positioned for successful careers.

Studies show that adults can expect to hold three careers and over 30 jobs across their lifetime, and that half of what students learn today will be outdated within five years. For individuals to “upskill” or to acquire new knowledge, today’s workforce requires short-format programs such as badges, bootcamps, and certificates. We are already developing these alternative credentials at Molloy, but with a new focus on deepening partnerships with employers to engage in workforce development that benefits both the employer and the employee.

So, we now move forward in honoring our tradition, while we embrace innovation at Molloy College. While I believe the reasons to attend Molloy are evident in the career success of our graduates, we are in a region abounding with good colleges and universities—why choose Molloy? This is where our Catholic, Dominican

heritage and living mission make the difference. I have been in higher education for 33 years, but I have never seen the kind of unifying belief in values expressed by the Four Pillars of Dominican Life, which are Study, Spirituality, Community, and Service. Regardless of their background or faith tradition, everyone in our Molloy community cares about the mission, and therefore, care about each other. This is the magic formula, fusing excellence in education with a set of values that develops the whole person spiritually and intellectually.

St. Dominic said it best when he met St. Francis of Assisi, saying: "You are my companion and must walk with me. For if we hold together no earthly power can withstand us."

My friends, I humbly ask you to walk with me as we create and innovate a new path forward for Molloy College, for if we do so together, we will forge a bright future for our students, community, and the world.

God bless and thank you for celebrating with us here today.