"If you could have whatever you wanted, how would Seattle U. be different in ten years?"

University Convocation September 13, 2006 Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

I love coming to the University Convocation because it feels to me like the moment when the new year really begins. There is much in the lives of each of us that leads up to this day: preparation and hard work. There is so much as a university that is done over the summer to prepare for the year, recruit and orient and advise students, renew the campus, develop calendars, plan, perhaps worry and be anxious, hope and look forward. But it is not till we convene, that we come together, all of us, in one place, see one another, say hello, hear the buzz, greet new members, perhaps laugh a bit, celebrate, take pride, and get strength from one another that the year really starts. We are in this together and we are not into it until we are together. So let's just be aware of one another, the power and energy that is in us at this gathering, and be grateful for one another and the great common project we share.

It is curious but perhaps providential that we are gathering this year in a tent at the center of our campus. We are in it because we no longer fit for welcoming new students and families in any other place on campus and no longer have a facility big enough to host the expanding, wonderful Costco Scholarship Breakfast that gains for us so many underrepresented students of color. The fire marshal would not let us have it on the tennis courts, so here we are in a tent on the University Green, which will probably become the University Mud Brown after this experiment. Surrounded by beautiful new buildings and fixtures of SU: Hunthausen Hall, the Japanese-American Remembrance Garden, the Jeanne Marie & Rhoady Lee Center for the Arts, the glorious Chapel of St Ignatius in its 10th year, the Rose Garden of the El Salvador Martyrs, the state-of-the-art Pigott Auditorium, and the new sparkling, dramatic Chihuly tower of glass... here we are in a tent!

What might that mean for you? For me, beyond being the big tent, the umbrella that brings us all together, with a touch of a circus atmosphere among us, it evokes temporariness, being in transition, being on the move, changing. A tent is not a permanent abode but a habitation for persons on a journey or a climb. That's who we are as the community of Seattle U., a university on the move, changing, going somewhere, in transition to something new, a university with a destination. Let me tell you what I hope and believe our future can be... as it were lie awake with you under this tent and talk together about dreams of our destination.

A poker game

I think you all know where the President's Dining Room is, tucked away at the very back of Casey Commons. It's a place where all too often I ask people for money. Some refer to it as being invited into the "closing room". No free lunch there! And not a lot of digestion for me either! Casual conversation over salad, "the how-are-things-going-for-you?" item on the menu. Then the entrée of "I-thought-you'd-like-to-know-what-Seattle-U-is-up-to-these-days" meat and potatoes, with a bit of a gathering drum roll in the background. And then—and you are trained to do this—before the dessert is served, the pitch "Well, the reason I wanted to talk with you is I'd like you to consider..." ending with a "so I'm asking you to make a gift of a million dollars to Seattle U.". This is followed by the toughest thing in the world to do... be silent, let the donor stew and squirm, not rescue him or her, while hoping that the promise of a sweet dessert will sweeten his or her response. The closing room and its menu!

A few times an invited guest has turned the tables on me, put me on the spot, asked me a question, and left me in an awkward silence, and not come to my rescue. It goes like this: pushing his chair back from the table, crossing his legs, leaning back, the person asks me, "So, Father, if you could have whatever you wanted, how would Seattle U. be different in ten years?" "So Father, if you could have whatever you want, how would Seattle U. be different in ten years?" The first time I was put on the spot with that question, that "OK-Father-please-stop-clearing-your-throat" question, that "Let's-lay-it-on-the-line-Father" question, I felt like the silence cost me about a million dollars of embarrassment, caught me off guard. I'm going to ask you to put that question to yourself in a moment. "If you could have whatever you wanted how would Seattle U. be different in ten years?" As I begin my tenth year as president, let me try to tell you how I would answer it.

The question is as if another person in a poker game has called me and I have to lay down my cards, show what cards I am holding in my hand. So here goes for me. But I want to know from you, and all of us want to know from one another, what cards we are holding. Let's make this tent, this temporary structure for a university community on the move, a big gambling casino, and let's show our cards how Seattle U. would be different in ten years if we could have whatever we wanted.

In order to make this real, and more focused, let's allow a hand of only five cards. And on each of these cards there is one thing we really want, not five laundry lists, or five grocery shopping slips, just five things that we really want that we are holding so that in laying them down we show how our university in the future would be different. (If you want to cheat, don't cheat on what you want, but go ahead and cheat on "in ten years". Maybe what you really want takes longer than that.) So here are my five cards.

Students from poverty

The first is a ten of hearts: on it is who the students would be. I'd want 9,200 students: 5,000 undergrads, 3,000 grads, and 1,200 Law. That's 1,000 more undergrads and 1,000 more grads, and 100 more Law students than now. I want these additional students because I want them to come from the economic classes of our society and from other countries especially poorer ones who are presently, in effect, shut out from our kind of education. As the head of the Jesuits recently said, "the cry of the poor should never be absent in our Jesuit schools". Those students need the opportunity of our kind of education, but even more so we need them. Nothing bothers me personally more than to know that I live in the top percent or two of the wellbeing of our world: my education, my opportunities, my access to art and beauty, my travel, my dwelling on the pinnacle of economic wellbeing—and not just as president in the closing room or the downtown club—but always. If I could have what I wanted, Seattle U. would welcome, support, educate, but most importantly learn from the poor not just around us, but among us as students. That would at last be the education of the whole person because the poor hold much of our wholeness as persons.

These students would be diverse, persons of color, from different backgrounds, diverse parts of our world, not because that's interesting or enriching, but because that is the truth of our shared humanity and we need to learn it, love it, work with it, enjoy it, find peace within it, allow it to educate all of us, show us how much we depend on the poor so that we are taught our truth and our future and the gift of God that is meant to be ours, all of ours.

I could say much more about what this first card—my ten of hearts—what I would want our students to be if I could have whatever I wanted, but, if I said all I wanted that would be breaking the rules of the game and making the card into a grocery list. So I'll leave it at this. I want to know what students you'd want. The change for me from the wonderful, diverse, bright, good, and even many-times economically struggling students we currently have is that we'd have 2,000 of the poor from here in America and from everywhere. Hey, the questioner did say "If you could have whatever you wanted" so that's it and I'll not be inhibited from showing you that card by figuring out how we'd afford that. That's for a different game, not the kind of poker we're playing under this tent.

A new campus axis

Now comes my jack of hearts—and you may think you know what else is in my hand. This card I flip down and show you face up is our campus. You exclaim "That's our campus, wow!" because there's a lot that's different, everywhere, its size, its patterns, its green spaces, what it looks like from the air, while walking between classes, or driving by. But what's on this card and catches your attention by their beauty and prominence, but more so by the students, staff and faculty flowing to and from them is our new library and new sports center, the new axis of the future Seattle U., not just new buildings alongside others but transforming the whole campus and

tying it together and expressing more clearly who we are by delineating our educational parameters.

If I could have whatever I wanted on this campus card it's the library and sports center that I'd want. Not so that we can keep up with the Jones (especially not Bob Jones University!) or the Gonzagas or the Santa Claras or the University of Washingtons, but so that we can keep up with ourselves. We have more of a coherent, collaborative, student-learning-centered way of education than any of those universities. It's because that's who we are and what we do so well that I want a great academic center, a great learning commons at the heart of our university; not one that just adds an addition onto our library, but rather so transforms it and puts it at the core of our purposes that it makes it, in effect, a new library. Students and alumni want an up-to-date library. I want to do them one better, campaigning not for the library of their imaginations but for the library of our dreams and of our learning priorities.

The other hub on this new axis you see on my jack of hearts, this what-I-most-want-for-the-campus card, is the new sports center. Again we are not out to show off—because we don't need to and that's not us—to keep up with the Taj Mahals other universities have built—because we have no intention of doing that. Rather we are keeping up with ourselves and who we are committed to be. If I take the first commitment of our mission statement "to educate the whole person", and the first of our values "we put the good of students first", then if I can have what I want, I want the sports center for the good of our students (as well as for ourselves as the animators of this university) in our mind, spirit, and body reality. I want it to be so central to us and so utilized that it is no longer thought of as being on the edge or off the edge of campus but as the eastern hub, the fourth tent pole, the anchor that completes and defines who we are and our values.

Our campus is embraced on its north-south axis by the Chapel as the sacred space of our spirit and the Student Center as the hearth of our community. What we need is to anchor our west-east axis in the new library as the academic heart of our learning and the sports center as the home of our enjoyment. It's like a sign of the cross over Seattle University: Library... Sports Center... Chapel... Student Center; learning... enjoyment... spirit... community. This campus card will be a great blessing, if we can but play it... and we can.

A platform for programs

In response to my bluff being called by that question, "Father, if you could have whatever you wanted, how would Seattle U. be different in ten years?"—and I hope you are thinking what your cards would be—my third card is the programs of the Seattle U. of the future. But which ones? What's on this program card?

What I realize is that 80% of the very best educational programs we have are not ones we so much thought up ahead of time and planned for. Our best programs came from having a strong sense of mission together with a flexibility, and from these responding to opportunities that

presented themselves to us. My predecessor, Fr. Sullivan, was legendary for this. We didn't so much plan a Law School, we responded to an opportunity for one that presented itself to us. So also it was with an eleven-faith-community ecumenical School of Theology and Ministry. They came to us asking if we could and we were ready. The regionally powerful and influential Masters of Not-for-Profit Leadership program was again a nimble, flexible, we-can-do-it, it-fits-who-we-are, a leaping-at-the-chance response to an offer. So now is the Fostering Scholars Program that brings seven former foster-care students to us this fall with full financing and wrap-around services and gives them a home, as was the highly-impactful Costco Scholars (more than 250 of them now): we didn't plan them but we leapt at the chance to have them. The Nursing expansion and its Clinical Performance Laboratory, the promising Master in Sports Management and Leadership, and many more instances like this in all the schools and colleges and in student development are some of the very best programs we have, that we are most proud of, that give us most life. We did not think them up. We responded nimbly, quickly, collaboratively, flexibly, strongly to an opportunity that we knew was us because we know who we are, know our mission, and know we are in service to the needs of the community.

So what I would ask for in this program card—the queen of hearts by the way, in case you were guessing—is not a special program but a platform for programs. Just think what we could do, what we could become, how alive and vital we could be, how truly a university of the Northwest and of the world, if we had a platform for programs, a structure with people and resources, within the university and in all its parts that could creatively respond to what we are invited to be because of who we are. Too often all of us are so stretched and tied down by what we are doing that we can't consider, collaborate around, and create the programs our context challenges us to have. No other university in our Puget Sound region, our state, or in the Northwest is as poised and as flexible as connected and unencumbered as we are, to respond to new challenges. The word is out about what Seattle U. is and the invitations are coming. For this we need to be animated by and clear-sighted about our mission, have creative champions among us and a supportive, incubative structure, what I am calling a platform for programs. Give us this queen of hearts and we can continue to transform Seattle U. but in ways now unimaginable.

Seattle U. in the West Coast Conference of NCAA D-I

The king of hearts is one that I have never spoken of, especially in public, because of all of the cautions and considerations that must go with it. But this is a day not to say "This is what we are going to do", but rather "if you could have whatever you wanted" what would you do. So please understand this in that context.

The king of hearts for me is that Seattle University would become a member of the West Coast Athletic Conference. We would rejoin and be back together with, would be associated with, known together with, present in their cities and they here in Seattle with is Gonzaga, the University of Portland, the University of San Francisco, Santa Clara, St. Mary's, Loyola Marymount, Pepperdine, and the University of San Diego. We would be with them in basketball, which was and can be our tradition, but also in soccer where we can already compete,

in volleyball, baseball, and across the board. That is D-I but what we most want is to be with those other quality universities, those peers of ours. This is not a matter of academics vs. sports, it is about the very reputation and educational quality of our university.

As the person in the university I most trust for sound advice has said, "Because of the trajectory of Seattle University, going D-I is not a question of if but when". Embedded in his view is the essential reason for why I would want this king of hearts: for institutional reasons, because of the status of the university, because of the pride we take in ourselves, because of the reputation we deserve, and the kind and quality of university we should be associated with in our aspirations, in the view of our alumni and the public, and in the estimation of students considering us for their university education. We are a very different university from the one we were twenty-five years ago and the slope of the graph of our development, our trajectory, points toward being a very different university in a decade.

Now there is a card I'm not sure you know I held in my hand of what I would want if I could have whatever I wanted! The rules of the game allow me to show it. In regard to the second half of the question of my man across the table in "the closing room" asking, "How would Seattle U. be different in ten years?" I believe that this king of hearts could allow all of us to say we are "the premiere independent university of the Northwest" without a catch in our throats. Premiere Jesuit universities of major cities—because of their unquestionably premiere academic and student experience programs—compete athletically with and are proud to be associated with other premiere universities. We'd be different all right, more publicly known for who we know ourselves to be.

Jesuit in a new way

There is a final card to be played and the questioner leaning back and sizing me up wonders whether or not I have it. I do. The ace of hearts, "if I could have whatever I wanted", is that we would be "Jesuit in a new way" and that this would make us quite different.

Bear with me on this one because it probably is my greatest desire, is the most personal one, and takes a bit of explaining. Seattle U. already is, has been for many years, growingly is genuinely "Jesuit" in its defining character. We are in fact, more Jesuit than most Jesuit universities in terms of how we rally around this dynamic purpose, know it, promote it, rejoice in it, and trace it out in demanding intellectual programs, in spirituality and faith, in multi-faith dialogue, in service and justice, in respect for and care of students, in a positive engagement with our culture and other cultures, in a clear choice for diversity for both justice and educational purposes, in solidarity and with service of the poor, in global citizenship and companionship, in holding up Jesus Christ as an exemplar of humanity, and in lived fellowship in the Catholic faith-community that approves and supports this Jesuit tradition and this university.

We are genuinely Jesuit as a university. We have worked at it more than most for decades. There is more power in this animating strength of ours than in any other reality of ours. So

we've got the opportunity—as some don't—to make the commitment to evolve in our Jesuit dynamism, to take the chance and take the steps to become "Jesuit in a new way", not to be afraid of but to welcome the next stage or era of how Seattle U. will be Jesuit.

Essentially it means—here's where the "if I could have whatever I wanted" part comes in—that a much wider group of you as colleagues, hundreds more, take up, learn about, refashion for yourselves, make fresh, apply, model to students, make your own, and lead the university into a much more powerful way of living our defining Jesuit character. The Jesuits commit themselves to be here and to be with you and to embody in their vows, prayer, community life, and work this defining character. But it's now primarily your turn to lead. It will be Jesuit in a new way because you will be the new Jesuit leaders and because you will bring to it new insight and creativity that will transform what "being Jesuit" will come to mean and how it will impact our students for life from how it impacts your life.

This is the ace of hearts, the card that with the others makes a royal flush, for it brings together and explains why we would seek 2,100 students who experience poverty, why we are campaigning for a campus with a west-east axis of a library for learning and a sports center for enjoyment, why we need a platform for educational programs that responds to opportunities for service, and why this Jesuit university—because it is so Jesuit—should take its place among other premiere universities in the West Coast Conference. I saved the ace for last even though it is first and highest in value in my desires, in order to put in place at the end the missing piece that alone gives the picture coherence and shows how, indeed, Seattle U. would be different in 10 years".

I've shown you my five cards. Each of you has five blank ones at your table. I ask you to write on each card one of the five things if you could have whatever you wanted that would make Seattle U. different in 10 years. I'm going to ask you, as it were, to play poker at your table by going around and each person laying down one card at a go-around. When you are finished the house wants all those cards so that we can know and can let you know how our deck is stacked for the future.

But before you do that: two things. First, some steps for this year in how to get to our future; and secondly, an amazing anniversary today that gives us great hope for that future.

This year

You'll see in the second half of this morning's program what that new library and new sports center will be like. They represent together the greatest financial investment the university has ever made. They are the focus—the be-all-and-end-all of the campaign for this year and beyond. I need you to know these projects, to imagine what kind of university they will make possible. I need your support, your excitement, your buzz, your belief, your telling others, your personal help and contribution, your prayers, your patience.

They are not the only things we need. New science labs are a sine qua non of our educational success. It is for this reason that the Trustees have approved and we have set aside \$5 million toward addressing the need for science labs now and in the shorter term till we can get a new campaign with science lab building as a central piece. We will, also, continue to work on classroom and office space and on new student residences on an ongoing basis.

Two of our great strengths are our diversity and our Jesuit quality. We propose two initiatives this year on these. Beginning this fall we are entering a year-long process on how we can engage the diversity we are blessed with so that it makes a real difference in the experience of students and the outcomes of their learning and so that the climate and culture of our university, especially among us as faculty and staff, is a respecting, welcoming, learning from, and celebrating of our diversity. This is a must-do for this year.

The second initiative will begin in January and will be a probing by all parts and persons of the university of how we can evolve in our Jesuit character and become Jesuit in a new way. The results of this process will feed into our Mission Day on this theme in late-April. We've got enough on our plate right now, but come January and leading to April, it's time to see how we can take our Jesuitness a step forward. I'll present a two-page state-of-the-question paper for the university's discussion of this issue.

The university has also received a go-ahead from the Trustees to enter into an eight-month fact-finding study of all the aspects and consequences as we consider whether or not we should begin a formal process of exploring the West coast Conference in NCAA Division I status if the Trustees decide in May that this direction should formally be explored. A blue-ribbon committee chaired by John Eshelman and Rob Kelly will lead this process and will consult widely with the university about it.

The coincidence of an anniversary

Finally, today marks an amazing coincidence in an anniversary of the university as we look at our future. I only stumbled on this by doing some research while preparing this talk. Here's how it goes.

We all know that Seattle College was founded in 1891, 115 years ago, and that it's first permanent building on this Broadway site, what we call the Garrand Building after one of our Jesuit founders, went up in 1894. (The only other building on the forested site was a Women's Christian Temperance Union meeting house!) Garrand was a college, a high school, a church, and a Jesuit community all in one. The first forty years of our history were rough ones, especially for the college division. A fire in Garrand that gutted the top floors, the First World War and the Great Depression forced us to move over to the other end of Capitol Hill where Seattle Prep is now.

But in 1931 five Jesuits: Frs. McGoldrick, Nichols, Peronteau, Reidy, and Prange came back to the abandoned, dilapidated Garrand Building to re-establish Seattle College on Broadway. In the previous forty years of its history the college had given less than a total of 40 bachelor degrees. With \$15,000 to repair Garrand, though leaving the top floor still gutted, the college was ready to open in the fall of 1931 and trumpeted the fact that it was back by affixing huge black letters along the top of the building, emblazoned "SEATTLE COLLEGE". Tuition was set at \$25 a quarter, and a whopping, record enrollment at 46 students—31 of them freshmen—showed up. Fr. McGoldrick fooled the Archbishop, the Jesuit Provincial, and Rome by beginning that same fall of 1931 a non-matriculated "evening extension school" that—shame of all shames—had men and women in the same classrooms, in "mixed classes" that had never been heard of in Jesuit or Catholic colleges. He told them it was really rather harmless and not so daring an innovation because it was only an "evening school". What he did not tell them was that the "evening" classes began at noon. Thus began Jesuit co-education, not only here but anywhere.

So on a certain day—and it happened to be September 13, 1931, exactly 75 years ago today and probably at this very hour—Monsignor Ryan presided over the rededication of Seattle College, back home on our site, within a stone's throw of this tent. Wouldn't those five Jesuits be shocked, puzzled, befuddled, thinking they were sleep walking or experiencing some far-off planet in a science-fiction novel—except for the known reality of that one Garrand Building still standing—if they could see you the faculty and staff, the Jesuits of today, the campus, the Chapel and the Chihuly, and our 7,100 students. Seventy-five years ago today as they rededicated our school they could not have imagined the future of the Seattle U. that we live and know. Neither can we imagine our future, but in continuity with and gratitude for them and for all who came after them in our dynamic tradition, we can tell one another today what we really want if we could have whatever we wanted, and can imagine how this would make Seattle U. different. Let us rededicate ourselves to our mission and our future 75 years after that day of rededication.