

The World Comes to Seattle University

University Convocation
September 17, 2008
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Welcome to a brand new year, our academic year 2008-2009. Here we are together again: the community of professional, committed persons who make happen our educational mission. We are here before the students come—except for our law students who are already hard at it—in order to welcome one another, enjoy our companionship, greet each other after the summer, get our bearings on the year, and encourage and support one another in our common endeavor. It is good to be together this day, under this tent, with these colleagues, waking anew to our shared educational mission.

In saying what I am next going to say I am speaking to myself as much as to you. I invite us to see this year in a fresh way, with new eyes, to feel it as if for the first time. This is my twelfth convocation as president, and for most of you it is something you have done often, whether in Pigott, or in Connolly, or under a tent. Those of you for whom this is the first convocation, you not only join us but you help us see in a fresh, first-time way what we are about, who our students are, what our mission and opportunity are, and who we are in the quality of our collegueship and community. I need that; we need that.

We need new eyes, fresh feelings, wide open awareness, alert hopefulness. Can we be surprised by who our 7600 students are today, amazed at the campus we inhabit, thankful for a great and clear educational mission, happy in the community of colleagues we are part of? I invite all of us to take just a moment of quiet within ourselves and among us to be in touch with hearts and minds and spirits unclouded by habit, to see this new year in a grateful, bright, clear, fresh way.

Let me suggest what the year might be about. Every year has its character, has a way in which it coheres, comes together, revolves around a theme, will be remembered for. What might this year be about? God alone really knows, but a president can at least guess and suggest.

I am convinced this is the year the world will come home to Seattle University. That may sound strange to say, for isn't the world already and always here? I believe the world will be new to us this year, will reframe and stretch our mission. Our mission statement starts with the words, "Seattle University is dedicated to..." and ends with the word "world" as in "leaders for a just and humane world". It goes from "Seattle University" to "world". Our mission, our dedication stretches from who we are to what difference this makes to the "world". The world frames our mission. This year I believe the world will come home to Seattle U. in a new way and will stretch us and our mission. A fresh world will refresh our mission.

Before delineating how the new year will be marked by a new sense of the world, let us call to mind that we and our students come to this year with a rich experience of the world from the recent Beijing Olympics. The image from the opening ceremonies of the huge, blue globe of the world illuminated from within and danced upon by people of the whole world is freshly with us and will long be with us. It was an Olympics of what Fareed Zakaria in his remarkable book, The Post-American World, calls “the rise of the rest”, a world not dominated by us, but one in which many nations come forward confidently. It showed us a world in which we as Americans need to learn a new role of partnership as the rest rise and require a multi-polar modernity. The Olympics suggests the context for the academic year. How will it be the year the world comes to Seattle U.?

First of all, think about this imminent, amazing, historic presidential election, which is engaging our students more than any election in history. It is getting hold of hopes, ideals, the possibility of newness, a breaking through of barriers in our students, in young persons, and in ourselves. Isn't it largely about the choice of the place of America in the world and about the welcoming of the world into America? There is a once-in-a-lifetime educational opportunity for us as a university with our world-reaching mission in these immediate weeks of the new year. Something new is possible in this time for us educationally as the world comes to Seattle U. in this election in which we not only can register all students but they can register the world in a new way, take account of it, debate it, make it real. Hats off to Fr. Jack Bentz and his Deus Ex Macchina drama group who will seek to involve and register students and community members through their play “The Unregistered; a 2008 Election Cabaret”, October 2, 3, and 4, in the Lee Center, based on interviews with people between Jefferson and Madison and featuring actors of this same population. The election is a very fresh educational opportunity for us as educators, one in which we need to teach in a new way and also listen and learn from our students in a new way. This year the world comes to Seattle U. first of all in the elections.

Secondly, amazingly, providentially, immediately beyond November 4th the world comes to Seattle U. in an exceptional, once-in-a-decade way. This year on the evening of November 18th at Benaroya Hall and in a special Mission Day here on campus on November 19th we will meet three of the worlds' leading faith-based humanitarians. They come from India, Nicaragua, and Burundi. Seattle U. is bringing them here to bestow the Opus prizes of \$1,000,000, \$100,000, and \$100,000. They don't yet know who will receive which prize. That will be revealed on the evening of November 18th. Our students and faculty have gone to where these dedicated people work, to learn about them, to know the people they serve. We'll welcome them to our campus, see videos specially made for this occasion to take us to their worlds, and we'll hear from, learn from, and dialogue with them. Thus it just so happens that two weeks after the historic presidential election, the world will come to us in an unparalleled, new, compelling way. What is the educational opportunity in this remarkable coincidence, for our students but also for us and for how we educate? I believe this special Opus prize set of events will nail the year as the year the world comes to Seattle U.

I hasten to add a third notable feature of the year. This year the year-long salon – coordinated by Dr. Theresa Earenfight—is on “Engaging Worlds: Crossing Borders”. The kick off, common book for the new students is called, Crossing Into America: the New Literature of Immigration. How about that for perfect! Not only about the world crossing into America, but also about the world crossing into our campus and we crossing into it. It is the perfect thematic for this world-fresh year. If you haven’t had a chance, read the book because it is a couple dozen stories of peoples of the world envisioning coming to America, leaving their communities, becoming strangers among us, forming new communities here, changing us, being changed. I know from a first-hand immersion experience from this past summer that many immigrant communities are also our neighbors and press close to our campus: Somalis, Eritreans, Vietnamese, Latinos, Ukrainians, and many others. Let’s open our eyes this year to the world that has crossed into America and presses close to us in friendship, in cultural richness, and in need. Can we cross into their world, their America?

Finally and most importantly this year will, I suggest, be the year the world comes to Seattle U. in a more challenging, educational way because from among the key strategic directions we developed last year we now have a clear challenge for how global education can set the pace, encompass, and will transform all we do as a university.

A friend who is committed to who we are as a Jesuit university, read the report on the strategic direction of global education and its call for a comprehensive, institutional commitment to it. He thought it good, though a bit tame! He came to me to say he will give us at least a million dollars—and knows who to turn to to get others to join in this with him—if we are really serious about making global education a unique, unifying, fully Jesuit, transformative direction of our university. This is the year to take up that invitation and challenge. (A couple of years ago I talked at a convocation about playing poker. Well someone has just called my bluff!)

How will global education emerge within the academic strategic planning Dr. Crawford will be leading this year? How will our kind of global education be clearly informed and illuminated from within—as was that Beijing Olympics globe—by our Catholic character? How will formation for leadership and assisting students in the discernment of their life vocations be fully relevant to the global reality where their leadership needs to be learned and will be exercised? If the strategic directions our task forces so well developed last year and which our trustees approved concerning academic excellence, global education, Catholic character, and formation for leadership are the ship of our voyage, I am suggesting that comprehensive, transforming global education can be the prow of the ship. If this is, as I foresee it, the year when the world comes to Seattle U. as never before, then this is the year to make real that commitment to global education.

Clearly, I am very excited about what this “Year of the World” will mean for us, but there are many other things that excite me about the year. Let me name some of them.

The first interesting and important aspect of the year is the subject we are addressing in the second half of this morning's convocation: sustainability. Today we are revealing to you measures we can all take as a university to make our campus, our use of it, our ways of transportation to and from the campus much more environmentally sustainable. We are proud that we win more awards for sustainability than any other university in the state, but we can do more to do our part to face a world-wide critical challenge, we can set the pace for others, and we can make our campus an educational example for our students' future lives and choices. We welcome this challenge and opportunity.

The next key aspect of the year has to do with the much talked about freshmen class enrollment. The way I see it is the following. Like a couple who were expecting, we too were expecting and planning on a class of 815 new freshmen. But then on May 1st the doctor said to us, "I've got news for you, you're having twins!" Yes, rather than the 815 we were counting on, we got word that it will be 920 new freshmen! Great news! So we've had to buy a double stroller, expand everything, do everything we possibly can to be ready for more students than we expected. Twins happen. Larger than expected enrollments happen. Our thanks to all the deans, department chairs, faculty, registrar and schedulers, student development and campus ministry and facility personnel, and above all to the heroic Residential Life staff under Romando Nash for making all of the needed accommodations. And congratulations to all of us for being such a sought-after university on undergrad, grad and law levels. You might say this is a different sense in which the "world" is coming to campus! It does show the need, not for family planning, but for better enrollment planning, short term and long term, and that too will be a major goal for the year as part of the academic strategic plan.

Just to keep things really interesting, this is also the year when we will do the university-wide self-study for the 10-year accreditation review. What an opportunity this can be! We are a very different university from ten years ago in clarity of mission, new programs, university-wide assessment of learning and developmental outcomes, new faculty, leaders, personnel, scope and size and ambition. We can turn this self-study into the most solid, objective, data-informed basis of who we are and where we are going, and yes, and where we fall short and need to improve. What I want all of us to ask is: "What is it we want to learn from this once-in-a-decade self-study?" Huge thanks from all of us to the self-study steering committee headed by Dr. Bob Dullea. Let's all work together on this; it can be the platform for our future.

This year will also be the last year of the six year campaign for Seattle University called "For the Difference We Make". This past year we raised \$38 million on top of \$40 million the previous year. We are cruising at \$147 million toward our new goal of \$160 million. Guess what: people like us, they believe in us, they support us! We owe gratitude and admiration to everyone in University Advancement, inspired by Mary Kay McFadden's leadership, and just as much we owe appreciation to the deans of all the colleges and schools, the people who work in the schools and colleges with fundraising and with alumni, and to our first-rate communications, marketing, and publication professionals.

One big consequence of the successful campaign is that during spring break we will shut down and empty the Library—relocate it to the former Qwest building, kitty corner to Connolly, till the opening of school in 2010—and get about the \$55 million, 17-month construction which will yield the spectacular McGoldrick Learning Commons and Lemieux Library. Another consequence of the successful campaign is that this year we will raise the money for a much-needed new fitness center and get about its construction on the south end of Connolly. With all that's going on we will need to stay fit! No group on campus is so challenged and doing such a great job as the people of facilities as they try to keep up with us and as they try to get ahead of us by developing this year the Major Institution Master Plan which will guide our development for the next 15 years. Thanks for waking up at night with worry so that the rest of us can sleep better.

This year too we will lay the foundation for the long-term inclusive and integrated Catholic character of the university by raising a \$10 million endowment for supporting faculty fellowships, leadership in mission opportunities, symposia and lecture series, and immersion experiences.

We'll start the New Year of 2009 by playing our very first D-I men's basketball home game at Key Arena on New Year's Day itself, on our future home court, against Loyola Marymount University. That will be the springboard for a well-planned and exciting future for all sports of the Redhawks. Please join me for that game and in supporting all of our teams in this first year of reclassification.

Everything that I have said about what this year shapes up to be depends from the first and in the end on who we are and how we work together as the community of university colleagues. We believe Seattle University can and should be in the regional annual listings of "Great Places to Work". We have many of the pieces of that in place, but we lack others. This year we will review all aspects of all faculty and staff working conditions in order to create the environment that would justify being truly "A Great Place to Work". Last spring we held a special Provost's Convocation for all faculty on the subject of "The Catholic Character of Seattle University's Academic Mission". This spring I am pleased to announce I will convene a special convocation for all staff on creating a working environment that supports our mission.

If I might look beyond this year to this University Convocation day next September—as a way of indicating other critical developments of the current year—I would expect at that time to:

- introduce the new Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences;
- introduce both the new Vice President for Mission and Ministry and the new Director of Campus Ministry;
- have Dr. Crawford outline to you the new academic strategic plan he pioneered and elicited with its implications for such things as enrollment, core curriculum, semesters or quarters, criteria for new degree programs, investment in faculty scholarship, etc.;

- make known how we spent most wisely and most promisingly the \$500,000 we set aside in this year's budget to move ahead on what is most critical and important in our new strategic directions;
- highlight how we are on track with implementing diversity, technology, sustainability, and Division I strategic plans;
- and celebrate with you the successful conclusion of our capital campaign while regaling you with a few stories from a 10-week sabbatical I plan on taking next summer.

Speaking of stories let me end with one from this summer.

You may recall how I told you last September that I had flunked "Child Behavior Modification" with the piercing wail of my grandniece whom I severely scolded at my sister's summer home last August in New Hampshire. I was determined to do better this August, to be "great uncle sweetness and reasonableness". It got off to an unpromising start when I landed in Manchester, New Hampshire, and called my sister to say I'd be at the lake in an hour, only to hear her say excitedly to me, "Hurry, Steve, we've built a puppet theatre, are having the first production for the children right after dinner of "The Three Little Pigs" and you have the part of The Big Bad Wolf! Thanks, sister, that ought to reinforce my image with them. So, my total lines in the puppet show were "Little piggy, little piggy, let me come in!" and when turned down by sister Sarah who assigned to herself the role of the cute little pigs said, "Then I will huff and I will puff and I will blow your house down!" That was it, except to drop The Big Bad Wolf down the chimney of the unblowable brick house only to land in the pot of boiling water! My little grandniece, whom I had yelled at last summer, clapped, I thought, a bit too vigorously at that!

But this year I did a total presidential schmooze on three grandnieces and nephews for two full weeks, showing up on the dot of 5:00 each evening to pour myself a bourbon and coke and to make crackers with cream cheese and jam for each of the kids, standing in chilly water to admire little Maria swim, being Nate's gopher to fetch his rocket as he shot it into the woods, and bestowing gifts of kaleidoscopes on each of them when I left. In the end I got a couple of hugs and kisses and a "thanks, Uncle Teve"—I could have gone for "That's Great Uncle Teve to you", but that was pushing my luck too far in two weeks since being cast as The Big Bad Wolf! So maybe, just maybe, this is an indication of how "Uncle Teve" will be this year.

In any case, I'm coming into this year hoping with all of you to see it with new eyes, to feel it fresh, to welcome the world to Seattle U., and above all to enjoy it gratefully with our students and even more so with you, my colleagues.