Approaching the Third Millennium:
Making a Difference in the Local and Global Community

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Keynote

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Because intention is often conveyed by a speaker's tone, inflection, and body language, I ask the reader to keep in mind that this presentation was prepared as a speech and, therefore, was intended to be heard, not to be read.

We gather this evening conscious that we share a common congregational tradition, heritage, and history as well as a common commitment to the challenges and ideals inherent to higher education at the close of the second millennium. We gather this evening conscious that the world in which we find ourselves is in need of specific solutions to particular problems that are expressions of a general aimlessness. We gather this evening conscious that who we are, what we do, and how we do it can and will change not only the local setting in which we minister, but the global context within which we labor.

We gather this weekend to speak of mission; mission as it is lived by the founding congregation and as it is articulated in the missions of our respective colleges.

In John 17, Jesus clearly explains his mission. Simply, he indicates that he has come to draw all things together in God, "that all may be one as you, Father, in me, and I in you. I pray that they may be one in us." (John 17:21) The mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph flows from this very real and energizing mission of Jesus. Rooted in the Gospel of John, the Sisters of St. Joseph "live and work so that all people may be united with God and one another."

This union does not come cheaply. Indeed, the charism, the special gift of the sisters of St. Joseph, links unity with reconciliation in recognition of the fact that before we can become one with God and one another, we must be prepared to confront and engage our differences. Of course true union does not obliterate differences, on the contrary, as the great twentieth

century prophet Teilhard de Chardin states clearly, true union differentiates the elements it unifies. This process of unity and differentiation, which is anything but easy, is one of the greatest needs of our world today.

Study of Consortium College

Given the context of our times, it is important that we, as members of the Sisters of St. Joseph College Consortium, explore our response to the times in which we find ourselves. For if we choose not to shape these times, they shall surely shape us.

In her study of the Consortium Colleges, Sister Kathryn Miller identified five characteristics all of us share in common, these include: Hospitality and a caring community, concern for all without distinction, addressing the needs of times, striving for excellence in all endeavors, making a difference in the local and world community. I believe the first four characteristics fit well under the last one which is the topic of this conference: making a difference in the local and world community. Mindful of the over arching context of this weekend's theme, I would like to explore the other four characteristics under the aegis of the fifth because I believe that each of the first four characteristics is integral and inseparable from our goal to make a difference in the local and world community.

Making a Difference in the Local and World Community

1. Hospitality and Caring Community – *We are created to be in relationship.*

The early Sisters of St. Joseph were models of hospitality who welcomed and ministered to orphans, widows, the homeless, catholic and protestant alike. During the French Revolution they freely and with great danger to themselves offered refuge to priests faithful to Rome and to the Holy Father. In turn, it was often they who had to accept the hospitality of others when they were forced to flee from their convents in order to avoid being apprended by the revolutionaries. The graciousness they experienced from their families and friends, they gladly showed to others. Hospitality builds and maintains relationships. From our history it is easy to see that relationships were of central importance to the Sisters of Jōseph.

As we begin this evening, it will be helpful if we understand "relationships" in a universal context.

In their efforts to explain the origin of the universe, physicists take us back in time approximately fifteen billion years when nothing existed but what scientists call a quantum vacuum. A quantum vacuum has no real existence -- it is, in fact, total non-existence, nothingness. Yet, out of this quantum vacuum an explosion of energy catapulted the universe into its first gropings towards evolutionary fullness. From nothingness, seemingly out of nowhere, came the potential for an almost infinite variety of expressions and formations of being.

Interestingly, the subatomic particles -- hadrons, mesons, photons, pions, neutrons, protons,. electrons -- exhibit an undeniable interconnectedness demonstrated by a constant drive towards the formation of relationships with other dynamic energies. In fact, these particles can be defined and located only in relationship to each other and to the invisible fields from which they emerge.[1] "In the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting; to many physicists, they are all there is to reality."[2]

Current scientific research concludes that, from the inception of the cosmos, relationship was inherently and intrinsically integral to the process of evolution, to the rise of an ordered cosmos, the growth of life, and the advent of thought.

In the world of Newtonian Physics reality was dissected and defined according to its disparate parts. Scientists believed that if they were able to understand the workings of the individual part, they would be able to understand the workings of the whole. Thus, the goal of Newtonian physics was to understand and define the building blocks of matter and from them to construct what turned out to be a piecemeal definition of the universe.[3] Thus, during the modern period, we lost sight of relationships as the part was explored separately from the whole.

Robert J. Starratt observes that this segmentation of the world has fractured our vision and fragmented our perception making it impossible to perceive the deep interconnectedness inherent to the universe. Modernism promoted an unhealthy objectivism that distanced us from the world and

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[1]Margaret Wheately, *Leadership and the New Science* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1992, 1994), 70. The scientific information contained throughout this presentation is taken this work.

[2]Ibid., 32.

[3]Ibid., 8-9.

produced a superior attitude towards nature and mother earth. The world and its resources became something to be used for our self-satisfaction and fulfillment. Mystery evaporated. Soul and spirit vanished. Modernity elevated the individual and the individual's accomplishments at the expense of community and the common good.[4]
In short, Starratt laments that

> The notion of the human person disappeared into component systems of drives, microbes and cells, neural reactions, a unit of purchasing power, a unit of production, a unit of taxable income, an assemblage of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen and small amounts of other minerals.[5]

Therefore, in reaction, the postmodernist critique calls for a much needed balance, for an emphasis on the person and a focus on community.[6] This emphasis and focus is central to the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph and evident in the hospitable and caring college communities which they founded.

2. **Caring for All Without Distinction** -- *We are redeemed so that we might live in RIGHT relationship with one another.*

Our care for all without distinction, our welcoming of diversity grows directly from the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph who welcomed the rich and the poor alike, who ministered without prejudice to race, color, or creed, who nursed soldiers of North and South without distinction. It was always the person who was reverenced and cared for with little regard for social position or political preference.

For example, in 1843, in the face of tremendous opposition, the Sisters of St. Joseph ignored the social prohibitions of the day and opened a school for African Americans. Teaching the children to read raised the hackles of many for the ability to read meant the negroes could understand the Abolitionist literature that was circulating in the south. When angry

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[4]Robert J. Starratt, *Transforming Educational Administration, Meaning, Community, and Excellence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1996), 40.

[5]Ibid., 43.

[6]Ibid., 41.

threats took the form of violence, the school had to be closed. Despite opposition, the sisters' continued to welcome and minister to persons from all social classes and of all religious confessions.

Prejudice and a rejection of diversity still exists. What kind of college communities do we need today to meet the needs of a diverse population?

Nature and Types of Community

Thomas Sergiovanni in a superb book *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* describes three types of community or ties towards which educational institutions should be striving.

> . . . communities by relationships, communities of place, and community of mind. Community by relationships characterizes the special kinds of connection among people that create a unity of being similar to that found in families and other closely knit collections of people. Community of place characterizes the sharing of a common habitat or locale. This sharing of place with others for sustained periods of time creates a special identity and a shared sense of belonging that connects people together in special ways. Community of mind emerges from the binding of people to common goals, to shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing. Together the three represent webs of meaning that connect people together uniquely by creating a special sense of belonging and a strong common identity.[7]

Sergiovanni continues by saying that as we grow in understanding of one another the first three ties of community create a fourth kind of community. Robert Bellah terms this community a community of memory. "Being part of a community of memory sustains us when the going is tough, connects us when we are not physically present, and provides us with a history for creating sense and meaning."[8]

To create a community there must be a common bond, a common purpose, a common goal that invite the group to come together as a unit. In our colleges, we form a family of faith as we embrace a faith tradition, not

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[7]Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 50-51.

[8]Ibid., 51.

necessarily the same for each person, and a history that is common; we work together in the same space on the same campus with the same people over the course of years; we strive together to inculcate common values and ideals in the students whom we meet and we seek together to discover fresh ways of enhancing the learning process for our students. Over time, as we work together, we grow in a knowledge and understanding that creates a communal memory.

It seems that a college is the best possible place for community to happen among diverse groups of people. It seems to me further, that colleges founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph are the best possible colleges for this community to occur. In encountering diversity, we must be prepared to meet the many faces of truth. In so doing we will be forced to confront our fears, our prejudices, our preconceived notions. We must be prepared to relinquish our comforts and comfortableness. We must be willing to be pilgrims, sojourners, searchers -- indeed people of the question who are willing to admit that there are no answers that are facile or convenient.

The problem with the many communities we have formed throughout time in the Catholic Church is that, whether intended or not, they have been more communities of uniformity than centers welcoming a common union constructed from a constructive diversity. Renewal efforts in the Church have been made difficult, because many in the Church have mistakenly confused union with uniformity. Let us reflect briefly upon our history and our identity as Catholics.

We have shared a common set of beliefs defined in dogmas and doctrines; sometimes blindly followed Church laws and customs; faithfully adhered to ascetic and spiritual practices; shared a common language for religious celebration; priests and religious wore specific clothing common according to each one's identifying order; priests celebrated Liturgical functions in exactly the same ritualistic garb. Gradually, some Catholics believed that each of these elements carried the same weight and importance. The external trappings of the faith became confused with the inner essence of belief. Uniformity became synonymous with union.

Today, some Catholics speak pejoratively of "cafeteria catholics," those among us who are more selective about beliefs they think are integral to the faith versus those they believe are non-essential to membership in the Catholic Church. How does one respond to such an observation?

In human life, we have all found that our identity evolves and is re-defined as we change and grow. At various times, as our horizons broaden,

we find that we must rename "who we are" in relationship to a shifting set of realities. We are at a time in history when the entire human community is seeking to re-define itself in terms of a much broader global reality. Two thousand years after the birth of Christ, we stand on the threshold of the third millennium. The Church is at a moment of re-definition and God's people, all of God's people, are at a crossroads where the diverse human race is coming together. Despite the different races, cultures, and religions of the world that we represent, we have the potential to begin a common faith journey to discover the Holy Mystery that beats at the heart of the universe.

At this moment, it is important to remember that union does not mean uniformity. True union differentiates the persons whom it unites.

Using the dynamic, interrelated model of Trinitarian life, German theologian Jurgen Moltmann constructs a new pattern for Christian fellowship and communitarian relationships that harbor the potential to transform our understanding of community. Genuine Christian community can be realized only if its members are able to enter into authentic relationships with one another and with God. Productive interpersonal interaction does not occur unless each person is willing to sacrifice for the good of the other and for the welfare of the community as a whole. Community requires kenotic love, a love clearly exemplified within the community of the Trinity itself. The emphasis must shift from the one God to the three persons whose loving interaction creates an indissoluble unity in equality. This is the new model for human relationships, both personal and societal.

Moltmann centers on the teaching that the Divine Persons exist in a living relationship of mutual indwelling. Each person lives out of itself in the other. Thus, it is not the primacy of unity that forms the Trinity, but the Trinity which forms the unity. This doctrine is vital to Moltmann's understanding of what may be called the "mission" of the Trinity to bring into fellowship all men and women, to unite and welcome them to friendship. It is a concept that stands in opposition to monotheism which has perpetuated a monarchical structure that inherently fosters subservient relationships within the human community. Moltmann's trinitarian model operates from the principle of self-emptying, self-surrender, self-forgetfulness, absorption in the other.

These attitudes materialize in freedom, equality, and justice. God, seen in Trinitarian terms, cannot be identified with the exploitative power structure. God is the Father/Mother of Jesus Christ who suffered with a

beloved son for the sake of humankind. This God in Jesus chases down the lost, heals the sick, enjoys table fellowship with sinners, raises the dead, comforts the sorrowing, descends into hell, and tends the lilies of the field. These qualities mark Trinitarian fellowship and a new age of genuine interrelational community among all levels within the churches and society.

According to Elizabeth Johnson, "the Trinity provides a symbolic picture of totally shared life at the heart of the universe. . . Mutual relationship of different equals appears as the ultimate paradigm of personal and social life. The Trinity as pure relationality, moreover, epitomizes the connectedness of all that exists in the universe."[9]

Johnson believes that the Trinitarian relationship rightly understood stands as a critique of patriarchy. "The power of an interpersonal communion characterized by equality and mutuality, which it signifies, still flashes like a beacon through a dark night, rather than shining like a daytime sun. Human community in a relationship of equals has yet to be realized save in isolated and passing instances."[10]

This the challenge to which we are called as colleges founded in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph. We are invited not merely to form communities of relationship, place, meaning and memory -- as vital as these communities are; we are charged with founding communities of faith modeled on Trinitarian, self-emptying relationship, that animate and produce fire for the other four types of community. Only then will we be able to embrace unity in difference. Only then will we discover that true union differentiates.

3. **Addressing the Needs of the times.** -- *We are sanctified so that we think first of the others with whom we are in relationship.*

The circumstances of the world in which the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded are similar to those of the world in which we live. Seventeenth century France was a country beset by famine, poverty, plague, war, oppression, and crime. In these conditions, prophetic vision and prophetic voice called forth the Sisters of St. Joseph.

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[9]Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is, The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 222.

[10]Ibid., 223.

Two facts about our founding are quite important. First, in 1650, vowed religious women did not minister publicly as teachers, nurses, or social workers; instead, they were secluded in cloisters and engaged in prayer and some form of light work. Second, Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, had forbidden Jesuits to establish congregations of religious women. Defying tradition and ignoring Ignatius' prohibition, the Jesuit missionary Jean-Pierre Medaille founded the Sisters of St. Joseph, as apostolic religious women called to minister openly to the pressing needs of the poor in seventeenth century France.

The French Revolution erupted in 1789 and the Church of Rome came under violent attack and suffered fierce opposition. The Sisters of St. Joseph refused to support the French Catholic Church and to attend liturgies celebrated by dissenting priests. In addition, they hid priests who remained faithful to Rome and nursed them back to health when they were injured. During this struggle, many died or were executed, among them, five Sisters of St. Joseph who were guillotined for counter-revolutionary activity.[11]

In the early twentieth century, firm in the belief that "on the education of women largely depends the future of society," visionary and courageous Sisters of St. Joseph built massive structures that would become first catholic colleges for women in the United States.

The Sisters of St. Joseph have been called and challenged to take prophetic stances in order to address the needs of the times. Do our institutions, as institutions, take a prophetic stand before the problems of our time? Once upon a time and not so long ago, in this very land we call the United States, Colleges and Universities actively critiqued the society in which we live. What is our role today and how should we play it out?

Let us consider for a moment the Universidad Centroamericana, the University of Central America in El Salvador, and the role it and our brother Jesuits have played in raising the consciousness of that embattled nation.[12] Established in 1965, the original mission of the University was to educate the

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[11]*Les Martyrs de Privas*, History of three Sisters of St. Joseph guillotined in Privas France, 1794, trans., Ann Edward Bennis, SSJ (Philadelphia: Chestnut Hill, 1961).

[12]The information about the University of Central America was taken from an article by Luis Calero, S.J., "The Christian University At the Service of the Poor, in *From Power to Communion*, Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

children of the Catholic socio-economically advantaged and elite and to protect them from the communist and secular influences they would meet at El Salvador's one major public university. Given their history and tradition of educational excellence and theological orthodoxy, the Jesuits were entrusted with the mission of educating the country's upper-class youth and insuring that they would not be swayed by the highly politically charged atmosphere characteristic of the national university.

The influence of Vatican II, Medillin, and Puebla, however, forced a rethinking and reassessment of the original mission of the university. In keeping with the challenge of the Bishops to stand with Christ, to accept justice as a constitutive element of the Gospel, and to manifest a "preferential option for the poor," the University determined it would take an active role and raise its voice in the political debates of El Salvador. Their experience of the poor in El Salvador influenced the Jesuits to re-formulate the mission of the institution so that it was directed by the Gospel. This stance exacerbated anger and even hatred from the upper and ruling classes in the country.

Without diluting its educational and academic mission, UCA determined that it would become a voice for the voiceless. Its new mission stated that the University existed to "study, understand, and transform . . . the national social reality."[13] The leadership of the UCA placed its resources and used its influence to serve the needs of the impoverished and the persecuted in El Salvador. Those who attended the university were taught not simply the skills and information required to be professionally successful, they were made to understand their responsibility to assist in the struggle for human dignity and equality for all people. This education was not confined behind the university's walls. The message was proclaimed broadly to all who would listen.

UCA did all of this without abandoning its mission to be an academic institution, in fact, it addressed the issues by being precisely what it was -- a university committed to study and research. Through the foundation of university institutes, publications through the university press, faculty speakers, the UCA made its message known throughout the country and around the world. They trained lay leaders, seminarians, catechists and instilled in them their responsibility to foster human rights.

Of course, we all know what happened -- bombings; lay leaders, committed to preaching the Gospel, hunted down and killed by death

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[13]Ibid., 50.

squads; the ruthless murder in 1980 of the four Church women; the martyrdom in 1980 of Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador; and the martyrdom in November 1989 of the university's leaders -- six Jesuit priests as well as their housekeeper and her daughter. While the price of a prophetic stance is always high, the cost of silence is higher.

The situation in El Salvador, marked by extreme, poverty, and oppression, highlights the disparity between the rich and poor which is evident throughout the world.

> . . . on our planet of over five billion people, one-fifth, including ourselves, live in plenty, one-fifth live in destitute poverty, and the remaining three-fifths are able to get by. We have pushed the earth's productive capabilities to their limits and in, in this process, eliminated vital resources for the survival of the world. The gap between rich and poor nations has widened since the early 1980s, affecting most especially Africa and Latin American. Our own country contains only about six percent of the world's population but consumes close to 40 percent of the world's resources."[14]

Father Luis Calero points out poignantly that it seems Catholic Colleges and Universities in the United States are more intent upon their rankings as a Best Buy than they are in being distinctively Christian and prophetic.[15] We run our colleges like businesses and are driven more by the profit motive than by the Prophet's message. The religion of our founders and foundresses is often compromised and neglected as we worship, often unaware, at the high altar of the religion of consumerism.

> Critical knowledge when applied to social systems is a dangerous tool. When knowing is directed towards exposing the inhumanity that strips rights and dignity away from people, it frequently arouses a desire to change and revolt. Education becomes an instrument that penetrates the roots of an unjust order, produces dissatisfaction, and demands reform. This may explain why some societies prefer not to educate their citizens or manage to downplay structural questions. Education empowers the poor to take charge of their lives and effect change.

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[14]Ibid., 55.

[15]Ibid., 57.

> Here is our challenge as a Christian University: to awaken understanding, to form consciences, to have an impact on *la realidad* (the social reality).[16]

A commitment to all without distinction, a love of the poor and of minorities, is still a radical commitment. If we are sincere about diversity, we had better be prepared to face the consequences of the prophetic stance. Who will educate the new immigrants, if we don't? Who will empower the new poor, if we don't? Who will give voice to the voiceless, if we don't?

4. **Striving for Excellence in all endeavors.** -- *Like the Trinity, we are called to form communities of excellence.*

Jean Pierre Medaille, our Jesuit founder, challenged the Sisters to the more that inspired his own founder, Ignatius of Loyola. The problem is that the "more," at least in the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, became raised to the superlative and we always seem to be in search of the most. When Jesus challenged us to be perfect as God is perfect, he did not mean what we often interpret him to have meant. To strive to be perfect is not even laudable, it is indeed a foolish and foolhardy venture. We can never be perfect. Scripture scholars tell us that what Jesus means by this passage is that we are to strive to become as perfectly who we are as God is who God is. In brief, be yourself as perfectly as possible.

In terms of education, I believe we have always been communities mindful of this goal. We challenge students to achieve their full potential, to develop fully their talents and gifts, and to use them for the service of others. We offer an education that develops the whole person -- not just the head, but the heart, not just the head and the heart, but the hands as well. To be fully a person every facet of the human being must be stretched and developed.

Robert Jerald Starratt points out that excellence, as many a novice mistress learned, cannot be mandated by leadership. Leadership can establish an atmosphere in which excellence can emerge, can develop evaluative methods to measure outcomes, and provide incentives, but leadership cannot legislate excellence.[17]

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[16]Ibid., 59-60.

[17]Starratt, *Transforming Educational Leadership*, 143.

> Excellence is what people produce who excel. To excel means to go beyond the average, the routine, and the mediocre. Excellence signifies high-quality performance; more than that, it signifies a high quality of living. Of all the terms used to contrast with an excellent performance -- ordinary, average, mediocre -- I would choose mediocre. Something ordinary can still be excellent. . . Mediocrity, however seems to convey the idea of a half-hearted performance, a satisfaction with a minimum of effort. In contrast with mediocrity, excellence takes on the meaning of a full pouring of talent and attention into an activity.[18]

Starratt investigates excellence in terms of a community of excellence or a community of people who excel. He identifies five characteristics that describe such a community. I believe Starratt well describes whom we seek to become.

> 1. An excellent community would be made up of people who are wide awake, alert to what is going on around them, and responsive to the human context in which they find themselves.
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> 2. An excellent community would be made up of people who hold themselves to a high standard of work. What they made (no matter what it was) would be made with care. They would take pride and satisfaction in their work.
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> 3. An excellent community would be caring about relationships. Such a community would value friendship, openness, trust, and honesty. People would enjoy being with each other; they would be able to let others be themselves. They would have the ability to love, to forgive, to empathize, to accept imperfections. They would also have the ability to argue and disagree without fracturing relationships.
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> 4. An excellent community would care about the quality of its public life, in its cultural, political, economic, and environmental dimensions. This caring would be based on the conviction that a healthy and vigorous public life provides the context for a healthy and integrated private life.

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[18]Ibid., 146.

> 5. Finally, an excellent community would support individual expressions of and journeys toward excellence. Such a community would recognize that its own health requires diversity, new ideas, and inventiveness in all areas of life as a way of responding to new challenges and as a way of rediscovering and reinterpreting core community values. . . . This community would see, furthermore, that cultural diversity is a great treasure for enriching its life. Hence it would promote the preservation of diverse cultural traditions and heritage, as well as the mutual enrichment that can come from cross-cultural inventiveness.[19]

According to Starratt, "excellence is not a single, extraordinary talent in itself, but that talent exercised on behalf of a human purpose, within a richly diverse community that values the full range of human excellence."[20] Within the context of education, an education for excellence inspires students to pursue knowledge and skills so that they can use their talents to make a full contribution to the life of the community; a life that is dynamic and ever-changing.

For years, we believed that equilibrium was a desired state. Equilibrium signified a place of security characterized by a sense of well being, balance, self-possession. Growth, however, comes only when things are in a state of imbalance, disequilibrium, instability. Systems in disequilibrium learn to deal with new information by changing their configurations without losing their identifies.[21] They are noted not for their inflexibility or inability to change but for their resiliency and adaptability.

George Dehne of George Dehne & Associates, a Market Research and Marketing Strategies Firm, that has worked with 80 colleges and universities during the past ten years, has indicated that "things will never be the same for private Colleges. . . In the 1960s, 50% of the college population were enrolled in private colleges and universities," by 1985 this percentage had slipped to 23% and by 1992 it had eroded to a low of 17%

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[19]Ibid., 146-147.

[20]Ibid., 147.

[21]Wheately, *Leadership and the New Science*, 88.

and 39% of these are non-traditional age students.[22] We could say that private education is in a maximum state of disequilibrium. Is this a reason to panic? Margaret Wheately would say no.

Systems that have reached a maximum state of disequilibrium are faced with limitless future possibilities. Small, unexpected changes propel the system forward in new, unpredictable, evolutionary directions. Systems such as these have the power to alter the environment because change in one part of the environment affects every other part. "Stasis, balance, equilibrium -- these are temporary states. What endures is process -- dynamic, adaptive, creative."[23]

I suggest many college communities might benefit from learning to be at home with uncertainty. After all, in the midst of seeming chaos, order is at work.

Excellence is not a state at which we arrive; it is process during which we strive. It is dynamic, shifting, changing, turbulent, and unfinished. Striving to be excellent means reaching to become who we are, as individual persons, as persons in relationship, as members of a global community. When one understands excellence, one knows that it is a lot like God -- there is always something "more."

5. **Making a Difference in the local and world community.** -- *In and through communitarian relationships, we have the power to make a difference locally and globally.*

After the French Revolution, Mother St. John Fontbonne, who escaped the guillotine by a scant twenty-four hours, courageously re-founded the Congregation. During her lifetime, she witnessed the growth of the congregation from 12 members at its refounding in Lyon to over 3000 at her death. Hers was a voice, tempered by trials, a voice that challenged diminishment, dim possibilities, and fragile beginnings.

Today we face similar challenges. The number of Sisters of St. Joseph, once so plentiful, has drastically diminished. Our resources are shrinking; all small liberal arts colleges are in jeopardy. Federal and state

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[22]George Dehne, "What Happened? What's Ahead? A Look at the Future of the Private College," *Trinity College Magazine* (Summer, 1995) 15.

[23]Wheately, *Leadership and the New Science*, 98.

funding is precarious in many places, and the list could go on. As colleges founded in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph we cannot be daunted by adversity. We must not ask if we can make a difference as we approach the third millennium; we must ask how we can make a difference.

From my presentation thus far, it is obvious that I believe the operative word in the theme of this weekend's workshop is community. In today's world, I would suggest that we can make a profound difference by a commitment to communities that foster right relationships among diverse populations. In America today there are so many fractious factions fractured by an inability to understand another person's point of view. Conservatives and liberals both need to seek a more balanced position on issues. Some members of the Catholic Church have been excessively divisive, not in their stand on abortion, but in their attitudes towards those with whom they disagree. In a time when the United States is experiencing a new wave of immigration, at a time when the country is growing more diverse in culture, in language, in religion, in ethnicity, in national origins, it is more important than ever for us to learn how to interact productively and compassionately with those whose life experience is different from ours.

In our colleges, we have the supreme opportunity to create a microcosm of the macrocosm so that students can learn to interact intelligently and respond compassionately to the world in which they find themselves. Our colleges can model those behaviors and patterns of relationship that have the potential to become a power for transformation in the world. Scientists tell us with assurance that a butterfly beating its wings in Japan can affect our weather in St. Louis. What we do and how we do it has consequences that reach farther than we dare believe.

As Catholic colleges, we have a particular contribution to make both to the Church and to the larger world around us.

"Common Ground" Communities

Smaller in size than universities, colleges have the potential to create spaces in which student can engage differences and learn from them. I believe our Colleges have demonstrated well that we believe it is our mission to invite students to name and explore their differences, to respect the diversity inherent in diverse cultures, religions, and races, and to surface the visions and values that transcend those issues that are potentially divisive. Simply put, we encourage our students to discover, name, and till "common ground." When we focus on what divides us, we fail to notice what

unites us. When we focus on what unites us, we learn to dialogue about what divides us.

The sharing of "common ground" engenders respect, mutual understanding, and commitment to the common good. Coming to "common ground" is a prelude to productive dialogue about issues that continue to divide. Coming to "common ground" challenges women and men to learn not only how to think, but to determine what they think, and why they maintain the positions they hold. That means that any topic is acceptable for discussion; any issue may be evaluated from both sides; any perspective is worthy of consideration.

Since the promulgation in 1990 of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Apostolic Constitution on Higher Education, there has been a great deal of discussion about what it means to be a Catholic College or University. The precise relationship between the adjective Catholic and the noun university has been very much in question. I will say only three things about this issue.

First, it goes without saying that to be an academic institution, a College must permit students to raise any and all questions on the full spectrum of topics. This is the essence of the higher educational experience.

Second, as a Catholic institution, students are educated within the context of a Catholic world vision that is permeated and animated by the values, traditions, history, and teachings of the Catholic Church. However, the Catholic intellectual tradition has always believed that fidelity to the truth frees students to examine both sides of an issue.

Third, by the very nature of who we are, we do not restrict our student body to Catholics but welcome all who respect our faith tradition, who seek truth, and who endeavor to explore their questions with a reverence for the religious dimension of life.

To be truly a college in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph, we must be willing to welcome and extend hospitality to all persons – even, or perhaps especially, those whose ideas differ from our own. These persons challenge us to open our minds, to explore another point of view, to define clearly what it is we believe, and to express it while demonstrating great respect for the other's perspective. If colleges and universities fail to educate women and men to live well and successfully in a pluralistic society – they fail to educate them for life. As colleges imbued with the spirit of our

foundresses, we believe that all persons are sacred, that "common ground" is holy ground, and that difference and differences, so evident in our society, are potential gateways to unity.

In working towards community, it is necessary to recognize the issues that divide while we focus on ideas that unite. Identifying "common ground" and working together on ideas that unite will evoke the mutual trust necessary for issues that divide to be brought to the table for dialogue. To adopt such a process does not mean that we shall have to compromise our convictions or dilute the truth we hold in our hearts. Coming to "common ground" demands absolute integrity on both sides. It assumes that differences are deep and the divides great. But it also assumes that bridges can be built across the chasms that separate and that in time hills can be made low and valleys levelled.

In our Colleges we have Arab and Jewish students, we have Bosnians and Serbs, and we have Africans and African Americans, we have Chinese and Taiwanese, we have Iraqis and Iranians, we have so many cultures and nations represented whose populations have been or are at war in some sense of the word. What are we doing to help them come to some deeper understanding of one another? What are we doing to grow in our understanding of them? I believe that we can make a significant contribution if we create "common ground" communities where these cultural, religious, and political differences can be explored in an atmosphere of trust and respect. If we bring the peoples of the world to our campuses, we have a responsibility to educate them for life after graduation – life in the global community.

To everything there is a season. The world needs a season of tilling "common ground." The world needs a season in which those ideals that unite us permit us to put aside divisive approaches to the issues that divide. In our families, in our cities, in our states, in our nations, there is much work to be done if we are to stem the tide of prejudice, fear, and classism that threatens to sweep over the globe in an invasion as deadly and as devastating as the ravages of an invading army or an invasive plague. For the common good, we must learn to separate the person from the ideas and issues with which we disagree. While we can hate the latter, we must always love the former. We must discover as a global community of people what we can believe in together before our areas of disagreement divide us forever. We can love each other and still disagree. When did some good people stop knowing this?

Commitment to diversity, as we have seen, means that we work towards unity while we support and respect differences. Teilhard de Chardin teaches that throughout time the human race will grow increasingly more united and will begin to think more cohesively as a co-reflective unit. Ultimately, he foresees a time when through a sharing of consciousness humankind will experience a common vision motivated by a common love of Christ – a Christ whose face is still revealing itself, a Christ whose mystery still eludes us, a Christ whose presence permeates the universe, a Christ who comes to us in many different and yet to be discovered forms.

I suggest that we form communities of relationship, of place, of mind, of memory; communities of faith that identify those common values and visions that can create in us a fire and a passion for the common good. I suggest we form communities in which women and men of diverse ages, creeds, races, and cultures can live together in peace, in harmony, and in mutual respect. I suggest that we consciously and deliberately commit ourselves to communities in which conflicts are not avoided but resolved peacefully, in which differences are not sources of division but the structure of our unity, in which diversity is not a cause for distrust but a source of union. If we, as colleges founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph, can foster such communities, can engender such values, and can create such a spirit, then we shall have proven ourselves equal to the mission grown from their charism and equal to the challenges of our time.