2012 President's Council Speech

Good evening and welcome to Holy Cross’ annual President's Council Weekend. I would like to thank co-chairs Charley and Martha Polachi, the staff and students who have made this event so successful, and each faithful and generous member of President's Council who traveled home to Mount St. James in celebration of Holy Cross – particularly given what so many of you have had to manage in the aftermath of the storm this past week. We continue to keep our Holy Cross alums and their families in prayer, especially those who have lost loved ones, homes and businesses.

You have just seen our video, titled "Leadership and Promise." We have seen a community of people who are blessed by their time at Holy Cross, people who exemplify the leadership and promise our world needs, today and always.

We know other colleges provide an intellectual environment that prepares the way for great achievement. A Holy Cross education does that and so much more. Tonight we celebrate the qualities that define Holy Cross, and we honor our goal to make this college the very best that it can and should be.

So, just what should a college education do?

• It should enable students to participate in and preserve our democratic society by developing effective and ethical leaders.

• It should be an engine of social inclusion and possibility. It should prepare students for a lifetime of productive work and social contribution.
• At Holy Cross, we believe a college education should go even deeper. It should help students to identify and develop their God-given gifts and talents, recognize their passions, discern their calling or vocation, and then make wise career choices that lead to the transformation of our world.

To the values of academic excellence and vocational preparedness, we add our own distinctive contribution – our Jesuit and Catholic values, which distinguish us from all other elite liberal arts colleges.

Our emphasis on "living the mission" has a unique Ignatian focus – to find God in all things. In other words, to develop the capacity to see the world in new ways, to formulate new questions, and to devise new solutions to complex problems; and in doing so, to discover the presence of God in all of our relationships, endeavors, successes and challenges. At Holy Cross, we are known for our academic rigor and our emphasis on spiritual freedom, discernment, individual responsibility and care for others. Our students develop the capacity to think critically, to analyze, to judge thoughtfully and then make good choices. As "men and women for and with others," they discover how to realize their goals in ways that will make a positive difference in the world. We also support the development of a mature religious awareness and committed religious or spiritual practice, which gives them the hope and the courage they need for sound ethical living.

Does our special formula work?

The proof is in our graduates. You've seen that in our video tonight; you have also seen it in the classmates and friends sitting in this room. You will continue to see it in future generations who come to Holy Cross.
Tonight's video highlighted Lisa Taylor, Class of '96, who has garnered numerous awards from the United States Department of Justice for enforcing civil rights laws and for her unwavering commitment to public service.

You saw Harvard Medical School professor, Joe Coyle, Class of '65 – a pioneer in cutting-edge research on schizophrenia and Alzheimer's disease. Then there was B.J. Cassin, Class of '55 – a venture capitalist and chairman of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation, which helps low-income and high-risk students. B.J. has also done so much to further minority recruitment and retention at Holy Cross.

Our video introduced you to Jim Collins, Class of '87, who has earned a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" in support of his work in biomedical engineering. As a Holy Cross student, Jim earned a Presidential Service Award and served as valedictorian of his class, a glimpse of things to come. Jim's wife, Mary McNaughton Collins, Class of '87, has been an extraordinary doctor and teacher at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Maria Eugenia Ferré Rangel, Class of '89 and president of Puerto Rico's largest daily newspaper, has worked to buck the trends of waning circulation and credibility in the media. She has developed initiatives to engage and empower her readers, giving them a public voice and building their citizenship skills. And finally, you heard from Jay Clarke, Class of '88, whose name is synonymous with new understanding of the life and work of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. Jay is the curator of prints, drawings, and photography at Massachusetts' Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

The faculty member you saw working with our students is André Isaacs, Class of '05, and a new member of our chemistry department. A first generation high school student from Jamaica,
André went on from Holy Cross to earn his Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of Pennsylvania. We are very proud to welcome André back. The work he and other faculty members do with our students helps them to focus on the highest ideals – in the classroom, on the playing fields, in the arts, and through service to others. When they learn what they love, they discover what they can – and want – to give back to our world. That’s leadership that matters – leadership that transforms a life and that makes a positive difference for others.

Your own extraordinary spirit and love for Holy Cross is evident here tonight. Crusaders have always known they are part of something bigger than themselves because of who they are and what they believe. That recognition, and that awareness of the presence of God in all that they do, strengthens and empowers them.

Take, for example, our President's Council co-chairs, Charley and Martha Polachi, who recently completed a historic and rigorous pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago. Do you think Charley and Martha ever forgot about Holy Cross on their long walk? In a photo they shared with me, these intrepid Crusaders placed a sign that read "I ♥ Holy Cross" next to a well-earned beer as they made their way along El Camino. In a second shot, they held that same sign in front of Spain's Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela – still thinking of Holy Cross at the end of their long journey.

Like Charley and Martha, each of us here tonight is proud of Holy Cross. The devotion in this room reflects a shared history, common values, a rich faith tradition and a commitment to excellence. Make no mistake: This College is this good precisely because of your presence and support. Your example, your faith, your integrity and your sense of responsibility inspire our students as much as any other lesson they learn at Holy Cross.
We now find ourselves at one of the most challenging times in our history, as we struggle to best serve the needs of tomorrow with the limited resources of today. Our families need relief from the exorbitant costs of a college education. Meanwhile, we try to give every deserving student the opportunity to attend and to thrive at Holy Cross. It is clear that we – and the world – face an uncertain future for some years to come, and we are, by necessity, re-evaluating our priorities.

Despite these realities, I aim to lead this College proudly and successfully into the future, meeting our critical needs and surpassing all expectations for Holy Cross. Indeed, we must do so to keep pace with peer institutions and to meet the changing demands of higher education. Hard conversations and decisions await us in the coming months. But we will reach our most important goals thanks to you, our most caring friends.

This Holy Cross community is so famous for its spirit. I thought I understood school pride before coming to Holy Cross. I have since learned otherwise. I want to tell you a story about the strangest request ever received in our graphic arts department. An alum once called to ask for a high resolution file of the Holy Cross school seal. Our graphic arts employee thought perhaps this alum wanted to print it on letterhead, or to create a set of note cards. Wrong! It was actually to get an official copy of this emblem so that he could ink a new tattoo! You can't blame him for being so careful. After all, that ink would be part of this Crusader's life, indelible and forevermore. Now, not many of you will permanently emblazon the Holy Cross seal on your forearm, as this man did. But deeper, written across your hearts, there's a lot of Purple Pride, indelible for a lifetime.

I am privileged to be at the helm of this College. I am filled with gratitude for the blessing of your presence and your support. In our mission statement we say that Crusaders are "equipped
with the resources and perspective to respond as thoughtful leaders in business, professional and civic life." You, the members of President's Council, have always responded as these thoughtful leaders, especially when it comes to the future of Holy Cross. All of you know that leadership is not simply about doing more, it is about being more.

Thank you for that blessing, and for your warm welcome and good wishes as we celebrate my first President's Council dinner together. I look forward to welcoming you home to Holy Cross for many more.