

Very Reverend Prior Provincials, John O'Connor, John Welch, Justin Biase, members of the board of trustees, distinguished faculty and staff, colleagues from our neighboring seminaries, universities and centers of learning, members of our student body, alumni, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The Advent Lessons and Carols of this evening remind us that the whole world is moving towards the fulfillment of God's plan for us. It is the advent of His Kingdom. They tell us that our time in this world is fleeting but our individual souls are eternal. I hope that this night lifts your spirit, reminds you of God's loving presence in your life, and assures you that God's justice and mercy will ultimately triumph. We are people of faith, living in anticipation. While we celebrate the historical events of our salvation, we await the return of Jesus Christ, when all our tears, struggles and difficulties will be wiped away and all things made clear to us – our prayer is Maranatha... Come Lord Jesus.

On this night we have heard and rejoiced in the lessons of Sacred Scripture, the wonderful event foretold by the prophets, and come to pass in the mystery of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. We are the most blessed of all ages for we have seen what others only longed for, we have heard, through the proclamation of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, "what Angels longed to hear and look upon". In these last times, we are commissioned to proclaim, teach, celebrate and be transformed by this Good News.

Encouraged and fortified by the heralding of the Advent message of hope in song and celebration, supported by my Carmelite community, family members and friends, I am honored to accept the position of President of the Washington Theological Union. I am grateful for the trust and confidence placed in me by the members of the board of trustees, the faculty and the community of the union.

We are dedicated to the study of theology and the formation of ministers, both clerical and lay, for the Church. Our students are a sacred trust to us; they share with us a royal priesthood. Their vocations are conferred upon them, first through their baptism and then through the call of the Church to the Sacrament of Holy Orders or to the ministry of the laity. Each one embodies and represents, according to his/her own unique calling, the one Lord who is savior of us all.

I am blessed with a faculty of theologians, who are published and nationally recognized for their fine scholarship. I am grateful to Dr. Colt Anderson, our Academic Dean and Vice President for his assistance and warm welcome. I have no doubt, that with the collaborative efforts of this very competent body of scholars, we can carry on the mission and the pioneering tradition of the Union for the next 40 years.

I owe a special note of gratitude to Father John Burkhard, interim president and my predecessor. Over the past couple of years Father John has had to make difficult decisions both financially and operationally for the good of the Union. I know that these decisions have cost him personal anguish and suffering. I am so grateful that he was willing to shoulder these tasks, so that I might enjoy a fresh start. I suspect that the little smile on his face these days reveals more than words can say.

I am also grateful to Archbishop Wuerl, Archbishop O'Brien and Bishop Loverde who have been most welcoming and encouraging to me. They assured me of their admiration for the many graduates of the Union who now work in their dioceses. (Our alumni are our greatest treasure and they continue to make us proud.) I have sought and received the guidance from these prelates in ways that might improve our efforts and sustain their confidence and support.

The Washington Theological Union is a bold and daring venture which began in 1968 with the realization that times had changed, and the old way was not going to work any longer. The post-Vatican II era acknowledged that a widespread proliferation of small seminaries meant a squandering of precious resources. The twentieth century had also brought an extraordinary expansion of specialized scholarship in all areas of study, many having a profound impact upon both theological and pastoral education. A veritable 'knowledge explosion' took place in the field of theology, especially after Vatican II. Social-cultural-technological changes uprooted traditional styles. Patterns of living impacted the pastoral needs of the community of the faithful.

Clearly a reasonably large faculty was required to provide training in the many inter-related disciplines which were part of the theological/pastoral education for ministry. The Council's document on Priestly Formation called for much needed improvements in the quality of training for ministry and insisted that "the solid formation of seminarians...must be regarded as the supreme law in this matter."

1968-69 was also time of national unrest. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were murdered, riots between the races continued in our streets. The war in South East Asia worsened, as did a war of opposition at home. Violent crime had risen 57% since the decade began and, in the Church, controversy surrounded the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*. The United States put the first man on the moon, *Sesame Street* made its debut and yours truly was ordained.

In the midst of all of this, six courageous orders of men put their heads together and negotiated a creative plan forming what is now the Washington Theological Union.

The task was not an easy one, because nobody wanted to compromise their own unique heritage and the opportunity to form religious candidates according to each one's charism and

unique spirituality. Two years of meetings and planning led to a coalition of seminaries which pooled all the educational resources of the participating seminaries while fully respecting the autonomy and unique spiritual formational program of each seminary community.

Within three years of the founding of the Union, and with the application for admission of religious sisters, brothers and lay persons, the board of trustees saw that an additional level of formation was required of the Union. The Vatican Council had recognized and called forth an immense force of additional workers in the vineyard of the Lord: the laity. Many lay persons felt that they were not sufficiently prepared to assume the ministerial task to which they felt called. Some turned to the Union for help, and the Union reached out by developing degree programs and spiritual formation to meet their needs. More faculty and new offices were added to accommodate lay students and their spiritual needs. A strong professional program of pastoral field education and theological reflection was developed to train and to transform candidates into effective ministers. Today, the Union's program of professional pastoral preparation is highly regarded nationally.

The Washington Theological Union has become today, a school of theology and ministerial formation, set in the heart of the nation, with a beautiful facility: excellent library and classrooms, award winning chapel, resident quarters, with a defined corporate identity and exclusive control and direction for the academic and pastoral preparation of all our students. The educational vision of the Union has been built on the premise that effective ministry formation requires much more than pastoral skills or mere academics. It calls for a holistic curriculum, developing candidates with strong faith, broad theological understanding, spiritual depth and personal character.

Each of the religious orders and congregations sending students to the Union, collaborates with the Union by taking responsible for the personal formation of candidates in their own community context, fostering loyalty and devotion to their traditions, customs, goals and the Charism of their religious communities. Lay students receive equal attention by faculty and staff at the Union in a program of spiritual direction, supervised ministry and theological reflection.

The Union is the academic center which values good theological training as the best preparation for pastoral ministry. It provides the components and occasions for students to integrate a perception of the theological disciplines, Church teachings and traditions, and reflection upon personal-pastoral experience.

On the Great Seal of the Union are the words Freedom, Faith and Integrity. Freedom reflects the right to be educated, not merely indoctrinated, so that one can know the full range of the truth and its context in history as well as in contemporary magisterial teaching.

Integrity is the quality which helps us love and persevere in the truth, know and respect the church magisterial authority, and deal openly and justly with our constituents.

Faith is at the heart of the Union. Father Dan McLellan, the fourth president said during his installation address,

“Faith is not a body of knowledge or conclusion reached by logic. Faith is first and foremost a relationship. Faith is something that happens to the person. Theology tries to articulate what happened to soldiers and sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes when they heard Jesus say, “Come, I must stay in your house this night.”

Father Vince Cushing, our third President, explained the integration of theology with pastoral studies. He writes,

“Our vision of theological education is rooted in the conviction that theology is ultimately pastoral. This means that a bond has been forged between theology and ministry, thereby compelling the priest or minister to appropriate the dual roles of thinker and pastor. We seek to integrate theology and ministry by developing in ourselves that reflective and critical skill which enables the pastor to minister with a theological vision and enables the theologian to reflect on the pastoral situation.

The goal of the Washington Theological Union is to embody that vision of theology that preserves its integrity as the servant of faith and ministry, while it shapes and nourishes the minister personally, professionally, and prophetically.”

Now we look to the Future:

Today we stand at a cadence point in our journey. We look to our past and evaluate. We imagine our future and plan. The Union is developing a new strategic plan that will chart our way for the next five years. It will include improvements to our current operations as well as a bold and innovative plan to serve the future needs of the Church in her institutions and for her people on their spiritual journey. We have already begun this process by engaging our constituents in a dialogue of evaluating and dreaming creatively about possible future paths to take. I am reminded of the ancient saying, “Some people go where the path is worn and smooth. Others go where there is no path and leave a trail.” The Union has always dared to choose the latter.

Once again we find ourselves at a familiar point in history. The nation is at war; there is much political unrest and uncertainty in the homeland; our political parties are heavily polarized; the economy has recessed; many people are out of jobs and the poverty rate in the country is high. The cost of healthcare is out of control and the poor are especially vulnerable. While people retain their belief in God, they are less inclined to support organized religions. In the last ten years the Catholic attendance at Mass on Sundays has dropped to less than 30%, the number of

priests has declined by 10% and the average age of clergy has risen to the national retirement age. The number of sisters has declined by 25% while their average age is in the 70s. Meanwhile, the number of Permanent Deacons has increased by 40%. Fifty years ago, the number of laity working in our major institutions constituted a minority and very few laity held top administrative positions. Today the laity comprises 97% of the Catholic institutional work force. Many of them are not religiously oriented and do not see the Catholic identity of the institution as important nor their work as a ministry.

We, the WTU community, are aware of the needs of the Church today for Catholic Leadership and for educational and formational programs. This evening I propose five areas where the Union will focus its academic attention in its new strategic plan.

First, we will continue the vision of our founders by providing a seminary/graduate school for religious orders to prepare candidates for ordination. We recognize that the formation of religious candidates differs in some ways from those of diocesan seminarians because of the nature of the religious vocation. We also believe that it is important for seminary students and lay students to share the same classes and to respect one another's unique gifts. This will prepare them for the work that awaits them in church ministries where they will be working together for the good of God's people. We commit ourselves to working with formators of the orders and congregations to provide the very best theological and ministerial preparation for these candidates.

Second, we intend to remain a major player in developing programs to form Catholic leaders among the laity. One of the greatest fears today is that we are losing the Catholic identity of our institutions to the secular culture of liberalism, individualism and a pragmatic, subjective ethic. There is a place for us, here and now, to support our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessors in teaching a Gospel based worldview emphasizing the values of human life and dignity, and forming ministers who will support and guide our institutions in their Catholic identity and mission. To this end we are working with major hospital systems and national organizations of both Catholic health care and education to provide certification and degrees in mission integration for Catholic institutions. These programs will train leaders to keep the Catholic identity of our institutions foremost in the sights of administrators and practitioners.

Third, the inspiration of our member orders and congregations is God's compassionate care and love for the poor and those unjustly treated. Working for social justice fits prominently in our rules of life and in our vocation as religious. The bishops of the United States have boldly stated that principles of social justice are a constitutive component of the Gospel message. They further state that Catholic institutions must educate their people in the ways of social justice or they cannot call themselves Catholic. We will develop an institute to educate and heighten awareness to social justice principles and issues of injustice and division. The institute will invite a coalition of individuals and centers of learning in the Washington area to co-sponsor a series of lectures each year by outstanding theologians in the area of the social gospel and its applications to contemporary issues. We will publish a yearly collection of these lectures. We will also invite political leaders and media personnel to engage our speakers,

faculty and students in round table discussions. We will implement a sabbatical program inviting people from across the nation to come to Washington DC, study the Church's message of Justice and Peace and dialogue with politicians, media personalities and the academic community. This will heighten their awareness of social issues and assist them in developing strategies to address social issues both here and back home.

Fourth, our religious communities have provided the church with a rich variety of spiritual traditions and great saints whose lives have modeled these spiritualities. God's Spirit calls us to universal holiness while the lives and the writing of the great saints have shown us many ways to God's holy mountain. Great Saints such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. Augustine have shown us the way to integrate our love for God with our service and compassion for others. Our Doctor of Ministry degree in spirituality has been very successful over these past two years. We now have two cohorts of students numbering 25 members. Over the next five years, this program will be complemented by a master's degree in spirituality as well as certificates and academic study of other faith traditions in the spiritual life. The Union will continue and expand its offering of courses and classes in a variety of spiritualities fostered by our religious traditions including Ignatian, Dominican, Carmelite, Franciscan, Salesian, Augustinian, Redemptorist and Benedictine spiritualities.

Finally, we are a member and happily participate in the Washington Theological Consortium. We desire to study in a cross cultural and ecumenical context. Through collaboration with our other Christian partners we encourage the scholarly study and appreciation of other Christian confession in their historical traditions as well as the rich spiritual traditions of other cultures and faiths.

The Washington Theological Union is a unique institution which has been referred to by many as the best kept secret in town. It is small enough that each student is known by name and each student is given the kind of personal care that makes him/her feel welcome and appreciated. The faculty is multi talented and renowned for its personal care and individual attention to students. The staff stands by to be of service and is willing to go out of the way to accommodate most needs and requests. The result of such nurturing care is evident. Our students today serve as bishops, pastors, academics, and teachers, directors of diocesan ministries, chaplains, spiritual directors, and laity who live exemplary lives and service as leaven for the Church. Since its founding in 1969 the union has educated students from more than seventy religious communities, each with its own heritage and distinctive spirituality, and distinctive apostolic commitments. Students come to the Union from all parts of the US and from many other nations.

Our greatest challenge over the next few years is to build a larger student body, implement a bold new vision and find partners who are willing to help support our noble cause. These are challenging times. Vocations to religious orders and the priesthood are dwindling, fortunes have receded in the stock market downturn, and competing institutions are all trying to attract students and bolster their own futures. Where will God lead us in the next years? Will we

experience another metamorphosis as we did in 1969? I am confident of only one thing. God's spirit is alive and well in the world and the future of the Church is not in jeopardy. In words attributed to St. Ignatius. "We must pray as if everything depended upon God and act as if everything depends on us." But we must also have the humor and faith of Blessed John XXIII in the words attributed to him, "It's your Church Lord, I'm going to bed."

I want to thank all of those responsible for this evening's event, our wonderful choir and readers and to Msgr. John Enzler for hosting this even in his beautiful church. I thank Joan Knetemann and all those who have prepared the many details that have made this installation so special. Thank you and God bless you all.