Convocation – August 19, 2010

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Colleagues:

Welcome to your convocation.

I have completed my freshmen year at CBU and happily enter my sophomore year. This year I am hoping to make the Deans list. Thanks to you the members of the CBU community who have taught and nurtured me just as you teach and nurture each other and our students. This morning, we have celebrated service and accomplishments which go hand in hand at CBU. At this time, let me also recognize the CBU retirees who today return to campus to join our community for this event. (please stand). In addition, I would like to especially recognize the De Lasalle Christian Brothers who continue to serve as teachers and mentors for all of us. (please stand)

A special welcome goes to Brother Dominic, our newest Brother, who joins us bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge, working most closely out of the advancement office. Join me again in recognizing Brother Louis for 50 years of service to CBU.

Let me take you back to last year and return to the quote from Churchill who stated, “There is no worse mistake in public leadership than to hold out false hopes soon to be swept away”. During the past year, I have worked hard to carry out the agenda that I outlined at last year’s convocation and in my inaugural address entitled “Faith, Service, and Community”
Let me highlight some facts from last year. For the 2009-10 fiscal year, we were able to generate a small surplus of about $300,000 while investing in strategic improvements such as making our campus wireless which it is now, improving our infrastructure, and making our campus a welcoming environment. Our athletic fields have been upgraded thanks to the fine work of Joe and our coaches.

We began to attack the issue of compensation, realizing full well that during these uncertain financial times, that we could not solve all of compensation issues in one year. We did provide a one-time stipend and an average 3% increase to base salaries last year. This is only a short term solution. We need to provide our community with salaries that allow each and every individual to feel valued by this institution. I am committed to making the compensation issue a priority.

To do this, last year, I stressed that we need to find ways to enhance revenues both from enrollments and fundraising. (Story of student accepted to Engineering who went to a community college this year in spite of being given nearly $20K by CBU). In spite of the fine efforts of Anne Kenworthy and our dedicated admission’s staff, I must report that we are approximately at the 300 mark for new first year students, and transfer numbers continue to climb. Although this continues a CBU trend over the past several years, we had set an aggressive goal of 325 for our first year class. Our discount rate remains unacceptably high. How are we going to create increase our undergraduate enrollments and make CBU to go to school for students?

Today, I am pleased to announce that Jim Schlimmer, has accepted CBU’s offer to become the first VP for Enrollment Management,
overseeing a cradle to post-alumni sequence for our students, as his main responsibilities will be to oversee admissions, financial aid, the registrar, academic support, and the career center. We need a new paradigm for recruiting students, both from a geographic and financial aid point of view, and I am confident that Jim will bring a depth and breadth of experience to this new position. We need to tap into the 80 plus country global Lasallian network, and recapture markets that we have lost over the years. Thanks go to Eric Welch and the search committee for their tireless work over the summer. Jim will begin his job on September 6.

In the good news category, under the leadership of Mike Ryan and his GPS staff, we are hopefully seeing a halt in the erosion of the number of non-traditional students who attend CBU. Several off site cohort programs have been very successful, and we look to continue to expand these offerings over the next year.

I remain concerned about our efforts to secure outside funds. During the year, we secured the cash and pledges to completely cover the costs for our Cooper-Wilson Science Building. Alumni participation increased by about 4 percentage points from the previous year with an alumni giving rate of about 13%. Thanks go to Andrew and his IA staff. We have been pursuing 5, 6, and 7 figure gifts, and developing relationships with alumni who have no relationship with CBU. Last year, we convinced 1000 new donors to invest in CBU. The University needs to grow its annual fund and grow the endowment. Washington DC has remained largely untapped by CBU, but we are now in that game, hopefully reaping benefits this year for CBU. For the upcoming year, we
have added six new members to our Board of Trustees, individuals who can contribute time, talent, and treasure to CBU.

I promised increased transparency last year, and through the creation of the President’s council, budget committee, and other Presidential committees, we are moving toward a shared governance model where we all share responsibility for the movement of CBU to greater levels of excellence. Particularly noteworthy is the work of the Sustainability committee that is already involved in the greening of the CBU campus.

Although we cannot hinge all of our barometers of success on recognition by US news, let me applaud your efforts as this week I am pleased to announce that Christian Brothers University has once again received regional and national recognition for its outstanding academic programs and student services from U.S. News & World Report’s "America’s Best Colleges," the Princeton Review’s Best Colleges: Region by Region and Forbes' "America’s Best Colleges." Particularly noteworthy is our distinction of offering an A+ rating in our ability to educate B students.

We need to pay special attention to our residence halls. Thanks to Fr. Paul Wadkins in cooperation with our residence life staff, we have over 40 freshmen enrolled in our first learning community. We have just broken ground for the construction of a 90 bed Living Learning Center to be completed by summer 2011. Through some fine work by Dan Wortham, we have consolidated old bonds and restructured debt so that the construction of a $6.4 million dollar Living Learning Center will not negatively affect operations. I am hopeful that this wonderful structure housing more learning communities and freshmen honors students will be instrumental in allowing us to attract the best and the
brightest students to CBU. As fundraising occurs for the new center, we will continue our efforts to enhance our current residence halls.

So what can we look forward to this year. Let me highlight a several critical initiatives. Together we need to crystallize our mission, and I am very pleased the Dr. McDonald has moved from student life to take on this massive responsibility. We need a mission statement that reflects our nearly 140 year Lasallian mission, and our strategic planning should be consistent with that mission.

Our SACS accreditation is on the horizon with a QEP that has the potential to transform CBU if we do it right. Thanks to Jack Hargett and Scot Geis for leading the charge.

This summer, Mike Ryan and his staff have been working hard to develop programs in PA studies and Nursing building on our strengths in the sciences. You can expect that CBU will be a leader in health education in the near future.

As promised, I have joined numerous Memphis Boards including the Salvation Army, Rotary, Economic Club of Memphis, and the Memphis Talent Dividend. I have been recognized as a Who’s Who in Memphis spreading the CBU name everywhere I go.

For my upcoming sophomore year, I vow to continue to keep you informed and involved in decisions at CBU. As is the case with many institutions of our size, the financial instability has impacted our ability to attract and retain students. However, with the unparalled quality of a CBU education, I am confident in the future of CBU as a leader in education into the future. I ask you to join me in this endeavor. Show your pride in CBU!!!