

Musings on the Mission—Dr. Claire Sullivan, Professor of Education
August 29, 2006
Opening Meeting of the New Academic Year

Good morning! It is a pleasure to share my thoughts on the Mission of Holy Family University as we welcome the 2006-2007 academic year.

I must say that I rarely think of the mission without thinking of my first experience with what was then Holy Family College. My interview with Elaine Schietman, Joe Burak, Ginger Fisher, Sister Mary Paul and the brand new chair of the Education Department, Tony Applegate, seemed to go well. An informal chat with Kathy Moyer, who was the chair of Humanities at the time, had also been comfortable and collegial. I left feeling fairly positive. Soon came the exciting call that I was being recommended to Senior Administration. When I arrived at the appointed time the members of the Education Department were on hand to wish me well...and each one gave me the same piece of advice: Be sure to say that you support the college mission. As I walked to my meeting a few thoughts went through my head...

1. I must not have been their first choice after all, if they thought I needed coaching to voice my support for the college mission and,
2. I wondered exactly how many people met with the President and her Senior Administrators and said, "Dignity of the human person?" I don't know, may I get back to you on that?!

Actually, on that day in 1988, it was very easy to support Holy Family's Mission. It was easy because like most everyone here, I had spent my life up to that point defining my own personal mission – a mission closely aligned with that of Holy Family. While my experiences to that date had been very different, working with children and adults with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities, the ACTIONS of "seeking," "affirming," "witnessing" and "educating" were part of my personal and professional life.

Those action words are what I would like to encourage you to think about today. It is difficult to disagree with the mission statements themselves...

"The direction and inspiration from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ"

"The values of the Judeo-Christian tradition."

"The dignity of each person and the oneness of the human family."

"The assumption of life long responsibilities toward God, society and self."

For me, the everyday challenge to support the mission is in the call to action in the words preceding each of these statements.

Each day, each class, with each student, how do I Seek to direct and inspire based on my understanding and reflection on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ? This implies awareness of that life and those teachings, and more importantly to me, and ownership of those teachings that allows me to share them with others. Do I SEEK out opportunities to do this? Do I share with my students this journey of “seeking”... and any insights I may have “found?”

How do I AFFIRM the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition? What are those values? Do I affirm them by the way I live? Do I affirm them by how I treat my students? By the way I teach?

Do I truly give WITNESS to the dignity of each person and the oneness of the human family? Do the people I come in contact with each day leave feeling respected, valued, listened to and cared for? Have I looked inward to acknowledge my imprints, biases, beliefs, conceptions and misconceptions so that I appreciate more deeply the richness each person brings to our human family? Am I careful to use language that holds each person up as someone who makes a positive, genuine contribution to society?

And lastly, and maybe most uniquely ours as a University, do I EDUCATE my students to assume those life long responsibilities which will advance the mission beyond our campus? Am I a model of the mission? Do I ask the questions and provide opportunities for my students to learn and grow as they formulate their own mission statements?

It was easy to say I supported Holy Family’s mission at the meeting in 1988. I even thought I knew what the mission meant! That this statement continues each day to provide opportunities for me to grow is surely its beauty, its grace and, if you will its mission. What I say, “Yes, I support the mission of Holy Family University” is my everyday choice, challenge and commitment.

To paraphrase a commercial I saw while watching Nickelodeon with my grandsons...

SEEK

AFFIRM

WITNESS and

EDUCATE...

VERBS. JUST DO THEM.