



The Inauguration of Joseph R. Marbach, Ph.D.

Ninth President of Georgian Court University

Inaugural Address

“Answering the Call:
Transformation through Catholic Education”

October 16, 2015

Honored guests, colleagues, friends and family, thank you for joining us today to celebrate this important event in the life of our university.

As I assume the duties as the president of Georgian Court University, I'd like to take a few minutes to thank the many individuals responsible for today's celebration. This truly is a celebration of the "The Court's" rich history and contributions to our region, state and nation. I just happen to be the messenger.

In some ways as I am reading this list, I feel like I've just won the Oscar for Best Supporting Administrator. Hopefully, the orchestra won't start playing before I've finished thanking all these individuals.

My thanks to the Board of Trustees and the search committee for entrusting me to serve as the ninth president of Georgian Court. I am also grateful to the faculty, staff, administrators, and students, who have welcomed me so wholeheartedly into this great community of learners.

I also thank the Sisters of Mercy, who have embraced my presence on campus. You have been the stewards of this institution for the past century and your mark on Georgian Court is indelible.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the transition committee, who made this event and next week's series of inaugural events possible. It is a large committee, and I ask the 16 members of this committee to stand and be recognized. There are a few members of the committee who have gone above and beyond the call. They are Vice President for Institutional Advancement Dr. Mellissia Zanjani; Advancement Coordinator Eileen Fedele; Tara Strickland from our Office of Marketing and Communications; my right arm and executive assistant, Kathy Smith; and the chair of the Board of Trustees, Lesa Lardieri-Wright. Please join me in thanking them.

I thank the delegates representing visiting colleges and universities and my other colleagues, who have taken time out of their busy day to be here. In particular, I want to thank the two presidents here who hired me to serve in administrative roles as dean and provost, Dr. Gabriel Esteban of Seton Hall University and Brother Michael McGinniss of La Salle University.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who are here today, most especially my mother, who instilled in me my great love of learning and my commitment to the cause of social justice. My brother John and sister Kathleen and their spouses and families have bravely crossed the Delaware River to be with me today. I am also joined by my Uncle Tom and Aunt Delores, several aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews, along with my brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

My immediate family is here including my son Joseph, and my two daughters, Jillian and Madison. Most importantly, the love of my life, my wife, Paula is here. Thank you for your support and the faith you place in me. It has made all the difference.

I would also be remiss if I did not recognize the past presidents of Georgian Court who have joined us for this celebration. Together, they represent a total of 40 years of service as president of this university. They have left very big shoes for me to fill. Thank you, Sister Rosemary, Sister Barbara, and Sister Maria Cordis. Thank you for your years of service.

Our university is what it is today because of the leadership, vision, and dedication of these three sisters in particular, and the whole community of Mercy Sisters who have served Georgian Court throughout its 107-year history. The Sisters of Mercy are represented by various governing bodies and communities, including the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, the Mid-Atlantic Community, and all of the Sisters who work or reside at Mount Saint Mary's in Watchung, New Jersey.

To you Sisters, and to those assembled today, I pledge fealty to the mission of Georgian Court University and the five Mercy core values that have served as our guide throughout this past century.

In this spirit, I am committed to ensuring that Georgian Court survives and thrives for at least another 107 years. I am buoyed in this confidence by the recent good news that we have shared with the community. As many of you have heard me say, I am very proud that *Money* magazine named Georgian Court the 25th best school in the country for adding value to the education we provide. We also are a top 21 graduate school in the Northeast and a “Best Bang for the Buck” as noted by *Washington Monthly*. More recently, the university was named a College of Distinction, and more importantly, a Catholic College of Distinction. These accolades are based on the success of our students, or in the parlance of policymakers—the outcomes we produce.

Georgian Court has been recognized by these organizations for doing what we do best—transforming the lives of the students entrusted to our faculty and staff. Indeed, it is faith-based institutions like Georgian Court where students are afforded the luxury of discerning their vocation, the ability to answer their calling, and the opportunity to realize their full potential.

Today, we must renew our commitment to answer the call—the call to transform lives through higher education by encouraging our students to pursue their passion in an environment infused with the Mercy core values of respect, integrity, compassion, service, and justice.

My personal journey is a reflection of the power of faith based institutions like Georgian Court in influencing the choices one makes and the vocation one discerns.

La Salle, Temple, Seton Hall, Georgian Court.

What do these four schools have in common, besides being institutions where I have been fortunate to learn and work? All were founded or were inspired by a patron or patroness, committed to transforming the lives of those less fortunate or underserved through education.

St. John Baptiste de LaSalle is the patron saint of teachers. He made his life's mission one of educating young men from the working class of France, providing them training in practical skills to earn a decent living and enabling them to move into the emerging French middle-class. He established the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who today educate nearly one million young people in over 80 countries.

Reverend Russell Conwell was a Baptist minister who established his church in Philadelphia. When he wasn't tending to his flock, he spent hours in the evening tutoring working-class people in the basement of his church. These individuals were the original "night owls" (the Temple mascot for those of you wondering). These evening classes laid the foundation for what would eventually become Temple University.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first American-born saint, established the first Catholic girls' school in the United States. Her activities and success inspired her to found the Sisters of Charity. At the time of her death, there were over 20 communities of Sisters of Charity serving the needs of the faithful in eight states and the District of Columbia. Seton Hall College was established in 1856 by Bishop James Roosevelt Bailey in honor of his aunt.

Mother Catherine McAuley—most of us know her story. She established the House of Mercy on Baggot Street in 1827 to educate young women in their faith and prepare them for meaningful work in society. She also tended to their needs by providing health care, long before it was considered a public good and the concern of government. The Sisters of

Mercy, which she established in 1831, would eventually become one of the largest congregations of religious women in the world.

These four visionaries have inspired thousands of individuals, both religious and lay, to follow in their footsteps. For those of us in higher education, one result has been in the establishment of faith-based institutions that provide a value-based education with particular attention to the less fortunate in society. As you know, Georgian Court is one of these institutions.

Those familiar with Georgian Court know our five Mercy core values are respect, integrity, service, compassion, and justice. Among these values, justice is paramount. It is from justice that the other four values are derived. Justice is the transformative value that animates our work and allows us to carry on the tradition of Mother Catherine McAuley. Justice inspires us to improve the lives of the individuals that we touch on a daily basis. A Georgian Court education provides students the opportunity to discover their talents, hear their call, and prepare for lives of purpose, all while feeling free to express their faith.

When we tout the recent recognition that the university has received from *Money* magazine, the *Washington Monthly*, or Colleges of Distinction, we are not merely proclaiming a “feel good” story. We are providing testimony and giving evidence to whoever will listen that this institution is living its mission. By being an institution that is student-centric, we ensure that we will continue to transform lives.

I wish I could say that based on the success we have enjoyed, the task of ensuring the continued success of Georgian Court will be an easy one, however we know that demographics, the economy, and popular sentiment questioning the value of a college education are obstacles that we will need to overcome.

Demographers tell us that the number of traditional 18-year-olds graduating from high school will continue to decline until 2020. This is particularly true for New Jersey and the other states in our region. We also know that when the number of graduating seniors does begin to rebound, the population mix will be very different, and we will see a faster growing number of students of color, especially Latinos, who are first-generation and may face language barriers and cultural obstacles in their quest for a college education. As a student-focused university, our response must be to develop programs that meet the needs of this new generation of students. We must also realize that our already diverse student body will become even more diverse.

In addition to these 18-year-olds, the university needs to expand our outreach to nontraditional learners, those age 25 to 65. These learners are traditional graduate students, degree completers, and others seeking professional credentials and continuing study credits. In all, they make up over 70% of the higher education market. In meeting the needs of these nontraditional learners, we must bear in mind that they seek programs that offer convenience at a reasonable cost. Our response must be to develop programs that meet the needs of this community of learners. This will include a different mix of programs and different delivery methods such as online, hybrid, and accelerated programs, as appropriate to meet their needs.

The second major challenge is the economy. The escalating cost of higher education is at odds with the flat wages that most American families have experienced since the Great Recession of 2008. Furthermore, there is significant concern about the debt that students incur. While some of the debt horror stories are exaggerated, the pressure to contain costs is real, and is forcing the industry to reexamine how we do business. Georgian Court is not immune to these pressures.

Indeed these pressures have fueled a popular sentiment that is being stoked by populist demagogues, who believe that higher education ought to be vocational training. Many even question the value of a college degree. The irony is that every economic indicator shows the value of a college degree. Those earning bachelor's degrees have better incomes, better quality of life, and are more productive and active citizens than those without. Furthermore, from surveys of employers, we know that they seek employees with the skills that a liberal arts education provides including critical analysis, problem solving, effective communication, and teamwork.

Despite the challenges, there is reason for optimism, and I find that reason primarily in Georgian Court's Catholic identity. As the only Catholic university serving Central and Southern New Jersey, we have a unique opportunity to define our niche in the marketplace and to tell our story by ensuring that our students answer their calls. We must continue to embrace our Catholic identity, inspired by Mercy tradition and the five Mercy core values.

In that spirit, I am pleased to announce the establishment of scholarships for students graduating from Catholic high schools and scholarships for any student who is active in his or her local parish. In full disclosure, I must confess that I've stolen this idea from Bishop O'Connell, who established similar scholarships when he was the president of Catholic University. Thank you, Bishop.

In sum, our response to those questioning the value of a college education is that, we at Georgian Court offer a value-added and values-based education that focuses on student learning.

In order to live up to this promise, we as an institution must reexamine our academic program offerings to ensure that they are rigorous and relevant, preparing our students for success in the next phase of their lives, so that they have the tools to pursue their callings. We can only do this by taking a leadership role in this region and partnering with the business community, the educational community, and the nonprofit community. We must learn their needs and develop curricular and co-curricular programs in response.

We must also build upon our current success, and continue to be a welcoming community to traditional and nontraditional students, to commuters and resident students, and to first-time freshman and transfer students. We will do this by partnering with appropriate institutions to expand experiential and engaged learning opportunities for our students, by partnering with two-year institutions to enable their graduates to earn a bachelor's degree with minimal obstacles in the transfer process, and by partnering with graduate institutions to offer accelerated and advanced degrees in programs that we do not offer. Each of these initiatives empowers our students to reach their full potential.

We will also work with our current partners to expand relationships with local high schools, especially Catholic high schools, to provide accelerated programs, so that their students can earn college credits while completing their senior year in order to assist in lowering the costs of attending college.

By rethinking and improving the Georgian Court educational experience, with particular focus on the changing nature of our students, we remain true to our Mercy heritage.

As the only Catholic university serving Central and Southern New Jersey, we are uniquely situated to provide the students in the Trenton, Metuchen, and Camden dioceses—and beyond—the opportunity to discover their talents and prepare for lives of purpose.

Today, I ask each of you to join **Georgian Court** as we renew our commitment to answer the call—the call to transform lives through higher education. **The call to encourage** our students to pursue their passion in an environment infused with **Mercy and guided by** respect, integrity, compassion, service, and especially, justice.

Thank you.