



2010 Presidential Convocation Address

by David W. Burcham, President

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Sacred Heart Chapel
Loyola Marymount University

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PAUL HARRIS: Good afternoon. Good afternoon and welcome. Welcome faculty, students, staff, administrators, alumni, trustees and all members of the LMU community. My name is Paul Harris. I am a professor of English and president of the Faculty Senate. This is indeed a wonderful, historic occasion and it is truly an honor and a pleasure to introduce David W. Burcham, LMU's 15th president, for his 2010 Convocation Address. Dave Burcham is a genuinely transformative leader. In less than two years, he has instilled trust and confidence throughout the LMU community. Dave Burcham's word has purchase. He gains leverage by being on the level. Dave walks the walk, meaning he walks the campus to seek us out in person, and he talks the talk, meaning he engages us in direct conversation and considers our words very carefully. Dave Burcham's acts have purpose. His transparent decisions have acquired faculty buy-in, that most elusive, exclusive sign of respect. Dave's personal integrity and professional dedication demand and deserve reciprocation. He is a great president because he challenges us to think and do the unprecedented.

In this auspicious year, LMU faculty are engaged in three ambitious projects: revising and voting on a new core curriculum; revamping the tenure and promotion process; and revitalizing faculty governance. As president of the Senate, I am motivated and invigorated by the leadership of President Burcham and CAO Joe Hellige. They make a great team. We, the faculty, now have not only a rare opportunity, but a real responsibility to step up and shake up and shape up the academic body and spiritual soul of our university, and help President Burcham guide LMU into a thriving, innovative future.

In the days since Dave was named president, the bluff has been alive with the sound of music, and dance, and celebratory joy. This has been a truly unique period in my 18 years here, and in LMU's history; we find ourselves in a moment of kairós, a special and opportune time. Let us treasure this moment and follow the light that emanates from it into the future. And as a first step in this process, let us give our warmest welcome to President David W. Burcham, who will point the way in the 2010 Convocation Address "Moving Forward."

MR. DAVID BURCHAM: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Paul. That was a pretty good speech. Maybe I should just sit down. Let's go eat.

I'd like to welcome and say good afternoon to the trustees, the regents, the students, the faculty, staff, and friends of LMU. I really appreciate your coming. This obviously is an exciting day for me. I've been a member of this community for over 20 years, first as a law student, then as a faculty member at the law school, and as an administrator both at the law school campus and on this campus. I am truly honored to stand here today as your president. I am humbled by this opportunity, and I give you a promise, a promise that I will work as hard as I know how for you and for this university. I know that working together we will be able to accomplish great things.

Last week at the rally that announced my appointment, I emphasized that at the center of our university are students and faculty. They are the reason that we exist, and today I want to give you a glimpse of what I mean by this. John F. Kennedy once said that, "Change is the law of life. Those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." As individuals and as institutions, we can resist change or we can embrace it. We can stagnate or we can seize an opportunity to grow and to become stronger. This is the choice facing Loyola Marymount University as we prepare to enter our second century.

Today I want to talk about the challenges that we face and the great opportunities that lie ahead. In 2011, we will launch a yearlong celebration of the richness of our Catholic intellectual tradition, our Jesuit and Marymount heritages, and our success as an academic institution over the past 100 years. One sign of this new reality is yours truly, is me, standing as your president. This may come as a surprise to some of you, but I am not a Jesuit. In fact, for the first time in our history, someone who is not a Jesuit is leading LMU. We're not alone. Nine out of the current 28 Jesuit universities have non-Jesuits as their presidents, so we're not the only institution that is adjusting to this change. But adjust we will. I want to pause right here and from my heart acknowledge my gratitude to our Jesuit community and to our women religious for their courage and their willingness to embrace this change and to partner with me, and with you, as we all work together to advance our mission. Thank you very much.

A second change is for the first time in our 99-year history, we have, for lack of a better term, a first lady, my wife. She's really not totally enamored with that title, and I'm going

to pay for that tonight, but that's the way it goes. A third change you may have noticed is I'm trying out this teleprompter. I hope it works okay. If it doesn't, I'm in very deep, deep trouble.

In his Mission Day address here, in this place, a year and a half ago, Father Adolfo Nicolás, the superior general of the Society of Jesus, said that “Jesuits have found their long history of involvement in many cultures, traditions, and religions to be something which profoundly enhances and clarifies and, indeed, shapes their identity.” In this same light, I hope to work with each of you to enhance and clarify the Jesuit and Marymount traditions that make us so special. That is my goal because first and foremost I love LMU.

As a law student many years ago, this university's mission -- service to others, education of the whole person and the integration of the intellectual, the social, and the spiritual dimensions of human life -- instilled in me the desire to work for others. It also gave me a deep appreciation for the way that LMU seeks academic excellence for both students and faculty. These are the reasons that I stand here today, and these are the reasons that I am so passionate about LMU. There simply is no one that I have met or know who is more committed to this university than I, and it is my hope that we will work together to strengthen its foundation and ensure LMU's next 100 years.

The academic center of our university is strong. We have an excellent faculty, with more than 500 full-time faculty members, and by some external measures, we are doing quite well. We were just ranked number three in the U.S. News & World Report's listing of “Best Colleges in the Western Region.” This is an improvement of one spot over last year, but we have a couple of spots to go. Our law school, just 17 miles to our east, jumped 15 spots in U.S. News' “Best Graduate Schools” ranking, up to number 56 of nearly 200 accredited law schools in our country. The 2011 Princeton Review placed LMU in the top 20 nationwide for the most accessible professors, and just yesterday I learned that the Princeton Review's evaluation and ranking of law schools was just published and our law school did very well -- number three in the country in “Best Classroom Experience”; number six in the country in “Best Environment for Students of Color”; and number seven in the country for “Best Professors”. That's pretty impressive.

Now, we appreciate the plaudits, but inasmuch as all ranking systems are flawed, and these are no exception, we don't want to put too much stock in them. Although I always say that it's better to be going up in rankings rather than down, no matter how flawed they might be. And while we cannot ignore these rankings, as so many of our important constituencies pay attention to them, I agree completely with former Superior General Father Kolvenbach's assertion that the real measure of Jesuit universities lies in who our students become. Unfortunately, neither Father Kolvenbach nor anyone else has undertaken a ranking project based on that measure; but perhaps someday someone will.

So as we move forward then, the more important question that we face is how we, assembled here, the heart of our university, rank ourselves, and in what ways should we work to improve our university. As we consider these questions, we must be realistic and understand that we have several formidable challenges over the next years, and none –

none -- will be more of a challenge than our budget. I am happy to say as I stand here, we are fiscally strong. We've been steering a conservative course through these rocky economic times, and that course has served us well. But as we look ahead, our number one challenge is indeed our budget. We're certainly not alone in confronting this issue; universities across the country face the same challenge. In the past, we have increased undergraduate student tuition as a means of funding new programs, hiring new faculty and staff, and increasing our scholarship aid to students. But the price has been considerable. Today the cost of one year at LMU for undergraduate tuition, room, board, books and fees is in excess of \$52,000.

Now I realize that there is currently a national debate about this very subject, the high cost of a private college education, and many people question the value of that education. As we move forward, we face a formidable challenge because over the next ten years, we simply must come to grips with and solve this problem of affordability. And all of us must work to ensure that an LMU education is worth its cost. And, most importantly, we must be able -- each of us must be able -- to articulate why it's worth the cost. For the past two years, I've worked with the Board of Trustees on this affordability issue, with a basic but quite difficult to implement two-fold strategy. First, reduce expenses; second, keep tuition increases as low as possible so that our students and our academic programs do not suffer. As you probably know, last year the increase in our tuition was only 2.9 percent, and as far as we can tell, that's the lowest increase from year to year on record at the university.

On the expense side, we have moved to a zero-based budgeting system to increase our ability to monitor costs, to reduce expenses, and to achieve more transparency in our budgeting process. This means that we are asking each unit in the university to justify every dollar that that unit spends. But in all of this, I want to emphasize one very important point, and that is this: while we reduce expenses, we will continue to focus our spending priorities on academics, including faculty hiring, any new and enhanced academic programs that we deem appropriate, and making sure that we recruit the best students. All of those strategies, however, require money. And so we can't talk about the budget unless we also talk about other sources of revenue, like fundraising.

After tuition, fundraising is our most important source of revenue. We plan to reach our current campaign goal of \$380 million by May of 2012 if not sooner. As we look to future fundraising efforts, we will need to identify and prioritize our needs. We anticipate that the 20-year Master Plan, which I hope most of you have heard at least a little about, some of you a lot about, will be approved and in place by the end of this academic year. The first projects under that plan will be the relocation of our recycling center and the construction of the new Life Sciences Building. I know that right now, many of you in Seaver College are working in 40-year-old laboratories, and that affects your ability to do quality research, as well as attract quality students. This new building that we have planned represents the kind of infrastructure and the kind of upgrade that we need to stay competitive and to meet the needs of our students. This is a very ambitious project and thus far we have raised about half of what we need. We are absolutely committed to getting this building constructed and occupied as fast and as soon as possible. But listen

carefully -- it is important to understand that over the next ten years, we must shift much of our fundraising priorities from buildings to people.

What do I mean by that? Our tuition income accounts for about 82 percent of our operations budget. Historically, decisions to hire more faculty, undertake new initiatives, hire more staff, enhance our financial aid program, or grow in other ways, have been funded primarily by tuition revenue. Because our ability to raise tuition is seriously constrained, we have to look to other sources of revenue, especially to our donor base. In this regard, it is imperative that we, that I in particular, work to broaden our list of principal donors, and to convince them to invest both in LMU's current-use projects as well as in our endowment to augment our operating budget. That will be if not my number one, above all other, goals, certainly tied for number one over the next upcoming months and years. Our trustees and regents, many of whom are with us today, will be our key in this. They are our ambassadors in the community. We rely on them to help convince others to invest in LMU. We have the capacity to become an even greater university, but we will need additional help to get there.

As the national debate intensifies over the comparative worth of a private college education versus one that's received at a public university, there is no doubt in my mind, and I'm sure there is little in yours, that what LMU offers is indeed a unique educational experience that is individualized, nurturing, and valuable in a way that simply cannot be replicated at most public universities. We provide our students with the intellectual tools to answer deeper questions of meaning, of self, God, and of students' own personal place in the world. We provide them with means to think ethically about their lives, and about key world issues, and provide them with opportunities both inside and outside the classroom that many times are truly transformative. Our students and their families know this, but we must continue, indeed we must accelerate, our pursuit of academic excellence. We must continue to work hard to attract exceptional students, and we have very -- we have a lot of good stories to tell here, but let me give you just one example.

Eighteen-year-old Adam Dlugolecki attended Loyola High School and was a top student who did exceptionally well on his standardized tests. His father is an avid Notre Dame alum, and he took his family to South Bend several times during Adam's childhood and dreamed of the day that Adam would join the Fighting Irish. But when Adam received his Notre Dame acceptance letter, he also received letters of acceptance from UC Berkeley and from us, from LMU. Adam turned down Berkeley as too large and too impersonal. And in a move that still has his parents reeling, he turned down Notre Dame. Adam chose LMU because we offered a great education and, in his words, made him feel like he was joining a family. I personally think he was probably also influenced by the fact that our basketball team defeated Notre Dame last year on their home basketball court. And by the way, I think we're going to have a really good basketball team this year, so get your season tickets now.

We chose Adam because he is exactly the kind of student that we want here at LMU, a student committed to our mission, who expects academic excellence along with individualized attention; in other words, to be a member of a family. I often think that we do a disservice when we talk about our mission without addressing as part of that mission

the pursuit of academic excellence. Academic excellence is part and parcel of our mission, and the wonderful Jesuit tradition has placed it at the forefront of Jesuit pedagogy for the past 450 years. Along with the service of faith, and the promotion of justice, of educating the whole person, LMU's mission includes an unwavering commitment to academic excellence. This is a top priority, and it begins, it begins with our great faculty. Our faculty understands that a commitment to excellence in teaching begins first in the classroom. We offer an intimate education to you, our students, due in part to our small class sizes -- an average of about 15 in our graduate programs, and an average of 20 in undergraduate programs. This is possible and reflects an extraordinary student-to-faculty ratio of 11 to 1. This is an educational resource that we must all work hard every day to leverage.

But while teaching excellence begins in the classroom, our faculty knows it certainly doesn't end there. Our faculty also is committed to mentoring and advising students outside of the formal classroom setting. There are literally thousands, and I mean thousands, of individual stories to tell here, but allow me to relate just one. Brandon Sorbom, one of our 2010 graduates, just last May, read an article on nuclear fusion as a potential source of cheap energy and decided he wanted to build a nuclear reactor. He went to his professor, John Bulman, and physics lab associate, Anatol Hoemke, and with their guidance, and with parts purchased from Home Depot for about \$300, he built and tested a nuclear reactor -- perhaps a little disconcerting, but pretty impressive.

This, though, is what happens when you have inspired teaching and individualized attention. Students can accomplish extraordinary things. And this is the essence of what makes an LMU education unique and valuable and still worth the cost. When students are engaged in the classroom, and encouraged and mentored as they follow their interests, they stay in school, they flourish, and good things happen. Retention rates go up, and lots and lots of attention gets directed toward them by future employers.

A second equally important aspect of academic excellence is faculty productivity of scholarly and creative works. I've heard it mentioned a few times on our campus and elsewhere that somehow a university must decide, must choose, between excellence in teaching on the one hand and excellence in scholarship on the other. I believe this is truly a false dichotomy. When we hire faculty members, we must look for promising scholars committed to excellence in teaching, committed to putting students first. We all benefit, all of us, when our faculty members produce significant scholarly or creative works. Students benefit from the synergies between research and teaching. We as a community benefit from an enhanced intellectual climate. And the university as a whole benefits because the dissemination of faculty scholarship is the most effective way to raise LMU's profile and reputation as a place of academic excellence.

I'm not Pollyanna-ish, I understand. In order to do this, in order to continue this progress, we must put more resources into the academic division. We need to ensure that you, our faculty, have the requisite time and support to produce first-rate scholarship and then to attend conferences and symposia where you can present your work to peers, all the while serving as teacher, mentor, and adviser extraordinaire. I understand that we need more resources in order for us to do that at an even higher level.

At the same time, in order to advance our mission as a Catholic and Jesuit-Marymount university, I believe we simply have to increase the number of religious on our campus, and especially in our classrooms. In this respect, I will be working with others in a concerted effort to recruit and hire more Jesuits and more women religious who can all contribute to our educational mission.

Another factor in increasing our academic excellence is selecting you, our students. The freshmen that are with us on campus here today are the most academically qualified in LMU history, with a record-setting average SAT score as well as a record high school GPA average. In addition, our students are extraordinarily diverse, reflecting the population of Los Angeles, the country, and the world. Just as it is a disservice to separate our Jesuit and Marymount traditions from academic excellence, it is also a disservice to treat diversity as somehow separate and distinct from academic excellence. The two are the same. Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity is a vitally important component of academic excellence. I say that not as some theoretical platitude, but I base that on personal experience over the past 30 years. I have witnessed firsthand in the many classrooms I have been in my education life that students of diverse backgrounds and life experiences enrich the educational environment and climate in the classroom and on campuses for all students. Diversity stimulates debate and requires students to step out of their own shoes to consider other points of view. It teaches us to embrace and accept differences, not to withdraw and separate ourselves from each other. That is the essence of a sound, strong education, and diversity allows us to achieve that, and we're doing quite well. We were named as one of the top 11 universities nationally in successfully admitting and graduating African-American and Hispanic students by the prestigious independent Education Trust. I am proud of this, and we should all be proud of this achievement, but we should also not be complacent because we can always strive to do more.

And speaking of doing more, I want to acknowledge those who impress me on a daily basis by their commitment to do more to advance our mission, and I'm speaking about our staff. We could not provide our outstanding academic programs and warm campus environment without the tireless work of our non-academic staff and administrators. They help us recruit the best students and faculty, supply support and guidance to our students, keep all of the systems going that make this university beautiful and well-maintained. Thank you very much, staff.

As we prepare this year to start our next 100 years, I think it's time to challenge ourselves to seize the opportunity to use our collective talents and imagination to push LMU into greatness. We have the Jesuit and Marymount traditions, our Catholic identity, and a magnificent history to guide us as we unite behind our common purpose. One of the sentiments I have heard repeatedly on this campus goes something like this: LMU has so much potential. The unstated premise, of course, is that we have unrealized but realizable potential and that someone needs to do something about that.

I have a couple of observations about this unstated premise. First, it is obviously the case that our institution, like each of us as individuals, has unrealized potential. This is a natural condition of the human experience, and it's fairly unremarkable. Second, as institutions go, realizing potential is often a group project requiring agreed-upon

objectives, well-devised plans, and teamwork. I will offer to our community at my inaugural address in March a vision for where I think we should be headed with major institutional initiatives of this sort. But today I have something much more fundamental and much more important to say about our potential. LMU can never be greater than the sum of its parts, and its parts are each of us. So more fully realizing our potential as a university has to begin with each of us as individuals. We must regularly recommit ourselves to our university values, to our mission, to why we study here, to why we draw a paycheck from here, to why we donate our time or money to LMU.

So, today I say that the best plan for beginning of realizing our considerable potential as a university is for us as individuals, and now I'm talking to myself, to commit to be better. I pledge to you that I will work tirelessly to improve our university and to work with each of you, each of you that wants to work with me, to work with you constructively. I hope you will make a similar pledge and join with me in that endeavor. Our collective commitment to be better at what we do is a responsibility that we all have today, but it is essential to secure the promise of tomorrow, to be more fully realized as our potential as a great university.

I would like to conclude with a prayer for Loyola Marymount. Lord, our God, the LMU family gathers now to give thanks For Your gift of LMU founders, for centuries of traditions that ground us, for Loyola's inspiration and the legacies of our Marymount and Saint Joseph sisters, for generations of faithful alumni and friends who imitate You in giving so much, and then more, we give thanks. For Your gift of LMU learning, sharp minds honed sharper still, imaginations flexible, visions clear, hopes articulate, rigorous scholarship, and most remarkable students, we give thanks. For Your gift of LMU faith, Yours in us, ours in You; for heritage rich, tradition strong, mission sound; for Church to serve, a city to engage, a world of grace; for catholicity in all cases, lower and capital, and You playing for us in so many LMU faces, we give thanks. For Your gift of LMU freedom; freedom from and freedom for -- from quick judgment and easy answers, for theories tentative and all things uncertain; for searching, stretching, and the great grace of admitting what we do not yet know, work yet to be done by those who will come later; for restlessness rooted in the mystery of You, we give thanks. For Your gift of Loyola Marymount; You've made Your home in many places, including our own beautiful setting. You show Yourself here. We are transfigured -- not simply scholars and students and staff, but servants now of the God who so richly blesses LMU in this hour, the God who blesses Loyola Marymount forever. Amen. I am excited about working with you as we move forward. Thank you.