



2011 Presidential Convocation Address

by David W. Burcham
15th President

October 13, 2011
Sacred Heart Chapel
Loyola Marymount University

This document, including a full video webcast version, is available online:
<http://president.lmu.edu>.

MR. JOHN PARRISH: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Good afternoon and welcome to the centennial President's Convocation of Loyola Marymount University. I'm John Parrish, president of the Faculty Senate, and it is my pleasure and privilege to get to introduce today's speaker, President David Burcham.

At President Burcham's inauguration this spring we, the university community, pledged that each of us would work with our new president to cultivate bold dreams for LMU and to see that they come true. In his inaugural address President Burcham affirmed that LMU's two central commitments would be the pursuit of academic excellence and the enhancement of our distinctive Jesuit/ Marymount identity and mission.

Thus President Burcham has invited us to invest in the proposition that academic excellence and mission-defined distinctiveness are not conflicting values, but complementary ones; that their natural relationship is not strain or rupture, but harmony. And that the way to pursue academic excellence and mission-defined distinctiveness is not to try to compromise between them, but rather to seek each at once with the whole of who we are.

Thus, at its heart President Burcham's vision for LMU encourages us to trust, to have faith in the whole of our mission. Having faith in our mission means we pursue academic excellence boldly, because we trust that the God known in the Catholic tradition glories in inquiry and discovery and creativity, and in a human mind fully alive. Having faith in our mission means we cherish the whole person, serve faith, and promote justice boldly, because we recognize that if we understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have not charity, we are nothing. When we truly

have faith in the whole of our mission we make bold choices that are not compromises of our guiding principles, but deepened commitments to their fundamental meaning.

Successful leaders make promises that the communities they lead come to see as their own. President Burcham, these are the promises you have invited us to share: to have faith in our mission, to dream big dreams for this university, and to make bold choices for what it can become. These promises today we make our own. We trust you to lead us in fulfilling them. We are here to help you in keeping them. We are going to hold you to them. And now, presenting his convocation address titled "Vision and Transformation: LMU into its Second Century," it's my honor to present to you our president, David Burcham.

PRESIDENT DAVID BURCHAM: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, John, that was a great introduction. In fact, you said in about a minute and a half what I'm going to take about 30 to say. I perhaps should just sit down and we can go eat lunch. But good afternoon trustees, regents, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of LMU. Thank you very much for being here.

I'm happy to have this opportunity on an annual basis to talk about my favorite subject, Loyola Marymount University. But before I begin I'd like to extend a very special thanks to our new Board of Trustees Chair, Kathleen Aikenhead. Kathy comes from a family with a long tradition of supporting and service to LMU as regents, trustees, and major benefactors. And by accepting her new role as board chair she continues her own broad and deep commitment to our university's governance. We are pleased to have your wise guidance and skillful leadership as we move forward, Kathy.

LMU is fortunate that people like Kathy and her family feel such a strong commitment to our school. And we are grateful that so many people, including many of you here today, have played significant roles in our long history of achievements. 100 years ago our university was a little start-up operating out of a few bungalows in Highland Park. Because of the efforts of many dedicated people like you, LMU is now truly a world-class institution of higher education on a beautiful 150-acre campus.

We have come a very long way and this is only the beginning. A great institution does not rest on its accomplishments, it builds on them. And to build successfully on our accomplishments we are developing a blueprint for LMU's future, also known as a strategic plan. Now, I realize that it's become something of a sport to belittle strategic planning.

Some of you may have read the recent Chronicle of Higher Education article by Benjamin Ginsberg critiquing the fact that every new university president tends to launch a strategic planning initiative with varying degrees of success. Many plans end up on a shelf, gathering dust, and the university plods along as usual. Other plans take 18 or more months to formulate and then the president declares victory and leaves for a new position.

Well I've been serving LMU for more than 20 years now and I'm not going anywhere, at least not voluntarily. I'm afraid you're stuck with me. And I'm also afraid that we are stuck with the necessity of going through a strategic planning process, because I wholeheartedly believe that a properly developed and executed strategic plan is the only way to carry our institution forward.

I know that a period of reflection and planning can feel like an unnecessary delay on the road to accomplishment. As a person of action myself, I have to remind myself to be patient with the time

it takes to formulate effective strategies. But there's really no question that taking a few months to map out years of operational initiatives is time well spent. So, I'm asking for your patience during this process, and more importantly for your active participation in each phase.

A viable strategic plan requires careful framing, meticulous execution, and a powerful commitment from the entire university. It is essential that each of you buy into the process, give feedback as we develop our objectives, cooperate as we ratify our tactics, and remain effectively engaged as we assign responsibilities for implementing the plan.

Now, make no mistake, not everyone will like all aspects of our final plan; we're human beings. And we will have to carefully allocate our resources to achieve our goals. But I promise you that by getting onboard and working together we will create and implement a strong foundational blueprint for our future. And I promise you that I will guide this process every step of the way, because as we enter into our second century LMU faces many challenges, and the need for bold strategic action is clear.

It is no secret that universities across the nation are facing a time of difficulty and uncertainty. Along with unprecedented changes in technology that continue to impact everything from what we teach to how we teach it, our country is engaged in a debate about whether higher education remains a goal worth pursuing. In this fast-moving and uniquely challenging environment we must make hard choices about our own directions.

I'm very happy to report that our strategic planning steering committee is making significant progress toward finalizing those hard choices. Thanks to their diligent efforts and the thoughtful engagement of many academic and other advisers, we have the outlines of a clearly defined agenda for moving our university forward.

Our strategic plan will accelerate our university's growth in several areas, all of which rest on three bedrock objectives. We will reinforce and advance our Jesuit and Marymount mission and identity, and strengthen our commitment to providing the world with leaders who have been taught to cultivate full use of their judgment and to stand firm on ethical positions.

We will relentlessly pursue academic excellence. In a time when every university is being called to account for its educational outcomes, we must continually evaluate and refine the quality of our own scholarship here. And to keep soaring costs in line, we will manage our resources with increasing rigor.

Our steering committee will continue formulating measurable objectives for each of these three major initiatives. But I must stress again that no matter how detailed our strategic plan is on paper, we need everyone to pitch in and work hard to transform it from vision to reality. Sometimes the process will not be simple. And all of us find it easy to work with agreeable colleagues. It's much harder to collaborate when we disagree. Yet that is exactly what I'm asking of you all today.

Many of you have heard me say that we don't earn our paychecks, those of us who work here for the university, by working effectively with like-minded individuals, but we earn them by finding ways to compromise with people whose views are different from our own. Our university's foundation is solid, but our future depends on all of us coming together and working toward common strategic goals, even if we occasionally disagree on the best way to do so.

It is crucial for us to model the kind of reasonable cooperation and compromise that we expect of our students. Having seen what incivility and intransigence looks like on the national stage, I am asking each of you as LMU's community to commit to rising above these differences of opinion. As we face our challenges, let us not be Congress.

Let's be diplomats who are not prisoners of our own personal predilections and ideology, who map out effective solutions and use them to move our university forward, because to stay competitive we must continually update our curriculum and our infrastructure to keep pace with technological and social changes. I know we are up to the task.

LMU has become a leading institution by steadily building on decades of dynamic contributions made by our religious and lay leaders, faculty, staff, and students. And at a time when the value of higher education is being debated across the nation, it is more important than ever for us to recognize and to celebrate our university's many impressive accomplishments.

As imperfect, and I mean imperfect, as ranking systems are, we have nonetheless earned high marks from some notable organizations. U.S. News and World Report named us the 4th "Best Regional University in the West," our undergraduate business school 97th, our accounting program 21st, our marketing program 22nd, our engineering program 27th, our education school 86th, and our law school 54th best in the nation. And in Forbes most recent edition of America's Best College, we were ranked among the top 5%.

Our commitment to fostering inclusiveness has also been recognized by prestigious organizations. Hispanic Outlook Magazine named us the top private California university for the number and percentage of Hispanic students earning bachelor's degrees here. And studies conducted by the Education Trust recognized LMU as one of 11 colleges nationwide that excels at graduating Hispanic and African-American students.

But far more important than the rankings themselves is the fact that we achieved them while solidly upholding our Ignatian mission. We take great pride in being recognized as an academically rigorous school and as an institution committed to diversity; however we remain proudest of our core commitment to transformative education. This is what sets LMU apart and defines our special contribution to this community, this nation, and to the world.

Our Ignatian mission, with its strong tradition of truth-seeking, is more relevant and important than ever, because our world is in danger of drowning in disinformation. Gossip and opinion are spread as fact. And reliable news rushes at us with such speed and urgency that it's often impossible for young people, or for us not-so-young people, to know where or how to focus their attention.

Superior General Nicolas referred to this problem as "the globalization of superficiality". Jesuit and Marymount traditions of intellectual analysis, moral reflection, and civic action are an antidote to superficiality. We train young people to think deeply about the critical issues as they cultivate wisdom, accountability, and fair-mindedness.

So it's evident that Ignatian teaching methodologies have an important role to play in our global society. But determining how to best position LMU to fulfill this role is going to require thoughtful analysis. Superior General Nicolas has challenged us to think broadly and deeply about how globalization and social networking can inspire a re-imagination of our mission. And we have

responded in part with a yearlong Bellarmine Forum dedicated to contemplating the future of education, faith, and justice.

As part of this forum, LMU recently hosted the first annual Conference on Jesuit Higher Education. Focused on Ignatian intellectual tradition and emphasizing Jesuit rhetoric, the conference made significant contributions to planning courses for our new core curriculum.

The Bellarmine Forum will continue to act as an important think tank, assisting our strategic planning process, and will play a key role in helping us determine effective ways of reinforcing our Jesuit and Marymount identity. By coming together to engage in disciplined and imaginative deliberations about LMU's present identity and future direction, we practice what we teach and we exemplify who we are.

As faculty and staff we are confronting issues that will shape our school's future, just as our students are learning to think deeply about the pressing scientific, legal, and social problems that impact our world. And as students explore these critical issues they are simultaneously encouraged to serve faith and promote justice by reaching out to disadvantaged populations across a wide spectrum of need. They are able to respond to needs within our community and around the world, because we have a staff of dedicated professionals who excel at providing an enormous range of transformational service learning opportunities.

During the alumni barbecue weekend, which I attended along with many of you, I was privileged to get a closer look at one of these service learning opportunities. I participated in a 25th anniversary celebration of De Colores program, and was truly amazed, truly amazed, at the work that's been done through this program. Each month, LMU students travel to Tijuana to build homes, schools, and orphanages, immersing themselves in the culture and expanding their world views.

Former Superior General Father Kolvenback described our special pedagogical engagement of the whole person this way, "Jesuit education is a call to the fullest possible development of all human qualities. It is a call to critical thinking and disciplined studies, a call to develop the whole person, head and heart, intellect, and feelings."

The many community and global services performed by our students are the truest benchmark of LMU stature, because they affirm our dedication to our university's primary task, educating the whole person by integrating intellectual pursuits, spiritual intentions, and social actions.

Our faculty shares a basic responsibility along with our campus ministry staff and student affairs staff for answering this call to develop our students as whole persons through the relentless pursuit of academic excellence. It is not too much to say that LMU's past, present, and future, and its greatness is linked with our faculty's ability to translate our high educational ideals into the kinds of daily lessons and lectures that train our students to become the intelligent, ethical, and moral leaders of the 21st century. No pressure, faculty, but that's your job.

Exciting discoveries take place all across our campus, as our faculty engages with students as teachers, mentors, and advisers, both in and out of the classroom. Every single day, methodologies, technologies, philosophies that will measurably improve the quality of life throughout the world are being advanced under the leadership of our LMU faculty. And our faculty has made some impressive strides in the last year.

This past has been our most successful external funding period to date. Our faculty was awarded 53 research and sponsored project grants that totaled well over \$6 million. Among our many grantors were the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

Excellence in scholarship and research must go hand in hand with excellence in teaching in order to extend our Ignatian influence. That's why we continue to be committed to provide additional resources to our academic division. Our faculty must receive adequate internal support as they produce scholarship, present their work at symposia, and develop projects that win external funding. Outstanding faculty scholarship and leadership in teaching enhance our reputation and attract future scholars and leaders to study at LMU.

I'd like to highlight a few other of our academic accomplishments. After setting a goal to recruit the best and brightest scholars, we had a record number of undergraduate applicants this year, and the students we admitted had SAT scores again averaging above 1200 and GPAs again above 3.7. Among our doctoral candidates in the School of Education GRE scores have increased by almost 100 points, and average GMAT scores for our business school went up 10%.

So, during our strategic process, planning process, we have not been sitting still. We have been actively achieving goals that we set for ourselves. And speaking of setting and achieving goals, today I have some exciting news. Our eight-year-old capital campaign as of last June 1st was at the \$360 million mark. Because of that we felt mildly optimistic that we would be able to achieve our target amount of \$380 million by May of 2012, this coming May. That's when our campaign ends. However, thanks in large part to the dedicated efforts of Dennis Slon, the deans, his development team, and many, many people in this room I am happy to report today that we are over the top.

This is tremendous cause for celebration and another example of how a great institution builds on its successes. If you recall our original goal was \$300 million, which many thought was overly aggressive, and we chose to set and achieve a new target a few years back that was 25% higher. The recent major gifts have brought us to \$382 million and our most recent gift, the one that put us over the top, came as a \$5 million pledge from the William H. Hannon Foundation. Thank you, William H. Hannon Foundation.

But you know how this works. We have until May, and it's now my intention that we work really hard to reach \$400 million by the end of the countdown.

The campaign has allowed us to fund many, many infrastructure upgrades that help us advance our mission. And in addition to these ongoing campus improvements, we have collected more than \$63 million toward our approximately \$105 million budget for construction of our new Life Sciences building.

The building will enable our science and engineering students to work across boundaries. Important breakthroughs in modern science evolve between and among traditional disciplines, rather than solely within them, and LMU needs updated lab facilities that foster this kind of interdisciplinary cooperation. Completion of the Life Sciences building is a critical milestone in advancing our academic excellence.

After it is completed, and during the next period of time, our number one challenge will be the strategic management of our new resources. On the one hand we have an urgent need to make

competitive advances. But at the same time we face the formidable challenge of controlling costs. Tuition has reached a point where some say the price of earning a higher education degree is not worthwhile, because students cannot get jobs as soon as they graduate. But that argument really misses the mark. A university, our university, is far more than a factory for producing tomorrow's employees. We are charged with training tomorrow's leaders and tomorrow's thinkers.

The real issue is that we have reached the point where the high cost of tuition prevents worthy students from applying to or attending our school, and leaves many graduates saddled with a level of debt that discourages them from entering service careers. Pursuing a higher purpose unfortunately often leads to a lower paycheck. And with debts from student loans reaching into the six-figure stratosphere, a lower paycheck may simply be inadequate.

We cannot train students to tackle the world's most pressing problems only to leave them mired in debt that prevents them from living out their service goals. We cannot allow that to happen. Our obligation to our students begins with making an LMU education accessible and affordable.

We have a long tradition of preparing leaders from many different cultures and backgrounds. This wide variety of viewpoints and life experiences enriches our classrooms, enhances our campus life, and enables us to prepare leaders from all parts of society who will go on to serve all parts of the world. We have never been and we do not wish to become – and we will not become – a university that is inaccessible to all but the wealthiest among us.

It has been our duty and our privilege to reach out and provide financial aid to first-generation immigrant scholars and talented students of limited means. Every year our scholarship recipients are a wonderfully diverse and talented group of students, and LMU benefits in countless ways from their attendance at our school. Providing financial aid to ensure our school's diversity is mission critical.

Our integrity as a religious institution and our position as a global leader both depend upon our continued dedication to cultivating the rich and vibrant diversity that is a hallmark of our school. In the coming months and years, my top priority will be to raise several hundred million dollars in endowment funds, not for buildings, for endowment funds, to provide scholarship and to provide faculty support.

We must make sure that talented individuals from all backgrounds can afford to avail themselves of the kind of education that is singularly accessible through our Jesuit and Marymount ways of teaching.

Above all, above all, as we rise to the challenges of the future we must retain our focus and our faith. The renowned philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said, "Moral education is impossible without the habitual vision of greatness." Think about that for a minute. "Moral education is impossible without the habitual vision of greatness."

LMU provides students with a strong moral education. And this mission is grounded in our habitual vision of the greatness of our God-given task as educators, serving the world's need for ethical leadership. We must hold fast to this inspirational vision of greatness. It illuminates our past, encourages us in the present, and will sustain us in the future as we champion Ignatian pedagogy as an antidote to the globalization of superficiality.

LMU is a dynamic academic community, fortunate in location, and with a clear vision of our global teaching and service obligations. We must dare to be great and we must plan to be great. As we move toward our fullest potential as a renowned institution by completing and ratifying our ambitious strategic plan, I will be relying on all of you for advice, support, and assistance. I ask each of you to find ways in which your skills and talents can be used to advance our goals.

As trustees and regents you may choose to help us broaden our circle of benefactors and donors. As faculty and staff you can look for opportunities to recruit the best and the brightest in your respective fields. And as students the best way for you to contribute is to pursue your studies with passion and rigor. All of us are proud of our school and each of us has a direct role in shaping its future. Whether you choose to give of your time, talent, or treasure, your support is vital to maintaining and advancing our place as a top-ranked university and a global leader in critical and ethical thinking and service.

LMU flourishes generation after generation because of our outstanding legacy of spiritual, moral, and practical leadership. We are the beneficiaries of past actions and we are the standard-bearers of future accomplishments. It is up to each of us to carry on the traditions handed down to us by those who have gone before.

Today as we recognize and celebrate the past and present successes of LMU, let us vow to take up the mantle of greatness and get busy building our second century of accomplishment. Thank you very much.

On behalf of President Burcham and the Office of the President it's also my joy to invite all of you to a luncheon held in Sculpture Garden. Thank you very much, all of you, for being here today.