

COLLEGE OF MOUNT SAINT VINCENT
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Remarks at the Annual Scholarship Tribute Dinner, 2012

Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to acknowledge the recent death and celebrate the life of George Doty. At Goldman Sachs, George was a visionary leader in the world of finance. He and his late wife Marie, who was one of our trustees, were generous to many causes, all of which were intended to reduce suffering, open opportunity, and make us spiritually whole. In his last weeks, George also supported this dinner, as he always did. Some of his family are here tonight, and I'd like to thank George and them.

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Mount Saint Vincent's Annual Scholarship Tribute Dinner is about the American dream. Education is the glue that holds together the defining values of American life.

- Over time, with education, We the People drive the powerful from tyranny toward accountability, whether in this country in 1776 or 1861, or around the world since then.
- With education, regardless of birth, we make opportunity real.
- With education, we can honestly promise that talent and effort will be rewarded.

From colonial times through the early republic, Americans knew it. That's why by there were over 40 institutions of higher learning in the United States while there were still only 2 in England.

American slaves knew it. With emancipation they sought three foundations for true freedom: education for opportunity, land for economic independence, and the right to vote to protect their freedom, their interests, and their communities.

American women knew it, and they know it now. They sought educational opportunity to ensure full participation in every dimension of American life, including economic independence. They sought the vote to protect their rights, interests, and the common good.

Immigrants knew it, and they know it now. In coming to this land of opportunity, they sought and still seek education for their children and with it the opportunity of a better life.

And Elizabeth Seton and her Sisters knew it.

Before the Sisters of Charity took root in the United States, for 1600 years, the Church had been committed to education, including a learned clergy—but in practice, for those 1600 years, education was for the elite and powerful alone.

Saint Elizabeth Seton and her Sisters were the first to join the Church's commitment to education with American democracy. They knew that liberal education was the best preparation for a life of leadership and service. That part, they kept the same. But they knew also that every person is a child of God. And their vision of education was an American, democratic, inclusive one.

Our Sisters knew, and they know now, that education opens not only the riches of opportunity but also the obligations of service to everyone. There *is* a common good. Education can transform the life of every child—whether born to privilege or to poverty. And with it, we as a nation become a better people.

The Sisters of Charity came to New York City in 1817 to care for orphans—to care for the abandoned and disinherited and vulnerable. They first ran an orphanage on Mott Street. But almost immediately, our Sisters of Charity started founding schools, including the first schools in the nation serving poor students without charge. Our Sisters were interested not only in caring for others but also in giving children the capacity to thrive.

They broke conventions that restricted what women were allowed to do. They served boys as well as girls. They served the rich. They served the poor. They served freed slaves living beyond the margins of New York society. And wherever they served, they were quickly known for a commitment to rigorous excellence.

In 1847, the Sisters of Charity founded the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent. This was a radical, visionary act. Remember there was no public school system. The Academy was among the very few and first high schools for women in New York and for that matter in the country.

Because women, including our Sisters of Charity, broke barriers, opportunities for women expanded at the beginning of the 20th Century. Though Mount women were long required to wear hats and gloves, the Mount was no finishing school. After deciding to transform the Academy into a college, the Sisters waited until they built science labs and recruited Ph.D. trained faculty to teach the biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics.

We are very proud that the College of Mount Saint Vincent is true to the traditions of transformative liberal education, academic excellence, authentic inclusivity, and ceiling-breaking opportunity. Whatever our students' backgrounds, financially advantaged or financially modest, first-generation college or the great grandchildren of alums, the Mount transforms lives. We continue to lay the foundation of the American dream.

This is a lot to be proud of.

Our faculty and students are extraordinary. You are meeting some of them tonight. We are proud of them when some, like Mary Jonjoy do original, path-breaking, nationally important research. And when they present award winning papers at national and state scholarly conferences in anthropology, or psychology, or mathematics, or biology, or

biochemistry, or all of the other fields in which they are doing work. We are proud of them when they raise money in order to spend spring break serving the disinherited or Guatemala, or building homes in Appalachia. We are proud of them when, along with Jamilia Bastian, they enter superlative graduate and professional schools in unusually large numbers. And we are proud of them when they advance to the highest levels of the corporate world . . .

This is a beautiful thing. And, I have to tell you, it is not only beautiful. It is also uncommon.

The Great Recession is not over for everyone. The College of Mount Saint Vincent works hard to open opportunities for students of great talent without regard to family means, but the pressures on many families, including middle class families, are very, very great. Federal and State financial aid programs that assist those of fewest means are immensely important, but they are small compared to the scale of need. Programs to assist the middle class barely do so. Pressures on families are great, and therefore, pressures on the College are very great, too.

As wonderful as our faculty and students are, we have plenty of challenges. This good work would be even more difficult without your help. We know that some of you are sacrificing elsewhere to support our students. We thank you for it. And as George Doty would admonish us, keep at it!