

President's Fall Convocation Address

OneLeMoyne

Cura Personalis

Fred P. Pestello, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Greetings my new colleagues!

Today marks my 86th day as a member of our College. Each night I leave my office with the realization that I have joined a remarkable community. Each morning I return knowing that my job is to nurture the magic that lies at the heart of Le Moyne.

Toward that end, my remarks to you today will focus upon an opportunity we all must embrace, first and foremost, not only as we begin this new academic year, but also as we embark upon our collective future.

Here at Le Moyne the questions we now ask about our College will impact this institution for many years to come. As your new president, and one who is committed wholly to the values and the mission of this fine school, I believe a single question pulsates at our core: "What must Le Moyne College become?" Tonight I am asking that we come together to answer this critical question.

I have pondered our future since being presented as your president-designate on April 1. Now, as your president, it is my responsibility to declare, with passion and purpose, that this is the question we must all ask ourselves, and each other, continuously, over the course of this academic year. And we must end this pursuit with meaningful answers.

Today, as I address you for the first time at Fall Convocation, I am issuing an open and clarion call for a campus-wide dialogue grounded in meaningful discussion and resulting in necessary and appropriate institutional action.

This evening I ask that we unite, joining together in a process we will henceforth refer to as "OneLeMoyne." In this effort, we will fuse various groups, at necessary times, to listen and speak in candid, respectful, authentic conversation. Our conversations will address the question: "At Le Moyne College, what must we become?" No other question is more important for our coupled fate at this institution.

The outcome of our conversations will be the construction of four incisive documents: first, a compelling vision of our future as a Jesuit college; second, a description of those special characteristics that make our graduates distinctive; third, a distillation of the core content, pedagogy and learning processes with a focused emphasis on what is distinctive about the Le Moyne College experience; and, fourth, a delineation of a set of strategic directions to which we must commit ourselves, both in our individual actions, and organizational practices, during the years to come.

Higher Education Today: The Realities We Face

The opportunity to consider what Le Moyne is to become takes place within the realities of higher education. The numbers are staggering. There are more than 2,500 four-year colleges and universities in this country, literally dozens of which are right here in the Greater Syracuse Region. Each one has a unique history and culture. Most could be labeled "good schools." Some are even "great schools." Many have substantial endowments coupled with large and sophisticated recruitment and advancement operations. And, relevant to our future existence as an institution, almost all of them are competing for the same soon to be dwindling student type: the full time undergraduate with good test scores, and a high enough family income to defray a significant share of annually, rapidly increasing tuition.

In addition to ever-present four-year institutions, there are more than 1,000 community colleges across the U.S. These two-year schools are growing at a rate faster than four-year institutions. Our local Onondaga Community College, a school from which many of our transfer students enroll, is the fastest growing institution of higher learning in the New York State public system.

This is happening because community colleges are able to offer attractive programs, at a cost substantially below private colleges and universities. Now, a question that squarely faces us at Le Moyne College is: "What do we intend to do in reaction to these data?" This question roars out at us. We must contemplate, discuss, then act immediately.

According to Moody's, a leader in financial analysis for higher education, schools like Le Moyne, small private ones with high tuition, and modest endowments, are in the most vulnerable position. What Moody's and others suggest as the key to success is differentiation in the face of these challenges. Please take note of this empirical reality: differentiation on points of distinction is what separates colleges that will grow stronger, from those that will stagnate or decline. I believe that the key to differentiation distills to two crucial imperatives: first, articulating and embracing a powerful vision grounded in a compelling mission; and, second, an individual and organizational single minded focus on excellence in our programs, processes and outcomes. Today my focus is on the first aspect of our collective process: vision, the place where greatness begins.

OneLeMoyne

My esteemed colleagues, this year we must consider where, in the landscape of higher education, Le Moyne College should position itself. What you, the people in this room this evening, and others who will join us, meaningfully invest in this conversation will not only set the future direction of our beloved College, but it will determine the degree of success we will ultimately realize. Our conversation - OneLeMoyne - will directly shape our ability to become a first choice college for students, faculty, staff, partners and supporters we hope to attract, in the highly competitive world we find ourselves.

I will soon initiate our OneLeMoyne Conversation by appointing a representative committee that will oversee this highly inclusive process, and the ultimate writing of the four key documents I mentioned previously. The OneLeMoyne Committee will arrange and track conversations across our institution; then, draft, exchange, and revise the four key documents. It is crucial that we keep our community fully informed of the overall process and the committee's advances. I am asking each of you here tonight to prepare to nominate individuals to serve on the OneLeMoyne Committee. Please recommend those who possess a passion for our mission, are committed to our values, and will work collaboratively and respectfully with their colleagues even when they differ from majorities. Based directly upon the recommendation and nominations you send to Lisa Peters, in the President's Office, I will form a representative and diverse committee to lead this critical process. Please know that, as your president, I will be intimately involved at each step in OneLeMoyne. This is not my job, it is my mission.

To assist the committee and facilitate this substantial undertaking I have hired Dr. Dolores Byrnes on a one-year contract. Dr. Byrnes has more than 20 years of experience working on research projects in higher education and comes to us from the local company, Hezel Associates, where she has served as Senior Research Analyst for Higher Education. Dr. Byrnes, who holds a doctorate degree in anthropology from Cornell University, will have the title Coordinator of Strategic Planning, and begins her year-long service with us today. But make no

mistake about what has been introduced tonight: OneLeMoyne – its success or failure – rests with all of us who are fortunate to be members of the Le Moyne College community. We win or lose collectively.

Core Strength: Our Purpose—The Jesuit Approach

While I issue this call for conversation, I realize that I have much listening to do. In fact, “Listen First” should be the guiding structure in our OneLeMoyne process. I have a lot to learn about you, about the Jesuits, and about Le Moyne College. Since arriving I have begun meeting with various departments and divisions, as well as interacting with you, as I stroll across the campus or attend various events. I am deeply impressed by what I see and hear during these meetings. It is apparent to me that we at Le Moyne have three great assets: first, our members; second, our signature programs; and, third, our Catholic and Jesuit approach to education. These factors should serve as a focus as the OneLeMoyne process begins.

Jesuit education has been held in the highest esteem for centuries because of its commitment to quality, rigor, beliefs and values. It is an approach to education based on a compelling mission. As described in the International Commission of the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE) in the document *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, “The objective of a Jesuit education is to assist in the fullest possible development of all of the God-given talents of each individual person as a member of the human community.” (Paragraph 25) Here teachers and administrators “are involved in the lives of the students taking a personal interest in the intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual development of every student, helping each develop a sense of self-worth, and to become a responsible individual within the community.” (Paragraph 43) And, touching on what many regard as the hallmark of our approach, “In Jesuit education, the criterion of excellence is applied to all areas of school life.” (Paragraph 107) As Jesuit, we are, in fact, called to “. . . create an ambience or ‘climate’ which will promote excellence.” (Paragraph 113)

It should be stressed that while excellence must be at the very center of all that we do, we must also be prepared to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the times. As the ICAJE paper states, “Jesuit education adapts means and methods in order to achieve its purposes most effectively.” (Paragraph 144) Failing to do so in the highly competitive and highly priced environment of higher education is a guaranteed path to failure. Jesuit education is by definition and, in practice, adaptive.

Core Strength: Our People and Programs

Our other core strengths are you, the members of the Le Moyne Community, and the wealth of programs you offer. The Le Moyne faculty and staff care about the College and each other. You are a faculty and staff that share a genuine concern for our students. You work selflessly hard and sacrifice for student development intellectually, socially, spiritually, and physically. You believe in our mission to “strive for academic excellence in the Catholic and Jesuit tradition through comprehensive programs rooted in the liberal arts and sciences.” (Mission Statement) You are committed to the “education of the whole person and on the search for meaning and value as integral parts of the intellectual life.” (MS) You take pride in preparing students “for leadership and service in their personal and professional lives to promote a more just society.” (MS)

The depth and sincerity of your concern and commitment are impressive. I have not been on a campus that appears to care more than this one. This concern and care is reflected in both our National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data and the stories our students and alumni tell about you and your devotion to them.

I am also impressed with your many initiatives and accomplishments. You have recently hosted significant conferences in the areas of Religious Studies, Irish Studies and History. Your commitment to student scholarship is evident in the annual *Student Scholars Day* and the spring *Literature and Culture Conference*.

In just the past year, you have published numerous articles, poetry and creative-writing books; textbooks; and scholarly books with leading presses on an impressive array of topics. Your excellence has been recognized by the *National Endowment of the Humanities*, with several faculty members in the humanities having received prestigious NEH awards in the past year alone.

The special mentoring relationship you share with our students is also evident in our social science, health science and natural science programs. You engage students in carefully mentored research projects with an eye toward scholarly co-authored presentations and publications. The end result of these important undergraduate research experiences is tangible; recent graduates have been accepted to prestigious doctoral programs.

I am taken with the ways in which our *Centers for Excellence* and our outreach programming dissolve departmental boundaries, foster cutting-edge interdisciplinary teaching and research, and partner with foundations, businesses, and churches. They contribute to our internationalization and also bring externally funded grants.

The faculty of the Management Division also fosters outreach, programs that develop partnerships, and otherwise advance our educational mission, including supporting the needs of those in Syracuse's Northside Neighborhood. You promote important relationships such as collaborations with O'Brien and Gere, and the Bank of New York Mellon; membership in the CNY Consortium of Business Education and, the Campus Community Initiative; and, finally, through participation in a critical CNY environmental and economic initiative, "The Green Team."

In my short time here it has also become readily apparent to me, both directly and through talking with our students, that the members of the Le Moyne staff are also sincerely committed to our mission and our students. As evidenced by the *bene merenti* awards that will be given later tonight, Le Moyne is a place that nurtures loyalty, dedication and commitment among its many employees. This results in a strong community of mutual support, particularly during times of need or difficulty. Like our students, our staff members are committed to lifelong learning and making the world a better place through their many volunteer and civic activities. They set an example that our students can – and do – emulate.

I am also happy to know that half of our graduates stay in the region and make invaluable contributions to the greater good of Central New York. No matter where I go people are telling me about how wonderful Le Moyne alumni are. They are known particularly for being well-educated, having high integrity, and being committed to social justice. That is a tribute to each of you in this room and something about which we should all be proud.

Cura Personalis

As we prepare to engage in our OneLeMoyne Conversation we should keep the notion of *Cura Personalis* foremost in our minds. The Characteristics of Jesuit Education document states: “Let us keep in mind that ‘*cura personalis*’ is not limited to the relationship between teacher and student; it affects the curriculum and the entire life of the institution. All members of the educational community are concerned with one another and learn from one another.” (Paragraph 44)

As a learning community, we must and do analyze, question, critique, disagree, discuss, and advance our individual and collective thinking. I would expect nothing less at our vibrant College when deliberating on important topics. Most importantly, I pray that we successfully sustain a climate of *cura personalis*. Whether full professor or new adjunct, religious or lay, faculty or staff, we must now come together as one. This is the most critical factor to the quality and success of our OneLeMoyne dialogues. Everyone must and will have the opportunity to contribute, to feel valued and to be heard. As your president I must insist on the presence of this dynamic aspect so essential to the communication culture of OneLeMoyne. We will demonstrate genuine concern for each other’s ideas and participation. Through OneLeMoyne we will value and learn from one another. This will become our way of life, our organizational culture.

Conclusion

Today we come together to begin a pivotal year in the history of our young College. It is a year that I hope will be remembered as the time at which we joined as OneLeMoyne in rich and productive conversations about our future in a supportive context that models *cura personalis*. In these conversations let each of us listen first, speak second, and view everyone and their contributions as valuable. All of us must realize that our collective direction and level of success are entirely dependent on the quality of the conversation and the documents which result from it.

I also ask that, as we engage in the OneLeMoyne process, we not shirk from the work already before us this academic year. There are important opportunities to advance Le Moyne even as we chart our future. We must remember that the currents against which we dolphins must swim are strong ones, which take much energy, commitment, and skill to overcome.

I will conclude by noting the importance of my own Jesuit education. My education at John Carroll University transformed me and set my life on its very fulfilling trajectory. In my early days at John Carroll I realized, through the Holy Spirit, that I was part of someplace and something that was very special. There, in Cleveland, I developed a deep affection for the academy, and a Jesuit education devoted to excellence and grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. It is an enduring love and appreciation that continues to grow in me. I ask that you draw upon your own experience, affinity and appreciation to help me. Help us. Help Le Moyne continue to be blessed across time, with that special grace and magic I so cherish and without which I would not be standing here before you today.

Thank you for your generous welcome and support.