

# Le Moyne: A Place the World Needs Now More than Ever

Thursday Morning Roundtable  
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Thank you so much for inviting me to address you this morning. I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to meet with you, and I look forward to our exchange during the question and answer period.

Le Moyne College is at a turning point in its 62-year history. Earlier this year I began serving as the first non-Jesuit permanent President of the College, and only a few months into my tenure, we received a truly astonishing, transformational bequest of \$50 million. This is a very significant amount for any school and particularly so for one of our size. We have already begun taking steps to ensure that we will carefully steward this generous gift to accelerate our momentum towards becoming one of the very best colleges of our type in the country. The full implications of these two currents in our history are still unfolding, and we welcome the wonderful challenge of working hard as a team to set the wisest course for our future.

One thing is clear, however: we remain committed to continued excellence in both the Jesuit and Catholic traditions of rigorous education grounded in the

liberal arts and sciences. Perhaps now more than ever, places like Le Moyne must continue to provide an environment which cultivates the depth of meaning that so many seek: a sense of conscience and commitment to ethics and justice so urgently needed in the world.

What I want to emphasize to you this morning is nothing less than the lifelong project of seeking to discover, create, and enact meaning. The desire for meaning marks us uniquely as human beings. This desire fuels our lives. At Le Moyne College, we welcome all who choose to join us in this collective process of discovery, offering the mysteries of life to each other in a spirit of mutual respect, in the belief that we *are* our ideas.

It would be easy to stand here before you today and tell you about how much Le Moyne's professional programs like those in Nursing and Physician's Assistant programs are already benefiting Central New York, or sketch out for you some steps we are taking to upgrade our facilities to be more environmentally sound and sustainable, as well as comfortable and attractive. I could talk about other aspects of Le Moyne's enduring role here in the city of Syracuse, including our long commitment to producing graduates who remain in this area and who go on to play crucial roles of leadership and service throughout Syracuse and beyond.

But this is also a time to remind ourselves of the absolutely crucial role that higher education can and must play not only in Upstate New York, but in the

world. Just over one week ago, a deplorable series of targeted terrorist attacks began in the city of Mumbai, India – shattering the social fabric of life in that city. The death toll is, at last count, over 170. Hundreds are left physically wounded, and yet, as with our own nation on September 11th, the damage done to the collective spirit of a society can never be fully calculated.

As human beings, we are all damaged when any one of our number is hurt. Knowing that, understanding it, and yet always continuing to believe in the human capacity for good, for love, truth, healing, and forgiveness – this is why the world continues to need places like Le Moyne College. We teach our students, in the classroom but also well beyond, through every member of our staff and through our service learning and our many other activities in the community, that the precious notion of human dignity brings a responsibility that we are each charged to respect. As a community, we are committed to approaching each other, and our students, with an open mind, heart and will. We seek to make conflict into a source of inquiry, creating space for tolerance, learning to listen to the sacred in each other. We help the youth of each generation, as they confront a world of sorrow and loss, to take up the task of finding God on earth. Thus, while we make sure our graduates will enter the workforce with excellent academic and analytical skills, we also prepare them for a life of meaning – the pursuit of individual and social meaning, within a context of respect for each individual's differences in interpreting that quest. Teaching love, wisdom, peace and understanding is one of the best weapons against terror and violence.

At Le Moyne College, my administrators and I are well aware of our challenges. First and foremost: we face the realities of higher education in the United States today. Costs are high, sources of financial support are dwindling, many students are insufficiently prepared, and competition is staggering. Le Moyne, like the other institutions of higher education in the region, is operating in a difficult environment and must do all it can to address these serious issues.

Let us not forget, however, that Central New York is blessed with literally dozens of colleges and universities. The entire range of schools is represented here and all are contributing substantially to the vitality of the Upstate region. Tremendous benefit comes from the enormous talent and synergy that this concentration of exceptional institutions of higher learning brings.

Within this environment and given the challenge and uncertainty of these times, Le Moyne College is actively undergoing an intensive, collective process of examining its own mission, its collective future, and its best strategies for moving forward through the increasingly competitive higher education landscape, balancing market and mission. A crucial initiative in this first year of my presidency at Le Moyne is an inclusive conversation we are calling OneLeMoyne. This process is based upon the Jesuit principle of *cura personalis* – care of the whole person through respectful conversation. At Le Moyne we are engaged in a dialogue which is taking place across the campus while also involving alumni and other stakeholders. OneLeMoyne was begun in

September, and will result in the establishment of clear, measurable goals that are benchmarked against our peer and aspirant colleges and universities. We will be addressing a range of quality and other issues, seeking to improve and refine our ability to deliver on the Jesuit promise of higher education. Among our goals are to increase the excellence and diversity of our students, more effectively support faculty and staff in their various work efforts, and to discover and support all of the different elements of a positive and productive sense of unity and well-being across our employees. As a major employer and significant contributor to the regional economy, we feel that the outcomes of the OneLeMoyne process will be beneficial in ways far beyond our own campus.

Looking to the future, Le Moyne College is committed to strengthening our role as an economic driver and a source of innovation in Central New York, through multiple partnerships, workforce and professional development in response to economic uncertainties, green and other initiatives, and research activities across sectors.

Nationally, it is clear that market forces and demographic trends will force sweeping, structural changes within the higher education sector; we must ensure that the least privileged in society will not be overly hurt by these changes. We know that poor economic conditions are likely to hurt our students and their families: tightened credit from private sources, coupled with housing foreclosures, layoffs, relocations, and cuts to New York State tuition assistance will make it more difficult for students and families to invest in higher education.

With shifting state and national demographics, we, like all colleges and universities, must strive to be flexible and proactive. We must promote our many excellent programs, create new programs where there is need, and be more assertive in recruiting and retaining students.

A poor and uncertain labor market often provides incentives for many people to gain new skills or new certifications, so we will be adaptive and responsive to the needs which emerge. We are in the midst of developing plans regarding returning veterans, better engaging with regional Catholic high schools, and participating in the Say Yes program. Within the national political atmosphere of emphasis on accountability, access, and affordability in higher education, Le Moyne can make a very good argument about its own accomplishments. But circumstances demand that we must do better.

As a Catholic and Jesuit college, we take very seriously our role in promoting justice in many forms, in our graduates, in our dealings with local vendors, and through our curriculum and service learning programs. This part of our mission and identity remains central to our planning for the future. We hope to continue promoting the retention of alumni in the Syracuse and the Upstate region, working to increase the total numbers of individuals holding a post-secondary degree, developing new program opportunities in support of the region's needs, and renovating and expanding our Science Complex.

We intend to partner with other institutions of higher education in this region, as well as with local officials, businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations, in order to gain a clear and more detailed understanding of the best role for higher education in this region, the state, and the nation. Once that perspective is attained, more effective planning will be possible. A national debate about the social and national role of higher education is long overdue in the U.S. Although economic success is important, a discussion about higher education must be framed in terms which reach beyond those such as the higher salaries earned by those with a bachelor's degree. Building upon our local dialogues across sectors, we at Le Moyne College aim to achieve a national platform for our initiatives.

This is a time of year when many of us in Central New York are bracing ourselves for long, cold nights and yearning for a spring that seems a long time away. Yet this is also precisely when, as a group, we can allow ourselves space and quiet for reflection upon our many gifts, our strength as a community, and our enduring hopes for change. Together let us dream and gather the courage and inspiration for all that lies ahead.

Thank you.