



## Remarks to the Mount Mary Community on the Transition of Dr. Pharr Board of Trustee Chair Stephanie Russell – Sept. 15, 2021

Thank you, Dr. Pharr. We owe you a debt of gratitude for all that you have given, and continue to give, to Mount Mary. Please join me once again in expressing our appreciation for Dr. Pharr and her tremendous work.

We have been blessed by the service of Dr. Pharr for four years now, and Mount Mary has grown in important ways under her leadership. Alongside visionary and committed faculty and staff, she has not just managed the mission of the University. She has embodied it. That, to me, is among the most telling marks of true leadership – when we give ourselves freely to work that matters and are ourselves changed by it. Mount Mary is better for Dr. Pharr’s time here, and it is clear that she, too, counts herself better to have been in your company.

As Dr. Pharr said, her decision to retire at the end of the 2021-22 academic year is a personal one. It is simply the right moment in her life to return to hearth and home, to spend time with her family in ways that she cannot do as President. I should tell you that, when she shared her decision with the Executive Committee of the Board, there was a bit of a stunned silence. Sad as we are to see her go, we have nothing but the deepest respect for her choice. We are committed to making this final year of Dr. Pharr’s presidency a time of gratitude for her service and renewed energy for Mount Mary’s future.

Now is a fitting time to celebrate the institutional accomplishments of outgoing presidents, and I am very proud to mention some of Dr. Pharr’s most noteworthy successes today. These are more than a recitation of achievements however. At a deeper level, they reflect the values of Mount Mary: Competence, Community, Compassion, and Commitment. Thus, it is important to think of all that she has done, in the light of those animating values.

### **Dr. Pharr has been a President of Competence, academically and administratively.**

She led Mount Mary through a fruitful strategic planning process, resulting in a six-year plan that identifies clear goals for Mount Mary in five key areas through 2025.

Those goals, embraced by the community, are leading to good. The final fall census of students is complete, and this year’s new student enrollment is record-breaking: the highest in over 20 years. A virtual reality lab and immersive classrooms have been constructed, among other renovations. We’ve exceeded our enrollment goals in key programs such as Nursing and the Compass Year, and in our graduate programs:

- The Compass Year program for undecided students has, in fact, grown over 300 percent since it began three years ago.
- Mount Mary’s four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program launched this fall, after the construction of a \$2.5 million Health Sciences Center, and enrollment has exceeded expectations.
- Our expanded graduate offerings include a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision, a doctorate in Occupational Therapy, and extensive revisions to existing programs in Dietetics and Business.

These accomplishments, and others like them, can be sourced to the competence of the President, her team, and the many members of the Mount Mary community that have made them a reality.

**Dr. Pharr has been a President who builds Community within and outside of the University.**

The 2022 U.S. News and World Report released this week gave Mount Mary top honors among all regional universities in the Midwest for social mobility, which measures the six-year graduation rates of students who receive Pell grants. The lives of these students, their families, and their communities will be changed forever because of a Mount Mary education.

The University established, this summer, the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Dr. Pharr named Julie Landry as the inaugural vice president for DEI. This is another essential step toward the realization of Mount Mary's mission to enrich the lives of all students, faculty, staff, and alumnae.

Dr. Pharr's consistent connections with the civic community, women's organizations, and other Wisconsin institutions of higher education have strengthened us as a university community. She is visible in many corners of the city – a bridge-builder who turns institutional relationships into partnerships for the common good.

**Dr. Pharr has given form to Compassion in ways that are distinctive to a university.**

It is difficult to overstate the importance and potential of Trinity Woods, which she, with the help of so many partners, has championed into being. The School Sisters, Milwaukee Catholic Home, and Mount Mary leadership have all contributed to its realization. Trinity Woods is:

- an expression of solidarity with students and their families;
- an immersive classroom for academic exploration and growth;
- a visible link to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, whose self-giving is the reason we are all standing here today; and
- luminous evidence that, at Mount Mary University, the life of the mind and compassion of the heart are inextricably linked.

Compassionate university presidents recognize that God was on the campus before they arrived and will be there after they go. During Dr. Pharr's time as President, the interfaith space, Place of Peace, and Muslim prayer room were all created to honor the ways in which members of our community encounter God and each other. These holy spaces will continue to feed the faith of our students for years to come.

**Finally, Dr. Pharr's unwavering Commitment to students fuels her work every day.**

A tireless fundraiser who is deeply sensitive to student needs, she led efforts to raise \$2 million for Trinity Woods, established a \$100,000 endowment for food resources and has created the Madonna Fund to support single mothers and their children with almost \$300,000 raised to date.

Under her stewardship, Mount Mary moved up more than 20 spots to 51st in the best-of rankings of regional universities and is recognized for having the greatest economic and ethnic diversity in the Midwest. In 2020, Mount Mary became one of only two Hispanic Serving Institutions in Wisconsin. She has helped to define the Mount Mary of the present and the future.

Are all of these accomplishments the result of competent, community-focused, compassionate, and committed presidential leadership? Or are they evidence of a community whose mission roots are sunk so deep and wide that they withstand difficulties and consistently generate new academic and spiritual life? The answer is both. Presidential leadership, and leadership at every level, matter. Good leaders inspire us to be our best selves – to be leaders in our own spheres of influence.

So, thank you, Dr. Pharr, for your leadership now and in the year to come.

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As you know, I am privileged to serve as Board chair at Mount Mary, and I see that work as a sacred trust. My work has been in Catholic institutions for more than 35 years, most of those spent in Catholic higher education. I am not an alumna of the University, but I continue to learn from the faculty, staff, students, trustees, and alumnae who are the lifeblood of this place.

When Dr. Pharr shared the news of her retirement, I reached out to a veteran trustee, Mary Jo Layden, who chairs the Governance Committee, and asked her to co-chair the Search Committee with me. Many of you know Mary Jo, who has given years of service to Mount Mary and is often on the campus. She is among the most thoughtful and intelligent people I know, and she is deeply connected in the Milwaukee community. She sets her life's compass to the wellbeing of others and understands what it means to marry the intellectual life with a commitment to faith and social justice. In short, I believe she "gets" Mount Mary at a foundational level.

Mary Jo and I have mapped out a process that we'd like to share with you. We want to move thoughtfully through the search with as much input as possible, so that the next President of Mount Mary can lead the university successfully into the future.

1. It is our intention to name the Search Committee and launch the search in October. Search Committee members from a variety of campus constituencies will be invited in the coming weeks, and we ask for your patience as the committee is assembled. Presidential searches are large undertakings, so this will take a bit more time and consultation.
2. After vetting many search firms, we have engaged the services of consultants whom we believe will work hard to understand the culture and priorities of Mount Mary. They will partner with us to conduct a wide range of listening and information sessions, virtually and on-campus, help to surface a diverse and viable pool of candidates, offer logistical and communication support, and assist in the smooth transition of a new president. We look forward to announcing the names and backgrounds of the consultants once the contract is finalized.
3. A website for the Presidential Search is being launched today, and we will be adding information to the site as we have it. Very soon, dates for offering input through listening sessions will be listed, as will updates on the search process. There will also be a portal for you to offer online feedback.
4. Early in the process, we will be meeting with campus groups, such as the Faculty Assembly, Staff Assembly, Student Government, Diversity and Inclusion Council, and Alumnae Association. It is important to us that all members of the Mount Mary community who would like to offer input on the search have an opportunity to do so. The listening process will help the Search Committee to articulate the most essential qualities and qualifications of the next president. It will also help our consultants to talk knowledgeably about Mount Mary to potential candidates.
5. After conducting early interviews in the fall, we hope to bring finalists to campus sometime after the first of the year, and to announce the appointment of a new President in the spring. This will allow for some overlap between Dr. Pharr and her successor. As Dr. Pharr said, she will be retiring on June 30, and thus our new President will formally assume office on July 1.

All of this is a lot to take in. Mary Jo and I know that there will be many questions along the way, and we want to be as available as we can to the Mount Mary community in the months to come. The priorities of the university remain before us in a strategic plan that is both compelling and grounded. Academic and administrative leadership is strong. The board is growing in its diversity and thus in its capability to respond to new challenges. New and renewed programs are attracting students, and our students, in turn, are changing the University for the better.

There is no shortage of challenges, to be sure. Anyone who follows regional and national news in higher education knows the litany of hurdles that universities, and their students face. An incoming president will need to work hard and creatively, but Dr. Pharr will be passing the baton at a moment when Mount Mary is on the upswing, and it is our responsibility to continue that trajectory.

The mission of Mount Mary will be at the center of the presidential search. And, while this is a time of transition, it is also an opportunity to remember that our work relies on a God who loves and sustains us.

Now Mary Jo, Dr. Pharr and I would like to invite your questions and comments.