



LEADERSHIP SOCIETY APRIL UPDATE

You are receiving this letter because you are a member of Saint Mary's Leadership Society, a family of givers who generously contribute \$1,000 or more annually to the university.

Greetings!

Hello from Saint Mary's! I hope you enjoyed a wonderful Easter celebration with your loved ones. I joined the Saint Mary's community in 1992, seeking a shift from more traditional attorney work. Serving as the university's senior vice president and general counsel, I have not regretted the decision for one second. In February, I also became responsible for student affairs on our Winona Campus — a role I accepted enthusiastically, as building relationships with students has been one of the joys of my career at Saint Mary's so far. Whether it's legal affairs, staffing the board of trustees, or cheering on our students, there are two words that most represent my more than 30 years of service to Saint Mary's: gratitude and service.

The energy, passion, and talent of our students are constant sources of inspiration for me. Our Lasallian Catholic mission comes through in everything they do; the way our students learn, who our students become, and what our alumni accomplish are distinct from other universities. That faculty, staff, and students dedicate themselves — skills, talent, energy — to our community: that is the Saint Mary's way.

The First Generation Initiative (FGI) is one place where the gratitude of our alumni and our students' dedication to service comes together. Through FGI, alumni and benefactors provide scholarships and additional opportunities that allow first-generation students to participate fully in their education and our Lasallian community.

While alumnus Saul Hernandez B'17 did not graduate that long ago, he lives our distinct values each and every day. Growing up in Minneapolis near Lake Street, Hernandez wasn't thinking about college until a life-altering conversation with a Saint Mary's admissions counselor. The counselor, impressed with Hernandez, strongly encouraged him to apply for an FGI scholarship. "Finding out I was accepted as a First Generation Initiative Scholar was a surprise," Hernandez said. "My family and I cried because we knew it wasn't just the opportunity I was looking for, now we could afford for both my brother and I to go to school, because that wouldn't have been an option. It was like winning the lottery." Thanks to his hard work, dedication, and talent, his career took off after graduating with a finance degree. After working for U.S. Bank for several years as a sales manager, Hernandez now works as a bilingual bank manager for BMO Harris on Lake Street, dedicating his talent and skills to supporting where he grew up. He connects local businesses and clients to loans, financial services, and grant programs. By dedicating his talents and expertise to serve his community, he personifies the very mission of our university. His service extends to his alma mater. Hernandez gives back to Saint Mary's already; last year, he led a Hispanic Heritage Panel for all Saint Mary's students on the Winona Campus, and he spoke to FGI Scholars about financial literacy and the importance of perseverance. His call to serve both his community and his university is our Lasallian mission in action.

The First Generation Initiative is only possible through philanthropy. The Hendrickson Family Foundation, led by Julie Hendrickson, has invested over \$310,000 into robust welcoming, orientation, and career services for FGI students over the past decade. The George R. Kendall Foundation financially supports students from Cristo Rey Network schools. Just last year, despite a market-induced reduction in overall giving, the George R. Kendall Foundation increased their annual support to FGI by more than 10%, enabling them to support an additional student this year. Alumni Greg B'74 and Cat (Trusk) B'76 Stevens — acutely aware of the long-term value of a Saint Mary's education — recently made a pledge to support up to two FGI Scholars through scholarships. Visionary philanthropists and longtime friends of Saint Mary's Jack and Mary Ann (Wera) CST'64 Remick made a recent, transformative pledge to support 40 FGI Scholars over the next four years as well. As I consider the commitment, generosity, and investment of our wider community, along with the talented students who receive this support, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to be part of Saint Mary's and to serve our mission. "Your contributions stretch far beyond what you can imagine," reflected Hernandez, speaking to benefactors and alumni. "You have an impact because of the hope that it brings."

Like Hernandez, we all have an opportunity to serve the university that has given us so much. Our trustees give significantly of their energy and expertise. As the liaison for the board, I witnessed this dedication firsthand. Board members do not simply meet over Zoom once or twice a year, they gather over a period of days each time they meet, convening different committees and work groups to provide thoughtful and visionary leadership to the university. This dedication led the board to energetically accept the recently announced \$25 million philanthropic challenge — committing the board to a bold, hopeful future for Saint Mary's. "It is now a challenge for all of us who want to see our beloved Saint Mary's thrive and flourish in the future," said Board Chair Terry Russell, "to step forward and make a philanthropic commitment to help us realize this gift." Board members dedicate themselves to this work, because they live in service to something larger than individually: the importance of our shared mission.

Our community lives that Lasallian mission every day. Through the experiences that are created on campus, our students become professionals, like Saul Hernandez, who are dedicated to giving back to their communities and to Saint Mary's. Your generosity, your commitment in service to our university, is also part of that mission. I am so grateful to serve that mission and the university we call home. Thank you for being part of Saint Mary's. The future is bright!

Live Jesus in our Hearts, Forever!



Ann Merchlewitz

Senior Vice President and General Counsel

P.S. Mark your calendars for Reunion Weekend on our Winona Campus! We cannot wait to welcome back alumni on June 23-25 for a weekend of connection, festivities, fun, and deep pride for our Saint Mary's! Registration is now open at connect.smumn.edu/reunion and closes on Tuesday, June 6, 2023.