



## LEADERSHIP SOCIETY DECEMBER 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!

I hope you and your loved ones are enjoying a blessed Christmas season. I have always cherished this time of year. Students are wrapping up their coursework and looking toward the next semester. Intentional time for family, loved ones, and reflection are a hallmark of the season. There is a feeling of gratitude, as well as the spark of possibility for what's to come. As Pope Saint John Paul II reminds us: "Advent is synonymous with hope." As I reflect on where Saint Mary's has been and our path forward, I am deeply hopeful for our future.

It is my privilege as interim provost and dean of faculties to share an update on the significant progress made on implementing changes at the university, in particular our Winona Campus. As we continue to center our work on how to best prepare and transform students, we remain committed to practical real-world preparation, along with a sound grounding in liberal education courses that provide the critical "soft skills" needed for excellent careers and meaningful lives of service and leadership. At the heart of these changes remains a focus on ethics and service leadership through our character education and virtue formation initiative.

Regardless of their major, our students continue to take courses that provide a strong liberal education, which employers both look for and note among Saint Mary's graduates. Through our general education curriculum and dynamic pedagogy, students will explore the great questions of life, like 'Who am I, and what does it mean to be human?' 'Where do I want to go, and what is my purpose?' 'How do I become who I want to be?' The answers to these questions will deepen students' commitment to their chosen career paths and the impact they want to make in the world. We aim to link the universal and essential human search for truth, goodness, and beauty with students' sense of who they want to be in career, family, and community life.

Changes to our undergraduate general education program are not taken lightly; it is a profound responsibility. We plan to implement the modified general education program for the 2023 fall semester, and I am deeply grateful for the dedicated work and commitment of our faculty, staff, and academic leaders in this process. Led by faculty and academic leadership, a committee developed a draft curricular model that was shared with our wider faculty community in early fall for feedback which was enhanced by critical input from our faculty.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to holistically develop our students for a well-rounded life; this includes vital, co-curricular fine and performing arts opportunities for all students who seek them. By shifting fine and performing arts to a co-curricular model that complements our academic programs, we will make these enriching experiences available to all students, regardless of major. A university committee has

begun convening this fall to explore ideas generated from students, faculty, and staff. This work includes exploring potential partnerships with community arts organizations, in an effort to share local artistic and performance opportunities with our students. This committee will continue their work as we enter the new year.

Success takes our entire community. I am grateful for the generosity of our partners and benefactors like you, who have ensured our progress. Tim Horan, a Saint Mary's alumnus who studied English, made a critical investment over the summer to ensure the university could successfully execute an ambitious and rapid development of our revised academic programming. The university recently received an anonymous \$111,000 gift to undergo a robust planning process to develop a Catholic STEM program that builds a pathway for students from Catholic high schools to our college and to future careers. This exciting and emerging approach links high-demand majors and professional fields with our Saint Mary's Lasallian Catholic identity.

Our visionary leader, the Very Rev. Father James P. Burns, IVD, Ph.D., brings global prominence to our work in character-based education. This past fall, we welcomed a team of international scholars from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham in England to both the Minneapolis and Winona campuses, connecting with students, faculty, and staff. Earlier in the fall, Father Burns was a keynote speaker on this topic at the University of Birmingham. Much of the impact of this initiative is a product of a \$1.7 million investment from the Kern Family Foundation, and has allowed Saint Mary's to become a leader in character-based education. As vice president for character, virtue, and ethics, I am committed to advancing character and virtue education across Saint Mary's to foster a flourishing university community.

In a statement of support for the unique and robust education students receive at Saint Mary's, the student senate leadership drafted and shared a letter last spring:

“Saint Mary's continues to aim to be regionally dominant and nationally prominent, which can be seen by the launch of our new nursing and health humanities programs last year. The university is continually looking to improve our offerings and to provide students with the best opportunities possible ...”

Our student leaders know we cannot do this alone and concluded their letter with a stirring call to action, “it is important to follow the Lasallian call, ‘together and by association,’ as students and the university now more than ever need alumni support, involvement, and commitment.”

Because of our students, our partners, our benefactors – because of you — the future of Saint Mary's is bright. We embrace this season of hope with confidence in our strategic direction while always remembering what makes Saint Mary's unique.

Wishing you and your loved ones a very Merry Christmas.

Live Jesus in our hearts, Forever!



Dr. Matthew Gerlach  
Interim Provost and Dean of Faculties  
Vice President for Character, Virtue, and Ethics

P.S. Like our student leaders, I hope Saint Mary's continues to be blessed by your financial support. If you have not already made your annual gift, please keep Saint Mary's in your end-of-the-year giving plans. Every dollar you generously contribute supports our students and the bright future of the university.