

The Inauguration of President Nora Demleitner,
St. John's College, Annapolis

A selection of speeches

Delivered March 25, 2023

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This collection includes a selection of speeches made from prepared remarks. Additional speeches from the event, including those from collegewide President Mark Roosevelt, Board Chair Ron Fielding, Annapolis Mayor Gavin Buckley and State Senator Sarah Elfreth may be viewed at <https://www.sjc.edu/inauguration>.

President Nora Demleitner, Inaugural Address

Good afternoon.

I'd like to start by thanking the St. John's polity for your generosity in welcoming me into this distinctive community.

I need to thank the Board of Visitors and Governors and all of today's speakers for their support.

And I also want to thank the Annapolis community and the state of Maryland for their warm embrace.

What unites *us all* is our student body.

St. John's students are thoughtful in their questions and candid in their perspective on challenges and opportunities:

Smart, probing, thoughtful, skeptical—a tad absent-minded and a bit quirky—but also funny and incredibly personable.

You'll never tire of the conversation or run out of questions if you find yourself in the company of a Johnnie.

There is a secret formula to this place—not everyone is a fit here, but everyone who *is* here, fits.

Somehow, we have all managed to find our way here, to each other, on this Saturday afternoon.

It feels meant-to-be, at least for me. Let me tell you why:

For much of my career, St. John's College and I seem to have been stalking each other – fortunately in a perfectly legal and harmless way.

It started in the early 90s when I worked with St. John's alumnus, Pedro Martinez-Fraga, who thrived in the world of international law, perhaps because the field's themes and values reach back to Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero.

He also seemed to generally question everything I said.

I should have known he was a Johnnie.

Eventually, I learned to pick them out of a crowd. One of my law students, also a Johnnie, always wanted to get to whether justice could be determined at all, even when I asked merely for an interpretation of the language of a rule.

She may have been the only student who even read the rule.

And I must say, Johnnies are classy, even when disagreeing.

They have mastered the art of making strong counterpoints without being confrontational.

And before you notice, they've changed your view, or at least refined it—provided more nuance.

So I've been with Johnnies—and their questions—long before coming here.

But with all these *chance* encounters in mind, let's turn to the *intentional* questions that got us here.

Two years ago, when the Board of Visitors and Governors asked me to be the next President of St. John's College, I honored their question with serious thought and discussion—two mainstays of the institution.

Every one of us has had to answer life-changing questions over the years.

We can all relate to that.

For many of our students, their college choice may have been that major question.

Each of us knows the feeling of anticipation that hangs over an important decision that must be made.

Maybe you've felt confidence in your intended choice,

Or perhaps trepidation over what unknowns may unfold as a result.

Sometimes it is both.

Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan must have felt that same mix of hope and uneasiness when they charted a new path for St. John's nearly 100 years ago.

Their path to an education in the liberal arts, which included math and science, was through a radical pedagogy embedded in a new and non-elective curriculum that centered around a selection of great books.

We often invoke Barr and Buchanan and the impact their decision has had on the college.

But their story, *our* story, is also one of broader context.

In the 1930s, our country was deep in the throes of the Great Depression.

One fourth of the workers in Maryland's cities were unemployed.

Bank failures had wiped out the life savings of millions of Americans.

Fascism and Naziism had taken root in Europe, Asia was rife with conflict, and global war was on the horizon.

When Barr and Buchanan arrived in segregated Annapolis, just two hundred forty-nine young men were enrolled at St. John's College.

And the institution they had been asked to lead had lost its accreditation and much of its money.

Amidst worldwide uncertainty, Barr and Buchanan believed in the power of liberal education and the value of books in shaping learning and independent thought.

Demographic trends favored them.

- The number of high school graduates was increasing year over year;
- Federal government support was growing;
- And there was a tremendous appetite for intellectually stimulating coursework.

Informed by these trends, Barr and Buchanan doubled down on an all-required, interdisciplinary curriculum, which stood in contrast to the elective system that was coming in vogue.

Then termed a “new” program of instruction, it created an approach that set us apart from other institutions of higher education,

It brought the college back from the brink of financial failure,

And it has earned it national recognition and support.

Holding Barr’s position as president now, I feel certain he and Buchanan recognized the gravity of their daring choice, and the potential for failure, but also the possibilities it offered to *impact* the lives of young people.

Our pedagogy, our interdisciplinarity, and our promise of an “education for all” remain at the heart of the college.

The content of the program has never been stagnant, and it will continue to change, just as the *participants* have over time.

In 1938, Jacob Klein was the first of several Jewish refugees from Europe to join the faculty.

In 1948, St. John’s admitted our first African American student, Martin Dyer, becoming one of the first private colleges south of the Mason-Dixon line to integrate.

Shortly thereafter, the college admitted women as students and appointed them as faculty members.

In 1967, we launched the Summer Institute for teachers, which aimed to reach public school teachers, particularly from urban areas, laying the foundation for the master's curriculum.

And for decades, the college has admitted international students, so that today we have students from six continents enrolled—only Antarctica seems beyond our reach.

Neither time, nor geography, nor culture lessens the impact of this kind of education,

Nor the relevant history that led us to where we are today,

Nor the skill set of respectfully questioning everything - including, perhaps most importantly—ourselves,

Especially when we are the most certain of our path and of our righteousness.

And yet, *if* we spend all of our time looking backward through the long halls of history, we risk not seeing the world as it is today; not thinking about how we effectively respond to it.

We must not fall into this trap.

Instead, we must pursue our mission and be as responsive to the needs and demands of our time as Barr, Buchanan, and their successors were to the needs of their own.

I now carry the responsibility of charting the course into an unknown and unknowable future, one that will hold pitfalls and challenges, but also opportunities.

Our times and circumstances will force us to confront—again—difficult questions:

Will we have the courage to engage more actively with the world, as our predecessors did?

Will we live up to our ideals and provide a platform for engagement in some of the major debates of our day?

Like you, I worry about how difficult it's become to *talk to one another*, and how hardened our politics have become, both here and abroad.

And many of us wonder, too, if the scale and speed of new technologies like AI might outrun the liberating forces of democracy we wish to endure and thrive.

Remember though—

We owe the spread of democratic ideas and the accessibility of the great books in our very curriculum to a technological innovation that sparked monumental controversy in the fifteenth century—*the printing press*.

So, these are not new challenges.

Still, just as it must have been in 1937 when the new Program was founded, it can be hard to find hope amidst the trends of *our time*.

It is easy to wonder if we—as humans—will find our humanity again.

I believe that the search starts with two things:

- A dedication to *having real conversations*;
- And a commitment to the institutions that fortify society.

They are part of why I chose to be at St. John's College.

We need institutions like this one that feed the best in us; help us see the best in each other and in our history; unite us in a common purpose; and help us talk, learn, and grow together.

Now, good institutions also see clearly, and learn from, their own failings.

St. John's College has not always been the most involved neighbor.

In fact, there are times in our history we've been downright exclusionary to members of the local community.

But we are taking steps to change that—

This inauguration is one of many instances of that change:

Rather than solely including internal audiences as we've done in times past, we reached *out* to welcome *all of you* here to experience St. John's College.

And we will continue to do so:

- *As we develop* deeper, broader, and more authentic ties to the institutions, leaders, lawmakers, and higher education partners, whose well-being is inextricably tied to our own.
- *As we confront* the more troubling sides of history that have unfolded on the land we now occupy.
- And *as we reimagine* aspects of ourselves.

Last month, for example, we welcomed the Annapolis community to our campus's revived Mitchell Art Museum.

Here, we challenge all who enter to consider the human experience, and to let extraordinary art and artists inspire persistent and timely questions.

In the museum's first exhibition, called *The Open Museum*, we've invited visitors to write and draw directly on the walls.

The still-evolving display unites a variety of unique perspectives cultivated, not just around the Johnnie table, but across our region.

Married with a deep respect for our history, the power of our collective experiences—

- From the ones represented in the museum exhibition
- To those we heard in some of today's earlier remarks—

Enables us to meet contemporary challenges:

- How will we use our educational model to more effectively help students find a purposeful life and purposeful work?
- How will we offer broader access to students from diverse backgrounds, who will add to the special chemistry of the St. John's College experience?
- And how will we ensure they succeed here?

And of course, as a Johnnie would ask, what does success even *mean*?

As we reach new inflection points, / believe we are well positioned to face these and other challenges.

We have the brain power, the practiced skill of questioning, and the tools to have hard conversations and react to meet the moment;

And to push boundaries that sustain and evolve our distinctive pursuit of service to our students, our country.

In the past year, we've already begun to make some meaningful advancements—improving accessibility and augmenting quality of life for our campus community.

We celebrated the opening of our new and expanded Student Health and Wellness Center, which is intentionally located in the middle of campus.

Student well-being is both the prerequisite and the consequence of learning.

So naturally, expanding student support and ensuring they feel safe and ready to learn is a major priority for me, and for the college.

It is my vision that St. John's College sustains its unique spirit and continues to set itself apart from other institutions of higher education—

And that we keep leaning into our distinctive curriculum while responding to the needs of our time, remaining relevant for the next 100 years and beyond.

We must champion an atmosphere where students have a strong sense of Belonging, and they are set up for success as participants in civic life and the workforce;

An environment where we are engendering responsible citizenship and lifelong learning, while responding thoughtfully and ethically to the demands of the marketplace;

A wellspring of Diversity embraced by and encouraged in our student body, staff, faculty and program of study;

And a place where Affordability for our students is always front of mind.

We've created great momentum with the tuition reset, and the continued generosity of our alumni, friends, and the state of Maryland.

Our philanthropic model must be tended to regularly, to ensure our financial security and to continue allowing students from all walks of life to experience our world-class education.

As the leader of this institution, I am privileged to be surrounded by supporters who represent a diverse background of experience: our board, faculty, staff, student body, and alumni – each well-versed in addressing challenges present and predicted.

My thanks, again, to all of you.

Now, there are a few people I want to call out, who are very special to me.

The first male presidential spouse, my husband Michael Smith.

He is charting his own course in his new role.

And I couldn't wish for better counsel.

As a practicing lawyer, he is accustomed to reading lengthy writings some may consider unintelligible, which sounds like an essential trait for a St. John's College presidential spouse.

After more than 25 years of marriage, he still surprises me.

Without St John's, I wouldn't have learned of his apparent secret crush on Galileo.

Michael is a wonderful father to our children, Venetia and Cordell, who have shaped my life over the last twenty years.

They've taught me a lot, from texting to funky resume formats;

From living with a dog and a cat to traveling with less luggage.

In short, they have made me a better parent, and a better person.

I want to thank my brother-in-law Nader, who travelled here all the way from Honolulu, and say "hello" to my sister Ada who is home sick and watching us on the livestream.

My parents are no longer with us, but I know they would be very proud

And I'm delighted to see so many of my friends here today.

I am also deeply touched by the contributions of those who took part in today's ceremony.

Your gracious words and performances filled me with a sense of purpose and gratitude for the spirit of this institution and your confidence in me is humbling.

I feel both honored and at home.

At St. John's College we start with a question but it's time now to end with an exclamation mark.

Thank you!

Joseph Macfarland (A87), Dean, St. John's College, Annapolis

In the *Politics*, Aristotle suggests the best city is one that exists *in isolation*, one which—to an external viewer—appears to *do* nothing.

It is not the city that conquers and dominates others that is most beautiful, for there is nothing inherently noble about domination of the weak—

Actions of the greatest nobility are pursued internally, among free and equal persons.

The action of the craftsman is clearly visible, as he shapes *external* things, but the craftsman who directs other craftsmen, the “architect,” is the most active of all, simply by thinking. Like the architect in thought, the best city appears to do little while doing the most.

Yet a city is inevitably situated among other cities, subject to the rise and fall of markets and of empires, the vicissitudes of nature and the trends of technology.

I mean this, of course, as an analogy to St. John's.

The last years of the college have been turbulent—sustained austerity, a successful capital campaign, cultural turmoil, pandemic—

Many have had a hand in keeping the college buoyant

We owe many debts of gratitude—

But I would say, the essential source of our vitality, through all the disruptions, has been the way that we as-a-community have inerrantly focused on our noble activity and *telos*: reading, inquiring, conversing, listening, and *thinking*.

This activity that we carry on each day, each year, for decades—for ever, if we could—this activity that students come to enjoy, respect, and benefit from;

This continuous activity is our *living* treasure.

St. John's stands apart for its program, but it does not and *cannot* stand in isolation.

A happy sign of this are the many, very welcome representatives from peer colleges here today, and from the Annapolis community.

Of course, St. John's was founded on the notion that it stands for something essential about liberal education—something for *all* to see.

Moreover, it would be unwise to suppose that turbulence is at an end, that we will not continue to be in need of friends.

A president has to artfully navigate the foreign policy, so to speak, of the college, and she has to steer its internal activities well, while remaining *true-to*, and *grounded-in*, its most prized, internal activity—our learning.

Nora Demleitner is especially well-suited to this task. I will make a few separate observations.

(1) I have come to admire her *restless* energy and *resilience*—

It is harrowing work to be stretched between our high aspirations and the stark realities of safeguarding them.

(2) From her years as an educator, she brings a deep-seated *care for students* and a knowledge of the challenges therein, evident in the changes already effected to improve the conditions of residential life and the accessibility of services.

(3) When new to the college, she saw almost immediately that our study of many subjects is subordinated to a singular intellectual formation, a freedom of thought, that these studies *all* lead to.

(4) And in working with her, I have come to admire her *genuineness*—

She is... who she appears to be.

Her mind is always at work and she shares her thinking freely, *occasionally* saying the “wrong” thing rather than holding a thought hidden, and she hears herself contradicted without dismay.

These are conversational virtues in the classroom, and they are the foundation of the trust that has taken hold in campus leadership.

The qualities through which she watches out for the college, are ones essential, too, to our learning, and this happy consonance augurs well for our polity.

Ronald F. Wright, Associate Dean for Research and Academic Programs, Wake Forest Law

Good afternoon.

I join you today, joyful to see the start of new things at a great and storied institution of higher learning, St John's College in Annapolis.

Why am I joyful, with all the tumult and stress bouncing around in higher education?

I am joyful today because I know Nora Demleitner and what she can bring to this place.

Nora and I have been co-authors on books and collaborators in course design for over twenty years.

Working with Nora has made me a better teacher and a better scholar.

Two reasons come to mind.

First, Nora looks ahead, further ahead than most of us.

She tries to understand where large social forces will take us over the long run, and then devotes her energy there, way out there.

In the 1990s, when we first started writing a book together, Nora was not so interested in the yearly lineup of cases that issued from the U.S. Supreme Court.

The high court's docket – with its emphasis on interrogation practices and searches of closed containers in car trunks – dominated the agenda of most criminal law scholars in those days, but Nora looked elsewhere.

She knew what was happening out in the field with plea bargains, felony filing rates, mandatory minimum sentences, and other profound transformations in the courts.

As a result, Nora was more focused than most scholars on the work of sentencing commissions and other legal actors who were already reshaping our use (and overuse) of prison.

Nora was interested in that new field of inquiry years before others came to appreciate the human tragedy that we now call "mass incarceration."

Second, Nora looks far afield for evidence and ideas, not just the ideas close at hand.

Perhaps because of her own multi-cultural life experiences, she tunes into trends and concepts from outside our national boundaries.

While most legal scholars treat “comparative law” as a specialized sub-discipline for “the comparativists,” Nora treats that worldwide experience as everyone’s business, a resource for us all, right here.

For instance, she insists that we can learn from the experience of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda when it comes to sentencing questions.

That international court, based in Africa, developed criteria for the imposition of lengthy but legitimate sentences in cases that present the most extreme and horrifying of circumstances: the conviction of a head of state for genocide.

Or take a second example.

The courts in Canada, Nora noticed, offer early insights about how judges should account for the experiences of aboriginal defendants, especially women, when setting prison sentences.

Nora’s alert monitoring helped scholars and students see possible new answers (Canadian answers) to questions that sentencing courts in the U.S. struggle even to ask.

Nora sees these things and shows them to me, expanding my ability to shift perspectives, to get outside the domestic – and domesticated – frameworks that constitute our world.

She has inspired me to become a more wide-ranging scholar.

I believe this ability of hers will also work its expansive magic at St. John’s College.

And so it is with joy that I step back and watch to see what you – all of you in the community of St John’s College – will do alongside Nora Demleitner, as you work together for your students and for the world.

Thank you.

Daniel A. Wubah, PhD, President, Millersville University

Good afternoon.

Members of the board, Senator Elfreth, Mayor Buckley, administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends, and special guests, it is an honor and privilege to speak to you today and offer a brief glimpse into the personal and professional characteristics of my former colleague and friend.

The role of president at an institution of higher learning, whether large or small, whether public or private, is multi-faceted, fluid and demanding.

On any given day, a president has to address the needs of students, wishes of alumni, requirements of accreditors and government overseers, desires of donors and the list goes on.

Those who are most successful in this role can chart a path forward while navigating the often-competing demands of the diverse stakeholder groups.

It takes an extraordinary commitment and an unmovable set of core values to lead an institution.

I believe St. John's College has found just that person in President Demleitner.

Let me take you back a decade or so ago.

I came to know Nora when we were colleagues at Washington and Lee University.

Nora was at the end of her first year as the dean of the Law School at Washington and Lee University when I started as the provost.

She was one of my seven direct reports, and we had a very good rapport from day one because we had several core values, such as empathy and resilience, in common.

These two traits are particularly important for a college president to succeed, and I will return to them shortly.

One characteristic that distinguished Nora from my other direct reports at W&L was her mental acuity and ability to diplomatically bring people together to solve what initially appear to be intractable problems.

An example was a project that we undertook to add photographs of distinguished women and minority alumni to the walls at the Law School.

In 2013, none of the large size photos on the walls of the Law School was for a minority or a woman.

Nora initiated a conversation with her colleagues to develop criteria for putting up new photos.

This required a lot of tact and diplomacy because of the prevailing culture at that time.

Ultimately, new photos were added to express the diversity of distinguished alumni including a former president of the American Bar Association, who is an African American.

She was tenacious but tactful in how she addressed this issue to get the desired outcomes.

This example underscores four positive attributes that Nora possesses and stand out to me as her secrets to success:

Namely, her intelligence, compassion, global perspective, and resilience.

In addition to being widely read, she is deeply knowledgeable about other disciplines beyond her legal field.

Within the legal profession, some of her work has focused on inequities in sentencing of people from marginalized groups because of her compassionate approach to interacting with others.

This attribute is necessary to be a successful president because being able to step in other people's shoes is necessary for astute leadership.

Having an international background is one of Nora's strengths because it gives her a broader perspective in understanding the human condition and deeper appreciation for creating an inclusive community.

Being a good president requires stamina to combine a sprint and a marathon in decision-making, relationship building and implementation of strategies, which demand flexibility and tenacity.

Despite the professional challenges that Nora faced at W&L, she was able to rise above the storm professionally to reach the presidency.

These four attributes will serve her well as the president of St. Johns.

Much has been written about the state of higher education in America today.

Many say that we sit at an important moment as we face enrollment challenges and financial uncertainties, and renewed questions of the value of earning a degree.

While I remain confident that our institutions will navigate these turbulent times, I am equally confident that it will take extraordinary leaders, like my friend Nora, to give their institutions the opportunity to thrive.

The presidency is both an art and a science that requires enjoying what you do by building a good base of support.

I know that you will never lose sight of what you do and for whom you do it by continuing to make a positive difference in the lives of the students, faculty, and staff.

As Presidents, we remain keenly aware that the needs of our students are always the focus of what we do.

Best wishes, my friend, for a long and successful career at the helm of this wonderful and historic institution.

Kate Tkacik Sweeney, President, Annapolis Staff Council

I'm honored to represent the staff of St. John's College on this remarkable day.

President Demleitner, congratulations on your historic appointment, and everything that you've accomplished during your first year.

I know I speak for all the staff of the college when I say we are ready and eager to support you, and the college, as we move forward into this next phase of our history.

While the roles of tutor and student are well-defined by the college polity and the cyclical cadence of the school year, staff positions are wide-ranging and, in many ways, ever-changing, serving unique and crucial roles that scaffold the academic program.

The St. John's staff are *here* for you, Nora, as they've been here for the college all along – some working here more than four decades;

At least 8 of our colleagues on this campus alone have worked here for more than 30 years.

During that time, staff have adapted to new needs, new expectations, and risen to new challenges.

We pay bills, distribute scholarships, keep sidewalks clear, and ensure campus buildings are clean, furnished, safe, and welcoming.

We make sure meals are hot and ready, mail is distributed, webpages are up to date and accurate.

We provide healthcare, schedule intramural games, answer reference questions, stock and shelve books, set and meet ambitious fundraising goals. We schedule classes, book meeting rooms, and connect laptops to wifi and printers.

We keep alumni engaged, manage internship placements, and meet with high schoolers, giving them the opportunity to think of St. John's when they consider all that the future might hold...

We have done all this as best practices, evolving technology, and unknown circumstances demand that we learn, adapt, and change.

Again, I speak for the staff when I say, Nora, we're here for you, and the perspective and change *you* bring.

We look forward to continuing to share our knowledge, experience, and appreciation of this place, this program, and these students.

President Demleitner – congratulations and welcome to St. John's!

Josephine “Gigi” Escalante (A92), President, St. John’s College Alumni Association

“Read.

Read all the time.

Read as a matter of principle, as a matter of self-respect.

Read as a nourishing staple of life.”

This David McCullough quote is one that President Demleitner **LOVES**.

(Well, according to a tweet she sent out last year.)

If anyone had doubts about the president’s fit for our unique institution, her love for this quote on READING, should dispel them.

Because newsflash: we love books at the “Great Books” college.

There’s no great occasion, inaugurations included, when a Johnnie does not quote a Program author (usually Plato, sometimes Aristotle, hopefully not Kant) in order to center themselves through words on a page.

But I won’t be turning to our program authors today. I’m going straight to the heart of our institution, our founding documents.

This is a significant moment in our college’s history - our first female President.

And we mark significant moments in the present, by turning back to our past.

Our 325-year-old institution exists in a world that, paradoxically, is as increasingly interconnected as it is fractionalized.

What is the charge of leadership in this terrain?

There is comfort and insight, as there is in seminar, with “going back to the text.”

The College Polity states that institutions of learning should “develop the moral and intellectual powers of their students to enable them to... **take their own responsible part in shaping the future.**”

I am so heartened that at this unique moment, President Demleitner has joined this charge to enable a rising generation of Johnnies to take a necessary part in shaping the Future - - where the finest Johnnie attributes of critical introspection and circumspection is much needed.

Buried in our archives is a 1962 book - “Portrait of Graduates” including essays from alumni discussing St. John’s.

As President of the Alumni Association, I want to highlight a timely passage from this book of alumni.

In it, Aaron Bisberg, Class of ’49, states that Johnnies bring “both a searching and a sympathetic viewpoint to the world.”

By Bisberg’s description, President Demleitner *is* “Johnnie” and brings this spirit of questioning that is the bedrock of understanding.

As an educator with over a quarter century of leadership, I’ve witnessed both her intellect and care, at work to benefit St. John’s and its students, focusing on their welfare and success.

On behalf of the Alumni Association, we extend our best wishes as President Demleitner takes her place in the history of our college, leading with a “searching and sympathetic viewpoint” to the world and St. John’s role in it.

Lirian Selene Spolaore (A23), Archon, Waltz Committee

Hello everyone, buon pomeriggio, and buenas tardes.

As an undergraduate student, I am so grateful for St. John's, the distinctive education it has given me, and for the precious few months I have left to enjoy my time learning here on-campus.

My St. John's experience has been an education that values communication, a melting pot of ideologies, and the love of wisdom.

Some may even call it philosophia.

Thanks to it, I have learned how to learn from my peers. And I find myself more self-aware.

Our curriculum and reading have granted me the opportunity to be more self-reflective and *also* to be more lenient as I listening to the ideas of others – even ones that I might disagree with.

However, I did not always feel this way.

When I started as a student, I felt like there were not many others here, who looked like me: Italian-latine, first in my family to graduate this spring, and the eldest daughter of an immigrant family.

And I had questions, as one is encouraged to at St. John's.

I wondered whether this was going to change as time went by.

I worried that it wouldn't – that I would feel alone.

Soon enough, our polity would prove me wrong.

With the establishment of the Pritzker Program, I saw more and more students of color, more people who either looked like me, or had an enriched cultural upbringing like me.

I had an opportunity to mentor some of those students, and I never felt prouder to be a part of that change.

I realized that St. John's was up to the challenge to, as President Demleitner says, "*meet the moment*," by encouraging more diversity whilst still maintaining the core principles of this education.

I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Demleitner as she was walking on to the college grounds for the first time.

I realized that she and I shared a lot of things in common.

We had both grown up overseas – she in Germany, I in Italy.

We both share a passion for learning.

And, well, we are obviously both women.

When she was appointed President of the Annapolis campus, it was reassuring.

It showed me, and students like me, that a community like St. John's can accept progress, and *lead* it too, even if gradual and slow.

It means that there is hope, that our world will keep on becoming a better place for everyone living in it.

I am beyond grateful to see Nora leading this kind of change as our new college President, and as a student, to know that's what I am a part of.

Thank you.

Luis Parrales (AGI23), President, Graduate Student Council

Good afternoon.

President Demleitner:

On behalf of the Graduate Student Council and the Graduate Institute student body, I want to congratulate you on your inauguration as 25th president of St John's College in Annapolis.

As I was thinking about where to focus my brief remarks this afternoon, I kept going back to why many of my classmates and I ended up in the Graduate Institute in the first place.

Some of us have spouses and little ones to care for after Seminar;

Some of us balance Preceptorial papers with deadlines for full-time jobs;

Yet all of us came to the Graduate Institute because we've found in St. John's a committed educational vision, grounded in the Great Books,

And importantly, a space where we can more fully understand ourselves through our shared reflections with these delightful, *confusing*, but ultimately wonderful texts.

Upon further reflection, I also considered how my classmates and I learned about the Graduate Institute thanks to the work of the many individuals and initiatives here.

A graduate education often means narrower and narrower specialization, but that's not the case at St. John's.

I'm grateful for the commitment the college has made to a comprehensive, liberal education for adults and working professionals.

Without it, I would not have encountered Sophocles, or Dostoyevsky, or Tocqueville, in nearly as fulfilling an environment.

President Demleitner, I've been so heartened by the interest that you've already taken in the Graduate Institute community:

Through the informal conversations you've had with us students;

Through your visits to our convening weekends;

And last, but not least, through following me on Twitter.

But in all seriousness, as you advance the mission of the College, I have confidence that:

First, you will continue looking for ways to deepen the liberal education of adults and furthering a conversation with those typically outside the world of the College;

And second, that in this new chapter, you will always find us, the students of the Graduate Institute, a resource for collaboration, as advocates, and friends.

St. John's is a precious institution and its flourishing depends on the dedication and passion of our leaders.

I'm thankful to have you at the helm.

Congratulations on your inauguration.