

CONVOCATION ADDRESS 2025
Delivered by Carole Swain, Professor Emerita

**President Thompson
Vice President Sweeney
De La Salle Christian Brothers
Honorees: Professor Cortright and Sally Jamison
Saint Mary's College Community
Friends and Family**

We gather as we always do “In the Holy Presence of God”.

I am deeply grateful to be awarded this Honorary Doctorate from Saint Mary's College...my academic, professional and spiritual home for more than three decades!

**What a perfect day to celebrate our Lasallian Heritage with you ...
Saint John Baptist de La Salle's 374 birthday!**

I will be sharing some highlights of my Lasallian Vocational journey, as well as addressing this year's Heritage Week theme.

Transform Today... Inspire Hope for Tomorrow...

What a fitting theme for this Easter Season where New LIFE and GREAT HOPE abound.

**Transform Today...Inspire Hope for Tomorrow captures
“the call to action” lived by Saint John Baptist de La Salle.**

In 1681, De La Salle established schools offering quality education for youth, from families of the working class and economically poor. He was a pioneer and a disruptor of the status quo, because at that time in France, only the wealthy had access to a quality education.

The De La Salle Christian Brothers have been TRANSFORMING TODAY and giving HOPE for tomorrow for 345 years!

Over these three and a half centuries, Times have been tumultuous and always challenging for the Brothers.

In the 1700's during the French Revolution, they were thrown out of France.

Brothers were forced out of South Mexico in 1913, and out of North Mexico in 1914.

And most recently, Brothers were banned from Vietnam in 60's.

**Despite these setbacks, the Christian Brothers... through their spirituality:
the interior dimension of FAITH,
the exterior expression of ZEAL,
...all lived within an ACTIVE COMMUNITY,
have evolved into a world-wide order (thriving in a multi-cultural, multi-religious reality) and educating more students than any other order in the Catholic Church.**

The Brothers way of carrying out the Lasallian educational mission of serving the poor and marginalized, evolves with the times and circumstances.

...And for many of us, this EVOLUTION has been "life-changing."!!!

ARRIVING AT Saint Mary's in 1988, Christian Brothers' numbers had declined, as was true of most Catholic Church religious orders, after Vatican II.

Superior Br. John Johnson had recently called for a change in naming Brothers' Schools to Lasallian schools, in recognition of the role Lay Partners were playing and would be playing in the future of educating youth.

**The Brothers of our District took ACTION!
They invited us Lasallian Partners) to be "IN Association" with them.
We were invited into their communities, entrusted with leadership positions, and joined them in numerous Formation activities.
New smaller schools, serving only the economically poor and marginalized students were opened... two middle schools...De Marillac, De La Salle Academy, and three Cristo Rey High Schools.**

Saint Mary's has especially close ties with Oakland's Cristo Rey. Corporate Work-study students have served on campus for the last seven years. Sally Jamison, our honoree today, mentored many of them.

Currently, twelve former Cristo Rey students are receiving a tuition-free Saint Mary's education.

As I reflect back...

I arrived at SMC at the right time and under the right circumstances.

My Academic, Professional, and Spiritual lives resonated perfectly with Lasallian education where teachers know their students, "reached out and touch their hearts", as well as their minds.

Saint Mary's was a vibrant Community, where deep Relationships between colleagues and with our students was valued and promoted.

Believing that, God is in us, and among us, was captivating.

For my first 12 years, I dedicated myself to preparing elementary school teachers with a robust faculty and staff.

We embraced the Lasallian Spirituality... Lasallian Spirituality as an educational spirituality that integrates all of ones experiences. Educational relationships became a means of encountering the deeper natures of ourselves and the world at large.

In 1992, professor and supervisor, Br. John O'Neill, advised...I might understand the Lasallian mission in a more complete way, if I experienced Lasallian education INTERNATIONALLY.

Br. John and his Brothers' Community commissioned me to serve a month in the Philippines.

I observed Kindergarten through University classrooms and meet with each teacher/professor to discuss their teaching. I visited Supervised schools in the cane fields.

Students had no text books, just “blue books”. They copied lessons off the chalk board and took lecture notes. Their “blue books” became their text books.

Returning home my perspective had changed...

I was sent on a mission to serve, but I discovered, “I needed them more than they needed me!”

They accomplished so much with so few resources!

Fast forward a few years to 2000, when Br. Gerard Rummery, presenter at the Buttimer Institute, inspired me to envision a Lasallian Center in our School of Education.

I went to the President for support.

He NIXED my idea, but made me a Mystifying counter-offer.

He proposed a Special Assistant to the President who would serve the whole college.

He envisioned a Saint Mary’s that was inextricably interconnected with our District, Region and International Institute.

I accepted the new position... not knowing were the winds of the Holy Spirit would take me.

The President sent me to all the District schools from Yakima, Washington to East LA. ... with absolutely NO agenda.

A few months later, we met with the District Presidents and Principals at Mont La Salle.

We asked them, what do you need most from Saint Mary’s?

The resounding cry was More Teachers...More Teachers!!

Saint Mary’s responded by creating the Lasallian Educator Fellows Program.

Dean Sorenson and I designed a program to prepare six-eight teachers a year for our Lasallian schools.

When I retired seven years ago, we had prepared more 80 teachers. Saint Mary's College had invested over three million dollars in tuition remission to prepare teachers for our Lasallian schools.

In 2006, I was named Vice President for Mission, serving with Br. Ronald Gallagher and the District leadership Br. Stanislaus Campbell and Gery Short.

Many opportunities were afforded me (as you already heard in the Citation)...membership on the District Mission Council, Chairing three school boards, Participating in the District, Regional and International Assemblies.

In every situation, We Partners and Brother worked together to TRANSFORM THE PRESENT TO INSPIRE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

Chairing the Regional (US and Canada) Task Force was my most challenging responsibility. The District Visitors charged us with creating a "Model of Shared Governance" where Brothers and Lasallian Partners shared decision making and resources for the delivery of Regional Services.

After two years, two teams, progress and setbacks, we delivered the blue print for the newly structured Christian Brothers Conference.

We had a strong cohesive spirit committed to transforming what existed, to what needed to be, in order to secure the future HOPE.

I have highlighted some of my vocational journey that was transformative for me.

Now, I will share three First Generation Partners' stories. They received encourage and support from our Office of Mission.

And Each person INSPIRE me, and has given many HOPE for the FUTURE.

Margaret Brown-Salazar, Retired SMC Librarian

In 2015, Margaret spent a month at Bahay Pa Gasa (a center for adjudicated youth) in the Philippines.

Margaret built a much needed library from scratch! She returned twice more to offer her support and expertise. Over the last decade, Margaret has collected and shipped 800 “ups-to-date” books each year.

Imagine 8,000 books being received by the Center. Any overflow of books, went to rural schools where Monsoons had devastated their book collections.

In January 2026, Phillip Goodwin (The Associate Director of Alumni Engagement) is continuing Saint Mary’s commitment to Bahay Pa Gasa by taking his Jan Term class to serve for a month.

Rebecca Proehl, Retired Professor, Administrator and Lasallian Scholar

Becky’s participation in the Lasallian Social Justice Institute in El Paso, TX, had a significant impact on youth in Anapra, Mexico.

She was MOVED by the number of youth seeking educational support. Becky established a non—profit that raised \$400,000. An education building was constructed . Students received school tuition and uniforms. Of the many youth supported through high school, ten have earned College degrees in Accounting, Nursing and other practical professions!

Pamela Thomas, Retired Associate Director of Mission and Ministry, Lecturer

Pamela partnered with Br. Camillus Chavez for 20 years, making Meditation tapes to ensure Meditation would be available for students, staff and faculty for years to come.

Mary Volmer, faculty member and author, continues these weekly meditations in our side chapel.

**Margaret, Becky, and Pamela TRANSFORMED TODAY...
GIVING HOPE FOR MANY TOMORROWS.**

Four Former SMC students (2nd Generation Lasallian Partners), are currently leading our schools, as well as our District and College programs.

David Holquin is President of De La Salle High School, Concord

He reflects on his and many other Lasallian journeys as experiencing the “Ripple Effect”...one wave led to another without knowing or anticipating the final destination.

Chris Giangregorio is Principal/CEO of De La Salle Academy

He earned his teaching and administrative credentials as a Lasallian Educator Fellow.

After 10 years of serving hundreds of student, De La Salle Academy will be closing in June. The school has become financially unsustainably. Chris received support from Saint Mary’s professor Suzy Thomas and one of her former counseling students to place student in appropriate schools next year. All students have been placed!

Carrie Kiskila Davis is Director of SMC Mission and Ministry Center

She teaches the Lasallian Service Internship course and guides her team with serenity and grace.

Yolanda Franco is District Coordinator of Beyond Borders

Initiatives...enlightening faculty, staff and students about the lives of immigrants.

After each of us Partners experienced a Lasallian Formation opportunity ...whether it be a retreat, workshop, school visit, or International Immersion...we returned the SAME PERSON... TRANSFORMED with new energy, aspirations and commitments.

I hope many of you, students, faculty and staff will cease opportunities for **Transform Today Inspire Hope for Tomorrow** by choosing to be IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS and their LASALLIAN PARTNERS in continue this extraordinary educational movement.

In Conclusion,

We have witnessed the Lasallian Educational Mission
TRANSFORMING TODAY, INSPIRING HOPE FOR TOMORROW
FOR the last 345 YEARS!

Saint Mary’s College is a vibrant force in Transforming Today.

The Lasallian Educational Mission is reaching more students than it ever BEFORE:

1,160,328 Students WORLD WIDE!

How is this possible?

We are accomplishing this through the

Faith in the PRESENCE and in the ACTION of God.

Let us leave this Convocation convinced, as Saint Thomas Aquinas suggested,

“Through HOPE, each of us will rely on God’s strength...
and seek an arduous, but possible good.” TOGETHER!