



Inaugural Speech, March 21, 2024

Chairman Aloia, Vice Chair Sister Donna, Prioress Sister Luella, Good morning. Good morning to everyone here today. Thank you all so very much for being here to celebrate Caldwell University on Founder's Day.

At the outset, I want to recognize and thank the Members of the Board of Trustees for their leadership. And for giving me this extraordinary opportunity to lead our great university. You are so very important to our success and we truly appreciate your service, your generosity and your time. As you all know by now, I am totally committed to do all that I can to take the University in a direction that the Board and university community desires, deserves and demands. I will get to what I mean by that in a few minutes . . . I promise

Thank you to my daughter Mia for being here from Florida and my son Daniel from Philadelphia. Love you guys. I am profoundly grateful to my wife Alicia. I would not be here if it were not for her love and support. I love you. Quindi ecco qua, tesoro. Dr. Cillo! Thank you. I deeply appreciate you being here and for your kind words!

I wish that I could thank everyone by name . . . every family member and all our dear friends here but time does not permit me to do so. Thank "all you all" and Bless your hearts for being here (that's the good Bless your hearts). I guess some of the good things I learned down South will always stick with me!

We celebrate Founder's day today which would not have been possible without the community of Dominican Sisters of Caldwell. Thank you as well for your prayers and always warm embrace and support. Thank you also to all the delegates and colleague presidents for being here. It is an honor to be a colleague to you all. I am indeed humbled and honored to stand before this community today as President of Caldwell University. I agree with what Dr. Blattner said at her inaugural that this work is all about relationships, connections and community. And I repeat Sister Patrice's comments at her inaugural, as I too offer heartfelt thanks to the Sisters for entrusting me with Caldwell University. These most recent presidents certainly deserve the credit for leading the current incarnation of the University that we have the honor to build upon. Please join me in a round of applause for all of our past presidents all the way back to Mother Joseph and Bishop Walsh.

Thank you to the faculty for everything you are doing for our students and for your dedication and collegiality. Thank you to the staff of the university for their support, and for their efforts for students and for their leadership. Thank you to the Cabinet for your support, leadership and amazing commitment: Dr. Chernobilsky, AD Corino, Exec Manager & Board Relations Beth Gorab, VP O'Rourke, VP Rodriguez and Dr. Rodriguez

Universities are not about buildings, inaugurations, fundraising and so forth all those are essential to some greater or lesser extent . . . except for perhaps inaugurations. Yet they are insufficient in creating a great institution. Universities are mostly about the faculty and staff who serve students directly and we have some of the best here at Caldwell. Universities are about the students who choose to study here, who we educate, serve, and learn from. I commit to

continuing to work along with the faculty and staff to help us to build a University where we will always believe we can do our best! I also want to thank Board member emeritus, Linda Luciano and the entire inauguration committee, you all deserve the credit for this event. Please stand and be recognized. While I am on the topic of this event . . . I want to emphasize that this is the inauguration of the tenth President of Caldwell University. It is a celebration of this wonderful university on Founders day, not about the individual Jeff Senese. That is not to say I do not have a message I want you to hear. I most certainly do. I, like James Baldwin, believe that “the world is before us and we need not take it or leave it as it was when we came in.” One should strive for the things that one cares about to make a difference for others

So here we go! Since I arrived here in New Jersey, I have run just over 1,000 miles (about here to Washington D.C. and back again 2 times with another run up Long Island). And I am here today in front of you all with my toe humbly on the starting line again. I am ready to go, looking forward to the continuation of our race together. I offer my running as a hopeful metaphor for the time I serve as president at Caldwell University; that is:

- I will never give up,
- I will always be out there trying to get better
- in good and bad conditions,
- I will be focused on winning make no mistake,
- and I will always welcome you to join me no matter what.

Inaugurations provide a moment for universities to reflect on their institutional history and then to suggest their potential future. Caldwell has a particularly strong and interesting history. On August 1, 1939 Archbishop Walsh authorized Mother Joseph Dunn to establish Caldwell College after she spent 11 years planning and advocating for us. We had classes from Fordham, Catholic University and Seton Hall here before we opened. The College began operations on September 19, 1939 with 51 students.

The Sisters dedicated their lives to nurturing and growing this institution as one of their missions. They were, and are, tenacious, dedicated and faithful leaders and educators that were, and are, all about their ministry at the university. We became co-ed in the middle 1980’s. Graduate programs were added in the 1990’s. University status was awarded in 2010’s. And, today, we are recognized throughout this region and in parts of the country and globe as a strong teaching university.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote “What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.” Caldwell University has an amazing history, what lies inside us are decades of dedication of our Sisters, and our faculty and staff, over the past 85 years which has made us an outstanding teaching and learning focused University. Clearly, our past is foundational.

Please permit me to now turn to the present and then to the future of the University. It is all too evident that our world is imperfect. Today, there is a need for universities to focus upon the preparation of the next generation in a very rapidly changing world. Today, Universities must function like the businesses we are and at the same time retain our core focus on balanced, not

ideological, higher education. Today, it is just as important as it was at our founding to reject bigotry, and ignorance, and to embrace our Catholic and Dominican values, to hold up facts, and immutable truths that exist.

These responsibilities are met at our University through the pursuit of:

- objective scholarship that better's people's lives,
- through careful and balanced quality higher education of students where they are academically,
- an education that leads to critical, creative and effective problem solving,
- an open education, rather than simple, emotional, or personal opinion-based solutions

We are a Catholic university that is obligated to serve others . . . and we should make a difference. Truly, the academic community here at the university is a bold leader: We educated women for much of our early history when it was not always popular to do so, We are and have been a highly diverse and accepting institution for decades (we are now an HSI). We continue to look for ways to strengthen our liberal arts core which has grown with the university

Our focus requires us to ask, to really ask, what will higher learning look like in 2034? Ten short years from now. It follows then that we must ask how do we guide Caldwell University today as a consequence of our vision?

I believe the liberal arts are essential to a future focus for humanity, not just higher education. Artificial intelligence will continue to take on routine facts based processes and tasks. In our world that means a dramatic shift in work that may leave many without their current work. While new work will be created, the fourth industrial revolution that we are now in will be challenging . . . and especially for those without a high education. Machines cannot yet be seen as capable of taking over non-routine, more human creative and critical thinking work (e.g., Terminator quality robots or Commander Data from Star Trek are a long, long way off, Thank God).

Liberal arts education is open to all views and considers all sides of issues (not conservative or liberal views). The arts part of this term is also not only referring to what we know as the arts in common vernacular but in addition it refers to science, mathematics and many other fields we brand as STEM fields today. Students today need an accessible understanding of human cultures as well as to know the natural world to be effective professionals regardless of field. Students need practical skills to complete and understand analyses, to engage in creative thinking, and to be able to write and communicate, be capable of working successfully in teams and be able to solve complex problems.

These essential liberal arts learnings need to continue to be the foundation of our degree programs and education and remain as such. I am confident that the faculty here educate in these ways.

Our world also requires us all to be in a state of constant personal development throughout our lives. We are not returning to an analog or simpler world! The future then compels us at the University to continue to be a leader . . . to look for additional ways to serve learners and society

and for us to support faculty in their pursuit of the truth. And perhaps more broadly to support the integration, synthesis and making sense in the context of moving from good to better to great. In other words, we must achieve our value of Excellence and then strive for the next level of it!

We are a teaching university. Students are first and foremost in our focus. We do not ignore scholarship . . . we are a University after all. We choose, however, to continue to focus our energy on students to help them to achieve their educational and professional goals with respect and integrity . . . as we always have.

Ok, so that is the past and the present, we are in the last mile of our little run here today. Now to the future. We need to provide a future proof pathway for students so they can build on what is out there, be successful and so they can well raise the next generation.

I recently read “On Great Fields” by Ronald White about Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain who was a key figure in the Civil war, Governor and a college president of Bowdon. When he was 17 he was helping his father clear a field for planting and the plow and horse got stuck on a log. His father forcefully ordered him to get the plow free and Chamberlain asked how he was to do so. His father replied, “Do it. That is all.” So I start my remarks about our future with Chamberlain’s father’s words in my head.

I would like to speak to where we are going within the context of three essential emphases where we are just going to do it, that is all. The vision for Caldwell is expansive, some might even see it as audacious at this point, in a few short years, with hard work and luck, we will not see it as such. We are however going to need to do what is necessary and constantly look for what is possible as St. Francis would advise.

First, we are a community and that is critical to our future.

I see this University community as a true community of scholars and professionals focused on our students. A community of students striving for their future and toward their potential! Where to go with that? Let’s be a leader. Let’s be a model for a Catholic teaching University. Let’s create a university where staff and faculty continue to enjoy, truly enjoy, their work! Let’s strive to be even more collegial, a place where superior communication is the norm and while there are challenges, we willingly meet them together.

The commitment, engagement and energy of every single person in this community (faculty and staff) to working together for the good of the institution rather than for personal benefits only is critical. We all have the obligation to ourselves and to this university to work to maintain our drive, our optimism and our own morale. The work to improve the university community and culture here is about an enhanced emphasis on people. We will focus on building up, strengthening and listening to our people and especially and foremost to focus on those who are working to make a positive difference for our students and their colleagues.

That does not mean we will always agree. Truly, disagreement and dissent are catalysts to better solutions and decisions, and while the goal is not disagreement, it is better decisions. This perspective also creates, at the same time, an obligation that faculty and staff personally commit

to the larger goals of the university, and that we work to trust that we collectively are moving forward together for the university.

We must also stop focusing on not imposing our history on our present as if history is inevitable and the present is unchangeable. History is NOT inevitably repeated, and the present is changeable. I repeat, that history is NOT inevitably repeated and the present is changeable. There needs to be a continued emphasis on creating an excellent service environment for our students and each other. And a spirit of one-university community across all our departments is imperative. Our community must continue to evolve with and build upon these advantages.

Second, we are proudly and profoundly a teaching-and learning university.

With clarity and focus, we teach, we learn, we engage in scholarship to strengthen teaching and learning. We are focused on learning as THE outcome of our work. Simply put, and without overconfidence, we are going to be the best possible Catholic teaching University for our students. More than a few Universities over the past decade have begun a more exclusive focus on research. That is not where universities started, nor will we travel that exclusive path. In my view, a focus on students, serving the community and making an impact on generations of people is where we are, and where we are going.

I was a tenured faculty member at a research university and worked at three of them! So I understand what I am talking about. We are going to redouble our focus on teaching and learning. Why not Caldwell University? The strength of our teaching and learning community will allow us to be a more regionally known university. The strength of our teaching and learning will give us the potential scale of resources and market standing to weather the current revolution in higher education and the rapid changes that are occurring in work and society. A stronger teaching and learning focus gives us a better base from which to further innovate.

An even stronger reputation and focus on teaching and learning will also allow us to hire more faculty and staff and to focus on further building our quality given we will have the resources to direct to those needs. Even more altruistically stated we are called to serve as a Catholic and Dominican University. Serve we must and a teaching and learning focus is our service!

This also means that we will need to create new programs and deliveries to meet the demands of society and we must keep our existing programs current and forward focused as well. That includes our CORE curriculum! Degrees, graduate programs, certificates and micro-credentials will all be needed in the lifelong learning world we are in. Indeed, we are currently either offering or exploring programs in a range of counseling disciplines, in nursing and public health, and in business and in several other professional areas.

The curriculum should be on a rapid renewal cycle and we need to match faculty and staff resources to our new programs. We need a renewed and strengthened signature Core program that is forward leaning, universal in the Caldwell education and contemporary. That differentiates a Caldwell University graduate from others. That is, there must be a renewed “Caldwell Way” of

educating our students. This work includes on-campus, online, degree completion and onsite efforts with adult students and others.

The universities of the future that are successful will have multiple points of success and have a broad view of their place and role as well as an expansive view of their net revenue generating opportunities.

Third, and last, we are and will be a partner in an outstanding location and region.

I do not speak of our place in higher education relative to Harvard University or Rutgers University for example. Frankly we should care less about such institutions as they are largely irrelevant to our future and to the future of the vast majority of people.

We are a pragmatic institution that is focused not on the clouds but on the realities. I can guarantee you as well that higher education has incredible positive value. My dad was an immigrant. He understood the value. My dozens of trips to China, India, and South Africa speaking with colleagues and regular people there I can tell you they are promoting higher education not questioning its value.

I can also guarantee that the future is going to be more complex, not simpler. We should care about our partner institutions. Like Essex County College for example (With whom we have a deep and formal agreement). Our partners are those who see advantages in working with us and that we see a mutuality of purpose with.

I agree with John Donne's famous poem when he writes that "no man is an island entire of itself, and every man is a piece of the continent." And, so I believe that we are connected to other institutions of higher education and that any loss of ground or any institution is a toll on us all. Some institutions are closing and others will follow. Caldwell has, perhaps, a leadership role to play in that larger context as a partner in helping to preserve the best teaching and helping to sustain what others do best.

Therefore, we must engage in partnerships that benefit us AND our partners. This is about creating opportunities for students. We need to continue to focus on our student populations and our impacts. We also need to think about our presence in the most important markets in the region and even internationally (our class this year was 12% international). We must continue on the path we are on to achieve undergraduate entering class goals, in addition to our graduate students goals. I have no reason to believe we cannot consistently hit or exceed these. Nor do you, my friends!

The demographic cliff is not impacting quality institutions as intensely as others. This place in all its beauty and success can be even more than it is at present and with the addition of a new concept theater and community space for example (. . . why can't a scaled version of the Las Vegas Sphere exist here?).

We need to begin thinking about the next decade of renewals of our residential housing, and academic buildings and facilities to come, including a super high-technology, AI/AR enhanced, high touch science/health science building (to replace Raymond Hall).

Our idea is purposeful and focused on creating as many mutually beneficial relationships as possible to strengthen Caldwell. We will future-proof Caldwell University at the same time make a greater impact on the community.

So what will all of this require of us at Caldwell University? Actions! More actions . . . And additional actions! We must build our focus on letting people know who we are, celebrating our community, and advancing what we do in this learning community. We will also create traditions that have a deep impact on our Community. So please permit me to end my little talk with three significant actions that we and I have taken since I arrived here 9 short months ago.

First, action 1, this morning, I am pleased to announce that we have been given a donation of a significant six-figure gift to create the Beverly and Adrian Afonso Speakers Series at Caldwell University. This fall, we will welcome distinguished thought leaders and change-makers who are actively taking on society's most pressing issues to speak on campus. The broader community will also benefit from attending and participating in the Speaker Series. Thank you to Mrs. Beverley Afonso for her generous donation to make this important campus tradition possible!

Second, more ACTION! We need to significantly build our brand presence in this area, region and beyond. There is a lot of competition in this region. We can earn a much more prominent brand recognition for Caldwell University! The action we have taken will allow us to take a major leap forward in our visibility in this region. I am thrilled to announce today an amazing major branding partnership that we have created which uses a portion of existing funding that we already have dedicated to marketing.

We are now an Official University Partner to the New York Jets. Sorry Giants fans but we are Jets, Jets, Jets. I can assure you that our visibility and presence in this region, at MetLife Stadium and in social media and the media will move well beyond anything we have done to date or can imagine. I experienced this with Tom Brady, Gronk and the Buccaneers when I was in Tampa and the New York market is massive in comparison. We will be known this year!

I love trinities . . . and as such I have a third and final significant action to announce today before I conclude my remarks! As I said earlier we are a liberal arts, teaching-focused university that also focuses on professional programs. The area where our liberal arts education is taught and studied is in our School of Arts and Sciences which also touches every undergraduate degree program. And so, significantly, I am also so very pleased to announce today that I have worked with a major donor and alum to create an historic scholarship fund and for the naming of our School of Arts and Sciences based on a multi-million dollar commitment to the University. Only two schools left to name!

The donor will remain anonymous for now and the donor and I are working on the name for the school . . . but the commitment is signed, sealed and real! I can assure you that students who

receive the scholarships will well represent the generosity of our donor well into the next 85 years of our existence!

And so, I stand before you at the starting line of the run again. Committed, and ready to continue to take on the honorable servant leadership work for this university that it requires. Along with each and every one of you in the Caldwell University community. Together we will increase Caldwell's academic distinction, and we will grow this University, and we engage in the essential actions needed to fulfill our responsibilities to the future of this great institution.

Thank you for your patience this afternoon and thank you all so much for being here. I am truly inspired by our Sisters, our mission, our history, and our values and by all of the faculty and staff. I am convinced we have the Wisdom and knowledge as well as the ambition, talent, faith and enthusiasm needed. We will focus on our students and be a shining beacon of hopefulness on this hill, in this time and in these circumstances.

May God bless Caldwell University! May God bless all those assembled here today!

Thank you.