



May 27, 2021

My dear friends and colleagues,

In 2015, I was welcomed into service by the OLLU community. In my inaugural address, I committed myself to honor and uphold the charism of our Founders, even as we, together, brought the university into a new age. I did not take this pledge lightly, for I knew that our nation was on the cusp of change. At that time, there was a growing national narrative, devaluing education that threatened to further marginalize the people for whom education holds the greatest promise.

In my convocation address that same year, I enumerated the questions that we needed to ask of ourselves if we were to successfully navigate this “new age.” Among those questions, were these:

- Are we structured appropriately? Do our academic and administrative structures support interactions that will unleash our creativity and innovative spirit?
- How can we best continue our legacy of reaching out to underserved populations?
- How can we become more financially resilient? Can we become less dependent on tuition dollars?
- What investments are needed to increase the results of our fundraising programs?
- How do we care for our students and employees?
- How do we improve facilities so that learning, living and working is optimal for all?

Six years later, the answers to these questions are still evolving. In that time, we have:

- Significantly reduced the size of administration and we are in the process of determining our academic structure;
- Created processes for extending support services to all students, including those in graduate and online programs;
- Raised and distributed over \$1 million to help students with emergency needs, and this fall, we will open our food pantry to address food insecurity among our students;
- More than doubled the amount of funds raised annually and are on track to complete the largest fundraising campaign in school history;
- Raised our minimum wage; implemented pay increases, held firm on health care costs and avoided involuntary layoffs; and,
- Opened our new residential hall, are preparing for construction of the Center for Children and Family, begun repairs on Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, undertaken structural repairs to Providence Hall and are preparing to assume responsibility for the Convent.

At the time that I made my commitment to OLLU, I also made a commitment to my family: Dave and I would return to our family home in Virginia in six, maybe seven years. This commitment was equally important to us. In my 43-year career, I had often missed out on family time to attend to the needs of work. I did so only because I had Dave. Not only did he tend to our children, he stepped in to help my siblings and parents whenever they needed

support. I will be forever grateful to him for all the experiences that he was able to provide our girls, even when the responsibility of those experiences was solely his. Likewise, I am so incredibly grateful to my girls. They are happy, healthy adults who give me the pleasure of their friendship and the great joy of grandchildren. I am ready to focus on them and all that life brings outside of career.

When I first spoke of the 'new age' six years ago, I did not foresee the pandemic nor the seismic shift that it portends. It is said that biblically, seven is the number of completeness. While I cannot say that our work is finished, I can say that we are on the cusp of another advent; and that what we have accomplished provides the foundation for our future. The questions I posed six years ago need new focus: what does the workplace look like for our employees? How do we position ourselves in the rise of online learning? How do we generate enough revenue to keep our doors open to the most financially challenged students? How do we support students with complex issues? How do we package our educational programs to meet the evolving needs of the people and communities we serve?

These are big questions that deserve a fresh perspective. With new leadership, the creativity of our faculty and staff, and Providence, OLLU will do as she has always done: meet the challenges with ingenuity and purpose. It is with that confidence that I confirm my retirement date as July 15, 2022. In the coming year, I will focus on supporting the Board in a successful transition of the presidency as well as furthering on-going initiatives including SACS reaffirmation, the review of our mission statement, the defining of the academic structure, the recommendations of the inclusiveness and equity strategic planning team, our fundraising campaign and our capital improvement projects.

Even as we focus on the tasks ahead, the Board is preparing to implement an inclusive, national search for the 10<sup>th</sup> president of Our Lady of the Lake University. Trustee Steve O'Donnell and Vice President for Administration Rosalinda Garcia will lead a search committee representative of trustees, faculty, staff, students, Sisters and others. A national consultant will steer the process which will begin in August.

It is a great joy to serve the OLLU community. I look forward to the 2021-2022 academic year and all that is on our agenda. So, no goodbyes yet, there is still work to be done!

Yours in Providence,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane E. Melby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping underline.

Diane E. Melby  
President