



The Eucharistic Celebration and Investiture Ceremony for
Winston F. Erevelles, Ph.D.
14TH PRESIDENT OF ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Inauguration Speech

Your Excellency, bishops and clergy members, Our beloved Marianists, Trustees, delegates, greeters, St. Mary's campus community, alumni, friends and family:

All glory to God in all that we do. It is humbling to stand before you today, knowing how unworthy I am and yet selected to serve this community.

I stand before you as an immigrant, Keralite Indian by birth, American by choice, an engineer turned academic, and a servant to the Blessed Mother and our University. It has been an interesting 40 years since I started my professional career.

None of us gets to where we are by ourselves. I would like to begin my remarks by thanking a few of the most important people in my life.

I thank my mother, Jaya, for giving me life, for the incredibly heavy lift in raising two children as a young widow who also had to contend with life-altering financial fraud, and for being my first mentor.

My big sister Gi for being my second mother, who took care of me, fed me, and tutored me when our mother was at work. I am grateful for your love and care.

I lost my father when I was almost two years old. In the years that followed, my stepdad entered our lives. I am grateful to my stepdad, Kurien, for his quiet role in my life and for fostering my love for racquet sports and Scrabble.

When I arrived in the United States, my late uncle and aunt, Dr. Joseph and Gladys Kannankeril, welcomed me to Chicago. Related not by blood but by the ties that span 90 years of friendship between our families, I found a second home. I will ever be grateful to the Kannankeril family for your love and support.

My friend and brother Vinod John, you have been my role model for what it means to live as a faith-filled and committed Christian.

I have had one principal mentor over the past 35 years, Dr. Petros Gheresus. Pete, you have had an indelible

impact on my life and career, and I have tried to emulate how you work and live.

It is said that behind every great man stands a great woman. I am not a great man by any stretch of the imagination, but I am incredibly blessed to have a great woman in my corner — my wife, Chris Evevelles. This talented emergency physician and medical leader is the center of my universe and my partner in all we do. You have saved my life in more ways than one.

When we married in 2001, two beautiful little kids came with the package — David and Claire Tullius. Dave, thank you for your military service, and I am proud of the pivot you are making to resolve conflict through dialogue. Claire, I am in awe of the creative and tenacious spirit that has taken you from photography to boxing and mental health counseling. It is a privilege and my honor to be your stepdad. While that term is technically accurate, it does no justice to how I hold you in my heart!

Chris and I were further blessed with two children — Joseph and Michael. Mike, your caring demeanor and persistence in the face of adversity inspire me. Your arid sense of humor keeps me grounded. I look forward to seeing where your Biology journey takes you. I love you guys dearly and am proud of each of you. You motivate me to become a better man and father.

As you may know, our family lives with a painful loss. In October 2020, we lost our son Joseph to suicide. Joe was a gentle, sweet soul who did so much good in his 18 short years on earth. Our family has chosen to honor Joseph's memory by how we live in service to others. We have also used this devastating tragedy to become advocates for mental wellness in our community. My friend and colleague Ian Martines invited me to join him and Dr. Vanessa Pena to become a QPR suicide prevention gatekeeper instructor.

Amid our suffering, we learned what being a part of this community means. The outpouring of compassion, love, support, and prayers from our university community, the family and friends seated here, and many others carried us when we could barely stand. To our professed Marianists, you mean the world to our family. So, let us explore our community a little bit more.

St. Mary's University was founded by the Society of Mary in 1852 when four Marianist brothers came to San Antonio to establish our city's first institute of learning. They lived and worked faithfully through wars, pandemics, and economic downturns. They faced adversity with grace, sacrificed, dug deep, and adapted to meet the needs and circumstances of the times. Should we be surprised?

No, they were merely following in the footsteps of our founders — the Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, and Blessed Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon. Today, the timeless wisdom and vision of our founders are seen in the Characteristics of a Marianist Education — our true North Star.

Over our history, 13 dedicated and talented leaders have served as presidents. I have personally witnessed two of them in action.

President-Emeritus Charlie Cottrell hired me as SET Dean in 2009. I have had the privilege and joy of working closely with my immediate predecessor, President Emeritus Tom Mengler, a dear friend, brother, and

mentor, for a dozen years.

St. Mary's is a very healthy institution today, thanks to the efforts of those who have gone before us. Tom and Mona, your hard work through the Defining Moment Campaign has positioned us for great success. We have momentum on our side and will use it aggressively to take our beloved University to the next level. This is not a simple task – we are challenged by increased competition at a time of declining enrollment in parts of the country, questions about the perceived value of a college education, affordability, ineffective business models, talent retention, and polarization in our society. So, how do we continue providing the premier experience we are known for against this backdrop?

We will stay true to our identity as a welcoming, firmly Catholic and Marianist university where all have a seat at the table. Our Marianist charism will continue guiding, inspiring, and driving our work. We are a Hispanic-Serving Institution with a diverse student body, a high percentage of first-generation students, and so many with limited financial means. Serving our students is a privilege — a sacred trust because this is where lives are transformed.

Over the past eight months, I have held several listening sessions on campus, met with many of you individually, and traveled a good bit, visiting alumni, schools, and a range of constituents in our community. This has helped inform our strategic themes and the body of work that lies ahead.

I have referenced our commitment to St. Mary's Catholic and Marianist identity and charism. This is our foundation and core, the lens through which we view the world and through which decisions are made. It is also our guide to how we conduct ourselves.

Students are at the heart of who we are and what we do. Taking care of their needs must be our central focus. We will keep working to ensure a top-notch experience for our students in and out of the classroom. If you visualize this construct as a series of concentric circles (yes, I am a manufacturing engineer!), the next ring would be our faculty and staff, who are the heart of the university. This would be followed by the outer ring — our administrators. Investing in the recruitment and development of our faculty, staff, and administrators is important so that they may, in turn, take care of our students.

One of the most wonderful things about our campus is how faith and the liberal arts permeate all disciplines. We will stay true to that while responding to the economic drivers in our region - Aerospace, Cybersecurity, Financial Services, Healthcare, Life Sciences, Manufacturing, and Technology. Our programming must be current, competitive, and responsive to our region's current and emerging needs. This will require agility and innovation — we can do this because of our size, and we must do this to stay relevant.

We are a historic campus and a beautiful one at that. We will work to ensure that our learning, living, dining, athletic, recreational, and public spaces are attractive, inviting, and conducive to their purpose.

This campus does not live in isolation. St. Louis Hall was here in 1894 when there was pretty much nothing around us. We will engage our neighbors to strengthen the community, enhance educational opportunities for our youth, foster economic growth, and create a more vibrant environment that benefits

our students and neighbors.

Finally, as the oldest institution in town, we will purposefully connect to our alumni, employers, economic development bodies, the secondary education community, nonprofits, and government. Yes, the list goes on!

In summary, I see St. Mary's University as a destination of choice, a place where students are welcomed as family members, driven to accomplish what they never dreamed possible, mentored and supported along the way, building lifelong relationships with a community that loves them, as they discern who God is calling them to be. I see our students thriving in an environment characterized by excellence, enabling our graduates to be successful, no matter where they land. I see us as an integral part of key conversations in the community, invited to participate with our input actively sought. I see us creating a mindset and culture where we skate to where the puck will be, not where it has been!

St. Mary's community and friends, I invite you to join me in writing this next great chapter of our history. At our fall convocation, I talked about going farther when we go together. The body of work I have laid out will take all of us pulling together.

Let me close with a challenge to the St. Mary's community, including me. Will you see the image of Christ in each person you encounter on this campus? Will you bring the best version of yourself to the table each day? Will you stay firmly committed to our Catholic and Marianist mission? Will you be joyful in your work, even amid the inevitable challenges we all face? And finally, will you make a difference in the lives of those around you?

Thank you, and may God bless you abundantly, now and always!

