



Inauguration

PRESIDENT JENNIFER BONDS-RAACKE, PH.D.

AS 11TH PRESIDENT OF SAINT MARTIN'S UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 8, 2022 | HAL AND INGE MARCUS PAVILION



Saint Martin's
UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENT JENNIFER BONDS-RAACKE ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE SPEECH

Pursuing Our Mission: Turning Aspiration Into Action



It is a great honor to stand before you today to celebrate this historic moment for Saint Martin's University. We celebrate 127 years of faith, reason, and service that have made Saint Martin's what it is today, while at the same time, we celebrate the warm glow of optimism for our future.

On this historic occasion, I would like to acknowledge that the lands on which Saint Martin's University resides are the territories of the Squalli-Absch People, more commonly known as Nisqually. The Nisqually People are the past, present, and future stewards of these lands. Similarly, members of Saint Martin's community are the past, present, and future stewards of our University's traditions and mission. Together, we share a commitment to the common good, and in doing so, we can make a difference in the lives of those who reside here, and in the lives of our greater community.

I join the Saint Martin's community with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I would like to thank each member of the Presidential Search Committee for their dedication to the University. I would like to thank the Board of Trustees for their unanimous endorsement, as well as every member of the Abbey, especially Abbot Marion, for entrusting me to lead their treasured ministry. I would also like to recognize the Inauguration Committee for their tireless work, and everyone involved in preparing this week's festivities.

This occasion marks an official "passing of the baton", I would like to acknowledge my predecessor, Dr. Roy Heynderickx for his leadership and steadfast dedication to Saint Martin's. Both Dr. Heynderickx and his wife, Kathleen, will remain Saints forever in our hearts!

And I would like to share special thanks to our students who are here today – would you please stand. You fill our campus, our community, and our hearts each day. I am grateful that you chose Saint Martin's and that you have given us the privilege of being your Saints family, and your home away from home.

My family and I arrived in Washington on May 31st and each day since, we have been welcomed with an outpouring of Benedictine hospitality from our students, staff, faculty, monks, alumni, friends of the University, and leaders of our local community. We have experienced the significance of this community and felt the presence of God's embrace.

Being part of Saint Martin's was a decision we made as a family. Let me start by acknowledging the "OG" or the "core four" as we call ourselves. I would not be here today without the love and support of my husband, Dr. John Raacke, and our daughters, Callie and Brooke. I treasure our blend of unconditional support and wicked sense of humor.

I especially want to thank you, John, for everything you do for our family, for providing the women in your life with grounding and stability and concurrently pushing us to shine our lights and lead in service. Callie and Brooke – I am so proud of the women you have become. Thank you for challenging me and inspiring me to continue to grow.

Sometimes we recognize a fifth member of the OG. When we do, it is my baby brother, Will Nolan. Will's presence in my life reminds me to be a better listener and give more love to the students I encounter each day.

My heart is full to also have with me today Gracie Wasinger and Ariana Jansen - two cherished students who became members of our family as we traveled from Kansas to Wisconsin and have continued on this journey with us.

Finally, I want to thank my mom, Mary, who is here with me today, my dad, Jeff, who is watching via Livestream, and all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I had the chance to discover and pursue my purpose because of the countless sacrifices of my mom, dad, and grandparents. Thank you.

Leading up to this day, I have reflected deeply on the path that brought me here. I was privileged with Catholic education from kindergarten through high school, which continued when I started college at Christian Brothers University. This was the very same year my mother started college to become a registered nurse. The people who nurtured me throughout my education changed my life – people just like our faculty and staff who wake up every day do the same for our students.

From a professional perspective, there are three women who have significantly influenced me and my beliefs, values, and decisions. I am so happy that they are here today so I can thank them in person.

Sister Margaret Sue, you were my first-grade teacher at Sacred Heart School in Walls, Mississippi. At an early age, you nurtured my desire to learn. You taught me to respect each person regardless of class, background or professional standing. And, you inspired me to work toward a just order in our community and in our greater society. I carry your lessons with me every day. Thank you, Sister Margaret Sue.

Dr. Ann Die Hasselmo, you helped me see that my dreams were possible by doing the very work I could not envision for myself. You showed me it was possible for women to be exceptional leaders in higher education. Then, you introduced me to an invaluable network of leaders who have given me courage and confidence. Thank you, Ann.

Dr. Karen Whitney, you have been a fearless leader in higher education and advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion. As John and I navigated our dual-career family, you served as a role model. And, you have allowed me to tap into your vast experience and expertise more times than I can count. Thank you, Karen.

I have not traveled the path to Saint Martin's alone. None of us have. We all walk in communion with each other, with God our creator and Christ our brother, and with the saints before us. Along the way, we are called to break open our gifts and share them abundantly with one another, as so many people have done for me. With God's grace, I am blessed with the opportunity to do the same for the students, staff, and faculty here at Saint Martin's. [Pause]

With all of my heart and being, I welcome the opportunity to serve as the 11th president of Saint Martin's University, and to serve as the first woman president in the University's history. In this role, our Catholic, Benedictine and liberal arts traditions are the foundation and the University's mission is the North Star that guides me, just as it has guided our community since 1895.

During my first three months at Saint Martin's, I set out to learn by listening with the ear of my heart according to the Rule of Benedict. And, I have entrusted leaders from the Abbey, the Board of Trustees, and the President's Cabinet who have shared their experience, insights and guidance. While I may be the first woman president in the University's history, I find it fitting to recognize a few remarkable women who have served at the helm of Saint Martin's for a total of more than 67 years and paved the way for me.

Patty Lemon

Patty is Saint Martin's advocate for student accessibility to higher education and a strong, respected voice for marginalized students on our campus. Throughout my career, I have not seen a more heartfelt display of Stewardship. Of the many examples I could highlight, Patty leads recruitment for our Act Six Scholars program to provide leadership development and scholarships for students from urban areas who are committed to transforming their communities.

Cynthia Johnson

Cynthia puts all the pieces in place to create a welcoming and respectful environment for every member of our Saint Martin's community. She promotes the dignity of our daily work and applies our liberal arts tradition by putting programs in place to support life-long learning for our staff and faculty members. And, she emphasizes the importance of connecting with our greater purpose and mission as we carry out our daily work.

Brenda Lund

Brenda is unwavering in her commitment to our community. She exemplifies the Benedictine charism of Hospitality on behalf of the Office of the President. Raised in a military family, and as a military spouse today, she is a key advisor and advocate for our military and veteran students – demonstrating a sense of honor and discipline reflective of both institutions.

Melanie Richardson

Melanie began her career in social work and has carried forward her commitment to compassionate care for every student at Saint Martin's. She models the Benedictine charism of Striving for Peace on all levels: with self, others and God. Melanie leads Saint Martin's student life and co-curricular programming – dedicating herself to giving our students the opportunity to grow intellectually, spiritually and emotionally.

Patty, Cynthia, Brenda, Melanie, your work is beyond inspiring. You have helped students develop their hearts and minds in ways that have cascaded into the broader world, rippling forth to touch the lives of others, and sow seeds of joy, compassion, and wisdom. Today we reflect on the impact you have had on people in your care, and we thank you.

You have given all of us an example of what it means to live a life in the Benedictine spirit of prayer and work. And while all your excellent work—and the work of our entire community—has been accomplished one day at a time, by solving one problem at a time, and by investing in one student at a time, the impact is beyond measure.

As I consider the overall effect of our work, I find myself asking ... How does one measure a life well lived? Or a leader's ability to think critically and act responsibly? Or the fulfillment that comes from life-long learning?

As a Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts university, we strive to help our students to reach their full potential, or “self-actualization” for my fellow psychology enthusiasts in the room. For many students, college is a transformative time in their lives on their journey of becoming – a time that includes intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and personal growth.

While we can certainly measure the characteristics of self-actualization – things like peak experiences, self-acceptance, gratitude, and ethics – ultimately, achieving one's full potential can only truly be measured by the very person pursuing it. So, as we look beyond the formal measures of academic and institutional accomplishments, we see daily examples and feel the impact of our mission all around us.

In my short time here, I have invited our community to join me in contemplating the future of Saint Martin's University. I have asked my cabinet members to envision the legacy we would like to leave. I have asked students how we can make their experience here more meaningful. I have asked staff and faculty how we can empower them to enable their best work. And during a recent Board meeting, we asked one another to describe what it means to be a Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts university.

These discussions have shown me our community's unwavering commitment to our traditions, mission and values. In other words, our foundation at Saint Martin's is strong.

These discussions have also shown me the community's aspirations for the future. A future that amplifies our traditions; takes holistic learning to a new level; and expands our impact in communities across the region. I would like to share a few concepts that have emerged as we consider these aspirations and the effort it will take to achieve them.

First, when we consider the challenges and conflicts ever present in today's world, and the challenges that today's students will face in their lifetimes, there has never been a more important time to emphasize the benefits of a Catholic, Benedictine education. This is an education that promotes respect for every person, advances peace, and emphasizes not just listening, but listening with the ear of your heart. We have an opportunity, one might even say an obligation, to plant and nurture the seeds of our Benedictine charisms within each student so they might carry them forward into a world hungering for these values.

Amplifying the benefits of a Benedictine education ... this is how we pursue our mission.

Second, when we think about the breadth of experiences that we offer at Saint Martin's University, each experience – inside and outside the classroom – must be profoundly relevant to our students. As individuals, we can take time to appreciate the world as our students see it. As teachers, advisors, coaches and role models, we can account for their perspectives and lived experiences to foster meaningful relationships. We can help them discover their passion. And we can inspire them to take action in service to others – especially those in need. As leaders we are challenged to continuously re-evaluate the relevance of our academic offerings, facilities, and pedagogy to reflect the ever changing social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors impacting our region, and therefore employers and our students' livelihood.

Creating a profoundly relevant experience for our students ... this is how we pursue our mission.

Lastly, we see an opportunity to make Saint Martin's a place of belonging. This starts with providing more students, especially those who have historically been under-represented in higher education, with the opportunity to join our community. We can expand our outreach and recruiting efforts for these students. And we can call upon our entire community including alumni, friends and trustees to build our Endowment to create more merit-based and needs-based scholarships – making Saint Martin's an option for deserving students.

When our new students arrive, they must believe in their hearts that they belong here. We start earning their trust and belief in us the moment they step on campus – when we welcome them according to the Rule of Benedict, which says ... Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for He is going to say, "I came as a guest, and you received Me."

And this commitment continues each day after that – as we recognize the needs, the gifts and contributions of each student regardless of their differing capacity, disposition, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, or background. As a community, we will embrace diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in a manner that enhances each person's ongoing journey of becoming.

Creating a place of belonging and respect for all students ... this is how we pursue our mission.

I look forward to our work to make these aspirations a reality – and to working together as a community to take the actions that are necessary to achieve them.

In closing, it is a great honor to stand before you today as the 11th president of Saint Martin's University, and to serve this vibrant, mission-filled community.

Since its founding, this Saint Martin's community has been so invested in the human endeavor that the monks opened their doors on September 11, 1895 for a single student, Angus McDonald. Angus traveled by canoe from Shelton, some 25 miles away, to attend. At first, he was the only student receiving a full course of high school level classes. In the following weeks, more students arrived at Old Main.

Today we have more than 1,600 undergraduate and graduate students studying here – in a community as devoted to them as the monks were to Angus. Our students come from 32 states and U.S. territories, and 18 countries, from many ethnic and religious backgrounds. They have access to 34 academic programs, state-of-the-art technology and modern facilities, and they are surrounded by history, nature, and the spiritual beauty of our campus.

Like Angus, our students have chosen this vibrant, mission-filled place called Saint Martin's, and in doing so, they have placed their dreams and aspirations, and their livelihoods in our hands. With God's grace, we will continue our good work as guides on their journey of becoming, and we will accomplish our life's work each day and through each student. And together, we will make a difference.

Thank you.