

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology:
Your Seminary

It's a pleasure for me to be here with you today as we engage in our first Rector's Day together. Before beginning my term on the 1st of July, I shadowed Fr. Tom in May and June as well as participated in various events and meetings in an attempt to get as detailed a picture as possible of the seminary. As part of this, I have also had individual meetings with most of you. It has all been very good.

As most of you know, I have a long history with Sacred Heart. I was hired in 1988 to establish the Hispanic Studies Program, one of the first of its kind in a seminary. Over the course of 24 years I had the privilege of working with various SCJ rectors, including Fr. Jim Brackin, whom I consider a type of mentor. I also served as a professor of systematic theology, Vice Rector and then Vice President for Academic Affairs before leaving in 2012 to take a job with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). It was short-lived, however, since I was elected Vicar General of my community, the Salvatorians, and went to Rome where I served for a six-year term, ending this past December. At that time, Fr. Ed Kilianski, the SCJ Provincial, invited me to interview for the position of President-Rector.

But actually, the first time I interviewed for this position was 8 years ago, in the fall of 2011. I said then that I was convinced that Sacred Heart was moving toward greatness. Since returning, it's obvious that Sacred Heart is not the same seminary I left in 2012...nor am I the same person. Upon returning, I see just how far Sacred Heart has advanced and is truly on the verge of greatness. I believe this is due not only to the dedication, hard work, and unwavering interest of the administrators, staff, faculty, and board of directors who have endured some difficult times recently, but especially to the new dynamism brought to Sacred Heart by Fr. Tom Knoebel and the improved relationship to the SCJ Provincial, his council, and the Province.

Fr. Tom has inspired the Seminary community with his vision linked to Jeremiah 29:11-12, namely: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm to give you a future with hope..." "A future with hope." I sense this hope coursing through the life of the seminary, especially as many of you wonder who I am and what my leadership will be like.

Well, while Fr. Tom has been a visionary, I am a dreamer. At a gathering of youth in North Macedonia earlier this year, Pope Francis decried the lack of dreaming among the

youth of today. So, he admonished them to dream and to dream big! I take my inspiration from his words as well as from the prophet Joel 3:1: “it shall come to pass I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

I am now in my mid-60s, an old man to some, but certainly with big dreams. When I began teaching at Sacred Heart, I was in my mid-30s. Even then I envisioned a bright and glorious future for Sacred Heart. Today, I dream of Sacred Heart as a place of excellent priestly, religious, and ministry formation. It will be a full house of diocesan and religious seminarians and with programs full of students, where bishops and religious superiors will want to send their seminarians. And where men and women, lay and religious will want to study. That’s because I dream it will be a place full of prestige that enjoys national and international fame for its superb theological, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation, and as a holy place, where the world meets to encounter and extend the reign of God.

Yes, I’m a dreamer, but I also have my feet on the ground. And dreams can only be achieved if we take care of those things that will help us move forward to attain them. Clearly, one of those things is the continued support and dedication of the SCJs to the future of the seminary. A sign of this is the investment they are making in renovating the building. I thank them for their generosity and vision, for...

Sacred Heart is their seminary. It is an important apostolate of the US Province as well as of their world-wide community as one of only three major Dehonian seminaries in the world. Along with their other apostolates, it adds to the prestige of their presence and charism in the US, making it visible here and around the world. Because of this it’s imperative that the SCJ charism and Dehonian spirituality be an integral part of the life and purpose of Sacred Heart.

In fact, it’s my ardent hope that I will be succeeded by an SCJ. And this requires a large investment including the right attitude, commitment, preparation, and knowledge of what’s required of a major seminary to function and succeed in the US. Also, it’s important that Sacred Heart have a connection to the other two SCJ major seminaries so that the Dehonian spirit grows at Sacred Heart.

At the same time, it’s very important that SCJs recognize that we, the administration, staff, faculty and board of directors of Sacred Heart are their partners: the spirit of Fr. Dehon and his charism are at work here. Like all charisms, it was a gift to Fr. Dehon, and so

through him to the world, as an instrument of God's life and salvation at the service of Church and society. Consequently, I believe because of that Sacred Heart, with its administration, staff, faculty, and board of directors add to the richness of the expression of his charism in the US and beyond.

You and I offer the SCJs our dedication and collaboration in this regard. What I have seen and heard in these last few weeks, particularly in our one on one meetings, is just how much you are truly invested in Sacred Heart. You see yourselves as partners in this enterprise. Furthermore, as a result of my six years in Rome, it has become very clear to me that the future of religious congregations involves greater collaboration and sharing of resources in order to move into the future and bring our unique perspective to bear on the life of the Church. I see my appointment as a sign of this. Therefore, Sacred Heart is not only an SCJ seminary but it is also my and your seminary. Yes, Sacred Heart is your seminary.

So, given this, what do I envision for Sacred Heart?

I see a place where God's reign, God's kingdom, is flourishing. This is linked to the Dehonian value expressed in the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. It's already taken root at Sacred Heart; now it's our duty to contribute to its growth and development. This is done by all involved, not by one person alone.

Therefore, I envision that everyone associated with Sacred Heart is responsible for its success in accomplishing what Christ is asking of the seminary and what the Holy Spirit is guiding it to be. I certainly do not have all the answers, nor is my vision perfectly clear. Therefore, if I am to make any difference at all it's because I am able to cooperate with God's work in me and in you: I am incomplete without you... and you are incomplete without me. And together we are incomplete without God.

So, I have a strong sense of what God wants for Sacred Heart regarding our life in the heart of Christ as seen in the four dimensions of formation, in terms of the life of the seminary and in terms of relations with the SCJs and other sponsors, both diocesan and religious. I have a strong sense also of what God wants of Sacred Heart in terms of service to the Church and to the world, and in terms of why I've been chosen to be rector at this time.

Basically, I envision Sacred Heart offering a new model of seminary and theological study that will help the Church move toward a future with fewer priests and more collaborative ministry among diocesans, religious, and laity. For that reason, Sacred Heart is more than an SCJ seminary: it belongs to something larger, it belongs to God's purpose.

With this in mind, the starting point is Spiritual Formation: our relationship with Christ has to be the center of everything to which we aspire, everything we do, and for everything which we hope. There has to be a dialogue, a connection, between what we study in the classroom or what we do in our offices, and what we pray in the chapel. I see this captured in the SCJ expression *In Corde Jesu*, “in the heart of Christ.”

One of the ways we can grow in this relationship is to give evidence that we are a prayerful community. Therefore, every class day I ask the entire community present on campus, administrators, staff, faculty and staff, to assemble in the main chapel between 11:45 and 11:50 in preparation for the praying of the Angelus, a very simple but meaningful prayer. After a short period of silence, we'll pray this together when the bell strikes at 12:00 and then go to the dining room for lunch. Thank you for your cooperation since it will mean adjusting your work and schedules a bit. I'm truly convinced that our praying together will lead to great results.

So, then how do I envision the results of the formation/education of those who come to study or to work or to participate in the programs offered by Sacred Heart? I see those who study, work, and graduate at Sacred Heart as persons imbued with grace who are becoming more and more Christ-like, so that when they leave Sacred Heart they have come to know Jesus Christ in a deeper way (i.e., intimately), to love Him more intensely so as to follow Him more closely, and, therefore, capable of making Him known, loved and served better in the context to which they are called to serve. I see them as instruments of Christ's love and salvation, preparing the way for Him in all that we are and do. This requires attention to spirituality in its many forms.

In terms of Intellectual Formation, Sacred Heart has always been very strong in this area despite criticism that it was watered down for the older vocation. But especially after working for ATS, I see just how demanding our program has been and is, in comparison to so many other Roman Catholic seminaries in particular. Many of our graduates and participants in our programs, have gone on to take on important service within their dioceses or religious congregations, for example as bishops, chancellors, moderators of the curia, vicars general, major superiors, and formators. We need to make this better known.

Consequently, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as persons who are well-educated to understand the Church's teaching in all of its forms. I envision them as persons capable of applying the Church's teaching using their intelligence

born of a deep relationship with Christ. That is, as persons capable of using appropriate critical thinking and deep reflection on what they have learned, including openness to what Christ is revealing to us through, not only the Church, but also the world and the experiences of the people around us. The recent science and religion initiative is an important tool in this regard.

Therefore, I envision our graduates as persons committed to developing their knowledge and understanding with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I see them as persons who've acquired or built on the needed skills in order to be more effective in their service. I see them as persons who are able to dialogue because they know their knowledge is incomplete. I see them as persons who desire to be all that Christ has called them to be. I see them as persons, whose desire to continue learning after they leave Sacred Heart, has been given impetus by what they have learned and experienced at Sacred Heart.

In terms of Pastoral Formation, experiences have to be well chosen but also the purpose of these experiences has to be clear to those who engage in them. The selection of appropriate guides has to continue to be a priority but also the continuing formation of these guides needs to be offered to the extent possible.

I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people of service, who put the needs of others ahead of their own, who are available to serve and go where the Lord is leading them. I would like them to be people who know that it's all about Jesus and not about themselves or their personal commitments and interests. And therefore, I envision them as persons who care about others and who permit their hearts to be touched by others.

And, in terms of Human Formation: this is the weakest of the four dimensions, not only at Sacred Heart but in all houses of formation. Sacred Heart has the potential of developing a groundbreaking human formation program. The presence of the SCJ formation program at Sacred Heart is a great step forward in this regard and can help to provide the development of an overall program.

I envision a program that attends not only to celibacy formation but also to such basic things like manners, and to more demanding things like communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to listen and dialogue, community living, valuing the common good and balancing it against individual needs, identification of and respect for appropriate boundaries, fostering humility and goodness, appreciation for and celebration of

differences, how to build bridges and tear down walls, fostering healthy relationships and self-esteem, etc. Sacred Heart already has a good foundation for this in terms of our reputation for hospitality, which is often taken for granted. Hospitality is the ability to put others first rather than oneself.

Therefore, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people who are in touch with their humanity, in a healthy way, who are capable of understanding and responding to the human condition with compassion and with the heart of Christ. I see them as persons who are able to love others because they themselves have been loved. I see them as persons who are able to treat others as they wish to be treated. I see them as persons who are able to create unity in diversity as expressed in the SCJ motto *Cor Unum*, "of one heart."

In sum, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs, as persons who have received the appropriate type of formation whether they are diocesan, religious or lay so that they can live, move and have their being in Christ (see Acts 17:28).

So, what do I envision for our administration?

Our administrators are very hard working and talented. You've helped Sacred Heart improve its programming and offerings with clear goals, procedures, and desired outcomes for the most part. The Strategic Plan is a good example of this. Yet I also see that communication sometimes falters and so I challenge us all to work on improving that. In order to help us, I see us working more as a team, modeling good, shared decision-making and putting into practice, as well as possible, the principle of subsidiarity so that decisions are made at the right level in the organization. Even so, though I'm not a micromanager, I do like being informed of what's taking place and of the decisions being made. Often what are perceived to be small decisions have the biggest impact.

In addition, in order to facilitate the management needs of the seminary, I envision that the two main internal administrative structures, the Rector's Cabinet and the President's Council, will remain in place, but with a little twist,

I've expanded the Rector's Cabinet membership to include the directors of the Lux Center, IT Services, and the new Marketing Director as well as the chair of the Faculty Council and the new assistant to the rector for sponsor relations. We'll meet once a week for an hour and a half to help us be more efficient, timely and on point. As we go forward,

we'll assess how it's going. I also intend to publish the minutes of the Rector's Cabinet so that all are informed of what we're doing.

And while the Rector's Cabinet will deal with the concerns of the various departments and programs that comprise the seminary, the President's Council will have the duty of looking more at the bigger picture. I see the Vice Presidents as those who will help me see the broader issues and by whom and when they should be addressed. I see them as helping me focus on moving the seminary toward greatness, with hope, and remembering that it's all about Jesus and His kingdom among us.

So, what do I envision for our staff?

I see you as partners in all that is Sacred Heart. St. Benedict says that when consulting the community, such as in chapter, we are to consult the youngest members as well, since often they have insights lost on those with more experience. Often staff are treated as if they were like the young and had little to contribute, other than fulfilling well their duties. But you have a wisdom and knowledge that needs to be consulted periodically. I see you as persons who want Sacred Heart to continue to be a vibrant, pleasant, and exciting school with which you are associated, because you are Sacred Heart also. So, in order to foster your contribution, I'll organize a general staff meeting every quarter to provide an opportunity for dialogue and better communication among us. Also, as many of you are aware, I have consulted with staff and their supervisors regarding how best to distribute workload equitably. Consequently, some job duties have been reorganized and job titles changed to help respond to our administrative needs as well as for the interests of the persons involved. Thank you for your patience as we continue to tweak this as we go forward.

Then, what do I envision for our faculty?

In general, we have always had a very dedicated and gifted faculty. Even so, I envision you growing as persons of faith who have entered into a deep dialogue between faith and reason. I see you not only as teaching theology well in its various forms, but also as those who do theology, contributing to its development. That is, I see you as persons who are reflecting on what you are teaching, open to what is taking place around you in Church and society, and who share your insights not only in the classroom but beyond through talks, articles, and books. I'll come back to this in a bit, for...

In terms of programs, what do I envision?

I've noted a great bubbling up of ideas and initiatives that have developed at Sacred Heart during the time I've been away. This ferment is wonderful, and I hope that it will continue. At the same time, we need to always assess what Sacred Heart is truly capable of doing at a given time due to real limits and the need to be well focused on what Christ is asking of us at this time in order to move toward the future.

For Sacred Heart to be able to respond to the changing needs of the Church and the people around us, I envision Sacred Heart continuing to develop the excellent MDiv and academic programs offered here while upholding appropriate academic standards. But also, Sacred Heart needs to continue incorporating various ways of learning and teaching (conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, cohorts, mentoring, study tours, etc.). It should also be creative in this regard. Furthermore, we need to continue seeing priestly formation, whether diocesan or religious, as situated at the heart of the purpose of Sacred Heart.

Because of this, Sacred Heart needs to devise a formation program appropriate for diocesan and religious candidates for priestly ministry. Too often both diocesan and religious formation programs do more to infantilize those who go through them than to help them become fully what they're being called to be as priests and/or religious. Our experience with older vocations should give us insights into how to overcome this, as well as to minimize the tendency towards clericalism. This may mean developing parallel programs, or one in which certain pieces are shared while what is specifically needed for one group or the other, is done in an appropriate manner.

In terms of academics, I envision the continued development of the *Cor Unum* MA program, with its well-rounded cohort model of learning beyond the purely academic. I especially applaud its goal of graduates prepared to heal a fractured world. And Sacred Heart should continue to offer and develop the *Lumen Cordis* MA in theology for those who want or need something slightly different. Also, the new distance-learning *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* MA program with SCJ seminarians from India provides Sacred Heart another avenue for serving the world-wide Church and establishes it in a unique position among seminaries. Hopefully this can be expanded to other SCJ units or other religious communities as well.

Furthermore, I envision the offering of Ecclesiastical Degrees, not only for seminarians who wish to pursue them, but also for clergy, religious, and lay people both

within the US and outside of the country. This will also contribute to a higher profile for Sacred Heart and help it be more at the service of the world-wide Church.

I also, see the development of a DMin program that responds to actual pastoral and intellectual needs beyond a purely academic setting. Even so, it must be something that is different enough from other programs so that its viable and makes a needed contribution to the ministry of the Church.

In addition to continuing the two Dehon Lectures and the yearly Lux Lecture, I see Sacred Heart needs to offer periodic symposia on timely topics, such as the recent one on Pope Francis. We also have to make sure to open these events to the general public so that Sacred Heart is of greater service to the wider community and Church. This includes opening Sacred Heart to outside religious groups to use spaces for their particular needs as appropriate. We also need to continue offering sabbatical programs, retreats, and speakers.

And as part of this I see the publication of a journal (either on-line or in print) on a yearly basis, that captures the theological thought and prowess of our faculty so that the greatness of Sacred Heart can be made known to a wider public. It should also address all four dimensions of the formation process taking place at Sacred Heart.

I applaud the great initiative of expanding the ESL program from more than just learning English into the new English and Cultural Studies (ECS) Program. And I want to see the bridge program which is part of this initiative promoted and developed more. Together with the BA/MDIV program with Cardinal Stritch University it offers an appealing alternative to the traditional way of progressing through the educational system still in force.

And of course, I see that the Hispanic Studies program needs to continue and also adapt to the changing reality of the Hispanic presence in the US Church and beyond. In this program we truly have the possibility of fostering bridges of understanding and mutual respect for those who are often excluded from the power structures within the Church and society. The Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue also is an important element in this effort. In both of these programs the SCJ value of promoting social justice is most evident and they're a good launching pad for this value to have greater influence within Sacred Heart. For that reason, I've established the new Intercultural Preparation for Ministry Department to raise the profile of these three programs.

Finally, I see that Sacred Heart can be a space where the concerns of the Church and society can meet and thus contribute to the furtherance of the reign of God in the world.

Truly Sacred Heart under the leadership of Fr. Tom Knoebel has claimed a future with hope. I see my role as helping it to fulfill this hope, and so be more and more a place where all will see the face of God in us, and his life, vibrant and strong, coursing through all those associated with Sacred Heart.

I am convinced that it is He who is moving among us, gently, leading, drawing us on into all that is new...and good...and lovely. For I believe that all He has in mind for us is good, that He desires life and not death for Sacred Heart. The signs of this are already evident. Sacred Heart is truly capable of helping conform the world to the heart of Christ. May we be apt instruments of His life and His salvation. And may Sacred Heart continue to make you proud to be a part of it, for Sacred Heart is your seminary.