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Inauguration Speech

By President Kathleen A. Getz, Ph.D.

Chair NeCastro and Mercyhurst Trustees, honored delegates, members of my Cabinet, Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni, family, and friends:

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me on this day as we celebrate Mercyhurst University – all that we are and all that we may become.

As President, my immediate calling is to inspire hope and optimism. And, in that regard, I believe the theme of our inaugural celebration is most fitting:

Enriching the Circle of Mercy: Good Today, Better Tomorrow.

Many of you may recognize the latter part of that sentiment, inspired by Sister Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

You may also be familiar with Mercyhurst's motto, "Carpe Diem – Seize the Day." And, oh, what days we live in:

Recent societal challenges – ranging from a global pandemic to political discord, from natural disaster to war and terrorism, and even to people questioning the value of higher education itself – may cause us to question the purpose and value of nearly everything we previously took for granted.

And yet, this world fills us with wonder and awe – as we consider something as valiant as the personal sacrifice of front-line workers and selfless soldiers and the achievements of scientists, or something as magical as the sound of a baby's giggle or the sunsets over our beautiful Lake Erie.

To be good today requires that we do all we can to confront our world's challenges. To be better tomorrow requires that we nurture the wonder and awe that the world gives us and all that is possible.

Today, I encourage each of you to affirm your own belief in the enterprise that is Mercyhurst University. WE embrace our work of educating women and men in the Mercy tradition, by thinking thoroughly and clearly, by acting with mercy and compassion for the well-being of others, and by rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty.

This is how the Sisters proceeded when they first founded Mercyhurst. Those of you who know Mercyhurst history will recall that there came a time when the construction of Old Main halted due to a workers' strike. The Sisters didn't wring their hands in despair. Instead, they did the work – literally undertaking the remaining construction tasks so that the building would be completed on time.

I am so honored to be with you – in true Carpe Diem spirit – as we begin this next chapter in the life of Mercyhurst University.

A few comments about my place in Mercyhurst's history.

- Much has been made of the fact that I'm the first woman to serve as Mercyhurst's president in almost 50 years, since Sr. Carolyn Herrmann, our 7th president, served from 1963 to 1972.
- While I appreciate why many people note this fact (after all, we started as a women's college *and* the Sisters of Mercy have long given special attention to women's education, health, and spirituality), I prefer that the fact that I am a woman not be a focal point.
- My objective is to be the best president for Mercyhurst at this moment in time – to help us to realize our great potential, to rise to the challenges of our time, and to enter our second century in 2026 with as much vigor, dedication, and audacity as Mother Borgia Egan, our beloved founder, demonstrated in 1926 when Mercyhurst first opened its doors.

We prepare our students to be intellectually creative and globally responsible leaders. With a renewed emphasis on the liberal arts and growing efforts in sustainability, **we will be better tomorrow.**

We engage our larger community as socially merciful ambassadors of service. With new opportunities to support those in our community who are marginalized, **we will be better tomorrow.**

In our Catholic Christian environment, we are reflectively aware of our purpose as part of something larger than ourselves. With increased interfaith understanding, **we will be better tomorrow.**

We welcome all with compassionate hospitality. With leadership from our new advisory council for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, **we will be better tomorrow.**

In some moments, I am profoundly aware of the responsibility that comes with this office and the complexity of the challenges ahead. In those moments, I try to remind myself of the importance of finding joy and renewal. I'm told that Catherine McAuley loved to keep things light and cheery, and tried very hard to teach the Sisters how to balance the difficult works of mercy with a lighthearted spirit and simple practices of laughter and joy.

One of the Mercy history books shares that after a long day of work, she was often known to enjoy dancing. She is also well-known for having encouraged the Sisters to have a comfortable cup of tea. Debates rage on about whether a cup of tea was made "comfortable" by adding a shot of whiskey.

As we prepare for our centennial, we must mark every day with something good we have done and plan to be better every tomorrow.

There are so many here who've been instrumental in my formation, as a person and as a professional. I am grateful for the support and kindness shown to me over the years by teachers, mentors, colleagues, and friends and the trust placed in me as President by the Board of Trustees, the Sisters of Mercy, and my new Mercyhurst family.

I thank you all, but I will call out five people:

- My parents, Frank and Vivian Eck: Mom and Dad, with firmness and love, you guided your five daughters, providing us a foundation in faith, a love of learning, and the joy of music.
- My precious son, Dietrich, and his wife, Christen, daughter of my heart. Dietr, your boisterous embrace of everything the world has to offer inspires me to open my heart to each new day with a sense of possibility. And Christen, you have added immeasurably to the happiness of our family.
- My cherished husband, Gary. You are my love and my life. I still get butterflies every morning when we hug and recommit to our wedding vows. I thank God for the gift you are to me.

Again, I thank everyone for being here this afternoon. Let us go forward now to Enhance the Circle of Mercy by being Good Today and Better Tomorrow.

Carpe Diem!