

Opening Convocation 2015
President's Remarks
President Steven M Corey, PhD
August 25, 2015

Be Challenged. Be Changed.

Let me offer welcome once again to this year's President's Opening Convocation. This year brings changes to two long-standing traditions. Tradition is important in sustaining and conveying the history and cultural values of our college and college community. Founded in 1844, Olivet College is one of the oldest colleges in Michigan and we are fortunate to have sustained a powerful and consistent values-based mission throughout our history and into our contemporary era. Several of our traditions have also been able to transcend time with us, reinforcing and strengthening our values and our college community along the way.

The first of these is this very ceremony, Opening Convocation. Opening Convocation, a ceremonial gathering at the beginning of the academic year, goes back to the earliest days of the college. Why? Because we've always known that bringing people together for a common, shared experience is a critical and central component of building and sustaining community. It reinforces our commitment to a relationship-based experience. It also provides an opportunity for us to create a common language, a common dialogue for the coming year.

In earlier years when the college was smaller and more contained, this was a little easier. In the more modern era as the college has grown, programs have become broader, more diverse, and student life has expanded and become more complex, this has become more difficult. In these last years, Opening Convocation was held a little later in the day, following the conclusion of classes and students found themselves in conflict between Opening Convocation and the array of other demands, be it sports, performing arts, clubs, work, or another of the many life demands and Opening Convocation began to lose its potency as a vehicle for building community, reinforcing shared values, and as an opportunity to create common a dialogue. So, recognizing the importance of not only the tradition but the important opportunity for our community, this year we changed the schedule, moving Opening Convocation to this earlier time so that the majority of our college community can participate. Thank you to each of you for being here today; not only do you benefit from being here, but our college community is stronger for it.

Our common dialogue for this year is "Be Challenged, Be Changed." A number of you were introduced to this concept during your orientations as I spoke about challenging yourself and gaining comfort with being uncomfortable. I want to thank our speakers this morning who have given their own testimonies about how challenges have changed them for the better. So, whether it's Robert Frost's "road less traveled;" Ben Franklin as Poor Richard's "no gains without pains;" the (maybe in this case) great philosopher, actress and once exercise video star Jane Fonda's "feel the burn" and "no gain without pain;" or this year's theme "Be Challenged,

Be Changed” this notion applies to all of us... students, faculty, staff, and yes, even presidents. So I ask you to join me and our students who’ve given their testimonies here today to challenge yourself in significant ways this year, make it a habit, and find reward in the positive change you’ll discover.

The second tradition I referred to earlier is Stand Up. First, let me ask, Who has participated in a Stand Up before today? Raise your hands... Thank you.

I have a sense that Stand Up is one of the oldest continuous college traditions in the country. It’s certainly one of the oldest here at Olivet College, beginning in the 1870’s and taking on the name Stand Up shortly after the turn of the century. Stand Up recognizes and reinforces that relationships are at the very core of our community and the Olivet College experience. In the slideshow playing as you came into the Upton Center you saw that Stand Up has taken a variety of forms over the years. It’s been held in a variety of venues. At times it’s been a highly formal affair with tuxes, ties, and evening dresses while in other eras it’s taken on a more casual tone as a picnic with shorts and flip-flops. I’m also guessing that as you may have noticed by the dashing student of the 70’s (now faculty member) in the white coat, broad-collared shirt, and bell bottom slacks that it’s also taken on a reflection of the times in which it’s held (I think I had that same outfit once). Regardless, it’s remained a central mechanism for reminding us of a central defining quality of this great college, that we find ourselves in the middle of a community and experience which is defined and finds its value in the people who comprise it and the relationships that we are able to form through our learning and living experiences.

Like Opening Convocation, Stand Up has been challenged by the growth and diversity of the college community and our various activities and demands. So, this year we’ve moved Stand Up from its place as an isolated evening event to the recessional at the conclusion of Opening Convocation. Today, as we leave the Upton Center my wife and I will begin Stand Up, followed by the faculty and staff, and then each of you in turn. We’ll form an ever growing greeting-line of our college community, giving greetings to one another along the way, reinforcing and symbolizing the importance of the individual and collective relationships that are at the core of the Olivet College experience.

This will take time, but not too long. Stay tuned and listen carefully at the end of today’s program. Dr Davis will provide each of us with more detailed instructions and then our college marshals will guide us through the process. Those who’ve done Stand Up before can also provide support and guidance along the way.

In conclusion, let me say welcome once again. There’s great anticipation for the year ahead. I’m glad you’re here and thank you for being a member of this great college community.

God bless each one of you and God bless Olivet College.

And now, let me ask Dr Davis to join me for the recognition of the attainment of new academic degrees by our faculty and staff.