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SMC Commencement

Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta challenges Saint Mary's grads to lead

By Cathy Dausman



From left: Brother Mel Anderson, FSC (president of Saint Mary's College 1969 - 1997), Brother Ronald Gallagher, FSC (president of Saint Mary's 2005 - 2013), Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs Bethami Dobkin, Leon Panetta, chair, Panetta Institute for Public Policy, former Secretary of Defense, and Meagan Leader, chair, Saint Mary's Board of Trustees.



Laurels to, and on the Class of 2014 Saint Mary's graduates!



A new Saint Mary's grad, this one a man of the world, is all smiles after receiving his diploma May 24. Photos Cathy Dausman

Saint Mary's College conferred more than 750 undergraduate diplomas May 24 in ceremonies held outdoors on stadium grounds with former Defense Secretary and CIA chief Leon Panetta as commencement speaker. The Monterey, Calif., native has served in public office for over 50 years but it may be in his latest role, as chairman of the Panetta Institute for Public Policy that he spoke to the heart of the students' creed: "Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve."

"Saint Mary's is a remarkable academic institution with a commitment to educating students dedicated to improving the lives of others in our society. That educational approach is extremely important in this day and time," said Panetta. College president James Donahue called Panetta's "high regard for public service" inspiring.

Panetta interspersed stories of his work as a child for his immigrant Italian parents with his college years at rival Santa Clara University and finally to what he called "the ups and downs in our democracy," which he has seen at close range. Beyond

learning a way to think and the importance of service to community, Panetta said is "that will to fight for what you believe in."

"That will to fight," he said, whether for a fair and just system of immigration reform, to promote income equality or to provide sound energy policies "is what all of us pay tribute to on this Memorial Day weekend.

"We could have an America in Renaissance ... or we could be an America in decline. What path we take will largely be determined by how we govern ourselves or how we fail to govern ourselves, and whether we have the courage to lead," Panetta told his audience. "Change won't happen from the top down, it will happen from the bottom up, and you're it."

An additional 467 graduate and professional degrees were conferred May 25. Those graduates were addressed by football coach and Saint Mary's alum Bob Ladouceur, who reminded his audience that education is not a goal but a path.

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