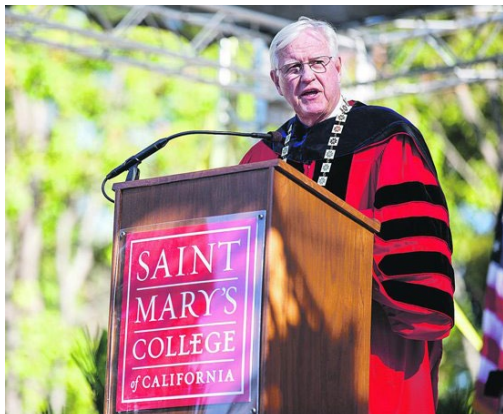


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## SMC holds farewell celebration for retiring president, James A. Donahue

By Vera Kochan



James A. Donahue Lamo archive

In April of 2020, Saint Mary's College President James A. Donahue made an official announcement to the Gael Nation, sharing his plans to retire in June 2021, at which point he will have served at the college's helm for eight years. Donahue leaves as the 29th president of SMC, and the first lay-person to hold the position in the school's 150-year history.

Looking back over his time at SMC, Donahue acknowledged his pride in leading such an academically rich institution. "What makes this the right time to transfer the reins of leadership is that Saint Mary's today stands securely in a strong position with a promising future," he stated. "We are fully prepared to move on to our next stage - academically, financially, culturally, and educationally."

The college held a socially-distanced "virtual farewell celebration" on May 26 at the SMC campus honoring Donahue's accomplishments during his tenure, including his final year, steering the school through the challenges of education during COVID's demands. The select handful of attendees also included his wife, Jane, who commented on how welcoming everyone was to them when Donahue began his presidency back in July 2013.

Moraga Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke presented Donahue with a town proclamation honoring his service to SMC which stated, "President Donahue steadfastly upheld and advanced the Lasallian, Catholic and liberal arts mission of the College while elevating the College's reputation as a top-ranked West Coast liberal arts college and, consequently, the visibility of the Town of Moraga during a dynamic time in American higher education."

Among the many honors conceived to thank Donahue for his work on behalf of the college, SMC created the James A. Donahue Presidential Endowed Scholarship intended to leverage public and private funding to provide full-tuition scholarships for students with strong academic promise and high financial needs; the Gaels men's basketball team presented him with a framed jersey bearing the number 29, in honor of his rank as the 29th president of the college; and Donahue and his wife were made honorary alumni.

Many accolades describing Donahue's characteristic attributes were expressed throughout the celebration: A gentleman, scholar, kind, caring, deep moral backbone, man of compassion, integrity of faith, nice guy, and a very hands-on president. Students appreciated his leadership, availability and presence during school events.

In his farewell speech Donahue thanked his wife and family for their support and stated, "It has been an incredibly marvelous experience. It hasn't been a job - it's been a vocation. I've always looked for ways to balance tradition with innovation."

Donahue was touched by the casual encounters he's had with others, "The essence of Saint Mary's College is relationships and people. We meet each one of our community members with respect for who we are." He also felt that SMC has helped to shape him by allowing him to recognize the changing needs of the school. "I have tried to lead with empathy and vision. It was important to hire the right people for the college."

After acknowledging the services of the late Brother Mel Anderson, FSC, Donahue concluded, "Saint Mary's College does what other colleges and universities only aspire to do."

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