Comments on the Conclusion of the Rectorship of Thomas R. Hurst, PSS

St. Mary’s Seminary & University

Ronald D. Witherup, PSS

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It is my pleasure to say a few words in honor of Father Tom Hurst who will shortly be concluding his impressive nine-year term as President Rector of St Mary’s Seminary & University. As you can imagine, coming at this point in the program, I fear some who have gone before me have stolen my thunder! But I am nonetheless pleased to participate in honoring Father Hurst tonight. It is also fortunate that the General Council and are here this evening to witness this event. Some of them have never been to the United States, so it is great to be able to show them the vitality of Sulpician ministry here.

St Mary’s, as you well know, is not only the oldest Catholic seminary in the United States but has become over the years a rather complex institution as it has evolved to meet the new challenges of priestly formation in a post-Vatican II age. With its school of theology, its Ecumenical Institute, its center for ongoing formation, and its Associated Archives—not to mention the complex balance of governance between the U.S. Province, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and the Board of Trustees—St Mary’s has indeed become a formidable institution for priestly formation here in Baltimore and throughout the Northeast, the mid-Atlantic region, and beyond.

Finding the right person with a proper balance of skills to direct such a complex faith community is not always easy. As you might expect, it was also a challenge to find a successor to Father Robert Leavitt, who I am happy to see here tonight and whose incredible 27-year tenure as President Rector was so successful. Fortunately, when Father Hurst was appointed rector in 2007, I knew he was the right person. Nine years later this judgment is more than confirmed “in the flesh.” Father Hurst has had that marvelous blend of modeling the priesthood well with his spiritual and pastoral leadership, his excellent administrative skills (without being micro-managing), his ability to relate to donors, Board members, bishops and vocation directors, and most of all being a “pastor” to the whole community—seminarians and students, faculty and administration, staff and Board members—has shown that he has been the right leader at the right time to steer the “ship” through sometimes rough waters. I also marvel that he has done it graciously and with a good sense of humor! And moreover, he has been a wonderfully generous “landlord” to me, allowing me to make St Mary’s my U.S. base for the last seven years.

So, in the name of the General Council and Provincials who just happen to be present on this occasion I extend my personal and our sincere gratitude for your most effective ministry! Although I know you look forward to your well-deserved sabbatical, Tom, I am delighted that you will be able to continue making your contribution to St Mary’s as a professor and wise colleague. Thank you, Tom, and I wish you every blessing and good health in the years ahead!