

## **Profile in Mercy: Sister Maryanne Stevens**

The average length of service for college presidents is less than seven years, according to the American Council on Education. Sister Maryanne Stevens of Omaha, Nebraska, has beat the average almost four times over. In fact, she is the longest-serving president at College of Saint Mary (CSM), with nearly 27 years at the helm. Dr. Stevens is retiring after this spring's commencement.

"I have cherished my time at College of Saint Mary," says Maryanne. "I can look back with pride at all that has been accomplished."

It began in 1996 when Maryanne briefly excused herself from a CSM board meeting. At that time, she was the theology program chair at Creighton University. When she returned to the meeting, she was "greeted by a room of loyalists who hoped she would agree to step up and turn the school around." After some deep thought and prayer, she accepted the challenge.

Maryanne took the struggling, debt-ridden institution and transformed it into a thriving and financially sound university. It was not easy.

"I'll be honest. When I first became president, I was worried," says Maryanne. "Every night I would drive home praying for the angels to surround us."

Under Maryanne's guidance, the College of Saint Mary has developed several innovative programs. It now has Madonna Hall, which allows college-age single mothers to live with their children on campus. It welcomes high school girls to its Latina and African American Summer Academies. The university offers a Misericordia scholarship program that provides tuition, room and board for undocumented women. Additionally, CSM's graduate programs now include education, physician assistant studies, occupational therapy, kinesiology, and organizational leadership, as well as a unique doctoral program in physical therapy.

Aside from these accomplishments, Maryanne's passion for education and advancement of women is most evident by her leadership of numerous capital campaigns and scholarship initiatives. The university recently completed a \$40-million Striding Forward Campaign within four years, allowing for growth in the endowment, new scholarships, and a new fitness center building.

Maryanne's efforts resulted in College of Saint Mary gaining national attention by earning a spot on U.S. News' Top 50 List of Regional Universities. Additionally, a number of local and national organizations have recognized Maryanne over the years for her leadership and dedication to women.

"Often people say to me, 'You have vision,'" Maryanne says. "I'm not sure what having a vision is, because these programs and other things we have done have simply been responding to a need."

“Educating women in an environment that calls forth potential and fosters leadership is right and good; it is meaningful work,” Maryanne says. “We need more women at the table because they bring a priority focus on relationship, a propensity to make peace, and hope for the children. These are all too lacking in our world.”

Maryanne adds, “And there is a cloud of witnesses allowing us to throw off all that holds us back. As Catherine McAuley said, “No work is more productive of society than the careful education of women...because their influence will always be needed.”