

Inauguration Address
Manhattanville College
October 23, 2016
Michael Geisler
President

Good Morning!

Before I begin, I would like to thank all of you who made it possible for me to be here today: The Manhattanville Board of Trustees, and in particular the Chairperson of the Board, Marcia DeWitt and former President Elizabeth McCormack, who would have loved to celebrate with us today as a member of the Board of Trustees but could not be here for health reasons, for putting their trust in my leadership of this great institution. I would also like to thank the faculty, staff, students, alumnae and alumni for accepting me so generously into their community, for sharing their stories with me and for giving me their advice when I need it. I thank all the members of the Manhattanville Inauguration committee who have worked long hours to create an exciting three-day event celebrating Manhattanville's past, present, and future and to Provost Lisa Dolling for presiding over today's meeting. I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends and former colleagues at Middlebury, former President Ron Liebowitz (now President of Brandeis University), Provost Susan Baldrige who is here today as the official representative of Middlebury College, my former colleagues and friends in the Middlebury senior administration, the directors of the Middlebury summer Language Schools, as well as my friends on the Middlebury faculty and staff, many of whom are also with us today. Thank you to President Driss Ouaouicha for making the long

trip from Morocco and for his kind and generous words as well as the speakers preceding me for their warm words of welcome. A big “thank you!” also goes to Rosemary Feal, the Executive Director of the Modern Language Association, for encouraging me to apply for this position and to Nancy Martin and Dr. Lorna Edmundson of Archer-Martin. Thanks to President Don Steinberg and my fellow Trustees from World Learning. A special and warm thanks to my friends and family from both Germany and the United States, who were there for me during some of the best and some of the more difficult times of my life. Most importantly, my biggest thanks goes to my wife Alice Leo and my daughter Julia Larissa Geisler the two people most responsible for making me feel at home on this continent.

Unfortunately, the higher up you go in any given hierarchy, the sketchier the instruction manuals become; just as unfortunately, for those who have to suffer the consequences of their actions, presidents don’t come with warning labels. It would be nice if, hidden in small print on an unobtrusive, but clearly visible location on the president’s college tie, you would find a little notice mandated by the American Association of Learned Societies, such as “Warning, engaging this president in a conversation about his favorite soccer team, or the greatest motion picture ever produced may do permanent damage to your circadian rhythm!” Or: “Caution, excessive exposure to this president’s vision may lead to shortness of breath, cause disciplinary allergies, and in extreme cases might lead to serious academic befuddlement!” Or, more pragmatically: “Beware of prolonged conversations about your

department's central significance to the college may result in permanent loss of tenure lines!"

So what I want to do this morning is provide you with both a manual for dealing with this president in a manner that is not detrimental to your physical or mental health and to affix a metaphorical warning label on my office chair, so you know what I stand for, what brought me to Manhattanville and what connects me to this wonderful institution, along with my sinister designs for implementing some new initiatives, always building on the foundations of what generations of dedicated, passionate, and very bright people have built in the past, allowing us to chart a course forward from there, to boldly go where no Valiant has gone before.

This year marks the 175th year of Manhattanville as an institution. Next year, 2017, we will celebrate the Centennial of the *Charter of the College* as an institution of Higher Learning authorized by the New York State Board of Regents to award both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Originally, Manhattanville College was established by the Society of the Sacred Heart, founded in France in the early 19th century. The College still today sets itself apart from other colleges by the strong values embodied by the founder of the order, Madeleine Sophie Barat who, horrified by the Reign of Terror that followed the French revolution, resolved to create a new order dedicated to educating young women.

First established in Manhattan's Lower East Side, The Academy of the Sacred Heart (as we were then called) moved in 1847 to a hillside overlooking the village of Manhattanville, which was actually north of New York City proper at that time. In 1952 we moved again, this time to our current beautiful campus in Purchase, a place with a history nearly as colorful as New York City itself. It was right here that the legendary Ben "Doc" Holladay, who had made a fortune with the Pony Express and the Overland Stage Coach, bought a thousand acres to establish his own gentleman's farm to please his wife Ann Calvert who, as the daughter of a well-bred family in the East had married Ben over the objections of her parents. He called it Ophir Farms, after a Nevada silver mine he allegedly had won in a game of poker. At the time, and well into the 20th century, there were sheep grazing right outside this Chapel, on what is now the Quad. Ben Holladay loved showing his guests around the 18 buildings he had erected, preferably by taking them on a tour on his specially-built narrow-gauge railway. He imported all sorts of plants, flowers and animal life to Westchester County, including buffalo, staging the only buffalo hunts the East Coast has ever seen.

After Ben Holladay lost his wife and his entire fortune, all on a single day in 1873, it was sold to a shipbuilder, John Roach and later to Whitelaw Reid, the owner of the New York Tribune who was married to wealthy heiress Elisabeth Reid, after whom our magnificent Reid Castle was named.

In 1783, six years before the French revolution, 17 years before Madeleine Sophie Barat joined with three other nuns to establish the Society of the Sacred Heart, and 58 years before Manhattanville College was established on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a play was first performed on a German stage.

The title of the play is *Nathan the Wise*, by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and I would like to talk to you a little bit about this drama today because more than any other single text I have ever read it has shaped my thinking, made me who I am or perhaps more accurately, who I have always aspired to be, and standing here on this day I am convinced that in serendipitous ways it has brought me to this place, to this day and to this gathering.

Nathan the Wise is a story about the then dominant three world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each embodied by a central character: Nathan, a successful and popular Jewish trader and businessman, Saladin (or Salah-al-Din) possibly the greatest ruler of the Arab empire of the Middle Ages, and a Christian Knight Templar, whose identity and inner turmoil provide some of the central conflicts of our drama.

One of two narrative engines of this play revolves around what you could call a “Machiavellian Conundrum” in which Saladin, as a just ruler on the one hand, and a warlord on the other, finds himself: he is in urgent need of financial support for his campaigns, yet reluctant to simply expropriate the funds he needs from the city’s wealthy merchants, in particular the Jews, as was routinely done by secular rulers at the time,

whether they were Muslim or Christian. More concerned about his reputation as a just ruler than most contemporary heads of state appear to be, Saladin nevertheless comes up with a slightly disingenuous scheme: he will invite Nathan, one of the city's wealthiest merchants, into his palace and, under the pretext of a polite court conversation, pose a question to him that presents Nathan with a Catch 22: which of the three then dominant world religions is the true faith: Islam, Christianity, or Judaism? You can see where this is headed: if Nathan decides to simply act the sycophant by telling the sultan that Islam is the true religion, it raises the question why he does not convert. Is he a hypocrite? That might provide Saladin with a pretext to take his money or at the very least impose a heavy tax penalty. If he proclaims his own belief, Judaism, as the only true religion, he has insulted his Muslim overlord, thus likewise offering Saladin an excuse to take his money or at the very least impose a heavy tax penalty. Either way, he finds himself in a very deep hole.

The metaphorical escape chute Nathan finds for himself is one of the most famous stories in literary history, first told, at least in the West, by the Italian Renaissance writer Giovanni Boccaccio in his wonderful *Decamerone*. It is "The Parable of the Rings."

A long, long time ago, Nathan tells sultan Saladin, there was a magnificent ring that contained an opal, set in gold. This precious stone had the magical power to make the wearer of the ring beloved both by humans and before God. Small wonder then that the owner of the ring priced it above all his other worldly possessions, and when he was getting old ensured that it would go to the one among his children that was dearest to him, who

then would also be the new owner of house and estate. This went on for quite some time until at last the ring came to a father of three sons (note the absence of women in this succession!) whom he loved equally, who appeared equally dutiful and loving to him, with the unfortunate consequence that the father made the understandable mistake of promising the ring first to his oldest son, then to the second one and on another day to the third. Feeling that death was approaching and not wanting to disappoint any one of his three equally beloved children, the father secretly sent for a skilled jeweler whom he trusted with crafting two additional rings, fashioned to look exactly like the original— minus, of course, the original ring's magic power. Before his death, he secretly and separately bestowed each ring to one of his sons, blessed them, and passed away peacefully. Following his death, a quarrel breaks out among the three sons, each of whom feels that he is the rightful owner of the ring, they do what we would do today in a similar situation, they go to court and sue each other, just as they would in 21st century America and just as they would in 21st century America their lawyers make a ton of money and that is all: the genuine ring could not be discovered.

When their lawsuit comes to trial, each son swears that he has the genuine ring, adding that, rather than sully the memory of his beloved father with suspicions of duplicity, he had no choice but to accuse his brothers of lying. The judge responds with dripping irony that it might be necessary for the original ring to also acquire the gift of speech, but since the ring apparently is less talented in this regard than the Sorting Hat at Hogwarts School of

Wizardry and Witchcraft, he tells the sons to get out of his courtroom, since it is not his job to solve riddles or perform magic tricks.

But then he has an idea: he asks the three sons a simple question: “Since we *know* that the original ring has the magic power to make the wearer beloved by Humans and God alike, all you have to tell me is *which one of you the other two love the most*. Obviously, that son has the true ring. Simple as that.

But the three sons are silent, and so the judge concludes that the power of their rings only works backwards, making the wearer love *himself* above all others and that therefore all three are “deceived deceivers.”

But it is in the judge’s parting piece of advice to the feuding brothers that Lessing’s drama lifts us far above Boccaccio’s 14th century narrative. I will quote here from the 1955 translation by Bayard Quincy Morgan:

“So, [...] if you will not have my counsel,

Instead of judgment, go! My counsel

On the other hand, is this:

Accept the matter wholly as it stands.

If each one from his father has his ring.

Then each one should believe his ring to be

The true one. – Possibly the father wished

To tolerate no longer in his house
The tyranny of just one ring! – And know:
That you, all three, he loved; and loved alike;
Since he would not humiliate two of his sons
To favor one. – Well then! Let each aspire
To emulate his father’s unbeguiled,
Unprejudiced affection! Let each strive
To match the other two in demonstrating
The magic of the opal in his ring!
Assist that power with true humility,
With benefaction, hearty peacefulness,
And with profound submission to God’s will!
And when the magic powers of the stones
Reveal themselves in children’s children’s children:
I bid you, in a thousand, thousand years,
To stand again before this seat. For then
A wiser man than I will sit as judge
Upon this bench and speak. Now go.”

This is what the wise judge has to say to us: no matter which religion, creed, ethnic or racial background or gender identity seeks to define us, to constrain us, to make us believe we hold the one and only true magic ring, it is only through our attitudes towards other faiths, races, ethnicities and gender identities, that we can rival the love of the father, or, since I believe God is above any gender differentiation, the mother. And if we *can* show through our actions, through “humility, benefaction and hearty peacefulness” that we deserve to be the wearer of the true ring, does it really matter which ring is the original?

The reason why I am here today, as president of Manhattanville College, is that in this place, generations of nuns, faculty, students, staff members and alums, Catholic or Protestant, Jewish or Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, have held the same beliefs as Nathan’s judge. If there is one principle that has guided me throughout my life it is simply this: the true value of our faiths and beliefs, or, to put it in the language of commerce, the “value proposition” of each of our identities, the baseline that gives it validity, whether it is founded in religion, gender, racial or ethnic origin or in a particular national narrative, is not primarily what makes it unique in and of itself but more than anything else, *how that unique identity accepts other identities*, interacts with them, is empathic to them and supports them. Without understanding our own identity, as an individual or as a group, we are nothing, because we do not know what made us who we are; yet an identity that rejects other identities, that wants to exclude them, belittle them, destroy them or disrespect them is worse than nothing.

I grew up with the Parable of the Rings. I grew up with it during a time of great hope in Europe: after two devastating world wars and the horrors of the Holocaust, Europeans finally seemed to have learned their lessons from history. I wish I could conjure up for you the aspirational mentality of the times: we were looking to the United States, where President John F. Kennedy (coming from a family with close ties to Manhattanville College), laid out a challenge to each American to think about what they could do for their country, not what they could expect their country to do for them. Can you hear, as I do, an echo of the Parable of the Rings in his words?

It was a country in which Dr. Martin Luther King, standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, invoked the power of America's most famous national symbol to remind a nation that it had not met the obligations it had imposed on itself by its constitution, and people were listening and learning. Can you hear, as I do, in the ringing words of the minister from Montgomery, Alabama, the same challenge to us that we must prove the power of the magic stone we have inherited through "true humility, benefaction, and hearty peacefulness" in our actions as the one laid down by Nathan's judge?

At the time when I was growing up, the Parable of the Rings seemed to me to be an awe-inspiring challenge that human kind was in the final stages of fulfilling. 20 years from the end of the second millennium, we seemed to be almost at the point where Nathan's tale perhaps was no longer needed because, when Menachem Begin, then Prime Minister of

Israel and Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, shook hands after signing the Camp David Accords in 1978, we seemed to be so close to turning the dream into reality. So close.

We were almost there: we were winning the fight against world hunger, we were making progress in the battle against debilitating diseases of all stripes, and popular television series of the period, such as *Star Trek*, dared to dream not only of a liberal and enlightened global civilization, but of a United Federation of Planets and of space craft staffed by a diverse and truly multicultural crew of people from all racial, gender, and ethnic backgrounds, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial (“Live long and prosper, Mister Spock!”) whose simple unifying mission was “to boldly go where no one has gone before.” Compare that hope, that aspiration, to the dark, dystopian vision of the emblematic films and television series of today: “The Hunger Games”, “House of Cards” and “Game of Thrones.”

What has happened to us?

Today, all over the world, people are no longer marching for equality and social justice, they are running for cover. But they are running in the wrong direction, into the past. They are once again following the pied pipers of nationalism or in some cases, the New Tribalism, not created but certainly aided and abetted by the Internet. Far from ushering in Marshall McLuhan’s utopian concept of a “Global Village” or Teilhard de Chardin’s grand vision of a *Noosphere*, where all of humanity is linked together by a globe-spanning externalized memory, the internet has generated a patchwork of millions of balkanized

communities, each with its own tribal customs and each afraid of all the others. The hate speech, the rank intolerance and lack of empathy pouring forth from these balkanized realities on both sides of the political spectrum is an imminent threat to our liberal democracy.

This is the reason why the Parable of the Rings, the challenge of the judge to each of the sons to prove the power of his ring through tolerance, love of others and active support for those who need our help, has suddenly become so topical and urgent again.

I am here today because I firmly believe that Manhattanville, with its unique tradition can make a vital contribution towards turning that tide around.

The first thing I learned about Manhattanville when I came here is our long tradition of engagement for equity and social justice, coupled with an ethos that puts a high institutional value on civic engagement and a strong interventionist streak in the most positive sense of that word.

While many institutions make similar claims, here at Manhattanville the active engagement for social justice is in our DNA, going back all the way to our Catholic heritage and our association with the Society of the Sacred Heart. In a recent document published by the Society of the Sacred Heart, I found these values identified as its core tenets:

- Dialogue, relationships, communication and networks
- Contemplation

- Community Life
- Justice, Peace, and integrity of creation in solidarity with those who are most vulnerable
- Focus on young people

These have been the values of the Society of the Sacred Heart since the beginning, and these are the values to which every human being, Catholic or Lutheran, Muslim or Jew, Hindu or Buddhist can subscribe to, provided we each have one of Nathan's rings and provided that we believe in its power. These are also the values that Manhattanville College subscribes to.

But as both Nathan's judge and the Danish Theologian Søren Kierkegaard remind us, it is not enough to believe in these values, we have to practice them and we have to *live* them.

So what does this mean for our future? In the time remaining, I want to identify five central **Destinations** we want to reach over the coming years:

Our **First Destination** is actually quite close-by, it is, as it were, easily reachable by commuter train, but just like Metro North service to New York City, it has been prone to interminable delays, breakdowns and lapsed service *en route*. To get there we have to accomplish a simple-looking, yet wickedly complex task: we have to define our very identity, both going forward and reaching back to the past, just as a runner in a relay race has to firmly clasp her hand around the baton handed to her by her teammate who has just

completed the previous lap. We have to understand who we are, how who we are relates to where we are coming from and how we can leverage both our current and past strengths towards mapping out a sustainable future, a future that will give our students the best education *and* at the same time will make people sit up and take notice. Among other things we have to define what common curricular values and traditions underpin all of our units, the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business, the School of Education and the Master of Fine Arts in Writing. Since they all sprang from a common mold, I have already been able to see that there are more commonalities between these different academic units than one might suspect at first glance, but we need to clearly articulate and expand these commonalities and we need to build bridges between the undergraduate and graduate programs, both on the student and on the faculty side. We need to *connect*. The traditional rigid distinction between undergraduate and graduate programs has been eroding for some time and frankly is no longer sustainable in my opinion. Some of that work has already begun with yesterday's SCULPT discussions and with the first meeting of our Strategic Planning committee, and I would anticipate that we will reach the first destination by the time of our Centennial Celebration one year from now.

For our **Second Destination** let me take you back to the great poem by W.H. Auden you just heard. At Manhattanville we do NOT “turn away quite leisurely from the disaster,” we do NOT “sail calmly on” when a boy is falling out of the sky, as happened right here only two weeks ago. We rally as a community, and we support each other. We DO hear “the

splash, the forsaken cry” and it is NOT an “unimportant failure” to us. We all fail, and all of our failures and the failures of others, are very important indeed to us, and we work hard to turn these failures into successes whenever possible. As those who have collaborated with me in the past already know, I like to call this “lateral vision” – helping our students develop an understanding that actions have consequences, both individually and collectively, and that we are responsible both for our actions and for the absence of action when action is required. This is more than an ideal, it requires educating our students for positions in which their professional activities have an actual impact on our society, and to instill in them both the desire and the self-confidence that they can actually be the person who has this kind of an impact. We need to identify more students like Tashae Smith, who inspired by her history professor Collin Morris, went to work and rediscovered the lost history of African Americans of Newburgh, New York, then teamed up with a media company to set up a walking tour of the city on the subject, winning the Open Space Institute’s Barnabas McHenry Hudson Valley award in the process. My challenge to our faculty is that we need to find ways of integrating more such task-based and project-driven learning directly into our curriculum, beyond internships and volunteer engagements (although we certainly intend to continue and expand those opportunities as well). The reason why I am confident that this challenge can be met is that our faculty has traditionally been so supportive of task-based learning that we just need to find ways of codifying what many of us are already doing and then communicating it to the outside. We need to connect

what we do in our curriculum to the needs of employers, both domestic and worldwide and simultaneously we need to make sure that the skills we teach our students connect to the needs of those who are currently underserved and left behind.

Once we reach the Second Destination, the **Third Destination** will already come into view in the distance: drawing, for the most part, on Manhattanville's remarkable faculty and staff resources, we will set to work to create a new type of program, a School that will leverage the traditional strengths of a liberal arts education in entirely new ways.

In his brilliant book *The Tides of Mind*, David Gelernter, a computer scientist at Yale (and one of the survivors of the Unabomber attacks) has shown that in order to understand how the human mind works, we need to understand not just what we do in our high-focus hours (the times of day when we think most logically and analytically, screening out emotions and sensory experiences to a significant degree), but also and especially in our low-focus moments, when our attention drifts, when we may daydream, pursue unexpected memory paths or free-associate. The eternal quest for engendering creativity, defined as the ability to invent new analogies, or, in David Gelernter's words, to compare "a puzzling something with a something else to which it's never ordinarily compared," depends upon our ability to draw on *both* high-focus and low-focus thinking but, most importantly, on having memory access to experiential learning from a very wide range of segments of empirical reality. Gelernter's own text demonstrates how this works: to make his points he draws on both the

natural and the social sciences, as well as on literature (particularly poetry), art, music, and history.

On some level we have always known this: Paradigm-shattering breakthrough insights have almost always been made by people to whom we afterwards tended to refer as renaissance men or renaissance women: they had the broad experiential base in the sciences, arts, and humanities that enabled them to make that crucial creative step of “comparing a puzzling something with a something else to which it’s never ordinarily compared.”

This, at its core, is what a liberal arts education delivers, it produces students who know how to connect the dots, and this is the reason why, increasingly, CEOs of major firms are looking for people with a liberal arts background for leadership positions: strong research skills, combined with superior communication skills, both in oral and written expression, independent thinking, flexibility in adjusting to new and different environments, a broad experiential learning base, and, above all, the ability, derived from the sum of these experiences, to compare “a puzzling something with a something else to which it’s never ordinarily compared.” The ability to connect.

In our new School, we intend to put David Gelernter’s theories to the test by having students from different backgrounds collaborate across disciplinary boundaries on problem sets drawn from life beyond the walls of the academy, realizing that, for tomorrow’s markets and in a global economy, it is no longer enough to be able to simply solve a

problem, you have to solve it in a particular context (and that context is in a permanent state of flux) you have to communicate your solution, you have to develop critical empathy skills with those who would profit from your solution and you have to be able to anticipate what the likely future needs of your customers will be before they actually have clearly defined these needs.

We hope to be able to rely on help from our successful alumnae and alumni, as well as from our successful neighbors in Purchase and Harrison and indeed all over Westchester County and New York City, in *actively participating in the education* of these future generations of Manhattanville alums by coming to campus to provide us with specific problem sets drawn from their practical experience. When we reach the Third Destination we will have connected the strengths of a liberal arts curriculum to the requirements of tomorrow's workplace.

The **Fourth Destination** takes us back in a loop to our immediate vicinity, Purchase, Harrison, and Westchester County: We need to become better neighbors than we have been, both locally and in the region. I am both grateful and excited to have been asked to join the Board of the Business Council of Westchester whose President and CEO, Dr. Marsha Gordon, is here today to help us celebrate. I hope to work with the Business Council and with our Manhattanville contacts in many of the thriving businesses of the area to collaborate on combining the proven benefits of a liberal arts curriculum with collateral education during the summer or over winter break that will provide students with additional

skills most needed by businesses, whether it is statistics or graphic design or courses in marketing or perhaps courses in technical translation to complement a liberal arts degree in one of our majors in languages, literature and culture. I invite a conversation with regional businesses as to what skills they most need and how we can partner with them to enable Manhattanville students to provide them with a workforce that is ready to tackle the constantly shifting demands of a global economy. One possible solution would be to adopt a practice that has already produced remarkable results in Germany, the so-called dual-track education. One significant difference we will add to this successful model – our American accent, if you will – will be that our dual-track education will *complement* a liberal arts curriculum, not *replace* it, so businesses and students would get the best of both worlds – liberal arts plus, you might call it. I also hope to team up with some of our business neighbors in Westchester County to further promote both the School’s and the county’s global footprint, perhaps by linking up with regional business hubs in Germany or England, in Spain or Japan, or in one of the United Arab Emirates. In reaching the Fourth Destination we are connecting Manhattanville to Westchester County and helping to connect Westchester County to the world.

Our **Fifth Destination** - and one that completes the loop, will be taking us right back to where we started: our own campus, where we have to face issues involving equity and inclusion right here and also across America. When, prior to taking this position, I did my due diligence, I found entries on “College Confidential” by students who said the

Manhattanville College campus was the most diverse group of people they had ever encountered. The fact that this was said by students about our school filled me with pride, and I confess I may have even bragged a little bit about our diversity to my former colleagues at Middlebury College. And in some ways, this picture is quite accurate: among this year's incoming class we have students from 37 different countries, including Albania and Egypt, Germany and Brazil, Jamaica and Japan, Singapore and Senegal, the Russian Federation and Vietnam, and many other countries from around the globe, and we have very sizeable Hispanic-American and African-American contingents among our students. However, as soon as I began meeting with students during my transition visits and even more so in some informal conversations I had with students in our dining hall, I realized that this surface picture covers up some of the same racial and ethnic divides that are currently threatening to undermine civic discourse in America and to paralyze our country. Many of our African-American or Hispanic-American students feel left out, not validated for who they are as individuals but at best simply recognized for the contribution they make to a particular numerical patchwork and at worst singled out and stereotyped for their heritage. The same goes for other minorities, in particular Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer students who are also still fighting an uphill battle in many ways. We also have students with different learning styles who are fully capable of making an equal and valuable contribution to our intellectual discourse on campus if we simply permit them to do so in their own way and at their own pace. And while we are in legal

compliance, we are still not as hospitable to students with physical accessibility issues as we could be. Some of these latter challenges are easily solved with some additional funding, and this is a challenge I would like to throw out to all of us, faculty, staff, students, alums and Trustees. We simply need to make this happen.

One solution my administration and I have already committed to is to create a *Center for Equity and Inclusion* right here on campus, where students of all backgrounds will be encouraged to meet and discuss the problems they are facing and to help us find solutions.

In 1938, while Manhattanville was still a Catholic institution, one of my predecessors, Mother Grace Dammann, had the courage to insist that Manhattanville admit the first African-American female student into what was then an exclusively white student body. And she not only accepted this student, she publicly stood by her action in a keynote address, “Principles vs. Prejudice” that was widely quoted around the nation at the time. Throughout the 1960s, Sister Mary T. Clark ’39, R.S.C.J., a civil rights activist and former advisor to the Social Action Secretariat of Manhattanville’s Chapter of the National Federation of Catholic College Students, sponsored social action seminars at Manhattanville which brought renowned speakers to campus, including psychologist Dr. Kenneth B. Clark whose work contributed to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. Sr. Clark spoke on numerous panels regarding the civil rights struggle, wrote a 1966 manual for social justice – *Discrimination Today: Guidelines for Civic Action*, and actively encouraged Manhattanville students to carry the College banner

and join the more than 200,000 Americans on August 28, 1963 to participate in the March on Washington for jobs and freedom, the March during which Dr. Martin Luther King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” address.

As proud as we are of this heritage, it sometimes seems that Manhattanville, as a school, and the United States as a nation have been treading in place since the early 70s, and in some ways and some areas have actually been slipping below the high water mark of the mid-1970s, particularly with regard to race and class. As one student asked me during one of my early campus visits: “why is it that I am expected to learn all about our white, Western cultural heritage, when nobody here seems to be interested in my heritage, my literature, my music, my culture?” This has to do with the stories we read and the stories we tell, the texts we assign in class and the faculty we hire (or do not hire).

So, as our **Fifth Destination**, I lay down a challenge to all of us, administration, faculty, staff and students, alumnae and alumni and the Board of Trustees to define the legacy left to us by the founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Madeleine Sophie Barat, who wanted to provide an education for women that was equal to an education for men, by Mother Dammann who extended this franchise to include African-American students and by Sister Mary T. Clark who translated these principles into active civil engagement, as an **area of distinction**, an area in which Manhattanville can lead the nation in shaping a constructive and collaborative dialogue across the divides of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and physical difference to create a society in which the term “diversity” loses its current unfortunate

instrumental connotation and once again shines as what it originally meant: a conversation where the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Perhaps, if we can get this one right, Manhattanville can become the crucible of a magnificent experiment in meaningful and collaborative dialogue, a place where people stop screaming at each other and start telling their stories to each other and begin to listen, where cynicism gives way to empathy. To be sure, this is a tall order, but if we can get there, we might call this **The Manhattanville Blueprint** and we will make the most important connection, the connection between different people and their identities.

When we have reached the **Fifth Destination**, maybe in five or six years, maybe in ten or twenty, our journey will by no means be over: each of these stations has connections to new destinations, so the Manhattanville train will keep going as long as we continue to connect. And that, finally, is the meaning of that famous phrase from E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, a phrase that could be the motto and rallying cry for all liberal arts institutions, but that has special significance for Manhattanville College: "Only Connect." - Connect to our great heritage and mission; connect to new, bold ideas; link the theoretical with the applied; reach out to expand and secure our College's local and world-wide connections to serve our students; connect to each other in this community, and finally, connect our mission to the passion each of us feel for this great institution: Just - Connect!