

Hilbert College
Spring Semester Start Up Meeting
M.S. Brophy
1/7/20

Today we begin the new semester. We begin the new year. We begin a new decade.

Over the Christmas break you may have noticed articles about the last decade. The decade when the world emerged from a great recession. The decade when computing moved off our desks and onto our phones. The decade when professional athletes protested societal injustice. The decade when climate change started to roll across our planet in ways we all could see and feel. A decade when the traditional family structure changed. A decade when same sex marriage became the law of the land. A decade in American politics that began with the emergence of the Tea Party.

A decade when nationalism and isolationism grew across the globe. A decade when drug addiction moved from street corners to the corner pharmacies. A decade when the promise of democracy for hundreds of millions came and went with the Arab Spring. A decade of mass migration across humanity, with families risking lives for the promise of a better life for their children. A decade with sustained protests in unlikely places like Cairo and Hong Kong. A decade of Me Too and Black Lives Matter. A decade of painful scandals in our church. A decade when the new Pope of Rome chose Francis as his name, in recognition of the need for Franciscanism in these times.

Turning closer to home. This was a decade when change accelerated in higher education. A decade when students fell asleep with their ear buds in, and a decade when they reached for their phones when they awoke. A decade when fewer and fewer families couldn't or wouldn't invest their hard-earned dollars in Catholic colleges and universities. A decade when political and media forces questioned the value of higher education. A decade when the demographics of Western New York brought enrollment declines to all of our public and private Institutions. A decade when Hilbert College asked itself existential questions about its future, including mergers with other colleges.

Today I begin my second year of service to Hilbert College. Over the last year I have experienced all the good that it is Hilbert. The commitment of our faculty to our students. The commitment of our staff to serve students, faculty, alums, and the community in a high-quality fashion. I have seen students in honors presentations, graduate poster sessions, on the field, on the court, serving the poor of the region, and visiting with our founders, the Franciscan Sisters of Saint Joseph. I have seen the most important element of our work, that work of character formation, in action in so many ways across our enterprise.

I have worked with the Board of Trustees to consider a new future for our College. One in which we recommit ourselves to advancing our Franciscan charism in a world in great need of what Saint Francis and Saint Clare offered 800 years ago. This will be a time when our prayers and our discernment about our College, about ourselves, and about our friends and colleagues will make all the difference going forward. A difference for our students and for all the communities they serve after they graduate.

It will be a time when our new senior staff leadership team will need to bring their “A” game to work each and every day as we implement Hilbert 2025, the strategic plan that was approved by the Board of Trustees in October and prepared for your review today in the divisional breakout meetings at 2 pm. Most likely you have read or heard about Hilbert 2025. Some of you may have been closer to it than others, but beginning today, as we start to implement 2025, I invite all of us to spend this time together with a renewed commitment to our College. A College that deserves our energy, our commitment, our creativity, our critical thinking, our own personal discernment, and love. Love for education, love for our community, love for our students, and love for each other.

Why? Because this is it. This is *the* time when we mobilize to create a new future for our College. A future where we improve our retention rates and our graduation rates. A future where we innovate in teaching and learning. A time when we take our well-earned reputation in law and justice to new markets. A time when we take our programs online to a national audience. A time when we bring our programs and services to international audiences. A time when all of our programs make a greater impact on the Southtowns. A time when we take our athletic programs to the next level. A time when we better determine how our central enterprise, the character formation that emanates from Franciscanism, is supported in who we hire, how we support who we hire, and how we acquaint them with a Catholic College that is on the move here in Western New York.

Our work will not be easy over the next decade. There will be wins and losses. We need more wins than losses, correct? And speaking of wins and losses, I’ve come to learn it’s pretty hard to have any conversation here in Western New York without discussing the Bills, am I right? So, let me see if I can work the Bills into this morning’s reflection. Just like the mighty Bills enter this decade better than they entered the last decade, let’s see if we can’t do the same here in the Southtowns, here in Hamburg New York, for our precious institution. Can we do that? Good. God bless you, God bless your families, and God bless Hilbert College.