



CHANGE MAKER

Meet H. James Williams, Ph.D., the Mount's new president

By Michael Schiavetta

On his way to Mount St. Joseph University for what would be his final interview for the job of Mount president, H. James Williams, Ph.D., stopped at St. Philip Catholic Church in Franklin, Tenn. He took out his bible and prayed, preparing himself for what he'd hoped would be the final step before joining the Mount community.

It was only hours after he'd left that Williams noticed his bible—which also held his itinerary for his Mount St. Joseph visit—was missing. He called the church and spoke to a woman named Kim who said she'd found it. When Williams returned the next day to pick it up, he learned that Kim was actually Mount alumna Kim Leisinger '92.

It was a sign of good things to come, he noted. Coincidences, as the saying goes, are God's way of remaining anonymous.

"Right away, we hit it off," says Williams with a friendly smile. "And she prayed for me to get the job."

Those prayers were answered in February 2016, when the Mount announced the former Ernst & Young accountant and business school dean as its seventh president. He officially assumed the role on March 15 amid enthusiastic support from the entire Mount community. His credentials include two degrees from Georgetown University Law Center, a Ph.D. from the University of Georgia, an M.B.A. from the University of Wisconsin and serving as president of Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn.

“Where much is, much is expected,” Williams told audience members at his Feb. 29 welcome ceremony, recalling the words spoken to him by a middle school educator in his hometown of Winston-Salem, N.C. “We have a responsibility to those around us ... We have been entrusted with the past, present and future of Mount St. Joseph University.”

BUILDING OUTREACH

Among his leadership priorities is enhanced outreach to Mount graduates. “Alumni relations is critically important, and the University cannot be at its best without the support of its alumni,” he says. “We want to reach out, find opportunities and be as transparent as possible.”

Williams is working with the Mount Alumni Association to create activities that further engage graduates. He also plans to host one-hour private webcasts (two during spring and two during fall semesters) for alumni where they can ask any questions they want.

To prospective college students, Williams wants to emphasize the crucial role of education to shape their careers. “These days there is so much negative commentary about college education and its importance,” he says. “But students need to know it’s worth the effort and expense—there is value in a college degree.”

Promoting the Mount to high school students and working professionals, Williams adds, will include showing how the University’s liberal arts foundation, sewn throughout its academic programs, provides “an understanding and appreciation of all the different dimensions of life, especially critical thinking, writing, research and other intellectual skills, to put them in a better place to adapt to today’s changing dynamics.”

FIRST LADY OF THE MOUNT

Joining Williams at the Mount is his wife of 28 years, Carole Campbell-Williams. They have two children, Michelle and Garrett. She recalls her first steps onto the Mount campus and how clean and well-kept it is. In particular, Carole remembers her initial experience with the Mater Dei Chapel. “When you walk past it and see stained glass mosaics, you have to take a deep breath and relax,” she says. “It’s such a beautiful chapel. I always have to stop over there.”

She plans to help bridge a stronger connection between the Mount and the city of Cincinnati. “I would like to get

involved with student activities and alumni programming, but also help connect students to the community. One of the

things I like to do is work with Habitat for Humanity, where the Mount already has a student chapter.”

Of her husband, she adds: “He is 110 percent devoted to the Mount, with a life that revolves around his family, his work and his faith. And he has the biggest laugh ever.”

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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Outreach to the Greater Cincinnati area is a paramount concern for the Mount’s new president. With a strong business background, Williams is eager to deepen connections and build mutually beneficial relationships.

“He understands that a university like the Mount is going to thrive only if it more deliberately makes itself part of the bigger business conversation in town,” says Jill Meyer ’93, CEO of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber. “He’s asking all the right questions. And it’s clear to me that he’s going to figure out how to make the University a bigger presence and integrate it into the business community. That will serve students very well.”



President H. James Williams, Ph.D., and his wife of 28 years, Carole, have two children—Michelle and Garrett. Among his priorities at the Mount are building outreach to alumni and the city of Cincinnati.

REIGNS OF LEADERSHIP

President Williams joins a distinguished group whose leadership and vision have steered the Mount for nearly a century.

Mother Generals of the Sisters of Charity (1920-1959)

Served ex officio as president of the College of Mount St. Joseph until 1959, when the separate Office of the President was established.

Sister Maria Corona (1959-1967)

Served as dean since 1933 and was the Mount's first official president. She oversaw the building of a new campus that opened in 1962.

Sister Adele Clifford (1967-1972)

During her tenure, the Sisters of Charity separately incorporated the College of Mount St. Joseph under a board of trustees and retained the role of sponsor.

Robert Wolverton (1972-1977)

Had the distinction of serving as the first lay president of the Mount.

Sister Jean Patrice Harrington (1977-1987)

Directed the College's expansion into adult and graduate education.

Sister Francis Marie Thraikill (1987-2008)

A member of the Ursulines of the Roman Union, she led the Mount's transformation into a fully coeducational institution, expanded student services and the intercollegiate athletics program from 4 to 21 sports, strengthened the curriculum and oversaw the largest campus expansion.

Anthony Aretz, Ph.D. (2008-2015)

Led the change in designation from college to university status, which broadened the educational experiences and opportunities at the Mount.



President Williams greets John Young, chair of the Mount St. Joseph University Board of Trustees, at the Feb. 29 presidential welcome ceremony.

SHARED VALUES

One of the key factors that attracted Williams to the Mount is its connection to the Sisters of Charity and, consequently, its commitment to a university education centered around faith.

“Faith is important along many dimensions,” he says. “It sustains the University and informs who we are and what we do. And because it’s fundamental to who we are, it explains our culture in large measure. That’s a direct result of our mission, vision and values as informed by our faith.”

“When I first met him during his interview in January, I asked him how the sponsorship of the Sisters of Charity impacted his interest in the position,” said Sister Joan Cook ’64, SC president, at the announcement of Williams’ presidency. “He responded that the values, spirit and mission of the Sisters of Charity are the heart of what this university was, is and hopes to be.”

The Mount’s core beliefs resonate with Williams on a family level as well. His mother and father are both retired pastors. He also has two sisters who are ministers and an extended family replete with ministers and pastors.

FINDING THE RIGHT LEADER

To find its seventh president, the Mount appointed John Young, chair of the Board of Trustees, to lead the search process in May 2015, following the resignation of Anthony Aretz, Ph.D., the Mount’s sixth president who led its transition from college to university status. His legacy includes the creation of new academic programs, as well as the Center for Ethical Leadership, the Vision2020 strategic plan and the career preparedness initiative known as the Talent Opportunity Program.

The search committee solicited feedback and comments from the entire Mount community. “We spoke with students, faculty, the Sisters of Charity, staff, donors and other supporters,” says Young. By fall 2015, qualified applicants were being reviewed with interviews commencing in December—but one candidate stood out.

“Right from the start, the information Dr. Williams provided was very well put together,” says Young. “When we met him, what he had on paper was very consistent with the way he presented himself. He was very authentic and devoted to the mission of the University and the entire community. It’s also connected to the way he runs his life.”

Young and his colleagues on the search committee took special interest in Williams’ business education. “It was important that his heart and soul was with the University but where the rubber meets the road, you also need someone with good business practices,” he says. “We wanted someone who could lead not only in terms of recruitment, enrollment and philanthropy, but someone who knew the business of running a university.” ✨