



Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Luimneach
~ Ollscoil Luimnigh ~

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
~ University of Limerick ~

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As Mary Immaculate College Lowers its Walls, New President Re-Positions the College at the Heart of the Wider Community

In his Inaugural Lecture today, the new President of Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick, **Prof. Michael A Hayes**, spoke of the recent lowering of its boundary walls as a symbol of the College's desire to embrace the community and to re-assert its position at heart of the city and the wider region.

President Hayes explained to guests gathered in the College's new, state-of-the-art Lime Tree Theatre that:

"This development is a deliberate attempt to convey, in a very visible manner, a number of important messages. The lowering of the wall is intended as a statement that 'Mary Immaculate College is open for business.' It says: 'This place is part of our shared heritage.' It says: 'We belong to your community and you are part of ours.' It says: 'Come in. You are welcome here. This is your space'."

President Hayes reminded his audience that this message was an expression of the vision of Catherine McAuley and the mission of the Sisters of Mercy who co-founded the College in 1898. As he set out the College development plan he stressed, in particular, the importance of celebrating and asserting the identity of the College in accordance with its founding ethos and the Mercy tradition. The President also stressed that the need for an "honest dialogue" to take place within the College community itself, following which the College's distinctiveness would, once more assert itself:

"We will come to know ourselves, once again, within this space and reflect upon how our distinctiveness influences how we connect with our partners, our peers and our funders and our friends, outside of these walls" he said.

An essential part of this dialogue, President Hayes said, would be to:

"Re-imagine what it means for Mary Immaculate College to be a Catholic College. Our re-imagining will involve that ongoing search for meaning, the questioning of perceived wisdom in the pursuit for truth."

Welcoming all to what was a momentous event in the 114 years history of the College the Very Rev. Fr. Tony Mullins, Diocesan Administrator and Chair of the Board of Trustees & An Bord Rialaithe at MIC said

"The Inaugural Lecture of Prof. Michael A Hayes, the 9th President of the College, provides us with

a unique opportunity. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, this gathering of the College Community this afternoon marks the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Mary Immaculate College, a chapter that will see the College continuing to grow and flourish with greater international links, while continuing to play a pivotal role in third level education in a more diverse and inclusive Ireland. Under the leadership of our new President, Prof. Michael A. Hayes, a renowned academic in the field of theology and religious studies, and with a talented strong team of educators and student leaders, we can have confidence in a future of great promise”.

Speaking at the event was **Mr. Ruairí Quinn T.D., Minister for Education and Skills** who said

“Prof. Hayes joins the College at a particularly interesting and exciting time in the world of teacher education. MIC will undoubtedly play a central role in ensuring that initial teacher education courses develop teachers for the future who are equipped with the knowledge and ability to apply educational theory and research effectively in practice, to adapt to the challenges they will face throughout their careers and to best support all students to achieve their full potential. I wish Prof. Hayes every success in his new role”.

President of University of Limerick, (UL) **Prof. Don Barry** spoke about the special relationship between the two institutions.

“The University of Limerick has a long and productive relationship with Mary Immaculate College. We are proud of this creative and ongoing partnership, which has facilitated genuine innovation while drawing on the unique MIC ethos and enriching the academic life of UL.”

Conveying his congratulations to the President **Mr. Tom Boland, CEO of the Higher Education Authority** said

“The role of the teacher is by far the most important role in education systems and the quality of the teaching profession is the key determinant of quality in the learning outcomes achieved for learners. Prof. Hayes takes the helm at MIC at a time of great change for education at all levels. He brings a wealth of expertise and experience, which equip him well for the challenges ahead. The HEA congratulates Prof. Hayes on his appointment and we greatly look forward to working with him”.

Echoing President Barry’s reference to partnership, President Hayes spoke of the pivotal role of the Shannon Consortium in the continued development of synergies between clustered higher level institutions, aimed at creating greater choice and access for a student populace that had become significantly differentiated within the challenging environment that has followed in the wake of the economic downturn:

“We see these challenges, not as reason for frustration or fatalism about what can be achieved but, rather, as an invitation to be bold in our imagination as we develop our programmes, to be confident as we set about enhancing the quality of our delivery, resolute in the assertion of our distinctive mission and its essential contribution to the continuum of necessary provision, and to be generous in our commitment to partnership so that the best of what we have to offer can be shared and targeted in a strategically coherent way.”

The College is already advanced in re-conceptualisation of its programmes in response to the needs faced by students today, President Hayes said, and was

“At the dawn of what we see as the most exciting period of our institutional history. We will soon complete the re-design of our flagship Bachelor of Education (Primary Teaching) programme, consolidating our reputation, nationally and internationally, as a pre-eminent locus for the education and professionalisation of the beginning teacher.”

He laid special emphasis on the developments underway with the B. Ed programme which, he said, would ensure that

“[MIC] graduates would be equipped to raise the standard of learning and achievement of all children in all classrooms, regardless of whatever faith or ethos that may prevail there. This, our nation’s children require by necessity, and deserve by right.”

The President availed of the opportunity not only to thank the Minister for Education and Skills for the financial support towards the College’s new buildings, TARA/Teamhair and Tailteann, but he also reminded the Minister for the need for on-going support for Phase 2 and 3 of the College’s master plan. He reminded the Minister that the last new building to be undertaken between 1979 and 2006 was the College Library which was designed at the time for 750 students. With a growing student population of over 3000 students he spoke of the need for a well-designed and adequately stocked library in order to bring the library to 21st century standards.

Bringing the proceedings to an end **Students’ Union President Mairead Collins** thanked all the speakers for their kind words of encouragement and congratulated Prof. Hayes saying

“Congratulations on your new role. We have no doubt that you will be an outstanding leader for this great place, with the student body at the heart of your work in your role as our President”.

Guests were treated to a performance by members of the **Irish Chamber Orchestra** followed by a reception. Attending this significant event were **Gary Ó Donnchadha**, Deputy Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Skills; **Brendan O’Dea**, Acting CEO, Teaching Council; **Anne Fay**, Vice President, INTO; **Mayor of Limerick Jim Long**; **Cathaoirleach Mary Harty**, Limerick Co. Council; Most Rev. **Archbishop Dermot Clifford**; **Bishop Kieran O’Reilly**, Bishop of Killaloe; **Prof. Peadar Cremin**, and **Sr. Angela Bugler**, both former Presidents of MIC.

Minister for Education & Skills Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D., pictured with Professor Michael A Hayes, President of Mary Immaculate College, at the Inauguration Ceremony which took place in the Lime Tree Theatre, Mary Immaculate College on Thursday February 2nd 2012.

