

**Investiture Address**  
**Philomena V. Mantella**  
**Grand Valley State University**  
**November 15, 2019**

Thank you, Chair Kramer and members of the Board of Trustees. I am honored to be joined today by three former presidents of this great university: Don Lubbers, Mark Murray and Tom Haas, who outlined our history, our chapters, and who graciously passed the mantel of the presidency to me. They truly are dynamic leaders, amazing individuals and thoughtful guides.

Thank you and welcome to our distinguished leaders of government and education, honorary lifetime trustees and former board members, foundation directors, other distinguished guests, colleagues, students and alumni of Grand Valley State University.

This is a historic day in the life of the university. It is a day to honor our past ... and to charge forward with wisdom, grace and power into our future.

There are moments in our personal lives and in the lives of institutions that call upon us to work collectively to achieve together what we could not achieve alone. As Helen Keller noted, **“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”** Today is such a day. It is the reason behind my call to our community to **“Reach Higher Together.”** We must use our **collective wisdom, collective energy** and **collective passion** to make it so.

Just look at the collective wisdom gathered here, with our dedicated former presidents and many others who have used their abilities to build this impressive university. There is a rich array of talent and expertise that surround us. Breathe in the energy of our students who will lead for generations to come. Appreciate the diverse and vibrant community that lives today — because of the faith our founders had more than 60 years ago.

This is a momentous day for me personally, I am honored and humbled to be installed as the fifth president of Grand Valley State University.

I am blessed to have family, mentors and friends — many of whom are here with us today — who are my inspiration and champions.

First among them, my husband of 41 years, Bob Avery. He has shown love and patience, even when it required personal sacrifice and compromise of his own goals. He supported my calling to make an impact through education. Thank you.

I am grateful for my mom, who is here. She and my dad showed me unconditional love and had total confidence in me. What a blessing.

I am grateful for all of my family who love and support me, now over greater distance, Vince and Brie, Nick and Verena, along with Vic — who couldn't be here today — and Meredith; my brothers, sister, and good friends.

I am grateful for my inspiring grandchildren — wonderful Haelyn and my best buddy, Emerson — thanks for representing today.

I am grateful for the many leaders from whom I have learned so much. Two of them are here today: professor emeritus and former president of Northeastern University, Richard Freeland, and the current president of Northeastern University, Joseph Aoun, who taught me the joy of thinking unbounded.

Above all, I am grateful to and humbled by God and His constant unwavering guidance. I give my sincere thanks to Father Peter, who is joining us from Boston to bless this occasion.

Let us acknowledge that on this occasion, as the saying goes, we stand on the shoulders of giants, with a mission of human empowerment. Let us embrace our obligation to shape the future for those who have entrusted it to us, and those who need us now.

Time is the great equalizer, in that we don't know how much we have to spend on the people and pursuits that mean the most to us. American author Annie Dillard reminds us, **“How we spend our days is how we spend our lives.”**

Let us value our time, and let us grasp the opportunity we have together to author Chapter Five at this remarkable university. Let those of us connected to this great place spend our days facing challenges by seizing opportunities ... and confronting complacency by unleashing energy, urgency and passion for our cause.

#### **What is our cause?**

- First it involves accepting the reality of fewer students in high school, fewer coming to college, and many more who need college but have not been privileged with opportunity or resources. They possess enormous gifts and potential that we must nourish.
- We are challenged to address access and affordability in higher education, and to win over those who say a college degree does not have a return on the investment or an inherent value.
- We must address the talent gap. Leaders in business and industry are looking to us to meet current and future needs. The majority of the workforce will require more knowledge and different skills than they possess today.
- We must embrace the opportunities technology brings. We are able to touch thousands of learners at all ages — those in front of us, and those around the globe.

**Our cause** is to build upon our history as a university created by this community in a private-public partnership that is unique and still thriving today.

**Technology and creativity make it possible. The demographics and the economic realities make it mandatory.** The time to act is NOW!

Our state and our nation need Grand Valley to seize the new reality that allows a university in Michigan to be a **“breakout university”** by asserting its entrepreneurial spirit, its history of

being agile, fearless of growing and changing to meet new demands ... hungry to shape education to learning styles that are as numerous as individuals are different.

A fair question: **Are we ready?** My answer is – absolutely!

In my few short months I have met so many creative faculty and staff who are full of passion for new ways to teach and to partner together with a relentless commitment to the **success of ALL learners**. Our spirit, talent, culture and community have the power to **make Grand Valley a leader in education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**.

Let's consider this leadership. **What are the commitments we must make to our learners, our community and to each other?** I offer **five** commitments today on behalf of Grand Valley.

First, **we commit** to *evolve our liberal education foundation* ... adding essential digital and entrepreneurial capabilities to the time-honored skills of critical thinking, emotional intelligence and creativity. I will rely on our provost, deans and faculty to fulfill this commitment.

A report from *The Institute for the Future* estimates that 85 percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet. The authors put it this way, **“The ability to gain new knowledge will be more valuable than knowledge itself.”** We must equip our students to thrive. And who better than Grand Valley, with its liberal education foundation.

Second, **we commit** to an unparalleled educational model that embraces the **reciprocity of learning**. The unique magic that occurs between teacher and student ... the unique magic between people who share knowledge and ideas. Individuals enriched by their differences ... who are open and vulnerable, because they ALWAYS consider themselves learners. That is how our students and faculty — my new colleagues — describe the intensity of what being student-centered means at Grand Valley. Our faculty live this philosophy and this can separate us from those for which “student-centered” is simply a tag line.

Third, **we commit** to experiential learning. We want **all** students to be able to take part in internships, co-ops, service learning and to study abroad. Ben Franklin's wisdom reflected what today's students know: **“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me, and I learn.”** Franklin knew what students today rightly demand. To answer that demand, Grand Valley will build a talent epicenter that will attract companies, non-profits, entrepreneurs and students. All who are eager to build and nurture explosive ideas and cultivate the talent to make dynamic growth possible. We envision a digital and physical space where the *best* employers will join with the *best* minds at Grand Valley. They'll fertilize the seeds that spring from the imaginations of the *best* creators of our time. The talent epicenter will burst with energy and ideas ... and attract partners who want to invent, and those ready to invest.

Fourth, **we commit** to supporting more students at different stages of life, acknowledging their multiple roles (parents, students, employees) that make it critical we deliver **when** they want to learn, **where** they want to learn, and **how** they want to learn! This will require us to build a sophisticated infrastructure that leverages the power of place and the digital medium. We will build the best of adult learning for which **completion**, not enrollment, is the measure of success.

Lastly, and most importantly **we commit** to our Lakers for a lifetime — to be not only your community, network and friends, but your **learning partner**. I am announcing today, for all Grand Valley State University students and alumni, a program that is an investment in your lifetime vibrancy — underscoring our firm commitment that lifelong learning is a necessity. We will invest in and build a **Laker Lifetime Learning Account** for all Laker graduates. This money will be available for Lakers to reduce costs and improve access to badges, certificates and advanced degrees at Grand Valley. Lakers can return to us when their life journey requires additional skills and knowledge. This lifetime learning account will begin in May. I will call upon our community partners to join me in assuring Lakers can always get what they need from Grand Valley to fulfill their highest potential.

**The promise of our future demands these changes, investments and our collective fortitude. The commitments I've outlined today will ready Grand Valley, and those who partner with us, to create and shape our future as a 21<sup>st</sup> century education leader.**

We are all shaped by our experiences, our community, our families and those who support us. My parents shaped my passion and commitment for education. They did not have the option of higher education themselves, but understood it could be life-changing for their four children. And it was. My background motivated me to pursue a career in social work to help first-generation students like me navigate the road to a degree and a more fulfilling life. That early mission evolved into my desire to understand and challenge the entire system of education, to open doors for even more students. In Grand Valley, I have found a university with a positive and entrepreneurial environment, benefiting from unparalleled community support. I found a system open to new possibilities for more students.

My strong commitment to all students at every phase of life has resulted in my being with you at Grand Valley State University **at this moment**. We share a deep sense of care, concern, respect for others and a profound sense of purpose. We understand that diversity of culture and thought are at the heart of a liberal education.

Grand Valley has a mission to educate students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies. It is a noble and grand mission ... **A mission that is timeless but one that must adjust to the needs of this century.**

We must reimagine education to serve all who would benefit. We need educational trailblazers who will create possibilities to widen and broaden the university's reach. We need educational entrepreneurs who smile with a knowing nod because they have experimented and won ... or experimented and learned.

We will answer the call to reimagine the choreography of learning, from the “one-size-fits-all assembly line approach” to one that meets students where they are, how they learn and with what they need.

We will keep education affordable. Grand Valley remains an incredible value with tuition in the lower third of Michigan public universities and among the lowest in the nation. We will support

students as they realize their dreams and build their futures over a lifetime. And all along the way we will enable opportunities for inclusive prosperity.

We will work together to embrace the disruption and glory of technology, robotics, big data, virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

We will act with urgency, passion and our whole selves — because we know to our soul that education not only addresses the material necessities of life, but it allows for the flourishing of the human spirit.

The entire Grand Valley community is called and encouraged to let our imaginations soar as we coauthor Chapter Five. An opportunity of this magnitude requires all to be involved, using the totality of our creativity, passion and thinking unbounded.

It is our time to lead. We must have the courage to be bold, the drive to act, the urgency to move quickly and the wisdom to steward well for future generations. We need to bring together ALL who believe Grand Valley is poised to be a leader in “The Fourth Industrial Revolution.” We need those who commit to our cause and will invest in our collective future.

I was able to learn about bold moves and courageous risks right at home from my dad. When I was 10 years old, my father left his job as a manual laborer to start his own business. He had no knowledge of what was required to accomplish that, and he became the original experiential learner in our family! As he took that risk — for the betterment of our family — he relied on his ability and willingness to learn. Through sheer grit, and many failures, he made the most of everything and everyone he encountered. My dad showed me how to work hard, follow my passions, and turn my lessons into leadership gold.

I pledge to you today that I will bring the best lessons of my life, the most beneficial experiences of my career, the totality of my passion for students and lifelong learning, and my full energy — further ignited by each of you — to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for this university community.

I ask that you join me with your best ideas, intentions, vision and resources to build our future. Together, we will reimagine education at Grand Valley:

- How it is accessed;
- How it is delivered;
- And how we keep Lakers learning for a lifetime.

It is my honor to serve as the fifth president of Grand Valley State University. And I am certain, we will “Reach Higher Together.”

Thank you.