

a letter from the president

Summer 2007

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The Mulberry Tree



The past three months have been a time of reflection for colleges and universities across the nation. As institutions and individuals, we have struggled towards an understanding of the recent violence that struck Virginia Tech. We have questions—chief among them, “Why?” Could anything have been done to save the young shooter before he unleashed his violent fury? Could such a thing happen here, here in this peaceful, tight-knit community we call St. Mary’s? It is this last question which is, perhaps, the most chilling of all.

Although we all know the cold facts of the case by now, these deeper questions linger. They force us to look more closely at ourselves. As we continue to work through them, we have been reminded of how much we rely on each other. On the day following the shooting, and throughout that week, we came together to grieve, to ask questions, and to fill our need to extend comfort to the Virginia Tech community.

I was moved by the way a university in so much pain gathered together in its grief—and in its hope for the future. I was struck by the way the community drew strength from its traditions—even down to the spirited Hokie chant that spontaneously broke out following poet Nikki Giovanni’s address at the memorial service. It is a reminder of the strength of tradition. What, in times of joy and fun are light-hearted rituals become, in times of trial, the glue that holds us together.

So, although we planned months ago to do an issue about St. Mary’s traditions, recent events have made it an especially timely topic. The Shoe Tree. Pondings. Rat Week. These rituals are silly, the products of boisterous, irrepressible youth. Don’t let that fool you. They are also part of the very bedrock of our collective memory and identity.

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