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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Mount Mary President Christine Pharr, Ph.D., announces plans to step down in June 2022**

MILWAUKEE (SEPT. 15, 2021) – Christine Pharr, Ph.D., president of Mount Mary University, announced Sept. 15 that she plans to retire on June 30, 2022, at the end of the current academic year. The University hopes to have a successor in place by July 1, 2022.

Pharr shared this news with the campus community during an all-campus informational session, saying the timing was right to make the transition, at the end of her five-year contract. Pharr, who began in July 2017, is Mount Mary's 12th president.

"I am choosing to retire so I can be closer to family," she said. "This is not a decision that I take lightly because of my deep love for Mount Mary and how much I have enjoyed serving as president."

This fall, the University experienced record-breaking new student enrollment, and Trinity Woods, Mount Mary's three-way partnership with the School Sisters of Notre Dame and Milwaukee Catholic Home, is set to open in late 2021.

"Over the past four years, we have instituted a multitude of new programs and initiatives, which led to a record number of new students for fall 2021. As we continue our work in the coming year and as Trinity Woods opens, I am confident that I will leave Mount Mary in an excellent position with a bright future."

The 2022 U.S. News and World Report released this week gave Mount Mary top honors among all regional universities in the Midwest for social mobility, which measures the success rate of graduating Pell students based upon six-year graduation rates.

Under Pharr's stewardship, Mount Mary moved up more than 20 spots to 51st in the best-of rankings of regional universities, and was recognized for having the greatest economic and ethnic diversity in the Midwest. In 2020, Mount Mary became one of only two Hispanic Serving Institutions in Wisconsin.

Mount Mary has experienced significant programmatic growth, such as the Compass Year program for undecided students. This first-year program designed to help students explore career paths and identify a major has grown over 300 percent since it began three years ago. Mount Mary's four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program began this fall after an extensive, \$2.5 million construction of a Health Sciences Center. Expanded graduate offerings include a Ph.D. in counseling and a doctorate in occupational therapy, and extensive revisions to existing programs in dietetics and business (MBA).

In addition to Trinity Woods and the Health Sciences Center, on-campus construction projects have included a virtual reality lab, immersive classrooms and extensive campus renovations. An interfaith space, Place of Peace, and a Muslim prayer room were created to accommodate the faith practices of all students.

Pharr led Mount Mary through an extensive strategic planning process, leading to “Living, Learning and Working in a Thriving Community,” a multifaceted plan that identified visionary goals in five planning areas through 2025.

A tireless fundraiser deeply sensitive to the needs of Mount Mary students, Pharr led efforts to raise \$2 million for Trinity Woods, established a \$100,000 endowment for food resources and increased the President’s Emergency Fund to \$100,000.

In summer 2021, the University established the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and named the University’s first vice president for DEI.

The University’s Board of Trustees has engaged a search firm to begin the process of selecting a new president, said Trustee Chair Stephanie Russell. The search firm and timeline will be announced in the coming weeks. Updates and a portal for input will be available on the Presidential Search web page at [www.mtmary.edu/presidentialsearch](http://www.mtmary.edu/presidentialsearch).

“Mount Mary educates committed change-makers and barrier-breakers, and Dr. Pharr has truly been a champion of change and growth,” Russell said. “Mount Mary’s strategic plan, strong internal leadership and capable faculty and staff will continue to move Mount Mary purposefully and confidently into the future.”

“The School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) are grateful for President Christine Pharr’s leadership throughout her time as President of Mount Mary University,” said S. Debra Sciano, SSND, provincial leader of Central Pacific Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mount Mary’s sponsoring organization. “It has been a pleasure for me to collaborate with Dr. Pharr, particularly as partners with Milwaukee Catholic Home in the creation of Trinity Woods on the Mount Mary campus.

“Her enthusiastic approach to building up the University and creating a sense of unity, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been remarkable and appreciated by all who have interacted with her,” Sciano said. “All of the SSND community hold her in prayer and wish her many blessings as she enters into the next phase of her life’s journey.”

Pharr has assumed multiple leadership positions within the local and state higher education communities. She currently co-chairs a committee for the Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA), and serves as vice chair of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU). She is also a member of the Milwaukee downtown Rotary, TEMPO and Milwaukee Women, Inc. In August, she was recognized by the Biz Times as a Notable Woman in Education for 2021.

A longtime advocate for women’s leadership, particularly in the sciences, Pharr served as vice president for alumnae and donor relations at the College of St. Mary, a Catholic women's institution in Omaha, Neb., and as the college’s vice president of academic affairs, developing new undergraduate and graduate programs in business, science, nursing, physician assistant and education. She previously served as academic dean and professor of chemistry at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho.

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*Mount Mary University is rated among the best institutions in the Midwest for supporting and graduating students of all backgrounds, and is ranked #1 in the Midwest for social mobility, ensuring undergraduate women of all backgrounds succeed. Sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mount Mary is a diverse and inclusive urban Catholic university located in Milwaukee, Wis., committed to social justice through more than 30 undergraduate majors for women and eight graduate programs for women and men. Visit [mtmary.edu](http://mtmary.edu).*