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Remarks, delivered at the dedication of the Cook-DeWitt Center on November 24, 1991

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REMARKS FOR DEDICATION OF COOK-DEWITT CENTER

Our coming together today to dedicate this building is a testament to the early vision and commitment of some people and the generosity and commitment of others. The Cook-DeWitt Center had its origin in discussions years ago, perhaps more than fifteen, when an active campus ministry began to have an impact on our campus. The lesson of this project is that a good idea should be kept alive to await the time of its fulfillment.

Several of us here today kept talking and planning when we were not sure how to accomplish our objective. Finally the idea that had taken root in our minds was transplanted into the minds of others, those who gave the resources because they, too, saw our vision. And today all of us are here to celebrate the vision becoming a present reality.

The Cook-DeWitt Center is more than a building that provides us space to carry out functions of the University. The Cook-DeWitt Center is a symbol. It is the symbol of a caring community. Its presence on this campus assures each student that he or she has come to a place where the mind and the spirit of each person is important, and that here there is the hope that all will grow, mature, and find favor in one another. This is a personal building, and those who planned it and gave money to construct it want the personal lives of those who use it to benefit from their contribution.

Towards that end, the intimate grandeur of this auditorium is a first step. Being here lifts the spirit. The magnificent pipe organ, the warmth of sound as music fills the room, gives this

University a new experience in a new and different hall. There was never a question about the location. Proximity to the Kirkhof Center food service was essential as the events of this day validate, as do several scheduled weddings and receptions. But that was not the only or even the first reason for selecting the site. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his Essay on History states, " The Gothic Church plainly originated in a rude adaptation of the forest trees, with all their boughs, to a festal or solemn arcade....no one can walk through pine woods without being struck by the architectural appearance of the grove, especially in winter....In the woods in a winter afternoon one will see as readily the origin of the stained glass windows with which Gothic cathedrals are adorned, in the colors of the ..sky seen through the bare and crossing branches of the forest."

Here we worship in a vaulted room close to the trees that allegedly centuries ago inspired its style, and instead of stained glass windows, we look through clear glass into the woods where, according to Emerson, they have their origin. As each day the building bustles with activity now and in the future, those who use it will be aware of the ravine, the woods and the changing seasons. Though mostly unaware of the relationship between the building and the origin of its antecedents in the woods, they will enjoy the beauty of both and find in that beauty and enjoyment a feeling of unity. The Cook-DeWitt Center is a symbol of our caring community, but it is a place where we want beauty to enter our lives. The architecture and the site, the music and spoken words should all

help us to know what beauty is and what it can do for us so that we may comprehend John Keats when he wrote "Beauty Tis Truth, Truth Tis Beauty."

We are all here to dedicate, but we come for different reasons. Those who are here because they have contributed money to give the University this building with its furnishings are the ones I want to address especially. I do so because most of you will not be here often as the rest of us will. Many of you cannot attend the dedicatory series of events listed in the program so this is my only time to thank you publicly for the good you have wrought. I hope this project gives you special pleasure because this building gives us a significant boost towards being a special University. To the Cooks and the DeWitts, whose large gifts allow us to be enclosed by beauty and whose names will identify this building forever, to the Van Andels and Patmos whose gifts fill our hearts and souls with music, to the Hanenburgs whose gift keeps us from sitting on the floor, to the Vos' whose construction company built this Center, to Rich DeVos who helped me work on Marv DeWitt, and gave generously also, to all of you who have given to this project, Grand Valley State University is grateful. I believe what you have done will make the kind of difference in the lives of people at this University that will over the years increase the value of your investment immeasurably. Many attending today will want to thank you personally, and that they can do when we gather together after the service for our celebration feast. All of you are generous people. You are accustomed to sharing. Even though you have been

thanked many times before, and felt the glow of doing good, I doubt if you have ever given to this kind of cause, to the students of a state University. What you have accomplished is special for us. I hope it is for you.