

MESSIAH COLLEGE
STATE OF THE COLLEGE - 2005
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Introduction

As the video illustrated – last year was a time of hopeful beginnings and bittersweet endings – a time of premature goodbyes. It was a time of significant accomplishment, and a time of spirited conversation. It was a time of joyous celebration and thoughtful reflection.

Yet, even in the midst of this transitional and sometimes unsettled year, each of you faithfully contributed to the fulfillment of our institutional mission, and you did it with passion, dedication, and excellence. Thank you for your conscientious work and your unwavering commitment to Messiah College. Be assured that you are making a difference in the life of the College, and as our senior exit interviews illustrate, particularly in the lives of our students.

Today, we have gathered together to worship and to gain a glimpse into the year ahead – a glimpse that will serve as a prelude to the shared vision we possess for Messiah at her 2009 centennial and beyond. C. S. Lewis wrote, “A glimpse is not a vision. But to a person on a mountain road by night – a glimpse of the next three feet of road may matter more than a vision of the horizon.”

I will be outlining a more robust vision for Messiah in the contours of my Inaugural address to be delivered in October, but this afternoon, my purpose is to concentrate on the next “three feet of the road.” Earlier as you entered the sanctuary, you were presented with a copy of the Annual Plan for 2005-2006, a document which will serve as the compass for navigating operational challenges and opportunities during the upcoming academic year. In addition, to outlining key objectives for the 2005-2006 year, this copy of the plan articulates four focal points we need to emphasize throughout the College during this next academic year.

Focal Point 1 -- AFFIRMATION

As members of the Messiah community, we have the privilege and the responsibility of nurturing a campus culture that is characterized by the affirmation of the pursuit of excellence and the affirmation of the unique giftedness of our employees and students.

To pursue excellence, we must remain keenly aware of and committed to the mission and heritage of Messiah College. Our rootedness in Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan theological streams has shaped our foundational values and our core commitments. Our embracing spirit has enabled us to create a campus ethos that is profoundly Christian but not overly doctrinaire. We are a faith-based college that seeks to educate and facilitate the intellectual, spiritual, and personal development of our students. We all know that we are living in complex and chaotic times, and we must prepare our students for a knowledge based economy and a religiously and culturally diverse world. Education that is holistic that nurtures the life of the mind and the soul – education that is inclusive of the liberal and applied arts and sciences is essential to enabling students to understand the similarities and differences among people and to develop capacities to bring people together to solve complex problems. The type of education we are seeking to provide at Messiah involves risk and courage on the part of educators and students. As we explore controversial issues and difficult questions – we often find ourselves in the situation of having to explain and defend our educational approach to the broader constituency. But we know that learning can only occur in the context of a community where people affirm and trust each other, and every one of you plays a vital role in creating that learning environment for our students.

Therefore, to affirm our institutional identity and commitment to educational excellence, we must continue to recruit and retain excellent employees. As evidenced by the new colleagues who have recently joined our community, we continue to experience success with recruiting competent and creative employees. But recruitment is only the initial step. We have to retain employees by fostering a work

environment that offers challenge, reward and fulfillment. In the midst of financial constraints, we will do our best to insure that employees receive competitive wage and benefits and that there are adequate funds for professional development including faculty scholarship. Toward that end, I have asked the Human Resources department to prioritize a review of the job classification and salary structure of our employee base to insure that we are meeting the compensation goals as stated in *The Centennial Plan*. I will also be sponsoring a December Open Door Day that will be dedicated to the issue of the impact of recent changes in employee benefits. Finally, the Provost has indicated he will be working with the Gender Concerns Committee and the Micah Partnership to seek to assess the difficulties some employees encounter when they relocate to Messiah. I am convinced that we need to implement tangible means of assisting colleagues and their families through challenging transitions.

In addition to recruiting and retaining employees, we must also recruit and retain students. This year, we are expecting a first-year class that is larger than last year's (an increase of 33 students), but as you know, we did not meet our enrollment target for the fall semester. A comprehensive review of our recruitment practices, tuition pricing, financial aid, and institutional marketing is currently being conducted. An enrollment target for Fall 2006 will be established and communicated following the completion of that review. I want to acknowledge the dedication and diligence of our Enrollment Management team and the need for all of us to assist with recruitment. Our willingness to participate in Open Houses, to telephone prospective students, to welcome guests when they are visiting campus, and to enthusiastically speak about the value of a Messiah education is critical to achieving full enrollment.

We must be as totally committed to retention as we are to recruitment. The information we will glean from the upcoming campus-wide program reviews and from seriously analyzing student assessment data should instruct us regarding our strengths and areas which need improvement. Identifying and addressing those outcomes will certainly be important to maintaining a strong rate of student retention and to insuring excellence throughout every area of the College.

Beyond affirming our intention to pursue excellence, we must also find ways to affirm and recognize individuals for their unique contributions. Kind words and notes of encouragement need to be the norm not the exception for our community. College-sponsored times for employee recognition and enjoyment will be scattered throughout this calendar year. In October, we are planning a community-wide celebration for the presidential inauguration. All employees and students are invited, and I hope you will join me as we honor Messiah's remarkable past and promising future.

As President, I will be working to insure that the accomplishments of colleagues and students are intentionally and creatively shared in a wide variety of public vehicles and venues. Communicating the excellence and the uniqueness of Messiah is essential to becoming an institution with a more vibrant national reputation but also to our personal and communal inspiration. I passionately believe in Messiah College and the role we are fulfilling in the landscape of higher education. We are a holistic student-centered, academic institution committed to excellence, rooted in a Christian theological heritage that is not anti-intellectual or strident rather it is thoughtful and hospitable. I welcome the privilege of sharing that message!

Focal Point 2 – CONVERSATION

The second focal point for the upcoming year is our need and responsibility to facilitate conversation surrounding campus, regional, national, and international concerns that demonstrates respect and appreciation for the opinion of others and for the complexity of issues. We are living in a culture where contrariness and hostility have become the accepted manner of dealing with different perspectives. Many of our students have not been exposed to civil, informed, sustained debate and discussion – not in their schools, churches, or homes. To fulfill our educational mission, we must be a community that demonstrates intellectual and spiritual hospitality toward one another and to those outside of our community boundaries.

To be a campus where conversation richly and naturally abides, we must first create a welcoming environment. Asbury Seminary professor Christine Pohl defines a welcoming community as a “place rich with stories, rituals, and a history. It is valued and it nurtures life. It is never simply a physical space but a place alive with commitments and relationships.” When we live in community, we tell each other our personal stories – we share perspectives and hospitality (the act of genuine caring and respect for others) – has a transforming effect – not toward unanimous agreement but toward deepened understanding. When we seek to live as a hospitable community, we recognize the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. that ours is a “network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

Healthy conversations will require frequent opportunities for internal communication. The President’s Office will continue to publish quarterly e-mail Presidential Updates in addition to sponsoring Open Door Days, Pizza with the President events in the Residence Halls, an All-Night Study Break at the President’s Residence for students during finals week, and meetings with alumni in various regions throughout the nation. Campus leadership will initiate conversations within and between Schools, divisions, departments and with various student constituencies. Attentive listening is essential to meaningful conversation, and all of us must seek to listen with empathy.

Messiah also has a significant responsibility to provide leadership to conversations with community partners and the broader Academy. This year the Student Affairs Division will be sponsoring campus-wide discussions during a series of issue-themed weeks. School initiatives, Presidential Scholar Lectures, and other academic forums initiated by faculty members will bring experts to our campus to provoke and challenge the thinking of students and employees. These forums present us with a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate that we are a Christian academic community that possesses firm convictions while humbly seeking to understand and learn from differing perspectives. Faculty and educator involvement with professional conferences, publishing, and performing provide the opportunity for Messiah to influence the Academy and the current culture. Pepperdine’s Distinguished Professor of Religion Richard Hughes reminds us, “Christians are called to take other human beings seriously . . . we must listen carefully to their points of view, always asking what we might learn from those who come from cultural, political, and religious traditions that are different from our own. Listening does not necessarily mean agreement but listen we must.” For the sake of our students and for ourselves, we must seek to be a community where genuine conversation flourishes.

Focal Point 3 – RECONCILIATION

Noted higher education researcher George Kuh outlined seven characteristics of a healthy campus community based on an in-depth study of fourteen highly regarded institutions. As I read the list, I encourage you to assess whether these characteristics are descriptive of Messiah College:

- nurture a shared culture (values, rituals)
- promote internal communication
- promote caring, trust, and teamwork
- maintain and govern themselves
- exhibit shared leadership
- promote links with the external world
- incorporate and value diversity.

I believe that we have made progress in each of those areas but much more remains to be accomplished, particularly in relationship to incorporating and valuing diversity. Our third focal point for this year is to work toward reconciliation, one of the three desired outcomes of a Messiah education articulated in our mission statement – an outcome on which we need to concentrate increased institutional and individual attention. Seven years ago, I came to Messiah as the Academic Dean. I was fairly confident of my understanding of and appreciation for issues related to diversity, multiculturalism, and the need for reconciliation. But I must tell you that, to use the words of my thirteen year old daughter, “I didn’t have a clue.” During my first year at Messiah, I became involved in sorting out two highly charged incidents of racial harassment. The pain of those incidents led to my ongoing involvement with the Micah Partnership and to the development of meaningful relationships with colleagues and students of color. I have learned

much about my white privilege and about the painful and emotionally draining challenges my brothers and sisters of color experience every day at Messiah and in the local central Pennsylvania community. I am deeply disturbed by the lack of hospitality some members of our community experience and I mourn missed opportunities to educate our students for a global, multicultural, twenty-first century world because we have not been willing to address our own prejudices and ethno centrism. Dr. Lawrence Burnley, our newly appointed Associate Dean for Multicultural Programs and Special Assistant to the Provost and President for Diversity Affairs, will be leading an effort to develop and implement a survey to assess campus climate as an initial step to beginning an intentional journey toward reconciliation across racial, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. As departments proceed with their program reviews, questions related to incorporating and valuing diversity in recruiting and programming will need to be addressed.

Working toward increasing understanding and appreciation for different cultural traditions and the experiences of others will take time and effort – indeed, it will be a lengthy journey. I know that some of you are not even certain that the journey is essential, but I challenge you to examine the language of our mission statement and our foundational values – we cannot realize our purpose and our potential unless we create a hospitable environment where we seek justice in our policies, structures, and personal relationships. We cannot adequately educate our students unless we make it possible for them to live and learn in a multicultural context (this is one reason institutional commitment to contextual learning and community involvement is so critical: Study Abroad, Internships, the Agapé Center, the Philadelphia Campus, the Harrisburg Institute, the Center for Public Humanities, the Collaboratory, the Oakes Museum, campus and community collaborations in the Arts, The Boyer Center, and the integration of service learning into many traditional academic courses make it possible for students to learn from “the other”).

Focal Point 4 – DELIBERATION

Finally, as we begin this academic year, we must carefully evaluate the present – which is why the institutional effectiveness plan for program reviews is so salient – and we must plan for the future by employing participative decision making based on thoughtful deliberation. During the past few years, I have learned a great deal about leadership in relation to decision making, particularly in the context of fiscal challenges. Iconoclast Stanley Fish, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, offered three rules for leadership which I am attempting to follow:

1. Always tell the truth;
2. Always tell more of the truth than you have to;
3. Always tell the truth before anyone asks you to. (or it is published on COE Net)

Honest, open communication throughout all sectors of the College is critical to informed decision making. Our system of governance provides for the involvement of employees and students in the decision making process of the College. I look forward to working with the COE, College Council, Ranked Faculty Affairs Committee, Staff and Administrative Councils, and Student Government Association as we seek to address educational- and employee-related issues.

Effective leadership is shared and it occurs when there is a distinct combination of elements: a compelling mission; people who want to accomplish the mission; and processes which enable those people to enthusiastically fulfill the mission. At Messiah, we are blessed to have that combination!

So, what are the challenges and opportunities before us? Nationally, we face the challenge of shifting demographics – the complexion of our country is changing (which is one of the reasons why our work to incorporate and value diversity is so important), and the population of 18 – 23 year olds will decrease by 2010. Competition for academically prepared students has drastically increased over the past decade. New technologies and for-profit institutions have mounted a challenge to all of higher education, including private colleges as students and parents seek a less expensive education. Accountability for higher education is being demanded by the government, the public, alumni, parents, and students.

Many of you have seen the latest edition of the *U.S. News* college rankings – Messiah remains in the top five in our category of Northern Comprehensive Colleges – but Grove City College moved ahead to third place – leading Messiah in the rankings by one position. The rankings, which are based on 2004 data, indicate that we improved in the categories of average class size, freshman retention rate, and graduation rate, but lost ground in categories such as acceptance rate, student selectivity, and average alumni giving. Obviously there are many limitations to the parameters of these rankings, but they do highlight some of the challenges we need to address—not to improve our ranking—but to fulfill our commitment to institutional excellence. We must be articulate and intentional about making a persuasive case for the value of a Messiah education. Our commitment to assessing student and program outcomes and sharing those outcomes through an intentional, coherent external communication strategy is essential to Messiah's future!

On the financial front, our challenge is simple to describe but difficult to realize. We must seek to control (and sometimes) reduce expenses while increasing revenue. Because of the excellent effort expended by all of you, we will end the FY05 year with a positive operating balance despite a projected budget deficit. (I will communicate specifics following the final report from our auditors.) This outcome was achieved because of three factors: 1) sound fiscal management by budget directors; 2) a record year in giving – thank you to the Development team and all who have assisted us or been donors. The campaign total is currently \$48.8 million, and we are aggressively working to achieve the \$50 million goal by the end of the calendar year; and, 3) a positive return on endowment income. We must seek to produce a similar outcome for FY06, understanding that less than full enrollment poses a challenge for us from the outset. One of my priorities as president is to be actively involved in fundraising. Building positive relationships with alumni and increasing Messiah's national profile (expanding our base – recruitment of students and donors/trustees, seek scholars of national reputation, develop of a national marketing campaign) are two strategies which are essential to generating increased revenue and insuring a firm financial foundation. I will be spending a significant amount of my time working alongside the Development team as we seek to find the necessary resources to support our institutional mission and objectives.

For the second year, the Institutional Planning and Finance Subcommittee of the College Council will provide oversight to the implementation of a connected, coherent approach to planning and budgeting – a deliberate approach that will enable us to achieve our shared goals. We will also be carefully reviewing current and future needs as we engage in the work of designing a campus facilities and land use plan that will complement the objectives of our *Centennial Plan*. Employees and students will have opportunities to be actively involved in this master planning process.

Conclusion

As we move forward into the next academic year, as we face the challenges ahead of us, we do so with hope, believing with Frederick Buechner that God instructs us “through situations and events in all their complexity and variety, through harmonies and disharmonies and the counterpoint of all that happens.” We must work together to become a faith-based educational community, characterized by affirmation, conversation, reconciliation, and deliberation. For the sake of our students, the Academy, the Church, and the broader society, we must model that faith and intellect are not competing entities – reason and empathy are not unrelated virtues, and conviction and hospitality are not polar opposites. At Messiah, we share a corporate and individual vocation to live, learn, and love with the full confidence and inspired hope that through our common endeavors – students, colleagues, and community members will be welcomed, affirmed, and challenged . . . from which well being, creativity, and inspiration will emerge!

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