

MESSIAH COLLEGE
STATE OF THE COLLEGE - 2004
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Introduction

- As the video suggested – the past academic year was filled with many impressive accomplishments and magnificent moments of celebration.
- The past year was also a time of profound sadness as we said goodbye to beloved colleagues.
- And it was a time of uncertainty and frustration as we pursued difficult conversations and examined options related to the long-term financial stability of our institution.
- As a community we learned important lessons from the experiences of the last academic year. We learned how much we truly care for each other, and that we sincerely value each other's contributions. We learned how much we need to have frequent, open, authentic communication with one another – communication across the entire campus community. We need to practice the true art of conversation, which Dorothy Nevill defined as, “not only saying the right thing in the right moment, [but] leaving unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” Finally, we learned how much we need to effectively integrate our assessment planning and budgeting for both the short-term and long-term future of the College.

Today we come together to acknowledge these and other lessons we have learned – we come together to affirm our corporate and individual vocations – to move forward with enthusiasm and confidence into the new academic year. Our task is not to fear change and transition but to welcome and embrace it as a natural stage in the life journey of this institution – a stage that holds potential, possibilities, and promise! But – in order to meet this challenge, we must nurture and encourage each other. The trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and friends of Messiah will need to rely on each other's expertise, insights, perspectives, gifts, skills, and abilities to fulfill Messiah's compelling mission (read it with me), “to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society.”

Why do we seek to fulfill this mission? Because we seek to faithfully respond to our individual and common vocations and because our world needs Messiah graduates – intelligent, caring, gracious, faithful, capable women and men who are passionately seeking to live their vocations as they incarnate love for God and neighbor. Because of their educational experience, Messiah graduates understand that their vocations are a part of a larger purpose-filled narrative of which God is the author and creator.

In order to fulfill our mission I believe we must focus on five major goals during the next academic year. These focal points are listed in the copies of the Annual Plan which were distributed to you earlier.

The first goal we need to fulfill as a community is to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to **academic excellence**.

Christian higher education **cannot** and **should not** be second-tier or of lesser quality. The gospel of Luke reminds us that “To whom much is given, much is required.” In all the areas of our lives we are expected by God to give our best. We have been given many gifts, abilities, and resources which we are to use in purposeful ways. As Christian educators we have an obligation

to provide a stimulating, intellectually rigorous educational experience for our students. The central task of a college is an intellectual one! We have the privilege of introducing our students to wonder and awe. We have the privilege of increasing their understanding of God and the created order. We have the privilege of helping our students discover the “connectedness” of things – the connectedness of theory and practice, leadership and service, faith and reason, work and play. Therefore, we must all be committed to and supportive of the pursuit of academic excellence.

How shall we accomplish this ongoing pursuit?

We need to continue to recruit capable, innovative teacher-scholars, staff and administrators who are deeply invested in Messiah’s mission and identity and personally committed to fulfilling their individual vocations.

We must also retain our highly committed employee base by allocating the necessary resources to support the professional development of educators, administrators, and staff. Our implementation of programs such as “Workload Reallocation,” Educators’ Grants, support for Conference participation and the facilitation of department and division retreats must remain an important institutional priority! Messiah was one of a very few colleges that included a funding request for administrator and staff development (along with faculty development) in the Lilly Christian Vocation grant – this aspect of our proposal that will be realized on October 22nd when we hold a special staff and administrators’ inservice on the topic of vocation.

We need to insure that we are challenging and preparing our students to live as global, faithful, thoughtful 21st century citizens. The cultures of the Academy and the Church do not always affirm or reward uncertainty or questioning, and yet, the complex world in which we find ourselves requires educated servant-leaders who are prepared to “live the questions” – to welcome and struggle with difficult issues and ideas – servant-leaders who are continually gaining knowledge of themselves in relationship to their Creator, each other and their subject matter – servant-leaders who carefully listen to and respect the opinions of others.

We also need to facilitate dialogues that cross disciplinary boundaries and campus boundaries. We must take the time to reflect on our educational purpose. Toward that end, I’ve asked The Boyer Center to facilitate a campus-wide discussion about the models of liberal arts education and liberal education in the specific context of Messiah’s unique identity and mission. Our most recent graduating class was almost evenly composed of liberal arts majors and applied/professional majors. An inclusive conversation about the intersection of the liberal arts and liberal education will enable us to better understand our institution and our common purposes.

Finally, we must work toward academic excellence by thoroughly assessing the effectiveness of our educational programs and institutional support programs. As a campus community we are called to fulfill our roles with our eyes fixed on the high standard of achievement which honors God and the students we serve. Even in the midst of change, uncertainty, and even frustration, we must do our best work. Many of you did just that during the past academic year. Thank you for your commitment to excellence!

If I concluded my address with the first point, Messiah might be defined as just another quality comprehensive undergraduate institution, but Messiah is much more! We have a **Christian Identity** that is rooted in our commitment to educating complete, multi-dimensional human

beings. The founders, leaders, and servants of this College have taken seriously Jesus' commandments, "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30-31)

We've all heard the prevailing national rhetoric that describes our society in terms that encourage polarities – red states vs. blue states – liberals vs. conservatives – coalition of allies vs. axis of evil – Christians vs. non-Christians. People engage in labeling that prevents them from truly listening to each other – from truly seeking common ground or empathetic understanding. Divisiveness does not benefit our nation nor does it benefit our campus. Polarization does not lead to cooperation; rather it leads to competition – one side must always win while the other side loses.

Messiah's historical religious tradition has enabled our institution to articulate an alternative to such polarization. We are flourishing as a College community bound together by core Christian values and a commitment to welcome and embrace faculty, staff, administrators, and students from the broad spectrum of Christian traditions and perspectives. We have chosen to concentrate on the values and principles we hold in common rather than on the principles on which we differ. We have attempted to espouse a rhetoric that is positive and hopeful. As a community, we believe that our faith and the faith of our students will be deeply enriched as we learn from one another. During the past few years we've described Messiah's approach to Christian faith as **gracious** and **hospitable**. This approach allows us to educate our students toward a spiritual maturity that is characterized not only by faith, but also by hope and love. We seek to help our students nurture and develop a Christian faith that is not mean spirited or divisive but a faith that embodies incarnational qualities such as humility, kindness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Of course, our students struggle with being gracious Christians – as do we. We must remain keenly aware of our personal and institutional failings – the lack of consistency in our faith and practice. We know that racism, sexism, consumerism, and self-absorption exist within ourselves and within our community. We must be honest – we must have the courage to identify and confront our failings – even when the realities are very painful!

In recent years, there has been an increasing national awareness of Messiah as a Christian college with a unique identity – a Christian college that seeks to be a welcoming place for a diverse community of individuals – a Christian college that emphasizes virtues of grace and hope – a Christian college that's willing to provide leadership for a broad series of dialogues on the role of faith in the broader academy and on the perspective of gracious Christianity. The Faith in the Academy conference which will be held on our campus on September 30th - October 2nd will be a significant opportunity to move that conversation forward. I hope that many of you will attend and participate in that important conference.

In one of his last official documents our beloved President Emeritus wrote these words about our common commitment to Messiah's Christian identity and our emphasis on a theology of hope. He said, "Hope and the mission of Messiah is pursued with such profound commitment because we believe that God is God, this is God's world and the resurrection is reality."

The tradition of **community service** and **engagement** is longstanding at Messiah. We've always understood that we have the responsibility to care for the world and its brokenness. We have the responsibility to fully participate as citizens, servants, and leaders. Throughout Messiah's history we have been involved in the community – from President D. Ray Hostetter's

establishment of the Philadelphia campus to Professor Miller's leadership of the Grantham Oratorio Society to President and Lorna Sawatsky's involvement in the Arts to Dean Jones's vision of the Harrisburg Institute for Community Partnerships – we have believed that education is most noble and vital when education is used in service to others, and we know that service is a salient element of Christian vocation. Today we are actively seeking private, foundation, and government support for the launching of the Harrisburg Institute and for initiatives related to support of the public Humanities. We are seeking support to enhance the Philadelphia Campus facilities, and to continue the influential work of the Agapé Center, Collaboratory, Boyer Center, Oakes Museum, and our Schools. These initiatives not only serve neighboring communities, they provide multi-layered educational encounters for our students.

Many of you are involved in the local community – volunteering, serving on boards and committees, and participating in creative partnerships. We need to continue to be role models of servant-leadership and community engagement. As we become involved in the lives of others – we learn much about ourselves, our world, and our God. Of course, this is also true for our students, and we bear the responsibility for providing them with thoughtfully conceived contextual learning experiences.

In order to focus our attention on academic excellence, Christian identity, and community engagement, we must practice **careful stewardship**. Messiah does not exist apart from its external environment. The financial challenges we face are similar to those of many of our sister institutions. In fact, we are more fiscally sound than many other colleges and universities. **But**, as we move forward we will need to make judicious decisions that are situated in the context of not only our institutional dreams but also our institutional realities.

We need to take the following steps in order to make decisions and allocate resources based on institutional priorities:

- Follow the Centennial Plan and execute an annual plan consistent with strategic priorities. (mention copies of Annual Plan)
- Implement a plan for Institutional Effectiveness. I will be presenting a draft of this plan to the appropriate governance bodies early in the Fall semester. This Plan outlines a template for a comprehensive review of every department, unit, and program over the course of the next five years (some are already completed). These reviews will enable us to assess the strength and quality of our work and to make any necessary alterations. The Provost's Cabinet and the newly formed Institutional Planning and Finance Subcommittee of the College Council will provide oversight to this initiative.
- Continue to control expenses, seek to cultivate new donors and explore possibilities for developing new sources of revenue. As I reported in my email Campus update, we ended FY04 with a very small surplus. Originally we had projected a \$600,000 deficit. Thank you for controlling expenses and carefully managing your budgets. This summer has also been a positive one for fundraising, and I intend to devote a considerable amount of my time working on behalf of the Campaign for Student Enrichment. The Campaign has reached \$40 million – the original goal that was established prior to adding the project of the much-needed Climenhaga Fine Arts Center extension. The Development team, Trustees, and College leadership have been working diligently and will continue to do so for the next 18 months in order to successfully complete the Campaign and reach the total of \$50 million. On September 24th we'll celebrate the official dedication of the Larsen Student Union (one of the Campaign projects). I invite you to join us for a special ceremony and international dessert reception.

- Respond to opportunities to sell surplus real estate. Last Spring the Board of Trustees authorized sale negotiations on four smaller pieces of real estate in Grantham. One sale was completed in August, two are under verbal agreement, and one will likely be finalized in the Fall.

We will be able to achieve our goals if we establish clear institutional priorities, carefully steward the rich resources we've been given, engage in integrated planning, budgeting, and assessment, and cultivate meaningful relationships with alumni and friends of the College.

Our final focal point for the upcoming year is to emphasize **student centeredness** in campus conversation, programming, and decision making. When I arrived at Messiah six years ago, Sister Patricia Matthews, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Marywood University for over two decades, offered to meet with me periodically. She knew that I needed an outsider's perspective, and she quickly became a trusted mentor and friend. One day I was feeling quite overwhelmed from faculty concerns about the issues of salary, workload, and governance, and I delivered an intense twenty-minute monologue without taking a breath (a minor feat for a woman from Brooklyn!) – when finally I exhaled, Sister Patricia looked directly into my eyes and said, “Kim, you need to remember one thing – as the Academic Dean you are responsible for leading and developing the faculty but never forget that ultimately you are responsible to serve students. Whatever you do on behalf of the faculty or staff – whatever you do to or for the curriculum – it should ultimately be about fulfilling your mission to students.”

During the past five years we've accomplished much regarding our internal structures: we've revised campus governance, developed numerous policies and protocols, designed and implemented the Schools, recruited the Deans and other institutional leaders, reviewed programs, and restructured many departments and divisions.

Now is the time to allow these structures and changes to fulfill their purposes and to refocus our attention and our conversation on the needs of our students. As we approach discussions and decisions we need to consider the impact on our students. We need to examine our personal priorities and ask ourselves if we are actively and positively influencing the lives of our students. We have spent considerable time honoring and supporting quality faculty scholarship, and we should! But we also need to support and celebrate effective advising, inspired teaching, and thoughtful mentoring. We need to encourage the development of personal relationships between educators and students and also between administrators, staff, and students. In the midst of the outsourcing discussions last Spring, three students came to meet with me. Two of them held work-study assignments in Campus Events; the third student's assignment was in Dining Services. They wanted me to hear their stories – stories of supervisors who loved them – who invited them to their homes, who took them to the doctor, who listened to their problems. They were concerned about Messiah potentially losing such dedicated employees. I was profoundly touched by those stories, and I was reminded that each of us has the responsibility of caring for our students. As Interim President I am looking forward to interacting with students – through vehicles such as Pizza with the Prez in the residence halls, participating in Chapel, hosting students at our home, and periodically addressing the Student Forum. I am eagerly anticipating the inauguration of our first common reading program including the hosting of James McBride, the author of the common text, on our campus on September 15th. I look forward to the implementation of the pilot of a new Core course designed to introduce students to the foundational values of the College. These new initiatives will provide rich opportunities for substantive, meaningful conversations with students.

Conclusion

We have a lot to accomplish, but I believe this is going to be an outstanding year for Messiah College because of the commitment and the talents of everyone assembled in this sanctuary. We are a strong institution – with a clear, compelling mission. We will meet our challenges because we are fully committed to that mission and to having conversations that culminate in understanding even when there is disagreement. Harvard professor Margaret Wheatley has written these words about “conversation,”

“We expect it to be messy at times. Because conversation is the natural way that humans think together; it is like all of life – **messy**. Life doesn’t move in straight lines and neither does a good conversation.”

Throughout the year we’ll have messy conversations. They won’t always be linear – often they will be circuitous, but if we work together and approach each other with a gracious spirit we can achieve our goals of Academic Excellence, Christian Identity, Community Engagement, Careful Stewardship, and Student Centeredness. Together we will accomplish our objectives and together we will fulfill the College’s mission. As we approach this new academic year and the challenges and opportunities that are before us, let us remember the counsel of the poet Walt Whitman who reminded us of God’s presence and faithfulness even as we sail into uncharted waters,

“Sail forth – steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee,
and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet
dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave soul!
O farther farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the
seas of God?”

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