



**2016 State of the College**  
**Kim S. Phipps, Ph.D., President**

“Creating a Future of Significance - *The Art of Embracing Change as Opportunity*”

If you’ve visited Midtown Harrisburg recently, you’ve likely encountered “Lady Commonwealth,” a majestic mural created by Daniel Finch, Messiah College professor of art. Daniel designed this mural for the Susquehanna Art Museum to serve “*as an image of beauty, hope and optimism about Harrisburg’s future.*” In creating murals, painters demonstrate planning, determination and resilience as they adjust to changes and overcome obstacles. To succeed, Daniel needed to design the mural with exact calculations, enlist help from Messiah College and community partners; smooth out the crumbling building facade; adjust for shifting weather conditions and brave the perils of scaffolding. Most of all, Daniel practiced perseverance to bring this mural to fruition throughout an eight-month artistic process.

Around the globe, murals adorn buildings and cityscapes, serving as beacons of creativity, community and hope. As we implement the College’s new strategic plan, I’m inspired by the words of Jane Golden, director of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, who underscores the importance of building upon the achievements of her early murals: “*When you have success it’s not a time to become complacent, it’s a time to become hyper-strategic. And people started to clamor for art because in that art...they saw hope and possibility...*”<sup>1</sup>

At Messiah College, we also see hope and possibility as we seek to create a secure and promising future of significance. Together, we cast our shared vision onto a canvas of societal and educational change, confident in the saliency of our mission. The College’s strategic plan for 2016 – 2020 “Embracing Change as Opportunity” emphasizes the importance of preparing students to be faithful servant-leaders who promote the common good by serving as redemptive voices and change agents. This plan will strengthen our institutional vitality and enable us to offer many positive contributions to our nation and our world. But, to fulfill that promise, we must proactively address changes including:

1. Higher education’s dramatic shift beyond the traditional model of a four-year residential college experience.
2. The need for educational excellence to be more broadly envisioned as student cohorts change in demographics, experiences and expectations.
3. Financial challenges for private higher education institutions due to stagnant or decreasing net tuition revenue
4. Challenges to the autonomy of religious institutions and increasing public skepticism about the mission of Christian higher education and its contribution to the common good.

We are responding to these changes by carefully analyzing our current context and seeking opportunities as we plan for the future. The mission of Messiah College truly matters in this world; therefore, we approach our work with courage and optimism. Together, we will create a future of significance by embracing change as opportunity. Together, we will advance our mission as a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences in a changing culture with a changing student body. By working together to achieve the goals of our strategic plan, we will strengthen our institution as we educate undergraduate and graduate students toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith. Messiah College graduates will be prepared to lead, serve and participate in God’s reconciling work in the world. This is our high calling!

To create a future of significance, we need to incarnate our mission as a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences in a rapidly changing cultural context. Messiah College delivers an academically excellent education imbued with faith, service and vocational purpose. This distinctive combination positions the College to make profound contributions to the common good of church and

society—a common good rooted in a Christ-centered commitment to the dignity and welfare of humankind, expressed as love for neighbor.

Our nation’s religious complexion is trending in new directions. Last year, I referenced a 2015 Pew Religious Landscape Study that identified a decline among Americans who affiliate with Christianity.<sup>ii</sup> David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, reports that an increasing number of those surveyed by his research organization believe Christianity is irrelevant, extremist or part of the problem in our world.<sup>iii</sup> He suggests that Christians must challenge this current narrative, *“I think this is an incredible and healthy moment for the Christian community—to wrestle, to struggle with what it means to live out our Christianity in this increasingly skeptical age.”*<sup>iv</sup> Put another way, how do we effectively bear witness and serve the common good when the public doubts our motivation and ability to do so?

At Messiah College, we are educating reconcilers to be change agents in a time of national discord and division characterized by hyperbolic and poisonous rhetoric. The liberal arts and sciences, combined with our applied programs, nurture intellectual growth in our students along with expanding their capacity for empathy, hospitality and gratitude. The benefits of a faith-infused approach to the liberal and applied arts and sciences are evident in the lives of students like recent graduate Phoebe Chua.

*Phoebe Chua '16 video*

Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Ken Burns affirmed the inherent connection between religious faith and the humanities component of a liberal arts education. Speaking at the 2016 Jefferson Lecture he said, *“Our religious traditions suggest that we human beings are made in God’s image. There is almost nothing in our collective behavior that suggests that is true. But every once in a while, we are permitted a glimpse into possibility, into circumstances where human nature changes just a bit...that’s the humanities.”*<sup>v</sup>

This “glimpse into possibility” is exemplified in the outstanding scholarship of humanities faculty like Emerson Powery, professor of biblical studies and co-author of *The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved*. The first chapter of the volume begins with this claim, *“African Americans’ respect for the authority of the Christian Scriptures is a miracle in itself.”* Given that their *“[African Americans’] introduction to the Bible frequently came by way of sermons...directed at ensuring their obedience to their masters.”*<sup>vi</sup> The authors explore the question of how those who were enslaved could ascribe authority to the Bible and extract sources of hope as they glimpsed new possibilities of liberation despite the horrible circumstances of their daily lives.

Our commitment to a liberal arts education that honors the imago dei permeates our curriculum, including Messiah’s general education course requirements—two-thirds of which reside in the liberal arts and sciences. We understand and value the distinct contributions of the Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences to the liberal arts and our educational objective of developing thoughtful and compassionate Christian citizens.

A liberal arts-infused education not only nurtures the life of the mind, it also offers a competitive career edge. When Alison Noble, associate professor of Chemistry, co-led a Messiah College cross-cultural course to Sweden and Norway, she took students to Volvo Headquarters to meet with a company executive who emphasized that *“Volvo not only hires scientists and engineers, but also social scientists and people from the humanities...The design of the product is important, the materials that make up their product are important, but understanding how and why people use (or don’t use) technology, as well as how to communicate well with customers are all integral parts of successful business.”* Alison concludes that *“This breadth of thinking, the development of intellectual humility ...and the ability to hold and examine a thought without necessarily accepting it—are at least three of the distinct advantages of the liberally educated.”*

Because of our deep commitment to the liberal arts, we are diligently working to strengthen all these

programs. We are particularly engaged in combatting the national decline in students majoring in Humanities fields by allocating resources for a multi-year, web-focused student recruitment campaign for the Humanities at Messiah, along with the establishment of a Humanities Scholars program. In the applied arts and sciences, our faculty and students demonstrate a commitment to seeing their disciplines anew and employing their expertise in service to others. One example is the Raptor Hand Project, which brought the promise of a prosthetic hand to a local child. Emily Ferrar, assistant professor of engineering, led a student team to utilize a 3-D printer and open-source design to construct a prosthetic hand for five-year old Emily from the Philadelphia area. Now little Emily can enjoy riding her big-wheel trike because of Messiah's engineering excellence. Team member Jason Yoder told *The Bridge* magazine, "*The encounter with Emily reinforced the career path in engineering I am headed on. Seeing a creation that I helped bring to fruition have an impact on another life was moving and humbling.*"<sup>vii</sup> At Messiah College we are educating students to lead purposeful lives.

Our graduate programs are also enriched by our institutional commitment to the liberal arts and Christian service. Valerie Olson, director of Messiah's new Doctor of Physical Therapy program, suggests that graduates of DPT programs need to understand the global nature of healthcare and they need to demonstrate worldwide sensibilities, "*I'm excited that Messiah is committed to faith and service. Our graduates can give back to their communities and world because they were inspired to do so while training as physical therapists.*"

The strengths of holistic education are a deep well from which we can draw to serve the common good. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner describe the many ways healthy religious institutions contribute to the common good. They are "*sources of conscience, shaping people's conception of justice. They are also irreplaceable sources of compassion, providing services and comfort to suffering people at home...and abroad.*"<sup>viii</sup>

Religious colleges also contribute to the overall richness of higher education discourse. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof defended the value of including Christian perspectives in academic discourse, "*The stakes involve not just fairness to conservatives or evangelical Christians...not just the benefits that come from diversity..., but also the quality of education itself. When perspectives are unrepresented in discussions, when some kinds of thinkers aren't at the table, classrooms become echo chambers rather than sounding boards—and we all lose.*"<sup>ix</sup>

As a community, we have the potential to influence higher education and society for the common good by enlarging the capacity for empathy, hospitality and gratitude among our students and ourselves. A University of Michigan study of 14,000 college students identified an increasing empathy deficit: college students in 2010 scored 40 percent lower in markers for empathy than students 20 or 30 years ago.<sup>x</sup> At Messiah College, our mission inspires us to nurture a community rooted in empathy and hospitality. The Division of Student Affairs has selected "Gracious Communication" as a major programmatic theme for the upcoming academic year. They are partnering with educators from across campus to help students learn to respectfully listen and dialogue about complicated and controversial issues.

In addition, we need to facilitate rituals of gratitude to create a more hospitable campus culture. Existing rituals recognize colleagues' excellent efforts—including the annual employee recognition celebration and the Department of Human Resources-sponsored "Thank You" program, which combines expressions of gratitude with a perennial favorite, chocolate. When you nominate a colleague, a Human Resources team member will send that individual a special thank you message. Now, admittedly this is a small gesture, but think of how our campus climate will be enriched if each of us makes a commitment to frequently express gratitude to deserving colleagues and students.

To be a flourishing community, we must ensure that students and employees experience our campus as welcoming and inclusive. Toward that end, a campus climate survey will be conducted during this academic year to help us accurately identify weaknesses and design a plan to address them.

In order to be a gracious presence for the common good, we must respond with compassionate conviction to those who seek to limit or discredit religious principles and values. The current external environment surrounding Christian higher education, contains potential legal, legislative and accreditation challenges to the right of faith-based institutions to define their missions and live according to their corresponding values as expressed in codes of conduct. The historic strength of American higher education has always been its support of a breadth of collegiate institutions including religious colleges. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities serves as the primary organization to lead federal advocacy efforts on our behalf, and we are in active dialogue with Pennsylvania's religiously affiliated colleges to formulate a state level advocacy strategy.

Messiah College will seek to articulate a clear and compelling case for principled pluralism but we will do so with a spirit of humility and hospitality. The effectiveness of making this case will be critical to the College's future of significance.

In addition, we need to inform the public of the many ways that our region and nation benefit from Messiah College's presence. One notable aspect of that story is the economic and social impact the College has on the mid-Atlantic region. More than 3,600 alumni and employees live in the Capital Region and contribute to the tax base, patronize area businesses and provide significant volunteer hours with community agencies and churches.

Our region is strengthened by Messiah's extensive community engagement efforts. Here is just a sampling:

- Last year, 2,444 students engaged in community service. And, we celebrated a record year of 521 students participating in domestic and international service trips.
- The School of Business, Education and Social Science recently received a Kline Foundation Grant to support service learning and community engagement in Harrisburg.
- Our colleague Michael True is spearheading Messiah's first Employer Workshop for business, non-profit and government sectors.
- In November, on Parmer Hall stage, our Concert Choir will join the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra for a special performance of Gabriel Fauré's beautiful and comforting Requiem.
- Last year, over 21,000 visitors came to The Oakes Museum of Natural History
- AROMA Missions, an organization that strives "*to empower Messiah Athletes to use their gifts and passions in sport to further God's kingdom*" sponsors initiatives that promote reconciliation. In 2009, while Danny Thompson was a men's soccer player, he and other Messiah student-athletes became involved in serving the Muslim Somali refugee families living in nearby Cumberland Pointe. Since then, Danny and his wife Lisa, a former Messiah women's soccer player, have dedicated themselves to building relationships and serving their neighbors. With the help of a cohort of Messiah student-athletes and alumni, they facilitate tutoring, promote interfaith dialogue and sponsor community block parties. Danny told ABC27 news, "*I see myself as standing in the gap*" *between Cumberland Pointe and the surrounding community. "Instead of there being a wall, creating a bridge between those two communities."* <sup>xi</sup>

Even as we express our love for God and neighbor in a changing culture, we are creating a future of significance by embracing the opportunities presented by a *changing student body*. In order to thrive, we must understand how quickly our student body is changing in terms of demographics and their over-reliance on technology. In recent years, we have discussed the challenges of recruiting a full cohort of 18–23 year olds for a traditional, four-year residential program. Meeting realistic but ambitious institutional enrollment targets will require the vigorous recruitment of a student body comprised of not only recent high school graduates but also transfer and graduate students.

In light of these factors, I am delighted to share the good news about Fall enrollment. On Thursday, we

will welcome 691 first-year students— 16 more than our budgeted goal and 86 new transfer students, which is 100 percent of our fall goal. In addition, we recruited this class without increasing our tuition discount rate—counter to national trends. We also continue to make strides in recruiting a more diverse student body. This year, 17.4 percent of our total undergraduate student population is composed of domestic underrepresented and international students—an all-time high and an encouraging sign as we work to achieve the 2020 strategic plan goal of 20 percent. The fall retention rate for first-to-second year students is also healthy—86.4%—a rate that reflects the quality of our educational program and the intellectual challenge and compassionate care students receive from faculty, staff and administrators.

Graduate enrollment remains very strong. Last year, we successfully met our budgeted goal for students and credit hours and FY17 is off to a good start—we have reached 47% of our credit-hour goals as compared to 44% last year at this time. This summer, we launched the College's inaugural doctoral program with 19 students enrolled in the Doctorate of Nursing Practice cohort. Thank you all for your diligent efforts to recruit and retain our students!

Due to the growth of graduate programs, the breadth of the undergraduate curriculum we offer and our institutional commitment to recruit an even greater number of international students, the board of trustees has asked us to research and recommend whether the College should proceed to apply for university status. I look forward to working with a campus task force to determine the advantages, disadvantages and costs related to such a decision.

Amid the changing demographics, transfer students are an increasingly important audience for Messiah. The regional pool of potential transfer students continues to increase as individuals seek to manage college costs by first enrolling at community colleges. Our strategic goal is to annually enroll 100-110 transfer students. To achieve that goal, we need to implement institutional practices that welcome and successfully integrate transfers into our educational community.

One of the most dramatic ways we encounter demographic change among current students is the reality that Generation Z or “Plurals,” (those who were born after 1995) are the most racially diverse generation in our nation's history.<sup>xiii</sup> Inclusive excellence and diversifying our campus community must be core priorities if our institution is to remain viable, and even more, for our institution to flourish. Inclusive excellence is essential to obtaining a more holistic understanding of our academic disciplines, ourselves and an ever-changing world.

My heart has been heavy this summer as I've reflected on our nation's troubled legacy of racism. I pray that our collective resolve as a Christian educational community will be to dedicate ourselves to the Kingdom work of reconciliation. In recent months, we witnessed painful violence in Orlando; Baton Rouge; Dallas and Milwaukee among other communities. We are trying to figure out our way forward nationally, regionally, and as a College. For those of us who benefit most from dominant power structures we have to confront the fact that while “race” may seem invisible to us—even as we benefit from it, racism confronts brothers and sisters of color every day in obvious and insidious ways. Individually and corporately, we miss out on a full spectrum of the power and beauty of community because racism has adversely shaped our public institutions and policies, as well as our personal perspectives and experiences. The Messiah College community's contribution to the common good will not be realized without a commitment to racial justice and reconciliation.

This year, employees and students will have opportunities to engage in educational opportunities that address racism and promote reconciliation as one step toward the goal of fostering honest dialogue and increased understanding, the President's Cabinet, Provost's Cabinet and Student Government Association leaders will join together in a shared reading and facilitated discussion of Drew Hart's book Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism.<sup>xiii</sup> Later this year, all employees will be invited to engage in See Diversity Anew sessions. And, we will continue to sponsor employee and student participation in the annual Civil Rights Journey.

No doubt, we will benefit from the wisdom of outstanding thought leaders who will be visiting campus to address topics of racial justice and reconciliation including Humanities Symposium Keynote Speaker Michelle Alexander, 2017 Commencement speaker, Bryan Stevenson, author of Just Mercy; and Rev. Gabriel Salguero, founder of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition will speak in chapel and meet with educators in February.

Changing our campus culture and working toward inclusive excellence through recruitment and retention of a more diverse community is essential to the College's future of significance. Although, we have made progress in increasing our percentage of domestic underrepresented students, faculty and staff—we need to pursue this change with even more tenacity. Inclusive excellence is both a Kingdom responsibility and an educational necessity.

I have been describing compositional demographic changes in our student body, but I also want to draw attention to another type of change in current students—their overwhelming dependence on technology and our responsibility as educators and supervisors to help our students navigate the role of technology in their lives.

Let's take a look at just a few descriptors of our current students—Millennials & Gen Z:

#### Millennials

1. Millennials prioritize purpose over major <sup>xiv</sup>
2. “They are hyper aware of their image” <sup>xv</sup>
3. They value experiences <sup>xvi</sup>
4. “1 in 4 of them think they will be famous by the time they're 25” <sup>xvii</sup>

#### Gen Z

1. Gen Z doesn't remember a time before Smart Phones <sup>xviii</sup>
2. They are concerned about privacy and prefer Snapchat over Facebook <sup>xix</sup>
3. They have an 8-second filter for new information <sup>xx</sup>

Both generations say they want to make a difference in the world.

For both generations, technology dominates their days just as it increasingly dominates all of our lives. I'm sure we have all observed that person who texts during a salient presentation, whose body is slouched, who seems oblivious to everything except the Smartphone screen. The college chancellor pictured on the screen reportedly texted for 40 minutes while seated onstage during his college's Commencement ceremony. <sup>xxi</sup>

This viral moment reminds us that we must be intentional in helping our students *and ourselves* learn to manage and limit technology, whether we are educating them in the classroom or supervising them at work. As mentors, we need to model the creation of “analog” spaces—places of unplugged reflection and community, characterized by MIT professor Sherry Turkle as “sacred spaces.” She says, “*Create sacred spaces at home—the kitchen, the dining room—and reclaim them for conversation. Do the same thing at work... Most important, we all really need to listen to each other, including the boring bits. Because it's when we stumble or hesitate or lose our words that we reveal ourselves to each other.*” <sup>xxii</sup>

The Residence Life department has already initiated a project along these lines. Residence directors of first-year halls sponsor a one day annual iFast to encourage students to critically examine the role of technology in their lives and the benefits of non-digital personal encounters. All first-year students are invited to fast from technology and engage in community-building activities and corporate worship.

Of course, we can practice moderation, even as we harness the advantages of technology and model purposeful educational use. Our strategic plan calls for us to examine the benefits of offering hybrid

online undergraduate courses which combine traditional classroom instruction alongside technology-based pedagogies particularly as it might benefit transfer and dual-enrolled students.

As we engage with Millennials and Gen Z students, we need to consider how to inspire them toward deeper intellectual engagement through mentorship and research. This generation of students places a high value on being mentored,<sup>xxiii</sup> and engagement in guided research often clarifies vocation and prepares students for a lifetime of intellectual growth and vocational fulfillment.

Elizabeth Arias, a psychology alumna, identifies mentoring as an influential resource in her maturation as a student.

*Elizabeth Arias '16 video*

There are many accounts of Messiah employees investing time, expertise and care in mentoring students. Whenever we sponsor a major campus event or experience a campus medical emergency, we benefit from the mentoring Tom Bennett, senior community safety officer and EMT, provides as advisor to the Messiah College Emergency Medical Services student team. Tom finds fulfillment in helping students gain self-confidence as they learn to develop valuable skills. After graduation, some EMS alumni have elected to work in hospital emergency departments, earned paramedic credentials or enrolled in advanced degree health related programs.

Another way that mentoring enhances the intellectual pursuits of students is through guided research and scholarship. Crystal Downing, professor of English and Film Studies, views mentoring as shaping someone's thought process—it is the time-intensive process of training students in the intellectual rigors of an academic discipline. One alumna credits Crystal's influence with changing "*the way I view and interact with the world (everything from faith to novels to cinema).*" In the past ten years, four Messiah alumni published volumes that included grateful acknowledgements of Crystal's mentoring.

In order to create a future of significance with a changing student body in a changing context, we need to strategically steward all of our available resources—human, facility and financial. Since the Great Recession of 2008, Messiah College has successfully managed financial challenges including:

- the necessity of providing a substantial tuition discount
- limited growth of net tuition revenue
- funding the ever-increasing costs of health care, technology and compliance.

Fulfillment of our educational mission will require the increase and maintenance of a robust financial resource base.

A key aspect of stewardship to sustain our institutional mission is the process of program review. Under the leadership of the Provost, a process for reviewing educational programming will be designed to assess our educational programs in order to make informed decisions related to the strategic allocation and reallocation of resources. The Provost and academic leadership will work with educators and their governance representatives to design an effective process to aid us in realizing long-term institutional strength and vitality. In addition, the President's Cabinet will collaborate with staff and administrative teams to design a plan to review divisional processes, policies and programs.

To accurately identify and plan for the College's facility needs, vice president for operations Kathie Shafer and the consulting team of Dereck and Edson have provided leadership to a campus master planning process that is resulting in a 10-15-year Plan—for facilities and major capital projects. Of course, the availability of funding will influence the timing and implementation of projects. Last fall, many of you offered insightful feedback to the Campus Master Plan, and a final report will be sent to the campus community following the October 2016 Board of Trustees meeting.

Speaking of buildings, construction of the new Wellness and Fitness Center is progressing nicely.

Scheduled to open in August 2017, this facility will address important needs of our nationally-ranked varsity athletic programs, advance applied health curricular programs and facilitate enhanced student life. I am very pleased to report that we are 98 percent toward achieving our campaign fundraising goal. This past summer, we opened the new Winding Hill facility which houses offices, classrooms and laboratories for the occupational and physical therapy programs as well as graduate faculty offices for counseling and the nutrition and dietetic internship programs.

Effective fundraising and financial planning are essential to obtaining the necessary resources to provide an excellent education for our students. By 2020, we will seek to increase our financial resource base by \$45 million through bolstering endowment returns; successfully fundraising for campus projects and endowed student scholarships; and increasing the number of legacy donors. We are blessed to be stewarding relationships with many faithful benefactors while establishing new connections with an ever-widening circle of new donors.

### Conclusion

Times of great change and challenge compel each of us to do our very best work as together we create a future of significance by embracing change as opportunity. Just as Daniel Finch and his community partners kept the big picture of “Lady Commonwealth” in mind as they completed the mural, one small brush stroke at a time, so we too will create a future of significance by accomplishing one goal, one action step at a time. The image displayed on the screen shows Daniel hard at work on an even more ambitious mural—one commissioned by the borough of Lemoyne. Four times the scale of “Lady Commonwealth,” this new mural celebrates the theme of the “Travel Pathways through Lemoyne History” and it will be installed on the long cement wall that greets motorists when they enter Lemoyne via the Interstate 83 exit. Just as Daniel’s murals enrich the beauty in our region, so too the fulfillment of Messiah College’s mission contributes to the beauty and the common good of our region and broader world. Columnist David Brooks described this high calling when he addressed a gathering of Christian college presidents last January,

*“You have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion and intellect. From my point of view, you’re ahead of everyone else and have the potential to influence American culture in a way that could be magnificent.”* <sup>xxiv</sup>

Together, – each one of us – faculty, staff and administrators, let us commit ourselves to the magnificent work of educating our students. Together, may we realize that each act of hospitality, each gesture of gratitude, each act of engaging a student is part of that magnificent work. Together, may we realize that the difficult tasks of determining priorities, allocating resources, changing pedagogy and curricula for a new generation, are also part of that magnificent effort to fulfill our high calling. If we understand this—then this season of change will truly be a time of opportunity as we work together to make God visible to the world through the creation of a future of significance for Messiah College.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>xxii</sup> Sherry Turkle, "Sherry Turkle: Connected, but alone?" TED video, 16:38, filmed February 2012.
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> David Brooks, "The Cultural Value of Christian Higher Education" *CCCU Advance*, Summer 2016, Feature, accessed August 18, 2016.