

Opening Year Meeting
Tuesday, August 26, 2008

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Thank you for taking time out of your day to join us this morning to welcome our new colleagues and to allow me to share my message as we begin the 2008-2009 academic year.

Last year, at this gathering, I shared with you my theme – One Body, One Bethany – for what I hoped we would accomplish together over the year.

This last year, my first at Bethany, has been an incredible journey. I can't thank everyone enough for making me feel welcome and for working hard to begin to return Bethany to its place of prominence among the Great Plains' private colleges.

Today's message is not intended to be my State of the College. I intend to do that again in October when we have received the final draft of our recently completed financial audit and the 20th day numbers are in. At that time, I will provide, in full detail, where we are and where we are headed.

But let me take some time to recap our accomplishments over the last year. We have done much and seen much improvement, because, quite simply, we have begun to come together as One Body, One Bethany. What we have done over the last twelve months could not have been accomplished if we had not worked for a common purpose – Bethany College.

First, we are quickly bringing to reality the addition of almost \$9 million in campus facilities improvements and additions. The new turf at Anderson Stadium is ready and the new track will be ready in a few weeks. The apartments are almost finished and should be occupied by the end of September. The new weight room and locker room should be completed by the start of second semester. Finally, the laboratory science addition should see dirt flying in the next few days and should be completed by the start of the 2009-2010 academic year.

Second, over the last year, we launched two important initiatives and the third will be launched this semester. All three are focused on building a better student experience. The

first was actually launched a year ago and is led by Dean of Students Freda Strack. The charge for the Bethany Intervention Group – BIG – is to track the adjustment of new students, both academically and socially, to Bethany College; to put in place a mechanism to identify those new students who are either academically or socially not adjusting; and to intervene, when necessary, with students who are identified through the alert process.

The second was launched last winter and is led by Dean of Admissions & Financial Aid Tricia Hawk. The charge for Building Enrollment Through Retention – BETR – is to continually research the potential variables that may or are impacting retention of new students; to continually review the literature for research on variables that are impacting retention of new students and may be transferable to Bethany College; to disseminate those campus and literature review research findings to the appropriate offices, staff, or committees for action to improve retention results; to identify peer schools with “best practice” retention and learn from them; and to review changes in policies or practices that resulted from the retention research or are hypothesized to improve retention to continually assess if improvements are occurring, and if possible understanding why.

The final initiative will be launched this semester and will be led by Dean of the Faculty Gene Bales. The charge for the Bethany Experience for Students and Teachers – BEST – is to identify those academic, social, spiritual, and athletic attributes of Bethany College that define an outstanding experience for students; to identify those academic, social, and spiritual attributes of Bethany College that define an outstanding experience for faculty, especially on those attributes that intersect with the student experience; to continually review and assess those attributes for the purpose of implementing or recommending changes to strengthen the Bethany Experience academically, socially, spiritually, and athletically for students and faculty resulting in higher retention and graduation rates for students and higher retention rates for faculty; and to consider NSEE or SSI surveys as a possible structure for assessing and planning a stronger student experience; and to identify and consider a similar survey tool for faculty to assess and plan a stronger faculty experience.

My hope is that through these three initiatives the acronyms can be realized for Bethany College – BIG, BETR, BEST. It will take One Bethany to bring these initiatives to a successful outcome.

Third, our fundraising results this past year were, in a word, outstanding. For only the second time in the last decade, Bethany College raised over \$3,000,000. What makes this milestone even more incredible is that we did this outside of a campaign. It took One Bethany for us to achieve this incredible result.

Fourth, while the numbers are still a bit premature, we are looking at a significant increase in enrollment over last year. As of this morning, we are anticipating a first day enrollment of 585 students, of whom 252 are new students.

We can all be proud of what we have accomplished in the area of student recruitment. Tricia Hawk will tell you loudly and proudly that this only happened because we are becoming One Bethany. Thank you!

Finally, let me mention several other accomplishments that only happened because we came together as One Bethany. Our teacher education program was re-accredited, our athletic training program was accredited, and Bethany College finished 47th out of almost 300 NAIA colleges and universities in the US Sports Academy Directors Cup competition.

I can stand here today, looking back to the horizon of August 2007, and say unequivocally that the Bethany renaissance has begun. The sun is rising on a new day at Bethany College.

This past year, we began to come together as One Body, One Bethany. Together, as One Bethany, we can continue to make progress and tackle what I see as our challenges for 2008-2009.

First, we must continue to make progress and work hard in our efforts to recruit and retain students. We cannot yet declare victory as there is still work to do. The initiatives being led by Freda and Tricia are just starting points. Yes, Admissions leads the effort to recruit, and, yes, Student Life leads the effort to retain, but it takes all of us to achieve success. It will take One Bethany.

Second, while our efforts to grow revenues will continue, we must ratchet up our campus efforts to more effectively manage tuition discounting and expenses. We have not yet

achieved a balanced budget. Our financial model has that happening next year. While the Board of Directors has consented to deficit spending to fund the first phase of the Bethany renaissance, they also expect us to generate a surplus by June 30, 2010. It will take One Bethany.

Finally, and what I believe is our biggest challenge, and a continuing challenge over the next few years leading to the fall 2010 or spring 2011, is the process of reaffirmation of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission. Success in this endeavor will definitely take One Bethany.

This past summer we started that process by appointing the co-chairs of the Self-Study Steering Committee. Let me acknowledge them and publicly thank them for taking on this important leadership role for Bethany. They are Carolyn and Bruce Kahler.

In addition, they have successfully recruited the Steering Committee. Let me acknowledge that committee and publicly thank them for taking on this important leadership role for Bethany. They are

Gene Bales
Denise Carson
Joanne Gunsolley
Brenda Meagher
Woody Meredith
Janelle Pearl
Janie Tubbs

I cannot thank them enough for their commitment to take on this important job. Let us all show our appreciation and thanks!

Let me make a few remarks about our self-study and how important I believe this undertaking is to Bethany College.

First, and foremost, I hope we all embrace self-study, not as a compliance activity that we are required to do, but as an opportunity for self-assessment and improvement that we

want to do. The self-study is the foundation upon which reaffirmation of accreditation will be based.

Furthermore, self-study will be critical and integral to our ongoing strategic planning. Because I believe that strategic planning is iterative, the self-study will allow us to make course corrections as new information is discovered.

Additionally, I see the self-study as part of my commitment to shared governance. If Bethany is committed to shared governance, and over the last year I have been led to believe it is, then we all must share in the hard work as well as share in the success of our efforts.

Furthermore, self-study, as I mentioned a moment ago, flows into strategic planning and strategic planning is how we will govern our work as One Bethany.

In addition to the shared governance work of self-study and strategic planning, over the next few weeks, we will be putting in place two more opportunities for shared governance.

The first is the Budget Advisory Council. This group will advise the President, the President's Council, and the Board of Directors on the construction and monitoring of the annual budget; in the development of a longer-term financial plan to ensure that the college budget supports the college's mission, vision, and strategy; and in linking the college budget with college planning.

The second is the Information Technology Advisory Council. Its purpose is to proactively support the appropriate use of information technology in achieving and maintaining the mission, vision, and strategy of the College. This council is being established to help assure information technology is provided the appropriate attention at Bethany College, and is intended to be a mechanism to help develop sustainable efforts to coordinate the strategic, tactical, operational, informational, and financial issues of information technology at Bethany College.

Let me conclude by pulling these comments together by announcing that our theme for the 2008-2009 academic year will be, "Many Gifts, One Bethany."

The inspiration for this year's theme is Romans 12:5-6a: ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us ..."

I want to continue to focus and to lift up our desire to become One Bethany. This year, however, I would like to also lift up that our campus family is blessed with many individuals who bring with them to Bethany many gifts.

So, we, who are many, are one body in Bethany, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us:

- the teacher, in teaching;
- the student, in learning;
- the coach, in guiding;
- the athlete, in competing;
- the leader, in serving;
- the follower, in diligence;
- the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let's have a great year, let's work hard and have fun – with Many Gifts, as One Bethany!

As we conclude today's opening year meeting, officially beginning the new academic year, let's go forth and begin the year with these Bethany "sending" words, similar to the liturgical sending which serves as a reminder to the people about why they came to church – to go and to do something.

Let me send all of us into the 2008-2009 academic year – to go and to do something – with these sending words, "Go Swedes. Serve the Lord."

Thanks be to God.