

Opening Year Meeting **Tuesday, August 21, 2007**

Let me greet you this morning with a familiar Pauline greeting:
"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 2007-2008 academic year.

Let me also mention that, in late September, when we have received the draft of our recently completed financial audit, I will extend an invitation to the campus community to convene again so that I may share the State of the College. At that time, I will provide, in great detail, where we are and the challenges that are before us.

Today, however, I would like to share my theme and priorities for the coming year as we begin, what I'm calling, Bethany's Renaissance.

To begin, let me share Paul's words in his first letter to the Corinthians:

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ... ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-19, 27)

I have intentionally chosen this passage because I believe it speaks to my first observation of Bethany College and what I choose to focus on during my first year. I shared this passage and my observations last week at both the President's Cabinet retreat and the Board of Director's retreat.

My first observation is that too much of Bethany acts individually and not part of the one body of Bethany. I have seen, quite candidly, the right hand and the left hand work at cross purposes. I have seen one office become frustrated with another office because there was a lack of communication – too much being an individual and not being part of the one body of Bethany.

As we begin the new year, let us resolve ourselves to becoming one body, one Bethany. Accordingly, I would like that to serve as our theme for the year ahead. In fact, One Body, One Bethany will be the theme of the Campus Leadership Retreat later this month that will bring administrators, faculty, students, and support staff – about 30 in all – together to begin focusing on how we as a campus community can become One Body, One Bethany. All year, I will encourage our campus leaders to lead with that theme in mind.

While One Body, One Bethany is my theme for the year, my overarching vision for Bethany, in the years to come, is to lead Bethany into a renaissance. To begin, over the next year, as a broadly-defined Bethany community – representing the campus, Lindsborg, the church, alumni, parents, and friends – we will revisit our mission and values, and either recommit to them or make them stronger.

We will develop a promise statement of what the Bethany Experience will strive to deliver to our students.

We will develop a vision statement looking out 10 years and 24 years to our sesquicentennial.

These activities will be under the leadership of a Strategic Planning Council that will emerge from the Campus Leadership Retreat I mentioned a moment ago.

But with that strategic planning in mind, we must still move forward and I believe there are four cornerstones to Bethany's Renaissance that must begin immediately.

The first and second cornerstones of Bethany's Renaissance are recruitment and retention. I will provide more specifics of where Bethany has been and where our planning must take us in regards to enrollment at the State of the College in late September. For today's purposes, let me remind everyone Bethany College is an enrollment-driven college. Our budget is driven by the number of students who attend. Over the last 25 years, our enrollment has slowly declined from around 800 to around 500.

There are two concurrent strategies that we must aggressively pursue to grow enrollment: recruitment and retention. There is planning in place to proactively turn this around. But let me stress, that it takes a campus to recruit a student and it takes a campus to retain a student.

Because this is important, let me say that again. It takes a campus to recruit a student and it takes a campus to retain a student.

Recently, I learned of an analysis that was done by Professor Paul Gentine back in 2001. That analysis, which I would call an enrollment opportunity analysis, looked at current curricular and co-curricular program sizes and their potential capacities. This effort's purpose was to assist the College in identifying where the growth opportunities were.

I have asked Professor Gentine, and he has graciously accepted, to update that enrollment opportunity analysis. If you are called on to assist, please help. It takes a campus. It will take One Body, One Bethany.

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 Body, One Bethany.

Let me also add that, as I have taken a first look at the numbers, at this time I am persuaded our real challenge lies with retention. Over the last three years, freshmen-to-sophomore retention has been 55%, 61%, and 55%, respectively. I believe the quality of the academic program at Bethany should support a freshmen-to-sophomore retention that far exceeds 57% - the average over the last three years.

To begin to tackle retention, we must become One Body, One Bethany, which leads me to the third cornerstone.

The third cornerstone is relationships, and that ties back to retention because the research on retention is clear and conclusive. Retention can be addressed and significantly improved when students are connected. Relationships with fellow students, faculty, coaches, and staff form those connections.

Under the leadership of Freda Strack and Jessica Schierling, they have put a plan in place where a group will be meeting weekly to discuss our new students and to identify and to intervene with those students who are struggling to connect to Bethany. They are creating a system of building relationships with our new students. You can help – as One Body, One Bethany – by building relationships

yourself and by sharing your concerns about students, if any, who are not connecting with Bethany.

But relationships, as a cornerstone, go far beyond building relationships with students. Building wider and deeper relationships must also occur with the Lindsborg community, our alumni community, our parents, friends, and the three synods that support the College.

By building wider and deeper relationships with our many and varied stakeholders, we will, at the same time, truly build One Body, One Bethany.

The final cornerstone is resources. When we are successful with the other three cornerstones – recruitment, retention, and relationships – we will then see our resources grow. By resources, I mean more faculty and staff, better pay, enhanced buildings and grounds, and improved technology. I agree wholeheartedly with the comments shared with me by numerous folks on campus and around Lindsborg, “The College is under-staffed and under-paid.”

But, please understand where I’m coming from, we cannot strengthen our resources – human, financial, physical, and technological – until we are first successful in recruiting and retaining students. So, you see, the four cornerstones form the foundation for my envisioned Bethany renaissance, where all four are interconnected and interrelated to each other.

To hold the four cornerstones in place is the mortar, which, for me, is renewal. As we move forward, creating a Bethany renaissance, we must make renewal a part of our college’s culture.

As I look at renewal, I see two parts to it right now. The first, over the near-term, would be pride in community and pride on campus. Or, you could define this aspect of renewal as the swagger is back.

I see the definition of success in making progress in this aspect of renewal as a clear and obvious expression of One Body, One Bethany through such simple means as a clean and well maintained campus grounds and buildings and increased attendance at campus events by students, faculty, and staff. In other words, I believe, if we are proud and if the swagger is back, then success in achieving One Body, One Bethany will be seen and felt.

The second part of renewal, over the long-term, simply put, is about asking and acting on, “How are we doing? How can we do better?”

Call this one renewal, or call it continuous improvement, or call it kaizen, or call it assessment – as a college we must commit ourselves to make ourselves better every day.

In fact, we have already started down that path. Administratively, last winter an assessment of the admissions office was conducted and we are now acting on those recommendations. Last spring, an assessment of the student life office was conducted and we are now acting on those recommendations. This week, an assessment of the financial aid office will be conducted and, next week, an assessment of the advancement office will occur.

Additionally, this past Saturday, during the Board of Director's retreat, we began a conversation that will conclude at the October board meeting centering on presidential assessment and board assessment.

Assessment has been circulating in the academic arena for the last few years with varying degrees of success and, it will, be a focus of the College's upcoming NCATE re-accreditation visit.

My point is, to achieve a renaissance we must achieve a college-wide commitment, and thereby success in, recruitment, retention, relationships, and resources – all bound tightly with an ongoing commitment to renewal.

To bring these remarks to a close, let me conclude where I started by reminding all of us that we will build the future on rock and not sand – and that rock is One Body, One Bethany.

If the faculty were to say, 'Because I am not admissions, I do not belong to Bethany', that would not make them any less a part of Bethany. And if students were to say, 'Because I am not the business office, I do not belong to Bethany', that would not make them any less a part of Bethany. If Bethany were about finances, where would athletics be? If Bethany were about alumni, where would the importance of the physical plant be? If all were a single member, where would Bethany be? As it is, there are many members, yet one Bethany. Now we are the body of Bethany and individually members of it.

Let's have a great year, let's work hard and have fun – as One Body, as One Bethany, as Terrible Swedes!