

Opening Convocation **Wednesday, August 29, 2007**

Let me greet you this morning with Paul's greeting to the Corinthians, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This has been an incredibly busy month for me and for Bethany College. In fact, today marks the anniversary of my fourth week as President. I would like to thank everyone for the warm welcome I have received.

I have shared with others that the last four weeks have been like drinking from a fire hose. Not a negative comment, but one that is rather descript of all the people, faces, facts, and figures that I have been trying to absorb.

Over the last four weeks, I have been around campus and I have been downtown to visit businesses, to have coffee, and, even, to enjoy the Stuga. I have been to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and both the Board of Director's and President's Cabinet each held retreats to begin shaping Bethany's future. I have met with the faculty and the Alumni Council. We have been through New Student Orientation and classes have begun.

Looking ahead, the next eight weeks will be even busier. During the month of September, I will become a resident in three of our residence halls. Starting this Sunday, I will become a resident of Warner-Third floor; starting Sunday, September 9, I move into Gregory-First floor; and, finally, on Sunday, September 16, I move into ASH-Second floor.

Also, I am working with the Advancement Office on the logistics to visit alumni and friends of Bethany College in Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Denver, Albuquerque, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, California, and North Carolina. In addition, I will have the normal fall campus activities of Family & Sports Weekend, Homecoming, Hyllningfest, and the fall Board of Director's meeting.

On top of all this, in late September, when we reach the 20th class day, the date we use to make official our fall enrollment numbers, and when we receive the draft of our completed financial audit, I will extend an invitation to the entire 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, the challenges that are before us, and our immediate plans to address those challenges.

Again, let me welcome our new students, our new faculty, and our new staff. I hope you are finding your reception to the Bethany community as welcoming as I have found it to be.

As Bethany's new President, this is my first Opening Convocation. For the freshmen who are here today, you may be feeling, as I did 32 years ago when I attended my first Opening Convocation, "I'm not in high school any longer." As you participate in your first academic convocation and observe the faculty, and others, in our academic regalia, you may now feel you're in the big leagues.

Well, welcome to the big leagues! But always remember, all of us are here to help you be successful!

Four weeks ago today, at the Opening Worship on my first day, the reading Pastor Noni Strand chose was from Paul's First letter to the Corinthians: "¹⁷Because there is one bread, **we who are many are one body**, for we all partake of the one bread."

"We who are many are one body."

In fact, during that same Opening Worship service, Noni additionally chose as one of the hymns, "As The Grains of Wheat," which makes the same point as Paul: "As the grains of wheat, once scattered on the hill, were gathered into one to become our bread, so may all your people, from all the ends of earth, be gathered into one in you."

This morning, I would like to focus on that passage from Corinthians because, as I shared with the faculty and staff last week and with the President's Council and Board of Director's the week before last, our theme as a College this next year will be "One Body, One Bethany."

Now that I stand before the entire Bethany campus community – students, faculty, and staff – I would like to explore that theme in a bit more depth.

Let me begin where I ended my remarks to the faculty and staff at last week's Opening Year Meeting, my paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12.

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.

As we begin the 2007-2008 Academic Year, let us commit ourselves to become one Body, one Bethany. In fact, One Body, One Bethany will be the theme of the Campus Leadership Retreat this upcoming weekend 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 those campus leaders to lead with that theme in mind: that we are the body of Bethany and individually members of it.

While One Body, One Bethany is our theme for the year, my overarching vision for Bethany, in the years to come, is to lead Bethany into a renaissance – to build a better, stronger, bigger Bethany College. As has been pointed out to me, and I do believe it's true, all the pieces are in place for Bethany to reach higher. Accordingly, I firmly believe that with God's grace, a good plan, and hard work, there will be a Bethany renaissance.

To begin that planning, we will first focus on our guiding principles. These guiding principles will be, if you will, our magnet North – keeping us focused and on course in the years to come.

Accordingly, over the next year, as a broad community – representing faculty, staff, students, the Lindsborg community, 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 vision statement looking out 10 years and 24 years to our sesquicentennial. I aspire for a bold, audacious vision – to quote Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in their book *Built to Last* – that answers “such questions as: ‘Does it get our juices flowing? Do we find it stimulating? Does it stimulate forward momentum? Does it get people going?’ ... Indeed, the envisioned future should produce a bit of the ‘gulp factor’: when it dawns on people what it will take to achieve the [vision], there should be an almost audible ‘gulp.’”

In addition to mission, vision, and values, we will also develop a promise statement of what the Bethany Experience will strive to deliver to our students. That promise will define, clearly and intentionally, what is important, believable, and distinctive in the Bethany Experience and in guiding what students can come to expect from the Bethany Experience.

Of course, once we define what our promise is, then we will have to have a community conversation on how to best deliver that promise. After all, we must complete the loop: promises made; promises delivered; promises kept.

On this point, let me digress for a moment. I believe it is critical for Bethany College to distinguish itself from our many competitors – to be heard in a noisy marketplace – we must embrace, “It’s all about the experience:” the experience in the classroom, in the residence halls, on athletic teams, and in every activity. We must embrace the concept of a total experience.

Of course, the starting point to building a better, stronger, bigger Bethany Experience is that we must never forget that we are a student-centered college. In all that we do, we must never forget it’s all about the students and building the best possible total student experience.

Finally, as we develop, re-commit, and/or strengthen our guiding principles, we must value and appreciate that Bethany College was founded by Lutherans and is rooted in Christ. As part of the mission and ministry of the ELCA, through the Central States, Arkansas-Oklahoma, and Rocky Mountain Synods, we must prepare our graduates, to the fullest extent possible, to live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. We must help our students grow, not only in learning, but also in their faith. “To not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, so that that may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

In bringing my remarks, this morning, to a close, I would like to share with all of you, what I’m calling, the **Bethan-E’s**. That’s B-e-t-h-a-n-(capital)E: Bethan-E.

Yes, each phrase begins with the letter “E,” and they are:

Expect the best.

As students, expect the best from your professors in their teaching. As professors, expect the best from your students in their learning. As One Body, One Bethany, expect the best from me, because I expect the best of you. Ask yourself and others, "How am I doing? What can I do better?"

Excellence should be valued and delivered every day.

Strive for excellence every day in the classroom, on the stage, on the field, or in the office. Quite simply, if you're not going to do it excellently, then don't do it at all!

Experience the richness and fullness of Bethany College as a student, professor, employee, coach. It's all about the experience and forming the connections that build a better and stronger experience.

Enrich yourself with lifelong friends and mentors.

Embrace those relationships that will last a life time – with friends, colleagues, professors, and coaches.

Empowered to serve. **Equipped** to seek.

Serve the Lord. Serve God by serving others. Seek God and seek that of God in every person.

Enjoy yourself – have fun!

Those are my Bethan-E's to frame our working, our learning, our teaching, our performing, our competing, and our playing. If we can continually strive to live out the Bethan-E's, then we will create a Bethany College ready to soar to new heights.

Lastly, let me conclude by sharing that during the recent ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the Rev. Gladys Moore, dean of religious and spiritual life at Mount Holyoke College, delivered a presentation on the "sending" words that Lutherans recite at the conclusion of worship services. In her presentation, Pastor Moore reflected on what Lutherans mean when they say, "Go in peace. Share the good news." The sending sentence serves as a reminder to people about why they came to church – to go and to do something. Or, as Pastor Moore put it, "We are blessed and we are to be a blessing."

So, let me send all of you with these words, "Go Swedes. Serve the Lord."