

OPENING REMARKS – May 31, 2007

Dr. Edward F. Leonard III

I am humbled and honored to stand before you as Bethany College's next President – the 13th President since Bethany's founding in 1881.

I wish my wife and best friend, Sheila, could be here with me. Sheila's commitments, however, to our church and to our community's Relay for Life prevent her from being here today. If God ever gave me evidence of His love for me, it was the day He brought Sheila into my life.

I would like to thank the Presidential Search Advisory Committee for its service and hard work. Kathleen Hurty, the chair of the search advisory committee, said it best in her congratulatory e-mail to me, "It has been a long, and surely fruitful journey for you and Sheila, for the Presidential Search Advisory Committee, for the Board of Directors, and for all our wonderful alumni and other partners."

I would like to especially thank Dr. Bob Vogel for his stewardship these last few months and for laying a solid foundation for me when I start later this summer.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Board of Directors for their confidence in selecting me to serve and lead Bethany College at this time in its history.

While on the subject of history, over the last few days, I re-read *Bethany In Kansas: The History of a College* by Emory Lindquist, Bethany's 4th President. As I re-read Bethany's history up to 1974, I took note of a couple items of interest as it relates to Bethany College and me.

First, Carl Aaron Swensson, Bethany's 2nd President, was born in '57. I too was born in '57. Of course, President Swensson was born in 1857 and I was born in 1957.

More importantly, however, President Swensson was described as a person of faith and optimism who frequently said, "tomorrow it will be better."

As you get to know me, you will find that President Swensson and I share that personality trait. I too am a person of faith and optimism – and I live and believe that "tomorrow it will be better."

Second, I did not lose sight of the fact that 40 years and 2 days ago – on May 29, 1967 – Bethany's 8th President, Arvin Hahn, was introduced to the Bethany community. At that introduction, President Hahn observed, "I have lots of ideas. I have plans to make a list of some of them, then begin to assign priorities." President Lindquist, in his book, went on to add, "It soon became apparent that President Hahn had many fine ideas which would be translated into meaningful action within a surprisingly short time."

Inspired by President Hahn and that time in Bethany's history, I would observe on the occasion of my introduction that whatever challenges lie before Bethany can be fixed, with God's help, by a good plan and hard work.

Throughout my life, I have been firmly rooted in the belief that little happens by chance. That what is frequently assigned the label of coincidence is in reality God's will or God's hand. That life's events are part of God's purpose or calling to each of us.

Was it coincidence that brought Sheila and me to Faith Lutheran Church in the winter of 2000 when, together, we decided the church we were attending at the time was not spiritually feeding us? Or, was it God who brought us to Faith Lutheran to introduce us to Martin Luther and his notion of calling and vocation in preparation for our call to Bethany College?

Was it coincidence that had Amy Pettijohn, a Bethany student finishing her junior year, sharing the message at the campus worship service during our visit to Bethany in early May? Or, was it God who wanted us – me – to hear how one student found Christ and discerned God’s call for her life while at Bethany?

Was it coincidence that the New Testament reading in the daily devotional *The Word In Season* for Tuesday, May 8th – the second day of our campus visit – included Romans 12:2 – one of my favorite passages and a passage I believe is God’s charge to Lutheran higher education?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (NRSV)

Or, was it God giving me a gentle tap on the shoulder? (Usually, God needs to smack me on the back of the head to get my attention, but not this time.)

You may call it coincidence and that’s ok. I will, however, continue to believe it was all part of God’s call to me.

Let me finish my remarks by looking to the future. For me, that future is inspired by this lapel pin – Bethany’s symbol. When this design was adopted in 1968 as the College’s new symbol – “a white bird in flight on a blue background” – its creator, alumnus Harold “Cotton” Smith, Jr., described the design as “a symbol of soaring and learning.”

That’s my inspiration for Bethany’s future – soaring and learning! More specifically, soaring.

Over the last few months, the College’s short-term action plan has been called, “Run To Daylight.” This is certainly an apt title and the results will bear it out. Look around the campus and you can see the visible changes taking place. Talk to the Board, faculty, staff, and students and you can hear the excitement in their voice. The enthusiasm excited both Sheila and me during our campus visit.

Over the next 18 months, I envision Run To Daylight will transition into Soar To New Heights. Working with the Presidential Transition Committee, the Board of Directors, the President’s Cabinet, and other leaders and members of the broader Bethany community, I want to see Bethany craft a shared vision and strategic plan for our future. A vision and plan that is framed by Bethany’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and, more importantly, results.

What are our strengths? ... leveraging those assets that will enhance our visibility, reputation, and competitive advantage ... and that will define and shape a better and stronger *Bethany Experience*.

What are our opportunities? ... waiting to be seized ... taking calculated risks to get outside of the box to expand our capacity as a 21st century small, liberal arts, Lutheran college.

What are our aspirations? ... dreaming dreams and creating a shared vision of the future for Bethany College in 10 years and in 24 years at the sesquicentennial celebration.

What are the results? ... to soar requires achieving measurable results.

Lastly, as we go forward, let me close by again borrowing from President Lindquist. As we look to our shared future together, the new Bethany will find its resources in the old Bethany – rediscovered, revitalized, enriched, and thrust into the future with faith, wisdom, and energy.

Go, Swedes! It’s time to soar!