

Opening Worship August 26, 2009

Welcome to Bethany College!

As you begin your Bethany experience, let me quickly share with you what I believe are the four themes that define Bethany College.

The first theme is our Swedish Lutheran, or Augustana, heritage. As you will learn, Bethany College was born in that sacristy on October 15, 1881. As a descendant college of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the values of the Augustana heritage live on in Bethany today as they inform our college life and indeed the Bethany experience. For example, at Bethany you will find ...

- "the wider college:" meaning a strong sense of community through our shared purpose, heritage, and networks;
- Ecumenism, or belonging to a wider fellowship of Christians around the world; and
- mission and outreach; that is, a college with a role in the world.

The second theme of academics is, first and foremost, centered on Bethany's faculty. Virtually every alumnus I have met over the last two years holds one or more professors close to the heart. The closeness of our professors to our students, the approachability and accessibility of our faculty, and the care and concern expressed by faculty toward students all shape our academic theme. Bethany's faculty have always put teaching first and that has always meant putting students first.

The third theme – art & music – is best explained in the words of Bethany College's 4th president, Emory Lindquist, who wrote in his history of the college, *Bethany In Kansas*, "The achievement in music and art has identified Bethany College as a unique and distinctive collegiate institution with great cultural resources."

The final theme is athletics and is best described by the story of Bennie Owen. In 1902, Bennie Owen was hired as coach to all sports and chemistry professor. Bennie Owen's three years at Bethany produced the greatest record of victories and attracted national attention. During Owen's three years, the "Terrible Swedes" – as the team became known – was 22-2-2 and compiled 796 points to their opponents 34 points. In 1903 and 1904, Bethany College defeated the University of Oklahoma, who hired Owen away following the 1904 season.

These four themes – Augustana, academics, art & music, and athletics – have shaped Bethany College for almost 128 years. Allow them to shape you. Allow us to help you become the person you are meant to become. Allow us to help you hear the voice of God calling you on your life's path.

Or as writer and teacher Parker Palmer elaborated, "Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent."

But, remember, as the Old Testament story of the prophet Elijah reminds us, it will not come in a great wind, or earthquake, or fire, but as a still small voice.

Let us help you hear the still small voice inside you. Let us help you listen to what your life is telling you. That is, after all, our mission and our promise.

As I conclude and officially welcome you as new students of Bethany College, let me do that with "sending" words that Lutherans recite at the end of our worship service. The liturgical sending serves as a reminder to the people about why they came to church – to go and to do something.

So, let me send you into your Bethany experience – to go and to do something – with these words, "Go Swedes. Serve the Lord."

Thanks be to God.