

## Engage the Future: Visions for 2031

Imagine with me it's October 1881. Imagine the buzz around Lindsborg. "Did you hear Swensson's starting his school?" "Impossible! This air castle of his will never last a year!"

Fast forward to today where we are celebrating the college's 130th anniversary. More importantly, we honor the boldness and compelling qualities of our founder, the Rev. Dr. Carl Aaron Swensson. Singlehandedly his dream became a vision and then a reality. Swensson did the difficult, if not the impossible. We are here to honor and celebrate Swensson's "air castle," as his naysayers called it. We are here because it's time to envision our next air castle, our next bold and transformational vision.

Bethany is at a defining moment in its history. These past four years we have done the difficult, if not the impossible. On my first day on the job, I declared, "With God's grace, a good plan and hard work, there will be a Bethany renaissance." And to make that happen, I started asking, "What's next? What's the path forward?"

Over the last four years, as we developed and are now executing our renaissance plan, our *Call to Action*, enrollment has grown each year from 537 in 2007 to 632 this fall. That represents an almost 18% growth in enrollment and is only the third time since 1970 that Bethany has had four consecutive years of enrollment growth. Furthermore, it represents the biggest four-year growth since 1970. Regarding enrollment, I am not here to declare victory, though we have done the difficult. Quite to the contrary, I stand here to ask, "What's next? What's the path forward?"

Helping drive enrollment growth is our progress on freshman-to-sophomore retention, which has challenged Bethany for at least four decades. Over the last four years our retention has improved from 53% to 59% to 62% to this year's 64%. On retention, I am not here to declare victory, though we have done the difficult. Quite to the contrary, I stand here to ask, "What's next? What's the path forward?"

Four years ago I arrived at Bethany challenged by a deficit budget. In fact, for many years over the last 20 years, Bethany found itself trying to compete and survive with deficit budgets. We all know that is not sustainable. This year however we have and are expecting a balanced operating budget. I am not here to declare victory, though we have done the difficult. Quite to the contrary, I stand here to ask, "What's next? What's the path forward?"

I share these bits of information because many of you were critical to Bethany's survival these last 20 years. To each of you, from my heart, I say, "Thank you!"

But we also invited you to help us celebrate because our future isn't just about surviving – it's about thriving. And we want you to be part of that bright future as well. I want to share with you what the Board of Directors, the faculty and staff, the college's leadership and I envision as that future.

Inspired by Swensson, as we look toward Bethany's 150th anniversary in 2031, **we must continue to expect from ourselves the difficult, if not the impossible.** We must boldly engage the future and audaciously blaze a path to 2031.

As we look to Bethany's sesquicentennial, a mere 20 years from now, we envision a Bethany that will soar bigger, bolder and stronger, guiding student success and co-creating the best total experience. Specifically, we envision a Bethany with 1,500 students from 50 states and 50 countries where 25% are international students; 84% of freshmen continue to the sophomore year; and 30% of alumni financially support the college.

We further aspire for an endowment of \$100 million that gives Bethany a competitive advantage in scholarship support for students and discovery support for faculty, staff and students. We also see a campus that is totally accessible physically and economically; facilities and technology that are state of practice to prepare our graduates for a career of consequence; and a Bethany that embraces and lives with equity and equality throughout the college, most especially in gender and race.

Lastly, we envision a Bethany that is a strategic partner with the city of Lindsborg and together we are a national model of town-gown best practices.

The psalmist wrote, "Show me your ways, O Lord; Teach me your paths." At Bethany, as a college of the Lutheran church, we ask our students, "What does this mean and what path will you take?" As we gulped at this bold, audacious vision, we too asked ourselves, "What does this mean for Bethany's future and what strategic paths will we take to get there?"

Like the bold and audacious Swedish-Lutheran pioneers who journeyed here to found this city and this college, our future students' journey through Bethany will require a pathway to follow to success, a compass to provide direction, a map to track progress and one or more guides.

This new, college-defining initiative, which we are calling *Bethany Pathway*, will launch next fall in 2012 for freshmen and then expand each year until it touches every freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior. The map will be the *Pathway Portfolio* and their guide will be faculty and staff serving as discovery partners or mentors.

As students grow in the success skills of critical thinking, effective communication, information literacy and intellectual curiosity, learning is tracked by a *Pathway Portfolio*. This portfolio maps academic work and progress, co-curricular activities and achievements, and professional experiences. Taken together, the portfolio enables students to reflect and find meaning on the intersection of their paths and passions to demonstrate to prospective employers or graduate schools growth and mastery of these success skills.

To assist students in navigating their pathway is the compass and its four directions of excellence.

The first direction of excellence is discovery, reflection and vocation. It drives students' learning where success will be marked at graduation by critical thinking, effective communication, information literacy, intellectual curiosity and employment or graduate school entry within six months.

The second direction of excellence is servant leadership and follows the example of Jesus of Nazareth who led and served, spanning boundaries in service of a larger vision. Our graduates will go out spanning boundaries to create new visions as educational, business, entrepreneurial or missional leaders.

Global citizenship is our third direction of excellence and prepares our graduates to function successfully in a "flattening world," enabling each graduate to appreciate a world view and to develop the ability and desire to become engaged in global issues.

The final direction is sustainable living and defines success as actively integrating social responsibility, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship and spiritual renewal – people, profit, planet and prayer – meaning our graduates successfully understand how to live a sustainable life and how to lead a sustainable organization.

To achieve this 20 year vision and transform the Bethany experience, we will embark on a series of fundraising campaigns to levels previously unimagined. For this vision to be realized, Bethany alumni, friends, churches and organizations must answer the call to levels previously unimagined. Accordingly, we will pursue in this first campaign a stretch goal of \$25 million.

This campaign actually began when our renaissance began more than four years ago, and we've been successful in securing many gifts and pledges toward our goal. Tonight is the public announcement and I am pleased to share that with the gifts and pledges made in the early phase of the campaign, significant progress has already been made toward our goal. Gifts and pledges received by the college as of today (10/7/2011) total \$13,071,223.

Beyond just the dollars, however, this campaign also presents an opportunity for everyone to participate. That is why we are calling it a “comprehensive campaign.” Comprehensive because the campaign includes gifts to brick and mortar, endowment and current operations. Comprehensive because any gift made during the campaign will be counted toward the stretch goal of \$25 million. Comprehensive because we need high levels of participation to achieve success.

What does this mean for you? Simply answered, what path will you take to support Bethany? Which area of the college has the greatest meaning for you? If you are thankful for your educational, co-curricular or spiritual experience, please consider giving to facilities enhancements or bringing the chapel and welcome center to completion? If you are thankful for the scholarships you received to help make your education affordable, please consider giving to the general scholarship fund or establishing your own endowed scholarship? If you are excited about *Bethany Pathway*, please consider giving to the Bethany Fund? This campaign has a place for everyone to help and we need everyone to help.

Imagine with me it's a few years from now. Imagine a graduating senior writing the following final *Pathway Portfolio* entry:

“Tomorrow is graduation! I can’t believe it’s been four years already. My last assignment at Bethany is to make my final portfolio entry: a self-reflection piece capturing my four years and how I changed and grew.

“When I arrived to begin my Bethany education, I was overwhelmed with how friendly everyone was. I immediately felt I had found my new home. Yet, while I felt at home, I also began to be challenged and knew I was going to be a different person at graduation than I was at orientation. There were so many things to consider.

“My academic advisor was incredible – always around when I needed her and always full of good counsel. She was a real mentor to me as she guided my class selections and asked challenging questions as I explored different career paths. I’m starting to understand this vocation idea that Bethany talks about a lot. Inside each of us is a small voice trying to guide our choices on what path to take. We just need to stop and listen.

“What I really enjoyed about my first year was the common freshmen courses. There are four of them and each focuses on a Bethany “direction of excellence.” I recall it being a pretty fancy term to grasp at first, but simply it’s just how Bethany guides us to find success.

“The first course is all about a new way to learn that was very different from high school, but awesome. Instead of the professor talking to us, the professor worked alongside us, like a teaching partner. Bethany actually calls them a discovery partner. Because the class was so active and engaging, I never missed and couldn’t wait for more. My roommate felt the same way.

“What made the course especially difficult – but intriguing – was trying to figure out what things meant. Through all four years my professors kept asking, “What does this mean?” At first, I didn’t get it, but after a while it finally clicked and I figured out they just wanted me to learn from what was happening in my classes, on my team, and in my life. *All the time*. How different!

“The other courses my freshmen year, after the first one on discovery, reflection and vocation, focused on servant leadership, global citizenship and sustainable living. These ideas are everywhere at Bethany.

“I had the opportunity to do a mission trip to Tanzania as part of global citizenship and Bethany gave me a scholarship to help cover the costs. While I was in Tanzania I recognized something important about how small scale capitalism can empower people. Part of my experience included working with an organization that gave out micro-grants in a quickly urbanizing area. This was a powerful experience for me and helped me decide the kind of company I wanted to work for after graduation and it helped me get my first job.

“In fact, the man who hired me told me that my resume stood out because of the broad experiences I had in college, like my time in Tanzania and my other EBEs (Experience-Based Education). He also told me that even though I was interviewing for a sales job the portfolio I brought with me showing what I did and learned at Bethany was unique and impressive. He said he wished more colleges would teach students how to think and how to learn the way Bethany has.

“Finally, the faculty and staff at Bethany always believed in me and that there was a successful person inside. I just needed to find that success and bring it out. With their help, I believe I did!”

Thank you again for all you have done and will do for dear ol' Bethany. Because of those who love Bethany like you, we can celebrate 130 years of changing lives. More importantly, however, because of those who love Bethany like you, we will soar to our sesquicentennial bigger, better and stronger, guiding student success and co-creating the best total experience. This vision and first campaign most certainly represent a defining moment in our history. They also most certainly represent a clarion call to the many who love Bethany to respond to the ancient Hebrew call to action, "If not me, who? If not now, when?"