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Building On Ancient Foundations

State of the University Address

Philip W. Eaton, President, September 21, 2005

My thanks to Dr. Congdon for his warm introduction. Thank you Bruce. I would like to thank Tami Anderson and all of the team participating in the worship service. And to our pastor, Mark Abbott, for his wonderful reflections.

And my welcome to all of you as we begin the 2005 academic year.

Can you believe the beauty of this morning! We hope it holds as our eager, young Freshmen and their parents arrive. This is the way the academic year should begin: the strong glimpse and feel of fall; the sense of new beginnings; a huge number of new people entering into our community. What excitement!

By the way, have you seen the entry archway to Tiffany Loop? Is that cool or what? We have intended this to be the monument entrance to the historic campus. My wife Sharon has been arguing for this for years. I met some students the other night and asked them what they thought. It's okay, they said. And I went nuts. Okay? It's fantastic.

This is the tenth State of the University Address I have delivered as your president. And I want you to know I come to this opening of the year with as much energy as I have ever had, with as much excitement, as much confidence about our future, with enormous commitment to our plans.

As I look out across this audience, I am humbled and inspired by all of you. The State of the University is about our people. It is about this team, working as a team. It is about all of you contributing your individual gifts. It is about all of those gifts coming together for a single big purpose.

What an extraordinary privilege it is to be working with all of you, with so many things going on in each corner of this campus. Sharon and I feel so blessed to be part of this special community. So, as I look out and see your faces and know of your work — I say the State of the University is healthy and strong. Thank you.

I want to talk about momentum this morning. Strong momentum describes the State of the University. That's a very good word to me. That says something very positive about an organization, that we feel a strong sense of momentum.

Let me tell you what I think the State of the University is right now. We are healthy. We are financially healthy. We are people healthy. We are vision healthy. We have strong momentum.

I think we know where we are going. I think we have fully and deeply adopted a vision and mission. When we talk about engaging the culture and changing the world, we know that this mission somehow guides our work. We believe our task is big and challenging and meaningful. We sense there is something very distinctive in the kind of education we offer. We believe we are growing together, working hard to get better all the time at what we do. And those are signs of momentum, signs of a flourishing organization.

We understand some of our weak spots. We know we have needs that must be addressed. But I am not one to dwell on needs. Needs do not drive productive action. It is critical that we know where we are going. It is critical that we are growing.

Momentum requires two things: 1) that we celebrate what has been accomplished and we celebrate the people who are accomplishing those things; and 2) that we make sure we are planning and dreaming and sketching out the future. I want to address both of those things this

morning.

So, first, let me briefly scan the year we have just finished. As I told the trustees last week, we had an extraordinary year last year. All kinds of things came together, a kind of culminating year for so much work we were doing.

- We finished the Campaign! \$56 million. 4,000 new donors. A huge new base of support. One \$4 million trust that came into the campaign has now matured into endowment. That's the way it works. The Murdock Trust just completed its \$1 million pledge last week. It was a pledge; now it is in our pockets. My thanks to Bob McIntosh and his team for their great work.
- We finished *2014: A Blueprint For Excellence!* This is work that we were doing for at least a year, and it all came together in November. We have a bold plan in place. We know what we need to do. My thanks to the President's Cabinet for their amazing collaboration on this plan. For their patience as I stumbled my way through the language and the concepts to lead this planning forward.
- We just finished restructuring the Board of Trustees.
 - As part of the blueprint work, our board asked this critical question: what does it mean to be a premier, national Christian university board of trustees? We decided, among other things, it was critical to be a smaller board. That was a huge task, to reduce from 33 to 15. Risky business for a president. But we did it, and we had our first meeting Friday: a smart, savvy, and smaller board of trustees. I had some of the best, most substantive and strategic, discussion I have ever had with the board.
 - And let me add this: our relationship with the Free Methodist Church has never been stronger. We received a resounding affirmation and confirmation of our plan for the board on June 18, 2005 at the Pacific Northwest Conference Annual Conference. My thanks to Matt Whitehead and Bishop Roger Haskins for their leadership. In addition, my thanks to Roger Eigsti, Gary Ames, Dennis Weibling, Bob Nuber, Marj Johnson, and Barry Rowan for their leadership on the Trustee Blueprint Team.
 - This was an extraordinary process with extraordinary results.
- We opened the Perkins Center for Reconciliation under the able leadership of Tali Hairston. We are staying the course with our commitment to reconciliation. With Tali and Joe and Stephen and Dante and Harvey and Alex and David and John Perkins—we have a team that is teaching and guiding us on what reconciliation is all about. My thanks to Gary and Barbara Ames for their support for this effort.
- We formed a wonderful partnership with John Medina in what we are tentatively calling the Brain Center and Applied Learning Research. My thanks to John Medina, of course, and to Dennis Weibling for his commitment and support. And to Bill Rowley and so many of our faculty who have gathered around this effort.
- We held three President's Symposia: with John Perkins in the fall, John Medina in the winter, and N. T. Wright in the spring. This is an ongoing effort to continue to invest in a vibrant intellectual community focused on our mission of engaging the culture. This year we will host Christian Smith for the Day of Common Learning on the spiritual life of teenagers, John Perkins again for the Perkins Lectures, David McCullough for the Business Breakfast. For next year we have booked the New Testament scholar Richard Hayes and the European intellectual historian George Weigel.

Let me add three other notes about what's happening:

- We are restructuring our bond financing package. We expect some major savings on our debt service once this process is complete. This is all made possible because our credit rating has improved significantly. My thanks to Don Mortenson and Craig Kispert and Vic Moses, Fred Stabbert, Ted Kibble, and others on our board for their expertise and commitment to this initiative.
- We just received word yesterday that the Lilly Endowment has awarded us a \$500,000 sustaining grant to continue our work for the theological exploration of vocation. You will

recall that we received a \$2 million grant from Lilly in 2001 for this program that has made a huge impact on our campus. Last spring, we were among a select group of colleges and universities asked to submit a new proposal, and we have now received their positive response. This is great work. My thanks to Les Steele, Susan Gallagher, Bob Drov Dahl, Mike Hamilton and others.

- We received word this summer on a \$1.5 million National Science Foundation Grant. My thanks to Stamatis Vokos and his colleagues in the sciences and to our folks in School of Education for their collaboration. This grant supports a huge amount of activity across campus to understand the learning of science.

All of this spells momentum, but momentum also requires a strong sense of direction for the future. And so for the last year and more, we have been working hard on a plan. We call that plan *2014: A Blueprint For Excellence*.

What is this Blueprint all about? What is this plan that drives our direction for the future? What's happening? Where do we stand?

Let me say this about my notion of planning. The Blueprint is in place, but it is unfolding. It is defined and clear, but it is evolving. I have come to believe that strategic planning in our time is never linear. That's the nature of a good planning.

There are four stages to the *2014: Blueprint for Excellence*.

First, we need a clear vision for the Blueprint. And our vision is this: we want to change the world with the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the big idea. Preposterous and audacious, but I hope not arrogant. Can a university change the world? Should that be the goal of the university?

Well, that's what our vision says. We want to equip our students to become graduates who are change agents. We want to equip and support our faculty in their scholarship and their teaching to become change agents. We want to model something very powerful and important in the way we do our business, a model that will change things in the world. We want to be change agents. That's our vision.

We want to enter into God's big drama for his world. God's drama is about changing things to be better. For all of his children everywhere. Always. We want to be players, participants. That's our vision. That's the big driver for the Blueprint.

Second, I think we need to define the distinctive signatures of this vision. This is new territory for us, a new dimension to our identity discussions. I think it is critical that we craft a sense of our unique identity. If we don't have anything distinctive to offer, forget it.

And so what would we call our distinctives? Our signatures? Let me try out these notions with you all. I have been talking to groups all over campus about these signatures. Are we not committed to something like this list of signatures?

- We want to be a place that knows and understands what's going on in the world. We want to be in the mix, engaged.
- We want to embrace the Christian story (becoming biblically and theologically educated). This now identifies us distinctly from any secular institution.
- We want to master the tools of rigorous learning (becoming a vibrant intellectual, learning community). We do the first two as a university.
- We want to model grace-filled community and practice radical reconciliation. This is perhaps the most profound dimension of our Christian identity.
- We want to graduate people of competence and character equipped to change the world.

Are these our distinctives? Keep talking to me about these notions. I believe we

have to be pretty sharp on these in order for our Blueprint to have a deeper shape. I believe we have to have that deeper shape in order for us to flourish.

By the way, I talked to our board last week about my own need to continue to grow into this vision and into these distinctives. They have supported me in that effort. I am convinced in the coming year that I must continue to carve out the time to write and to speak about these distinctives and the vision that drives us forward.

Third, we need to try to spell out our notion of excellence. This is where we adopt the language, the aspiration, of becoming a premier, national Christian university. This is the language of excellence. I've done a lot of talking about this goal and a lot of thinking. I know not everyone is comfortable with this language. Please understand this is not the vision. We are not doing all of this planning so that we can become a premier, national Christian university. We are becoming a premier, national Christian university so that we can change the world. And as one of our trustees argued on Friday, it is the distinctives, the signatures, that will make us premier, not the other way around.

Fourth, we need clear and concrete strategies in place in critical areas. How in the world are we going to accomplish all of this? Where do we invest our energies and our resources? I think we need strategies in the following areas:

- We need to transform our resource paradigm, our giving, our endowment, our facilities.
- We need to cultivate the next generation of partners. We must extend our reach, broaden the base, reach out nationally. We need new partners with a national profile.
- We need an aggressive, focused plan to support faculty.
- We need to recruit and graduate outstanding students, dramatically increasing our applicant pool, selectivity, persistence rate, and graduation rate.
- We need to aggressively expand our positioning and branding nationally.
- We need to create and shape a premier, national Christian university board of trustees.

So, that's the plan. That's the Blueprint. That's our big idea, our sense of direction, our strategy. I welcome your interaction with us in this great work.

By the way, on November 14, 2005, we are going to come out with a written version of the Blueprint. A kind of progress report, a momentum report, where we have come from with our vision, where we going. Watch for this publication.

Tomorrow we will welcome the largest group of new undergraduate students in the history of this University. The biggest and the best class ever, 730 Freshmen. Our SAT scores jumped some 20 points to 1160. Our admit rate jumped to 85%; this is down from 98% when I first came to SPU. And our students are persisting in record numbers. And our graduation rate is increasing by a huge 6% this year to 66%.

Together with some 800 graduate students our total enrollment is just short of 4,000.

But sometimes I look at those numbers, and I will look into the faces of these new students, and talk to the parents about their expectations—and I am frightened by the responsibility we have. It scares me. That's not what I am going to say tomorrow night, but that's what I want to say to you all. This is a huge responsibility. And it is our responsibility.

And we better have it right. We better know what we are all about. We better have our motives clear. We need to know what we are doing. We need to be focused. We need to do our work with excellence. We need to stand for something. We need a signature on learning, a signature view of the world, a signature view of our Christian identity.

That's why we are doing this Blueprint work.

But let me add one thing. At Christmas time two years ago, I received a note from a Freshman, a Christmas card, thanking me for my leadership and that sort of thing. And then she said something that challenged me profoundly: "I am grateful that SPU's current president loves Jesus and understands that Jesus call us to undivided devotion." This is a note of thanks, to be sure, and I am grateful for this kind of student. But this is a note of longing and hope. She needs this confidence in a leader. And I need to respond. This is a huge challenge, an enormous responsibility.

And what is this call to undivided devotion to which my student challenges me?

I have been reading a lot of Paul and a lot about Paul this summer. And in Romans 6, Paul speaks to this challenge: "Let us use the different gifts allotted to each of us by God's grace: the gift of inspired utterance, for example, let us use in proportion to our faith; the gift of administration to administer; the gift of teaching to teach; the gift of counseling to counsel; if you give to charity, give without grudging; if you are a leader, lead with enthusiasm; if you help others in distress, do it cheerfully. Love in all sincerity, loathing evil and holding fast to the good. Let love of the Christian community show itself in mutual affection. Esteem others more highly than yourself. With unflagging zeal, aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Let hope keep you joyful; in trouble stand firm; persist in prayer; contribute to the needs of God's people; and practice hospitality."

Ultimately this will be the measure of our State of the University: an undivided devotion to Jesus, a profound love for each other at the heart of this community, all of which empowers us to use our gifts to the fullest. Ultimately this will be the reason we flourish. This will be the only way we can change the world.

There is a verse in Isaiah that I like a lot. It speaks about crafting blueprints and about laying foundations on which to build our future. The writer says ". . . you will build on ancient foundations;/ you will be called the rebuilders of broken walls, /the restorer of houses in ruins."

As we think about the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the Southeast, with more frightening force on the way. Indeed, all around us, there are "houses in ruins." When we think about the broken walls of suffering and poverty and war. When we think about the ruins of lives and families and friends. Well, at that point, we are inspired to be the rebuilders of broken walls. And we have the chance to make a difference because we seek to build on "ancient foundations." May God bless each one of you as you launch this new year.

May God bless our work as we launch a new chapter in the life of this great university.

