

2009

“Remembering the Past – as we Reimagine the Future”

Kim S. Phipps

Follow this and additional works at: <https://mosaic.messiah.edu/state>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Permanent URL: <https://mosaic.messiah.edu/state/13>

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society. This content is freely provided to promote scholarship for personal study and not-for-profit educational use.

MESSIAH COLLEGE
STATE OF THE COLLEGE – 2009
“Remembering the Past – as we Reimagine the Future”
Kim S. Phipps
August 25, 2009

Let me begin by acknowledging that it has been quite a year. As the video illustrated, we’ve accomplished much that deserves to be celebrated. We are also acutely aware that the past year was characterized by complicated challenges brought on by a comprehensive economic downturn in our nation and around the globe.

Then, just as we took a deep breath (figuratively and literally) and started a new fiscal year, the unexpected happened...

On July 23rd, the Messiah College campus experienced a sudden flash flood. Within a little over two hours, Grantham recorded almost 7 inches of rain. The water levels of the Yellow Breeches Creek and on campus were higher than those resulting from 1972’s Hurricane Agnes. The flash flood caused water damage in 18 campus buildings. Carpet, drywall and flooring have been replaced in various educational facilities, residence halls and satellite houses.

As this surprising storm was ravaging our campus, I looked out the front window of Orchard Hill to witness a strange and curious sight. A wall of rushing water was cascading from the Grantham church property, forming a waterfall that gushed over the street onto the flat grassy field that borders Lisburn Road and marks the entrance to our campus.

To my amazement, two young Messiah College students appeared on the scene, each carrying a kayak on their shoulders. After climbing in, they propelled themselves over the waterfall then briskly paddled their kayaks across the newly created lake. In the midst of the roaring rain, I opened my front door to get a closer look and promptly heard their screams of delight at conquering the storm. Now, I am certainly not endorsing the safety of their actions, nor am I commenting about their sanity in undertaking such a venture, but as I observed them, I realized that their determination to seize a new possibility during a flood could serve as a fitting metaphor for the past year and the present moment in our life together as the Messiah College community.

As a nation, we have experienced a deluge of discouraging financial news. Economists suggest that the current recession may be the worst economic downturn our nation has encountered since the Great Depression. We have all witnessed the adverse effects on our families, friends, and members of our campus community. This past year, in order to maintain financial strength and institutional viability, we have had to undertake actions which were strategic and difficult. These actions have included some very painful personnel decisions. We have also been forced to discontinue some campus services, institute a hiring freeze, and adopt spending controls, along with implementing other cost saving measures.

Yet, as we gather together, anticipating the upcoming academic year, one in which we celebrate one hundred years of God’s faithfulness to Messiah College, I believe that there are two important lessons to learn from our students enthusiastically shooting the “Grantham Road rapids” and our campus community’s response to the flood. The first lesson was that these two students confronted an overwhelming, volatile situation, and yet they created an opportunity. They seized the possibility, in their case, to attempt a new venture and to make a memory. During the past twelve months, we have faced a series of challenges that, when combined, leave us feeling as if we, too, have encountered a flood. While we must honestly acknowledge the realities of the past year, *now* is the time to embrace the changing context of this time, envision new modes of doing things, and welcome future opportunities.

The second lesson to be learned focuses on the manner in which our community reacted to the flood. When the crisis arose, employees on campus responded swiftly and generously. Colleagues from Facilities Services, Enrollment Management and Safety acted quickly to reduce the overall damage and

ensure everyone's well-being. On that evening, students and employees including lifeguards, coaches, faculty, administrative, dining, and facility staff members and students, many of whom were not on duty or on call, quickly sought to give assistance. Employees who were off site contacted the switchboard to ask how they could help and some individuals came to campus and just started volunteering. The costs of the damage are expected to be approximately \$500,000, but it would have been so much worse if the members of this community had not joined together. We are richly blessed to have so many capable and committed employees who selflessly gave their time and used their skills to combat the effects of the flood. As we face other challenges in the weeks and months ahead, we need to continue to rally together with that same spirit.

Today we initiate the official inauguration of our Centennial year, we are reminded that for 100 years, God has bestowed blessings on the Messiah College as we have endeavored to educate our students and prepare them for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation. Throughout its history, the College community has confronted frequent seasons of enrollment challenges, scarce resources, financial difficulties and other uncertainties, but God has provided and, in so doing, has continually affirmed the significant mission of Messiah College. This morning, we pause to remember the past, but even more, we embrace *this present moment* as we heed the example of those young kayakers and look for opportunities – opportunities to reimagine Messiah College's second century!

As we celebrate our "*Shared Faith, Bold Vision and Enduring Promise*," we stand on the shoulders of a long line of men and women who have re-imagined the future while holding fast to a steadfast vision of Christian higher education – the belief that the study of and reflection on the created world will lead to a deep relationship with the Creator and a transformative sense of our vocational calling within that world. We continue this legacy as we seek to view our common mission and our common future from a new perspective as we "*Remember the Past, and Reimagine the Future*."

Why is the act of remembering so important for a community? Messiah College professor Valerie Smith's brilliant one-woman play, "*Between Two Chairs*," poses a series of provocative questions about memory and human relationships. The play powerfully illustrates Valerie's personal struggle and pain as she witnesses her father's memory loss to Alzheimer's, while simultaneously experiencing the wonder of memory development in her young son. One of the many intriguing messages her play reveals is that remembering always gives power to the present. Through the act of remembering – fully or partially – our present reality is shaped as we live, love and learn together.

Remembering our past, we learn that Messiah has been creating and recreating itself for the past 100 years as the College has continually responded to challenges and real world needs by providing quality Christ-centered education!

- From the humble beginning of a small cluster of students who met in S.R. Smith's living room in Harrisburg
- to founding a Bible College and Missionary Training School
- to expanding the educational mission beyond the Church to the broader society
- to welcoming students from all Christian traditions
- to offering undergraduate degrees in liberal and applied arts and sciences
- to extending the borders of our campus to include Harrisburg, Philadelphia and more than 40 off-campus sites through a nationally recognized Study Abroad program
- to designing a rich palette of community engagement and service learning opportunities

- to, most recently, launching our first on-line courses and master's degree programs.

Now, the present external environment in which we find ourselves once again calls for our most innovative thinking and creative efforts.

Everywhere we look, there are cautionary tales of people who ignored signs of change and wished challenges away at their own peril. In his book entitled *Reset: How This Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America*,” essayist and public radio commentator Kurt Anderson chronicles the unprecedented economic boom of the past 27 years and the accompanying warning signs that all was not as it seemed. From 1980 to 2007, the price of the average new American home quadrupled but the debt load of the average home owners also soared. From 1982 to 2007, the Dow Jones industrial average climbed 300% but the Federal Reserve kept warning us that it was a “bubble” and the “irrational” growth could not last. Research has demonstrated that the US automobile industry was reporting record losses as early as 1980. Yet, GM was building and selling gas-guzzling SUV's at rapid rates even as their share of the American car markets fell from 43% to 22% finally resulting in bankruptcy. It was hard to fathom that we might witness the end of an American icon such as GM.

For the past decade, with the advent of the World Wide Web and the Internet, newspapers have also experienced significant financial trouble. But until recently, most media related organizations have continued to function as if their businesses would never decline. But, now subscription rates and advertising are collapsing at a very rapid rate and newspapers are routinely downsizing or closing, including the Ann Arbor News and Denver's Rocky Mountain News. The newspaper industry is now being forced to change or face extinction.

As a nation, we knew what was happening for years, maybe even for decades, but we ignored the signs, not quite believing that the end to economic growth and prosperity would actually materialize.

Of course, Higher Education is not exempt from this genre of consequence. Messiah College and her peer institutions are situated in the center of this unpredictable economy, and there is pressure to change and adapt. In his book, Anderson warns, *“It is the end of the world as we know it. But, it's not the end of the world.”*

Economists tell us that a financial boom similar to the 1990's will likely not return during our lifetime. Therefore, as we consider the future of Messiah College, we must be willing to “think the unthinkable,” and entertain novel ideas and innovative concepts—not to change or alter our mission, but to fulfill it in promising new contexts. We must accept the realities of our present economic environment and find possibilities in the midst of the “flood.”

Why must we reimagine Messiah College's future? In short, because it is very questionable whether the current business and educational models of private higher education are sustainable. Forums for university presidents are being sponsored across the nation to discuss future implications for significant changes to the current models. As your president, I stand before you presenting my fifth State of the College address. In the past, I have proclaimed that change was coming and that we needed to be ready to respond, but, to be honest, much of what I called for was merely “tweaking” or “improving” our current model. For example, in previous speeches I asked that we “consider implementing some select graduate programs,” and suggested that we “need to work to find efficiencies and manage our finances.” However, as we enter the College's second century, I must tell you that “tweaking” and making minor adjustments to our program offerings and financial model are insufficient for meeting our challenges. We must thoughtfully explore models that respond to real world needs as we carefully pursue strategic long term institutional goals.

Unlike many in our society, we must heed the warning signs of the need for change. The College Board reported that college tuition in the U.S. increased 27% for private institutions from 1999-2009. During that same time period, the median family income rose only 22%. On average in 2009-2010, it cost

\$34,508 to attend Messiah College. The average financial aid package is around \$17,000 leaving \$17,580 that families need to contribute toward their children's education. A family that is expected to contribute that amount to their children's education typically would have a family income of approximately \$105,000. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, only 15% of the public high school graduates in the United States have a family income at or above \$100,000. The limited population that can afford a Messiah education coupled with the changing demographics of high school graduates has three implications for us:

1. We cannot continue to sustain a model of increasing educational costs at a rate that outpaces family's ability to pay.
2. We cannot maintain institutional strength and viability unless we develop robust revenue streams beyond those that result from undergraduate tuition and fees.
3. We cannot meet our enrollment goals unless we successfully enter new markets and deepen our penetration of current markets so that we can expand our pool of prospective students.

How will we face the challenges that are before us? I want to assure you that we are taking a proactive approach, guided by the four themes of our strategic plan. As we re-imagine ourselves within this turbulent economic and social environment, Messiah College enjoys a distinct advantage: *we know who we are!* One of Messiah College's greatest strengths is our shared commitment to our mission and identity. During the past year, in support of our first strategic theme, our institutional self understanding has been enriched as Provost Basinger capably led us in thoughtful and spirited conversation about our mission and identity. As we listened, we gained a more complete awareness of the distinctions between core and privileged beliefs and their role in our institutional life. "AB" "BC" and "CD" beliefs have now become a part of our campus vernacular! In addition, engaging in the very act of these dialogues has renewed our passion for modeling gracious Christianity and hospitable conversation to others, an example we desperately need to offer during this national period of hyperbolic and vitriolic debate.

Because *we know who we are* as a College, we are better positioned to help our students and alumni understand *who they are* in their calling as they discover and fulfill their vocation in the world. People across the globe are confronted by serious social, economic, and cultural problems and they need Messiah graduates whose academically excellent, holistic liberal arts education has prepared them to be leaders. Our students and alumni have the ability to solve complex problems because they have been educated to think beyond the present moment, to take the long view. Pulitzer-prize winning columnist, Thomas L. Friedman recently wrote,

"Encouraging young people to think horizontally and to connect disparate dots has to be a priority. Because this is where and how so much innovation happens. But first you need dots to connect. And to me that means a liberal arts education. . . . [The liberal arts] is all about making connections among history, art, politics and science."

Whether our students are learning the fundamentals of writing an argumentative essay, contemplating a troubling sociological trend or designing a multi year project to bring water to a parched community in Burkina Faso, we encourage them to ask both "how" and "why." As our mission statement boldly proclaims, a Messiah education prepares students to embrace the challenges of the world as they commit themselves to lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in the Church and society.

In recent months, I have become increasingly aware of the need to more clearly define and emphasize the reconciliation outcome of our mission. For instance, I have frequently been asked, "What does the College mean by the term reconciliation?" While I wasn't surprised when students asked that question, when the same query came to me from a school dean and a few hours later from a trustee, I knew we needed to develop a formal response to contribute to our communal understanding. Colleagues Eldon Frey, David Weaver-Zercher, Jake Jacobsen and Larry Burnley and I collaborated to prepare a document

that outlines the biblical foundations of reconciliation and the *how* and *why* of our mission-centric commitment to reconciliation as a transcendent goal that extends beyond personal salvation to the loving embrace of the diversity of God's Kingdom. A copy of that paper entitled, "*Messiah College - Educational Commitment to Reconciliation*" is posted on the Office of the President's web page, and your feedback is welcome. Let me share a brief paragraph from that document.

"The notion of reconciliation implies an ethic of putting things back together, of repairing what has been torn apart or unraveled. . . . But, before the Fall, humankind was one with the Creator, and now through Jesus the Christ, God has sought to restore/repair that relationship by reconciling us to Himself. By God's grace we are invited to participate in restoring the kind of horizontal relationships we enjoyed with one another and with all of creation prior to the Fall.

Together we are called by faith to be an educational community that responds to the call of the ministry of reconciliation and celebrates the signs of hope no matter how small or how global in scope."

The distinct emphasis we place on reconciliation has always been a part of the College's identity. Research for the Centennial celebration reveals that the importance of reconciliation was evidenced by early College leaders' who promoted "peaceableness" as restoring right relationships. During the College's first decade, there were attempts to reach across racial, cultural and gender dividing lines. Between 1913 and 1917, our first international students were recruited to campus. With the assistance of our first president, four young men escaped from the horrific Armenian genocide, and found a new opportunity by enrolling at Messiah College. In 1918, Rachel Flowers became the first African American woman to enroll at the College followed by her brother, Vincent, who enrolled in 1926.

In the aftermath of World War II, C.N. Hostetter Jr. practiced reconciliation when he invited the Harvey Sakimura family, who had endured internment at a relocation camp during WWII, to live on campus, where Harvey served as groundskeeper. They arrived just after the war ended, while anti-Japanese sentiment was still festering in the United States. Despite receiving threatening letters and phone calls, President Hostetter maintained Harvey Sakimura's employment and continued to take a personal interest in the family's well being and the education of the Sakimura children. In 1987, the family received a restitution grant from the U.S. government which they used to endow a Messiah College student scholarship as an expression of their gratitude.

While many colleges and universities identify service and leadership as educational outcomes, very few specify reconciliation. Our Christ-honoring commitment to reconciliation is a Messiah distinctive and an important element of our institution's viability for the 21st Century.

When I reflect on the vision and actions of our forerunners, it heartens my personal resolve to lead our community to deepen the ways we honor diversity and practice reconciliation as we seek to bring things together that never should have been apart. As we implement the recently drafted Diversity Strategic Plan in the months ahead, we humbly understand that our efforts are a continuation of a journey initiated by President S.R. Smith in the early years of the College.

Because *we know who we are*, we are also poised to communicate our mission and distinctives in a more compelling manner, as stated in our second strategic theme. Throughout the past year, Crane Metamarketing has been capably leading our branding initiative. The conclusion of their survey research findings indicates that there is much good news to share with our constituents through our new communication campaign. The level of self-reported satisfaction by students, alumni and current parents was extremely positive! Here is a brief sampling of responses to a few of the capstone questions from Crane's survey research.

“Would you choose Messiah again?”

- Nine out of ten current students and current parents said that they would choose Messiah again—the highest numbers Crane has ever seen for a college or university (public, private or faith-based)!

“Why would you choose Messiah again?”

- Current students, their parents, and former parents were most likely to mention the experience had been *challenging academically and spiritually*.
- The second most frequently cited reason among students was *love the people* (faculty, staff, students)
- Alumni were most likely to mention *great teachers/professors*

Quotes from research:

Messiah challenged me spiritually, academically, and socially within a safe environment and offered outstanding opportunities in the areas of global awareness and service in a variety of formats. - student

She has grown in ways that I couldn't even have predicted. She learned to think for herself and make her faith her own, not that of her parents. - parent of sophomore

Messiah prepared our child to be a problem solver, to stand up for her beliefs in the face of unbelief, and to be competent in her field of study. As an adult, she is successful in her chosen field, and remains biblically-grounded in her faith. - parent of graduate, 2003-08

On September 8th at 3:30 p.m. in Parmer Cinema, Patti Crane will be making a campus presentation of the College's new marketing communication effort. This campaign is being undertaken to, first and foremost, successfully recruit students and, second, to build strong awareness of and appreciation for the distinctives of Messiah College and the accomplishments of its faculty and alumni. Let's take a look at a few pages in the new viewbook which invites prospective students to consider a Messiah College education and learn to “See Anew” by reconciling ideas and perspectives that may have seemed to be in opposition. Let me read the tone poems to you.

faith/intellect
a discerning spirit

Philosophy class: *Existentialism*.

I can see the problem—
the longing for meaning—
in a world reluctant to give it.

The professor asks:
As Christians what do we do with this?

At Messiah
I grapple with ideas from all angles
until I see into the world's realities
in a much deeper way.

wisdom/expertise
authentic power to lead

Engineering students
explore philosophical questions,
nursing students
do practical theology.

Because Messiah professors
teach us *how*,
rooted in the context of *why*,
we learn to make
deeply considered decisions.

In other words
we learn to be leaders.

These new marketing materials will be ready to distribute during the upcoming recruiting cycle and I am convinced that these tools will enable us to persuasively tell the Messiah story!

We can only be truly successful, however, if every campus employee enthusiastically shares our story with prospective students and other constituents. To quote Vice President of Enrollment John Chopka, “It takes a campus to enroll a class.” Thank all of you for your efforts to bring in a new class of 764 first year and transfer students. The matriculation of each new student represents multiple personal contacts and many hours of follow up by members of this community. From front-line Admissions staff, to administrators, faculty and coaches who frequently volunteered to meet with students to dining and facilities employees who “wowed” our visitors with delicious cuisine and a well-manicured campus - it has taken a community working together to enroll this class. Although, we did not achieve the enrollment goal we established prior to the economic downturn, we are exceedingly grateful for all of the students and families who have selected Messiah College. Because of your efforts as employees, this new cohort of students is embarking on an educational journey that will transform them so that they might transform the world.

Be encouraged that our new enrollment initiatives are currently being fully implemented and we anticipate that they will yield positive results for the fall of 2010. Work is being finalized on the prospective student portal and the integration of Enrollment Management Suite (which will provide students with quick access to customized information). During this upcoming year, through a series of special events and related initiatives as part of our church relations efforts, 1,200 teens and 700 church leaders will visit our campus and the admission staff will visit 150 churches. In addition, as of July 1st we hired our first regional admissions representatives, who are located in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Boston, as well as retained some part-time assistance in Southern California. We look forward to expanding our reach, developing new markets and increasing the penetration of our traditional markets. However, undergraduate enrollment is not only about recruiting a *new* class but also retaining current students. Increasing retention by 1% would improve the College’s revenue by \$400,000 and enable us to provide a complete Messiah education to an additional 20 students. Because our retention rate has historically been satisfactory, we have not made an aggressive, integrated effort to improve in this area. I am pleased to report that Rob Pepper and John Chopka have agreed to co-lead a retention task force that will begin its work with a campus wide summit as we seek to understand the reasons students leave our College and what we can do to help them continue and graduate. We have established a goal of increasing our first year to sophomore retention rate by 1% annually for the next three years until we achieve the highly satisfactory rate of 89-90%.

Knowing who we are, and effectively telling our story should help us achieve our enrollment goals, but as I indicated earlier, revenue from the traditional model of undergraduate residential education will not be enough to sustain us for the future.

At my request, the Enrollment Management team has been working with Noel Levitz to finalize the results of a comprehensive Tuition Pricing/Financial Aid study for the College. These findings are being summarized and will be reported to campus in early September, but one certainty exists – we will not be able to go beyond minimal tuition and fees increases for the immediate future. Our pricing (including financial aid) is situated within the acceptable range, but at the very high end of that range. No doubt, the turbulent national economy is creating obstacles for many families who desire a Messiah College education but find that affordability is a significant challenge.

This brings us to the third strategic theme: developing new programs that meet identifiable market needs and provide increased revenue. This past summer, 255 students enrolled in summer on-line courses and our new Master of Arts in Counseling program exceeded its initial enrollment goal of 20 – with 38 students joining the program! To be honest, Messiah's decision to expand its programming has occurred long after the innovations of many of our competitor institutions. But now, under the leadership of the Provost, Deans and academic departments, our first graduate programs are being launched and recognized for the quality of their design and instruction. One of the most encouraging moments of my summer, was the privilege of hosting Messiah College's first graduate students and their faculty at Orchard Hill. Listening to their stories and observing their enthusiasm for learning was truly inspiring!

While the demand for traditional undergraduate education has been gradually decreasing in recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of master's degrees awarded in our nation during the past 10 years. The receipt of master's degrees has increased 44% from 1997-2007, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). There were 420,000 Master's degrees awarded in 1997 compared to 605,000 awarded in 2007 (an increase of 185,000 degrees). Within this increase, we can identify other relevant trends. More than half of the degrees awarded in 2007 were in the fields of education and business. Further, the number of master's degrees awarded in psychology increased 33% from 1997-2007. Many of our current benchmark schools have responded to this trend as 12 of the 19 other schools offer graduate programs.

Given the keen national interest in graduate education, Messiah must continue to innovate and design future master's programs that reflect our unique mission, meet societal and individual needs, increase our institutional profile, and enhance our regional reputation. At the same time, we know that possibilities for saving dollars and sharing expenses across private colleges exist and merit serious consideration. According to Anya Kamenetz' article, "*How Web-Savvy Edupunks are Transforming American Higher Education*," college tuition has increased more than any other good or service since 1990 and the trajectory has now ended. She argues that colleges must accept the value of new technologies to save money and still provide a quality education.

Many institutions are designing programs that enable students to graduate in six or seven semesters by making it possible for them to enroll in a dedicated series of summer on-line courses. Some European and American universities are aggressively altering the traditional four-year baccalaureate model to a three-year one, comprised of not only a reduction in the number of required courses for graduation, but also the inclusion of on-line courses to enable students to complete an accelerated schedule. Another emerging trend involves partnerships and consortia efforts where technology enables faculty to share specific expertise as they teach courses to students from multiple campuses (for example, Calvin's distance learning classroom - "real time"). These are just a few of the possibilities that we might consider to enhance the breadth and depth of our educational offerings and increase our competitive edge while faithfully maintaining our commitments to academic quality and the value of the liberal arts.

To ensure that we are intentional and proactive in developing new programming opportunities, this past spring I initiated a Generative Thinking group comprised of the President's Cabinet, the School Deans

and Director of Admissions. The purpose of this group is to provide a formal structure for brainstorming and discussing institutional programming that has the potential to increase the College's enrollment. Monthly meetings will continue throughout the upcoming year to examine enrollment trends, consider undergraduate and graduate programs, analyze current marketing research and discuss emerging trends in higher education. The Generative Thinking group will initiate dialogue with individual or multiple academic departments to request preliminary concept papers or to review pertinent research. Of course, the curriculum and proposed business plans for all educational programs – both undergraduate and graduate – will be assessed and reviewed by campus governance bodies, but the synergistic work of the Generative Thinking group will ensure that “long held, good” ideas receive careful consideration.

Am I implying that new program development – both graduate and undergraduate – for the foreseeable future will be linked to institutional enrollment goals? The answer is “yes.” Some future initiatives that are already in various stages of development include master's degrees in art education, music-conducting, education, Christian ministries, and an interdisciplinary undergraduate major in Sustainability.

To examine other types of potential opportunities for Messiah College, I have appointed a Strategic Partnerships and Alliances Task Force comprised of campus and external community members to explore possible collaborations with other colleges as well as government and community agencies. In this uncertain economic environment, we need to be alert and open to cooperative possibilities and, perhaps, even mergers or acquisitions. These exploratory discussions may or may not lead to any specific ventures, but it is vital for Messiah to be actively engaged in the conversation, so that we do not miss salient opportunities.

In addition to generating more revenue based on new programs, we are dedicated to increasing our fund-raising efforts. This summer we completed a major restructuring in the Development Office that will enable us to secure additional operating gift support during this extended economic downturn. During this year ahead, I will be spending 30-35% of my time specifically on fund-raising and relationship building. Throughout the fall, Vice President for Advancement Barry Goodling and I will continue to meet with potential donors in support of the proposed Worship and Performing Arts Center, a much-needed facility that will serve our entire campus and regional community. We are also committed to maintaining an endowment portfolio that is defensively structured for volatile times and simultaneously structured to take advantage of growth markets. Achieving financial strength is essential to our long-term future and to our ability to support and provide for our employees including their professional development and scholarly pursuits

Finally, as we seek to embody our mission and persuasively share our story, as we invite others to join our community, it is essential that we pursue the aims of the fourth strategic theme – to facilitate increased community engagement and, specifically, to prepare our students to be compassionate global citizens, an essential outcome if the education we provide is to be purposeful and relevant for the 21st century. Messiah College's excellence in the areas of Study Abroad, Cross-Cultural Studies, and international service projects, has become an important nationally recognized distinctive for the College.

Consequently, I have been thinking about the interests and commitments of various campus departments, curricular programs, co-curricular initiatives, and individuals and how those passions translate into an overarching institutional commitment to globalize our campus community and increasing our shared understanding of individuals and cultures throughout the world. We do not live in isolation from others and our institutional commitment to reconciliation requires that we explore and learn to celebrate and value differences.

Early in September, individuals from a variety of offices, departments and campus initiatives will be meeting to discuss the potential for a more strategic and integrated effort to globalize our campus. This is not a conversation for the purpose of creating a new initiative; instead it is an opportunity to increase our awareness of the many efforts that are being undertaken throughout our campus and to identify possibilities for collaboration and enhancement.

When I pause to reflect on who we are, the story we have to tell, (and by the way, the Centennial is a marvelous “once in a lifetime” opportunity to tell our story) the quality of current and future undergraduate and graduate programs led by outstanding educators, our commitment to civic and global engagement, and the dedication and creativity of our employees, I am confident and hopeful about the years that lie before us. As this community has done in the past, we will respond with courageous vision to promote a strong and vibrant future for Messiah College!

In closing, allow me to pose two questions for your consideration: First, are we prepared to dream together of a Messiah College that will be recognized as the premier Christian higher education institution on the east coast— an institution that is distinguished by the quality, breadth and scope of our programming (both undergraduate and graduate), differentiated by a hospitable ethos rooted in our core Christian convictions and respected for our lived commitment to faithfully prepare students for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation? Second, are we prepared and willing to put forth the effort to be creative and entrepreneurial so that the promise of Messiah College will be extended to meet the current and future needs of the Church and society?

While preparing for the Centennial anniversary, I have been reading many anecdotes of former Messiah College professors and campus leaders. One particular account involves Professor Emeritus K.B. Hoover. During his doctoral defense, a question was posed to him regarding the theory of evolution to which he succinctly and prudently responded, "Things change and God is in it all"—K. B. was right— things are changing and will continue to change for Messiah College, and for each one of us gathered here today, but as a community we share life together and we move forward with assurance because we know God is in it all! Let’s follow the example of our student kayakers and discover the opportunities in the midst of the flood, remembering the words of the seventh president of Messiah College, Rodney J. Sawatsky,

“We are not people of fear and despair, but rather of hope and confidence. May God strengthen each of us individually and us as a College...as we embrace the challenge and move into the future with confidence buoyed by a great company of visionaries and by God’s bountiful graciousness.”

#####