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STATE OF THE COLLEGE - 2006

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MESSIAH COLLEGE
STATE OF THE COLLEGE - 2006

Kim S. Phipps
August 22, 2006

Introduction

As the video illustrated—the past year was filled with many memorable academic, artistic, and athletic milestones. None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the diligence and dedication of the people gathered here this morning. Thank you for your faithful commitment to Messiah's mission to educate students toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith. In just a few days, our community will noticeably increase in number when more than 2800 students arrive on campus. These young women and men are brimming with passion, promise, and potential—and we have the privilege of participating in their educational journey. Thank you for the significant and lasting contribution you make to the individual lives of our students and to the life of our community.

Now to the specific purpose of this gathering, President's Day is an important occasion for us to celebrate the collective achievements of the past year and to articulate our shared goals for the future. But, before I outline our focal points for the upcoming academic year, I want to emphasize the character of the community to which we have invited these students and to which we ourselves belong. Sister Joan Chittister states that “the truth about Christian community is that we have to be committed to the same eternal things together. What we want to live for and how we intend to live out those values are the central questions of community.” Today, as we anticipate a new academic year, we reaffirm the value of Christ-centered education, and we renew our commitment to our stated institutional values: the unity of faith, learning, and life; the importance of the person; the significance of community; the need for disciplined and creative living; and the active ministry of service and reconciliation.

For the past ninety-seven years, Messiah has sought to consistently embody those values and to do so while engaged in the pursuit of becoming an increasingly excellent educational institution. From the College's founding in 1909 when Brethren in Christ leader and businessman S. R. Smith opened his modest Harrisburg home to an inaugural class of eight, to the comprehensive, complex institution that now occupies 400 acres in Grantham, an urban campus in Philadelphia, and a student residential site in Harrisburg—we remain steadfast to our core mission even as we seek to address the challenges of an ever changing, increasingly competitive external environment for private higher education. As we approach the celebration of our Centennial and dream together about Messiah's second century, we should be encouraged by the knowledge that throughout the years, Messiah has experienced change and adaptation while remaining committed to her central purpose and institutional values. Together we can face the future with confidence and hope as we strive to meet the challenges and opportunities of this new century, a confidence and hope rooted not in our own limited abilities and perspectives, but in our trust in an ever faithful God and in the power of a faithful community.

Focal Point 1-

Develop an Effective Response to the Challenges Messiah Faces in the Current Environment.

To develop a response to the challenges confronting us, we must gain an understanding of where Messiah is situated in the current milieu of higher education. The geographical area from which we have historically recruited students (the mid-Atlantic region and New England) will experience a significant decrease in the number of high school graduates beginning in 2008. In the areas of the nation where there is some expected growth in this traditional student population, eighty percent of that growth will occur in Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-American people groups. Among these groups, forty-five percent of these students will come from families with the lowest expected family contribution. The conclusion is this: the fastest growing segment of traditional college-age individuals will be the one that has traditionally enrolled at the lowest rates and encountered the greatest financial hardship. Obviously, this has important implications for Messiah's student recruitment and retention strategies and for the structure of our tuition and fees.

In addition, the inability of families to pay increasing costs is creating an enrollment challenge for private higher education. From 1995-2005, the average tuition and fees of baccalaureate private higher education institutions increased by seventy-four percent. Concurrently, the purchasing power of federal Pell Grants and Stafford loans declined from forty-five percent of the average tuition to a mere thirty-one percent. To put Messiah's costs in perspective, only about eighteen percent of the colleges in the United States cost about the same or more than Messiah. Our students are taking on considerable debt to finance their Messiah education. Two thirds of Messiah's class of 2006 graduated with an average debt of \$30,000. Increasingly, students and their families will be looking for ways to reduce the costs of a four-year private education, as evidenced by the increasing enrollments in on-line programs and community colleges. We must be diligent about controlling our tuition and fee increases, and we need to develop a creative multi-pronged approach for recruiting transfer students.

In his *Chronicle of Higher Education* article entitled, "Can Small Colleges Survive?" Eric Hoover warns that demographic shifts and escalating college costs will require that institutions like Messiah to cultivate excellence, pursue new student markets, and achieve economic efficiencies to insure institutional survival. He writes, "Small residential colleges that relied on students from their state and region now lose them to nearby public universities with lower price tags. Two dozen liberal-arts colleges, including several big-name campuses, have closed or morphed into highly specialized institutions. Others are struggling to balance their traditional missions with more professional programs, like education." Hoover continues his argument by providing a specific example, "Even Calvin College, in Michigan, a Christian college with a rigorous liberal-arts core, is losing its once-firm niche. Calvin, which had been almost completely tuition-dependent in 2005, has had no choice but to raise its rates and trim the cornucopia of 100 majors, minors, and programs it once offered to its 4,300 students. Financially needy applicants there are dwindling."

We cannot allow ourselves to mistakenly think that we are isolated from these concerns. Our response must be one of serious analysis resulting in effective strategies for addressing the challenges. Toward that goal, we are initiating a comprehensive strategic planning process in November 2006 (this is eighteen months ahead of the schedule called for in the current Centennial Plan). This process will involve the entire campus community, and it will build on the foundational work of last year's Campus Concept planning effort. Even as we initiate this process, we have already undertaken steps to reduce expenses and enact new enrollment and annual giving initiatives, including a focused effort on solicitation of scholarship aid for students. As your president, I pledge my commitment to working with all of you to achieve full enrollment, increase endowment returns, meet our annual giving targets, and plan and execute our next capital campaign in order to secure our long-term financial health.

Focal Point 2

Communicate Messiah's Educational Distinctives to a Regional and National Audience

To effectively meet these external challenges, we must assess our institutional strengths and construct a dynamic plan to intentionally communicate Messiah's educational distinctives to a broader regional and national audience. This initiative will involve a specific communications/media plan for telling the Messiah story in new ways, to new audiences in new venues. During a series of summer planning meetings—campus leadership attempted to define a list of the distinctives of Messiah's educational program—you may want to suggest the addition of others and I welcome your input!) which need to be promoted as we seek to increase institutional visibility.

1. The first educational distinctive of Messiah is a shared commitment to quality and excellence in every area of the institution—from academics to the arts—to athletics—to every service and support department—the commitment to excellent quality is evident. Accreditations, national rankings, the outcomes of institutional effectiveness reviews, the percentage of graduate school admissions, juried publications, exhibitions and performances, prestigious faculty and student recognitions including Fulbright, Rhodes and Truman awards, and regional and national athletic

championships provide compelling evidence of the excellence we have achieved and the goals we continue to strive for in the future. Of course, commitment to quality would not be possible without dedicated and gifted faculty and employees. Recruiting and retaining talented employees is critical to achieving and maintaining excellence. The resources we devote to the support of scholarship and professional development are central, not peripheral. In the past year, nineteen percent of Messiah's posted positions were filled by current employees (a common benchmark for strong employee development is typically twenty percent) and sixteen employees were promoted. These statistics reflect positively on the quality of our employee base and on our institutional commitment to employee development.

2. Messiah's second distinctive is a comprehensive curriculum firmly rooted in the tradition of the liberal arts. Our college-wide educational objectives seek to address the "big questions" about the meaning and purpose of life. We want to help our students learn to see the world through the eyes of others—to learn to listen and understand different perspectives—to develop essential skills for ethical decision-making and sound value judgments—to use God-given curiosity and creativity to continue learning for a lifetime! We want our students to reflect on what Ernest Boyer called deeply-felt issues and haunting questions so that the goal of education is realized, moving students from competence to commitment. At Messiah, we are passionate about holistically educating students for all of the varied roles they will be called to balance and master as professionals, scholars, practitioners, church leaders, citizens, friends, family, and community members. We seek to educate servant leaders who will make the world a better place in meaningful, tangible ways. According to social scientist Kevin Hovland, the 21st century demands the education of global thinkers who have wrestled with questions about difference and democracy, identity and community, privilege and oppression, and power and responsibility. Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist and author of *The World is Flat*, argues that liberal arts colleges must help students nurture skills of synthesis, adaptation, and collaboration if they are to succeed in a global and competitive worldwide economy. Messiah's commitment to the liberal and applied arts and sciences provides a curriculum and co-curriculum that are specifically designed to address the challenges suggested by Hovland and Friedman.
3. Messiah's third educational distinctive focuses on our institutional emphasis on contextual learning. By providing quality study abroad and off campus programming—including the unique collaboration with Temple University at our Philadelphia Campus, the Collaboratory, Agape Center, Internship Program, the Center for Public Humanities, Harrisburg Institute, Boyer Center, Sider Institute, and Arts collaborations with community partners—these initiatives provide rich and robust opportunities for our students and faculty to be transformed as they leave the familiar and the comfortable and enter the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable, resulting in profound and lasting learning outcomes. Through the vehicle of contextual learning, students and faculty are challenged to discover themselves, their universe, and their God. Students and faculty are invited to question their prior assumptions as they seek to gain a better understanding of their own roles in a rapidly changing, global society. This tradition of active engagement in service and learning is embedded in the College's heritage and our dedication to the educational outcomes of service, leadership, and reconciliation.
4. Our fourth educational distinctive involves the College's unwavering commitment to the Christian faith. As a community, we honor and emphasize our historic theological particularities even as we welcome colleagues and students from a breadth of Christian theological traditions. With care and caution, we strive to be an institution that avoids the extremes of both sectarianism and secularism. We earnestly seek to articulate and honor core Christian faith commitments which are realized in the institutional values we strive to embody. In the midst of a contemporary cultural climate that is often characterized by confrontation and polarization—Messiah is trying to model another way—a way of compassion and concern—a way of conversation and civility! As we seek to educate our students to identify and respond to those in need, we seek to do so with humility and hospitality, facilitating discussion and dialogue as we challenge each other to live

out our faith commitments by pursuing concrete opportunities for service to God and humankind. In a society lacking in compassionate civil discourse, a characteristic which unfortunately frequently extends to the Church and the academy—Messiah is a voice for and a model of gracious Christianity!

I believe that Messiah's educational distinctives are worthy of affirmation and celebration, and we need to become more effective at sharing those distinctives with a broader regional and national audience—first and foremost, because the nation and the Church need Messiah's voice and leadership and second, because we need to strengthen our national profile to allow us to penetrate new enrollment markets, nurture relationships with new benefactors, and increase recognition of Messiah's uniqueness and quality for the benefit of current and future students and alumni. To achieve this goal, I am forming a presidential task force comprised of trustees, campus colleagues, alumni, and marketing experts to assess our current practices for communicating these distinctives and to implement a new comprehensive communications plan for effectively sharing Messiah's story through a variety of media outlets.

Focal Point 3

Create a Compelling Vision for Messiah's Second Century

Last summer, Men's soccer coach Dave Brandt encouraged me to read the book entitled *Good to Great* which was authored by Jim Collins. I will confess that I am typically cynical and negative about leadership books written by "business types." I have often discovered that many of these authors fail to understand the unique differences and complexities involved in leading nonprofit institutions, particularly institutions of higher education. Dave must have assumed that I would not take the time to read the book because a few days later he sent me pages of his own personal book notes and observations...well, I read the notes and the book which details Collins' analysis of Fortune 500 companies that successfully made the leap from good results to great results and sustained them for at least fifteen years. I found the analysis to be quite compelling. Collins' research study demonstrated that to move from a good institution to a great institution required three stages of institutional life: developing disciplined people, shaping the institution through disciplined thought, and achieving results through disciplined action. He determined that greatness requires organizations to concentrate on a "hedgehog" concept comprised of three core interrelated questions—What can we do best? What are we passionate about? What drives our economic planning? Answering these critical questions will be central to Messiah's upcoming strategic planning process. The "hedgehog" concept will help us link our resource engine to our strengths and passions so that we will be able to meet strategic priorities. In fact, these three questions need to become our new campus mantra – let me state them again – What can we do best? What are we passionate about? What drives our economic planning?

As we endeavor to create a shared vision for the next century, we already know certain elements which will be a part of that collective vision:

1. First, the need to deepen academic, artistic, and athletic excellence. In the midst of financial constraints and ambitious enrollment goals, we will engage in careful analysis and review as we seek to develop new revenue sources and reallocate existing resources which will enable us to continue to achieve educational excellence. Of course, a commitment to excellence will require some new resources, but it will also require the disciplined re-examination of the allocation of current resources. Future decisions about new initiatives and program development will be rooted in careful assessment, accompanied by realistic, research-based financial plans, and these decisions will not be made in isolation from the institutional strategic plan. In the current context of static enrollment growth and the need to control tuition costs, we must commit ourselves to collegial decision making where we focus on what is best for the institution not just a single department or unit. We will need discipline, understanding, wisdom, and courage to make visionary decisions that insure future viability as well as maintain current strength.

2. Second, the need to secure our financial health to enable us to effectively fulfill our mission. I am sincerely grateful for your faithfulness in exercising prudent stewardship of the College's resources. The President's Cabinet and Institutional Planning and Finance Subcommittee are finalizing a comprehensive approach for increasing revenue and decreasing costs for FY08 and beyond. In early October, copies of this document will be distributed to campus governance groups, divisions, and departments for discussion. I want to underscore that Messiah has a firm financial foundation, but we must not be complacent – now is the time to be strategic about strengthening that foundation. We must work diligently to achieve the goal of projected balanced operational budgets, in contrast to recent projected deficits.
3. Third, the need to craft innovative programs which offer the opportunity to fulfill our mission in new contexts and to provide us with necessary additional revenue. As I noted in the first focal point, the current external environment is a highly competitive one for traditional residential undergraduate education. We must move forward with the implementation of an enhanced summer school program in 2007 (which could include some limited online courses and continuing education units) and the development of curriculum for select graduate programs (the full report from the Graduate Studies Task Force will be presented this Fall). These programs will clearly reflect Messiah's mission and identity, and they must meet educational needs of our region. We are also examining ways to expand the scope and profitability of our highly successful summer conference program.
4. Finally, we must sincerely embrace and embody the idea of "inclusive excellence" as outlined by the American Association of Colleges & Universities. The concept of inclusive excellence suggests that we all need to be committed to: the intellectual, social, and spiritual development of our students; the purposeful utilization of resources to enhance student learning; the need to give attention to cultural differences that learners bring to the educational experience; and the desire to provide a welcoming community that engages diversity—(diversity that includes cultural, ethnic, gender, and denominational differences). The AAC&U argues that inclusive excellence is critical to the 21st century because "nothing else will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives." Inclusive excellence is not about trendiness or political correctness—inclusive excellence is essential to fulfilling our educational mission and purpose. I believe that as a Christian college we bear an even greater responsibility to represent, honor, and value the diversity of God's Kingdom in our community and in our educational mission. Toward that end, the Office of Multicultural Programs will be leading a campus-wide assessment to help us identify institutional concerns related to campus climate. As I indicated last year, this type of comprehensive survey is foundational to promoting reconciliation within our College community and beyond the boundaries of our campus. We must nurture an affirming, hospitable campus culture where all of God's people are welcomed and honored as sacred beings. No doubt the campus climate assessment will need to be followed by honest and courageous campus conversations, conversations which should lead to a resolute commitment for constructive and lasting change.

Conclusion

I am certain that even a visionary leader like S. R. Smith would have found it difficult to imagine the Messiah College of 2006. I doubt that he could have envisioned our specific challenges, opportunities, or our achievements. But S. R. Smith was faithful to his vision in 1909 and with the support and contributions of a faithful community; he founded a college which ninety-seven years later continues to educate students for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation to a conflicted and chaotic world. As we initiate a new academic year, grateful for the legacy of dedicated servants of the past and hopeful for the promises of the future, we move forward with anticipation and confidence, and also with a spirit of humility—recognizing that we all have limitations and weaknesses, and that we need each other to accomplish our shared mission—to fulfill our individual and corporate vocations. In the words of an Irish proverb, "it is in the shelter of each other that people live." So, this morning in the shelter of each other,

we commit ourselves to our common endeavor, trusting in our God who is faithful, affirming God's calling for our lives as we seek to help our students unravel the paradox, the promise, the mystery, and the joy that is life!

Kim S. Phipps
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