



## Without A Moment's Delay

State of the University Address

Philip W. Eaton, President, September 22, 2004

I like gathering like this. I like the energy of new beginnings. Call it redemption or mercy or grace—but we get the chance to sort of start all over. And we get the chance to gather in community with our friends and colleagues and partners in this good work. We are doing a good work together. What a privilege, don't you think?

I hope you all come back renewed and refreshed with big expectations for the year to come. I have huge hopes for what is in store for us. In fact, I've got some special sense of excitement for this year. Let's check in about April or May, but I am charged right now, and I want to tell you some of the reasons why.

As I begin my remarks, I would like to recognize the Vice Presidents that work so closely with me: Marj Johnson, Bob McIntosh, Don Mortenson, and Les Steele. This is truly one of the finest cabinets anywhere in the country. I also want to recognize my wife Sharon who is such a partner in so many ways in this work. And our trustees that come alongside us in so many ways. We have student leaders with us. And some of the members of the Alumni Council. And welcome to all new faculty and staff. Thank you all for being here.

Tomorrow we will welcome 640 new Freshmen and 260 transfer students, a total of 900 new undergraduate students. Maybe double that number of parents will be with us. Last Thursday night we welcomed all of the new graduate students. What a great thing to feel all of that energy and expectation, the anxieties, the fears, the hopes and dreams. I get swept up in it.

When I went to college my folks just put me on an airplane. As I peered out the window of the plane, they just waved to me. These days that would be called abusive. We do it up big for new students and parents and family members. And as I speak to this group, both to students and parents, something powerful takes hold of me. The parents cry, and I almost cry. They know it's a big deal, and so do I.

And I recognize again, as I have for so many Septembers in my life, what a big deal all of this is. What a privilege. What a huge responsibility. When these kids and these parents are asking for bread, we can't give them a stone. We've got to do things with excellence and with care. What a privilege. How exciting to begin once again.

The focus of my address this morning is the *Blueprint For Excellence*. I want you to come out of this address with a good understanding for what we are trying to accomplish with this major, strategic planning process. Today's address, coupled with my Opening Convocation Address, will sketch out what I think are the contours for a bold vision for the future of this institution.

The pieces of the *Blueprint* are still being put together, but I am beginning to see the shape, and I am very excited about what is emerging. I will be taking the *Blueprint* to the Board at our November meeting to seek their affirmation of the direction we are moving. I look forward to hearing your thoughts in response to both of my opening addresses.

But before I zero in on the *Blueprint*, let me give you a few touch points on why I believe the state of the university is so healthy. I have said it many times over the last year, and I will say it again: Seattle Pacific University is absolutely flourishing.

- Our enrollment picture for this coming year is a very exciting story. We will

welcome a record 3,800 students this fall, 900 of them new students. This puts us right at 3,000 undergraduates and 800 graduate students. And here's the story: we have set out to manage our growth very carefully and that gives us the chance to shape the profile of our enrollment. We will see this year, for example, a 6% increase in the number of males in this new class. Significantly, we will see a 3% increase in the number of new ethnic minority students—and that is up 6% from five years ago! The incoming class has a record number of National Merit Scholars. Listen to this: our persistence rate continues to move up dramatically: 85% will persist from freshman to sophomore year, a whopping 6% increase from last year. We have improved our five-year graduation rate by 8% over the last five years. These are hugely important strategic indicators that will be part of the blueprint for the future. My thanks to admissions, financial aid, positioning folks, the Core faculty and all of our faculty, the Student Life and Res Life staff. Everyone plays a part in these great numbers. These are indicators that say we are indeed flourishing.

- Another touch point of health: we are moving down the stretch to complete the most significant fundraising campaign in the history of the institution. We stand at this moment at \$48 million already raised for the Campaign. The goal is \$52.8 million.

We can see the finish line.

- Some good recent news: just last Wednesday a couple we have been working with for years, a couple we actually lost track of, signed a commitment for a \$2 million irrevocable trust. This is a long story, but I commend the persistence and diligence of Bob McIntosh and his staff, especially in this case, Doug Bickerstaff. I wish you could hear sometime the amazing stories around so many of these gifts—and they just keep coming.

Stay tuned. Believe me, I will let you know when we have crossed the line. I want to thank all of you who have participated in this campaign. We've had great response from our faculty and staff and trustees, and I am grateful to you. I want to thank our advancement staff, our team of volunteers (lead by our trustee Bruce Walker as chair of the campaign committee), and our trustees.

Let me add this: seven years ago we hired a fine national firm to conduct a feasibility study for us on the prospects of a campaign. Our consultant, Bruce Dreon, came back and said we could only expect to raise \$25 million. The base was not broad enough for much more than that. I said, maybe naively and a bit brashly, thank you very much, but we are going to shoot for \$50 million. And then, when we sat down at the opening of the public phase of Campaign four years ago, when the market was plummeting and the economy was going south and 9/11 had alarmed the country, and we asked whether we should go forward. We decided to go for it, against the current. And we are going to finish.

This is a great story of high expectations, a great team, and a compelling vision.

- Third, I am proud to remind us that we are opening the John Perkins Center for Reconciliation. This is a big moment for us, a symbolic moment, and a practical moment, that says we are serious about diversity and reconciliation. We are delighted that Tali Hairston has decided to give leadership to this effort, and that John Perkins has decided to partner with us. The Perkins Center will be a center of encouragement and support and coordination. It will be a catalyst and an initiator. Tali will be a pastor, a mentor, and guide for us on issues of reconciliation. We are moving forward with so much going on all over the campus. One note of interest on our diversity efforts: over the last two years we have doubled the number of African American employees and increased the percentage of all ethnic minority faculty and staff from 7% to 9%. We have work to do, but we are gaining. My thanks to the leaders in all of this, to Tali and Joe Snell, to Les Steele and Alex Gee, to Gary and Barbara Ames, to Deborah Sequeira and Bill Purcell, and so many others. Let me remind you that we will stay the course on diversity and reconciliation.

- Fourth, I will launch this year something I am calling the President's Symposia on Engaging the Culture and Changing the World. In the priorities I have outlined for myself for the years ahead, I am committed to doing my part to create a vibrant intellectual community that is fully committed to cultural engagement. This is a three-part series beginning with John Perkins on reconciliation, followed in the winter by John Medina on brain research and learning, and concluding in May with the world renowned New Testament scholar N. T. Wright on the New Testament and cultural engagement. This should be a very exciting series, focused by our vision, drawing scholars and thinkers and Christians from around the country.
- One more note: you will see new banners around campus and some new ads coming in various national magazines. As most of you know, I am very big on positioning. We have to tell our story in all kinds of ways. Under Marj Johnson's direction, we have gathered a team of very savvy people about these matters. And we have launched an intentional strategy to be less scattered in our marketing and positioning work, to be clear about our image and identity. And we are empowering this positioning team to give us guidance in this important work.
- Just one more note: just yesterday the School of Business and Economics learned that the Princeton Review picked Seattle Pacific as the #1 ranked best administered out of the top 143 business schools in the country. Our congratulations to Jeff Van Duzer, Gary Karns, and Debbie Wysomierski for their good work with our students.

Well, these touch points represent so much that is happening and they all add up to say we are flourishing at Seattle Pacific University. Absolutely flourishing. We are indeed building a premier, national Christian university.

So let's turn back to the *Blueprint For Excellence*. Where are we headed for the future? What is this planning effort all about? What do we hope to accomplish?

First, let me lay out a little of the history of the blueprint. Last year at this time I announced we would launch a blueprint planning process. This came out of a strong sense on my part that we were at a moment of institutional lull, or to change the metaphor, that we had reached a plateau. I was restless. I felt we were in danger of coasting into the future. We needed to renew, reshape, clarify, and sharpen our direction for the next ten years. As I said last year we needed to define, declare, and deliver our distinctives.

And I also had the sense that we were on the verge of moving into another category of excellence and distinction. Perhaps we were really ready to define a new category of Christian higher education. Perhaps we were ready to step onto a national platform. That's big language and a big aspiration, I know, but I think it is true.

And so we spent the whole year last year in blueprint planning and conversation. Departments all across campus have created their individual blueprints. The Vice Presidents are managing the process in each of their areas. The Board of Trustees is doing its own blueprint. I have fanned out all over campus in conversation about our distinctives. I have been listening and talking and reflecting and writing.

Eight and a half year ago, we began another strategic planning process that culminated in the *Comprehensive Plan for the 21st Century*. When you look at that plan now, we can celebrate that most of it is complete.

Guided by the *Comprehensive Plan*, just think of the things we have accomplished. We have invested \$100 million into our facilities. We are just about to finish the largest fundraising campaign in the history of the institution. We have made dramatic gains in the number of applications, our admit rate, selectivity, persistence, and graduation rate. Our visibility downtown, in the region, and across the country has dramatically changed. These are huge accomplishments. We created a distinctive core curriculum, established

a Center for Scholarship and Faculty Development, invested heavily in the sciences, among so many other things. We have developed a strategy of outcomes assessment that is second to none. We created a new category of institutional publication with our *Response* magazine, now nationally recognized. We are taking our vision downtown in the Business Breakfast and the Benaroya Christmas concert. We have announced to the world we are serious about the arts, literature, and faith through the nationally recognized magazine *Image*. And we have announced as well that we are serious about reconciliation.

But most of all we crafted real clarity about our vision, our purpose, our identity. There is no mistaking who we are. This is huge. We know we are about the work of engaging the culture and changing the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our vision and mission language is now our distinctive language. We approved a new *Mission Statement*, weaving this language into the fabric of the institution. And then we went on to approve a new *Statement of Faith* that captures so clearly our special identity in faith.

And so here's the deal: with these foundations now solidly in place, and with all of the extraordinary work you have accomplished over these seven years, we now have to craft a blueprint, a plan, a vision of where we go from here.

Let me give you the spirit of this thing.

I sat up at the Faculty Retreat for a day and a half listening to the commitments and the accomplishments and the passions of our faculty from every area of the campus. I was dazzled and amazed. For the most part there was a real effort to align each area with the overall vision and mission of the university. And I said to myself, it's happening. This is excellence. This is a premier Christian university that knows a great deal about engaging the culture.

I was talking to Bruce Congdon late last Friday evening. I was pressing Bruce to think with me on the distinctives in the College of Arts and Sciences. Out our distinctive commitment to engage the culture in the sciences, for example, and out of the huge investments we have made in the sciences and our focused efforts on undergraduate research, and out of a 40% increase in pre-med and science enrollment and the work that is being done to change the way students learn in physics, and out of the new energy and synergy among our science faculty—maybe we do indeed have an emerging distinctive, maybe, to use Bruce's language, we have joined the table of distinguished Christian universities doing science.

On another note, in one of my conversations last spring, Rob Wall said something that rings true for me. He said, with real conviction in his voice, that our students are theologically educated. That out of the shaping and the doing of our Foundations courses, our students will emerge as theologically educated, biblically educated. Is that a distinctive? I think so. Does that address our vision to equip people to engage the culture and change the world? It is the ground point. It is pivotal.

And as I listened to Patrick McDonald and Rod Stiling talk about Core 2000, I thought, we're getting there. With courage and risk and clarity and wisdom, these professors and others are asking the big questions about creation and evolution, science and the soul, the problem of evil, stewardship, cloning, just war, and hell. These are the big questions, and if Christians are not asking these questions we will have no place at the table of the culture. This is the excellence we seek. Core is key to our purpose, our identity, our distinctive.

Listen, here's my point: I think we are at a pivotal moment, a moment of culmination, a moment of accomplishment, a moment of convergence. So many extraordinary things coming together. We stand here and celebrate all of this—and then we have to ask the question: where do we go from here?

And so the goal of the *Blueprint* will be to capture all of this. I want to capture what

distinguishes us. And I want to put it into a clear and compelling and congruent form and point it all in the same direction, guided and informed by our vision and mission. And then I want to tell our story to the world. And I want to unleash what I believe is now hidden to us, the desire that exists across this nation to invest in a university that wants to change the world with the gospel. I want to change the resource paradigm for Seattle Pacific so that we can be change agents in a confused and troubled world.

Here's my conviction: We have a chance to do something bold and new and significant, something with dimensions of impact and influence we have never dreamed of before. We stand on the front edge, on the cusp, and I want to see us define quite clearly a vision for the possibilities ahead.

Just this Monday, at the downtown business roundtable to which I belong, Senator Slade Gorton gave a presentation on his work with the 9/11 Commission. Senator Gorton reminded us that the conclusions reached by the Commission, among so many specific recommendations, was that the attacks of 9/11 came in part by a failure of imagination, and that the solutions will come in the long run only be a renewal of imagination.

Of course I don't want to trivialize the work of the Commission or the horrendous challenge of terrorism by comparing this concept to our work ahead, but let it not be said of Seattle Pacific University in this moment of opportunity that we missed our chance because of failed imagination. If we are going to change the world we need bold imagination for this great university.

Let me finish with this. Pastor Abbott cautioned me at one of our board meetings last year, and then Rick Steele echoed his sentiments at Faculty Retreat: be careful as you use the language of premier and excellence; be careful of the motivation; be careful of pride and too much competitiveness; be careful that our words do not get out ahead of our actions. I want you to know I am listening to this caution and to these concerns.

But I've got to tell you there is something in me that wants to move forward boldly. I don't think we can come out of this planning tentative or cautious. I think we have something to trumpet. I think we have a light to shine. Because I am convinced we stand at a very unique and exciting moment of opportunity, an opportunity we have been given, and an opportunity we have created.

And I've got a competitiveness in me that I have a hard time keeping tame. A story for another time, but I confess I got tangled up in that competitiveness this summer, as I sometimes do. Lord help me, and all of you help me, we are not competitive in order to beat others down or to gain some prideful advantage but rather to discover who we really are and to do that with the highest levels of excellence.

Here's the point: we have a chance right now to craft a plan together for a premier, national Christian university, a great Protestant, Wesleyan university like no other in this country. No one else has just our faith identity. No one else quite shares our mission to engage the culture and change the world. We are defining something very distinctive. I know we have to broaden our base nationally, and we have to transform the resource paradigm we have lived with in the past, but we don't do this as an end in itself. We must always ask the question: premier to what end? We will set our sights very high, so that, we can empower an extraordinary group of people, all of you in this room, to make a huge difference in the world.

One of my guiding texts for the year is that great story of two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. This was on the third day after the brutal crucifixion of their Lord. This was a time for them of crushing defeat, consternation, confusion, and fear.

And as they walked along, Jesus came to walk beside them, but they did not recognize him, the text says. Jesus then playfully asks them why they were so troubled. And then he began to teach them the whole story, the grand story of God's exuberant love for his

people, from the beginning to this culminating moment. And then he took bread and broke it and offered it to them. And suddenly their eyes were opened and they knew it was Jesus. "Were not our hearts on fire," they said, "as he talked with us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?"

"Without a moment's delay," the text says, "they set out and returned to Jerusalem." And they gathered with the others and drew up their plans. From this day forward they wanted to do nothing else but share the good news that Jesus is alive. And this is the story that changed the world. No failure of imagination here.

Perhaps the Emmaus story is little parable about where we stand at this moment at Seattle Pacific. I hope we can open our eyes in the coming year, day in and day out, to see that Jesus walks beside us. And let us study the scriptures together, intensely and thoroughly, and let us get hold of that big story that can make new sense out of all our confusion in this troubled world. And let us break bread together, and let our hearts be on fire together. And then let us set out, without a moment's delay, to change the world with our story, this good-news story that we discover on the road as we walk with our Lord.

God bless each one of you in this year ahead. Somehow I've got this feeling that the year ahead will be a good one indeed.

