

April 12, 2017

Bethany College began the academic year with a renewed spirit that was evidenced in the first actions of its new President, William A. Jones. At the Opening Convocation, which welcomes back to campus students, faculty and staff, President Jones washed the feet of a student to demonstrate his commitment to be a servant leader to his Christian faith and to student success and invited all attending to join him at the fountains in the center of campus to do the same. More than 200 responded, some waiting more than 30 minutes, to have the opportunity to wash the feet of someone else.

This visible example of one of Bethany's core values – Servant Leadership – has been a touchstone this year as Bethany continues to address current challenges and plan for a thriving future.

President Jones, the 14th president of Bethany College, started on July 1. He and his wife Amy, along with their six children, moved to Lindsborg from LaGrange, Georgia where he served as vice president of external relations. His charge to faculty and staff was clear from the beginning: how do we help our students become successful professionals who love God and love people and how do we help transform our local community?

These guiding principals have helped the college overcome adversity and create opportunities this year. In the fall, the college welcomed the largest class of incoming freshman to campus in 17 years and the largest class of new students (freshman and transfers) in 22 years. Additionally, the fall to spring retention of first time freshman increased from last year to nearly 81 percent (up eight percentage points.) This year, students at Bethany come from 38 states and 25 countries.

While the college celebrated an early enrollment victory this fall, it also faced hardship when white supremacists attacked the Jones family and Bethany students by writing racist messages across campus sidewalks. The college took immediate action to remove the hate messages and reached out to its students in a special chapel service to offer healing support. The incident was widely reported locally and nationally by the Washington Post and others. The coverage brought positive attention to the college's values, faith tradition, welcoming attitude, and multicultural community. The incident also rallied support of the college from Lindsborg and from people across the United States. It was truly an example of the lesson from Genesis 50 - what man meant for evil, God intends for good.

In December, Bethany announced a new opportunity for local students graduating from any Saline or McPherson County high school called The Good Life Scholarship. The scholarships offer free tuition to all local graduates accepted to Bethany for the next five years beginning in the fall of 2017. The scholarship, made possible through the generous support of local donors, is a way for Bethany to show its gratitude for 135 years of support from Saline and McPherson Counties.

Bethany celebrated more good news in the spring when the college's audit report was presented to the Board of Directors. The audited financial report showed a turn-around of \$5.42 million from fiscal year 2015 to fiscal year 2016, which ended with a surplus of \$77,000. The report credited the turn-around to the hard work of the college's management team and decisions that were made in the previous year to cut expenses and increase contributions. The college continues to carefully monitor and manage its budget and is confident that the financial progress made over the past year will continue.

In March, Bethany received word that it had cleared the first hurdle for removal from probation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). A report from the comprehensive evaluation visit team recommended removal from probation and reaffirmation of accreditation for Bethany. The HLC placed Bethany on probation in June 2015 for concerns over operational processes, finances, and assessment. While on probation, the college remains fully accredited.

While the team's report is not the final decision, it is an extremely positive step for the college. The evaluation team report will be presented to the Institutional Actions Council of HLC in April and its recommendation will be presented to the HLC Board of Directors, which will act in late June.

As the Bethany community strives for success and excellence during this period of renewed spirit, you also play a role in the college's achievements. We ask that you experience our core value of Hospitality and make a visit to Bethany and to Lindsborg. When you visit, you will find a talented community of faculty and students who are passionate about educating, developing, and challenging individuals to discover the best in themselves.

We ask that you pray for Bethany, for its mission that challenges individuals to reach for truth and excellence as they lead lives of faith, learning, and service.

And, we ask that you financially support higher education at Bethany College. Thank you for all you do for Bethany College, its students, and the greater Lutheran community.