

WARTBURG COLLEGE
COMMISSION ON MISSION GALA EVENT
6 p.m., Knights Ballroom
Friday, October 22, 2010

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT DARREL D. COLSON

As the Commission on Mission concluded its work, preparing the way for our Strategic Planning Committee, it was becoming more and more clear to us that the mission we all hold so dear – the mission of preparing young people to express their faith and learning by leading and serving – not only honors a precious heritage, but also requires a hearty embrace of the future.

Choosing the theme “Affirming the Mission, Ensuring its Impact,” the Commission set out to illuminate compelling new ways that Wartburg could fulfill its mission.

What we learned about ourselves in this process was both profound and inspiring. In addition to a rich legacy, Wartburg enjoys the gift of strong values.

I still recall when the Planning Committee sat down to take the materials—the vast materials—they had been gathering and cast them into a strategic plan. When we began to talk about the values that should guide us, I felt a good bit of trepidation. I had been through this sort of discussion before at other places, and I knew that such discussions could easily go on forever—*forever*—and not necessarily conclude.

Our discussion, on the other hand, was remarkably quick. Indeed, I remember, at the end of about an hour’s really productive conversation, looking at Lake Lambert with my eyes wide and he returned the look, his eyes wider than mine.

Now I’m not saying that we didn’t continue debating the actual formulations and phrasing; indeed, I think that even now Kit Kleinhans and I would still put an editor’s blue pencil to use if given half a chance—but that probably says more about our shared neuroses than about anything in the plan.

But in essential terms, the group shared a commitment to the values we hold up in this plan. That consensus the Planning Committee shared is no doubt a reflection of the consensus that has guided Wartburg College for generations.

We value the pursuit of *excellence*, and we commit ourselves each day to the highest standards of performance, expecting our students to achieve academic success and seeking continuously to improve ourselves.

We plan to inspire *integrity* by addressing the wholeness of each student; we want to use every means at our disposal to develop young people whose thoughts, feelings, and actions flow naturally from an ethical character and fulfill a strong sense of vocation.

We treasure our *legacy*, grateful for our German and Midwestern roots in the vibrant Lutheran spiritual and intellectual tradition that stretches back through Neuendettelsau through the Castle and all the way to the University of Wittenberg, circa 1515.

We heed the call to *stewardship*: the demands of fiscal responsibility, of environmental sustainability, and of responsible use of time, talents, and resources.

Not only in this year of celebrating community, but in all times, we seek to strengthen the bonds of *community*, valuing the diversity that is America and the world.

We proclaim a commitment to deepen our *engagement* with the world outside our doors.

These values set the course of our work, and our work is to reach forward, to act boldly, and to seize the opportunities that present themselves—heck, event to create the opportunities we can imagine. Wartburg Founder Pastor Wilhelm Löhe himself modeled this approach for us: to remain firmly grounded in timeless values, and yet act flexibly and imaginatively to address the changing needs of the people we serve. That's the role of the strategic plan we unveil today—to compel and to shape the transformative decisions that will secure our future and, more importantly, our students' futures.

Ensuring the enduring impact of the mission requires us to do exactly what our predecessors have done time and time again: to anticipate our students'

needs, to respond to those needs effectively and innovatively with the proper combination of challenge and nurture, and thus to build firm characters with the desire and capacity to excel at living their learning.

Upon the enthusiastic recommendation of the Strategic Planning Committee, the Board of Regents today has endorsed and adopted this plan as its own.

The first three goals identify the ambitions we share for the education of our students. We proclaim our intention to offer students the richest educational experiences we can provide, experiences that deepen their learning and integrate what happens in class with what happens in the world. We renew, as well, our commitment to the process of discernment, lending our support to students' efforts to hear their vocational calls. We promise also to foster a climate that embraces our students in the fullness of their diversity and to mentor their growth as whole persons.

Our final three goals address the practical measures without which we cannot secure our ambitious educational goals: strengthening finances and infrastructure; investing in the work of our people; and telling Wartburg's story far and wide.

I mean for us to achieve these goals; I mean for us to become the very best college--certainly in this region but perhaps beyond it as well--at deep, integrative, mentored learning that grounds meaningful lives and opens countless career opportunities.

I'll share with you a little story: Recently I was talking to another Lutheran college president, a guy who's spent a lot of time in the Midwest. He told me that once was the time he didn't pay any attention to Wartburg College. Now, he says, he's constantly looking over his shoulder to see what we are up to. I liked that metaphor of the footrace, and I took it a bit further in my own mind. My intention is that when we get going on this plan, he'll be looking at the numbers on the back of our jerseys, for our calling is to be the best, to attain the excellence that is our vocation.

As I look forward to implementing and pursuing this plan, I envision a future not too far distant in which *everyone* within earshot knows that our school is the finest in the East or West.

I brought some show-and-tell tonight. On this table are samples—mere samples and chosen almost totally at random—of items that testify to the quality of what we do here at Wartburg. In broadest terms, these are symbols of the engaged learning that we do so pervasively. We have co-curricular items, such as awards for intercollegiate athletics. We have art from Africa, symbolizing those many learning experiences that integrate classroom and travel, Waverly and the wider world. We have awards from local, state, and national organizations recognizing the service that our students and our employees offer to the wider community. And, now, we can add to that set of items on the table, another that takes us to the international level.

I'm going to invite Fred Waldstein up to share some thoughts.

Dr. Waldstein makes brief remarks and present the College with the MacJannet Prize plaque.

These randomly selected items—we have many, many more of these, I assure you—say important things about the trajectory of this college. We are already moving confidently into the future; the conditions are ripe for this strategic plan, which will carry us to the next level.

In the first instance, of course, it falls to us on the campus to implement this plan. The immediate responsibility lies with the faculty and staff to take the actions that serve these six goals. But, as has always been the case in the life of Wartburg College, we will have to draw on the strength of others to achieve success. Fully to realize these goals, we will need the help of everyone who loves Wartburg; our students, both those on campus now and those who follow tomorrow, need for each of us to hear and to claim the call to serve—in other words, to live out what we learned in the shadow of Old Main, to continue to devote our time and our energy, our talents and our treasure to this College, playing our own parts in leading it confidently into the future we'll create together.

As I say these things, I know that I “sing to the choir.” Wartburg's astounding ascent during the past three-quarters of a century is due to the continuing support of our many friends and alumni who have always responded to the College's call. With gratitude for all that you've done in the past, I invite you to share in transforming our future into a tomorrow of our own bold design.