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A Time To Plant, A Time To Harvest 2009 State of the University Address

September 23, 2009

Philip W. Eaton, President

Welcome to the beginning of another academic year at Seattle Pacific University.

Thank you for being here this morning. Thank you for being part of the exceptional team that makes up this great university. You're great. You're all great. What a privilege it is to be working with you. In this very place, for this season of time in the life of this institution, we are the team, all of us gathered in this room.

I welcome this morning all of our faculty and staff. I welcome many of our trustees who are here this morning. I welcome our student leaders. Kristin Unti told me out on the loop yesterday that she had never seen a group of students so energized and charged. Hang on, folks, here they come. I welcome also a number of our friends and supporters we have invited to join us in this celebration of opening.

We all have our individual roles to play, don't we? We have biologists in this room. Good ones. We have chemists and physicists and theologians in this room. We have economists and psychologists and engineers and professional educators and professors of literature and history and philosophy. We have experts in finance and financial aid and technology. We have experts in plumbing and lighting, experts in flowers and trees. We have vice presidents and deans and department heads and coaches. *And yet we have all come to the Lord's table this morning.* And we all bring our individual gifts and our unique interests and our special contributions to this common table of our work, this amazing venture we call the Christian university.

I was thinking about all of this during the Wimbledon competition this summer. Some of you may have seen the historic final match between Roger Federer and Andy Roddick. It went on for four and a quarter hours. There were 30 games in the final set. Sharon and I were watching the match with two of our beautiful grandsons, Elliott and Andrew. As the last set at Wimbledon went on and on, six-year-old Elliott began switching to the cartoons during the commercials. Andrew and I would say, "No, Elliott, it's time to get back to the match. This is a very cool match." Not impressed, and finally exasperated, Elliott said: "Granddad, you can watch Wimbledon in the newspapers tomorrow. I will never, ever be able to see this version of Scooby Doo again."

Our challenge this morning, as it always is, is to bring all of our individual gifts and interests and passions together for the common work of this great university. Not always an easy task when we get into the swirl and the fray of daily life on a university campus. But that's our goal. Wimbledon and Scooby Doo can come together. And that's why we gather together here this morning.

Sharon and I begin our fifteenth year in our roles at Seattle Pacific! I want you to know I come into this year as energized as I have ever been. I come into this year full of an incredible sense of *confidence* about what happens on this campus day in and day out. I come into this year, as well, hugely *optimistic* and very excited about what is about to unfold over the year ahead.

What is the state of the university this morning? Maybe it has something to do with that sense of deep *confidence*. I've never been more proud of the accomplishments of so many of our faculty. It all adds up to something quite incredible. That's a theme I want to strike this morning. I've never been more proud of our students, who they are, what they too are accomplishing, where they are headed. I've never been more confident about the unique and distinctive *idea of the Christian university* that we are trying to shape and model in this place.

Every university goes through the seasons of its life. 118 years ago there was a season of the first planting and planning for Seattle Pacific. The resources in those early years were meager, to be sure, but even then, out on the ragged fringes of the American frontier, our founders had a vision. They imagined that their graduates would fan out across the globe to make a difference. That's in our DNA. I love the expansive boldness of our founding visionaries.

I had a conversation with Annette Weyerhaeuser a couple of years ago. Annette is the longtime wife and partner to the great Dave Weyerhaeuser, one of my heroes in life. Annette grew up on Highland Drive, just over the hill on Queen Anne. That's the spot where you can look out over the city and the sound and Mt. Rainier all at once. Annette talked about walking over the hill with her mother to visit "little Seattle Pacific," as she called it. This had to be in the

1920s or 30s, early on in our history. She said, "Oh, my, it was such a scruffy, muddy little place. There weren't many trees back then. And very few buildings, of course. *Oh my, how it has come along over the years.*"

And so there was a time of planting and a time of growing and maturing. We look out across to the loop where our magnificent, hundred-year old trees now stand, mature and tall and for the most part still flourishing. Somebody planted those trees. We must gather here this morning with gratitude for those who have gone before us, for the shaping of a bold vision, the building of a campus, the staying true to the core, Christian identity of this place.

Over the last fourteen years that we have been part of this great university, we have been through another season of planting and planning, of building and growing. When I began my work here, we went through a time of digging down deep into our roots. It was a time of rediscovery, I think, a time to cultivate and nurture who we are, and a time of planning about where we were going, a time to catch and cast a vision for the future. We did a huge amount of building through that time. And then over the last two years, we have gone through another time of extensive, careful, thoughtful planning.

But here is my message for this morning: I sense now our time for planning is over. Now is the time for action plans. *Now is the time to move forward. Now is the time for us to take things to the next level of influence and effectiveness.* The vision is clear. Our identity is certain. The plans are in place. Let us clear out all of the distractions and roll up our sleeves and move forward. That is our season in the life of this great institution.

Most certainly the challenges surround us. Faced with enormous, intensified competition from other universities; faced with disturbing trends of reduced support from federal and state resources; faced with the flattening demographics of college age students; faced with the challenge and even the threat of technology to our way of doing education; faced with the growing public suspicion that what we have to offer may not be worth the price; faced with an economy that continues to swirl around our families with uncertainty and even fear—in the face of all of this, *I am convinced this morning it is time to take our work to the next level of influence and effectiveness, and I have never been more confident.*

All through the winter and spring of last year I worked with Tom Box and Karen and Kristin and Lynne to get me in front of lots of people. Tom and I put together a list of our top 100 supporters, and I connected with 74 of them. That's a lot of lunches and a lot of breakfasts.

In that time I figured out what my elevator speech needed to be as I sat across from all of these wonderful people. This is the practice presidents have to master. This is the speech we have to give as we enter the elevator at the garage level before we get off on the 17th floor. An elevator speech has to be crisp and concrete and compelling. It has to allow for presidential spin, to be sure, but it has to be real and true and convincing.

But here is the elevator speech I've been giving these days. It goes something like this:

- 1. First, we are guided by a clear vision.* Our Christian identity is crystal clear. Our vision and mission call us to engage the culture and change the world. That's unique. That's powerful. That's a university seeking to make a difference in the world.
- 2. Second, we build on a stunning track record of accomplishments.* This part of the speech is critical. I am so proud to trumpet the accomplishments that go on all across this campus every day. I am delighted to tell the amazing stories of our graduates. This is where I have such confidence these days.
- 3. Third, we are going to take all of this to the next level of excellence and effectiveness and influence.* We are going to be of influence in the world *even more effectively.* The gospel calls us to help make the world a better place for all of God's children, and so we seek to do this with excellence, at the highest levels, with effectiveness.

And so that's it. That's the elevator speech. People get these three things. They respond. I will be in front of lots of people this year giving such a speech. That's my assignment for the year. I will be traveling. I will be eating lots more lunches. The Advancement team will be doing the same thing. Our trustees will be going with me often.

You can't believe how charged I am to take the word out *even more broadly and even more personally* than I ever have. I need your help. I need your prayers. Let's live and give this elevator speech throughout the year.

Part of our 2014 Blueprint calls for a campaign for The New University Center. We are launching the quiet phase of a major campaign. Under the direction of Dave Church and Don Mortenson, we are deep into the design phase of this incredible village complex of buildings. After extraordinary planning by Tom Box and Marj Johnson and their teams, we are ready to get in front of our top donors, to approach 30,000 new partners, huge numbers of them connected through the new social media. Much of this work will be anchored by an exciting new web that will emerge through the year. I have asked Les Steele to map out strategies for faculty hiring and how we can take so many of our program initiatives to the innovative edge.

Let me remind you about this New University Center. This great new village complex will consist of three critical components, all carefully and beautifully designed to take us to the next level as a vibrant intellectual community:

- There will be 13 state-of-the-art-classrooms. This will be a center for learning, for faculty and scholarship;
- There will be a center for the arts: music, art, and theater, now complementing with the arts our

years-long commitment to the sciences;

- There will be a 1,100 seat state-of-the-art performance hall: for lectures, music performance, chapel and worship, high ceremony events, and community gathering.

This great project will allow us to gather in Christian community, even as we reach out into our broader community, across the nation, even across the globe.

We have a lot of money to raise and a lot of resources to bring to this great project and to our strategic plan. I encourage you to get out your own elevator speech and tell the story. I encourage you to suggest people we need to see. We have a story to tell about the next phase of our work, and that is the job we tackle with urgency and enthusiasm for the year ahead. We're going to try to clear out all of the distractions and get the job done.

What do I mean by this enormous sense of confidence I bring to our work in this coming year? Over the spring and summer we have put together a huge list of accomplishments, the impressive things that are happening all across this campus, the incredible things our graduates are accomplishing in the world, the ways in which we are out on the competitive edge.

Here are some of the things I think about this morning:

- Our numbers for the fall are stunningly positive. Tomorrow afternoon I will welcome 690 Freshmen and 236 transfers and about ninety thousand parents and family members. With some 900 expected graduate students and all of our returning students, we will enroll 3,950 students. We are announcing an 88% persistence rate, a huge leap. We are announcing a 74% graduation rate, a leap of 10% over the year before. We are announcing 27% ethnic minority students among our new students. In a year of such enormous challenges around enrollment, we are coming in right on target. This is a big story of accomplishment this morning, a story of tremendous team work.

- I would lift up again the work of our faculty in the sciences. So many people on this great team. In fact I am blown away that our scientists and our science educators have put us on the cutting edge. This is something that gives me confidence.

- I would lift up our exploding work in theology. I am so proud of this team. Talk about a season of maturing work, our faculty now launch the Center for Biblical and Theological Education, funded by a major grant, a new graduate program in theology, that will also be funded by a grant. My thanks to Dean Doug Strong and all of this great team in the School of Theology. We are on the map nationally in theology and biblical studies.

- I would lift up the work going on in the School of Business and Economics. Jeff Van Duzer and the faculty are leading the way for AACSB accreditation, placing us once again in the top third of all business schools in the country, launching a Center for Integrity in Business, staging sold-out conferences on things like Microfinance social ventures, placing annually some 250 students in mentoring situations in the business community.

- I would lift up again the work of the Perkins Center for Reconciliation and all of the work on reconciliation across this campus. Under the leadership of Tali Hairston and so many others across the campus, this is a season of maturing. And yet we must take things to the next level. Even as we trumpet the enormous success of our 27% ethnic minority enrollment for new students, we must increase the number of people of color on our faculty and on our staff. I have asked Tali and Les Steele and others to take on this task. I might also mention that we will be premiering this year a documentary of the life and legacy of our great friend John Perkins. Through the funding of some of our partners, we are trying to capture some of the legacy of this great man. We will keep you posted.

- I would lift up as well the great efforts in the School of Psychology, Family, and Community, the flourishing new program in Industrial Organization Development. I would lift up the continuing explosion of demand for our nursing program. I would lift up the incredible success of our Concert Choir, the wind ensemble, our orchestra, the vibrant Gospel Choir. I would lift up an exciting new season for athletics, a young new coaching team that will take us to the next level. I would lift up the maturing of our chapel program, under the direction of Dr. Stephen Newby. I would lift up the work of our professional educators in the School of Education who seek change the way our schools do their work.

And on and on. Where do we stop. You ought to see the sheets we have developed about our accomplishments. I call them *Competencies That Matter For The World*. It is truly amazing what you all are doing across this campus.

And so, what is the state of the university this morning? Here's what I think: *Now is the time, as never before, with a profound sense of confidence and appropriate pride, now is the time to trumpet to the world who we are and what we are doing and where we are going.* That's the action plan we've drawn up. I have an action plan. Every vice president has an action plan. It's now time to roll up our sleeves over the year ahead.

Next Tuesday, at our Opening Convocation, I want to talk again about *The Idea of the Christian University*. I want to talk again about our distinctive way of doing this great work of the Christian university. Why are we seeking to take things to the next level? What does all of this mean? How do all of these accomplishments add up to make a difference? Can a university change the world? What does that mean?

On Tuesday I want to share from my reflections over the summer. And here's the kind of thing I want to talk about: We do all of this, this great work of this incredible university, so that we might make the world a better place for all of

God's children. This is the call of the gospel on our work. This is the Christian story at the heart of all we do. This is why we seek to take things to the next level of effectiveness and influence.

Somehow we've got to say, even more effectively, that world change begins somewhere. We believe it begins when students learn at the highest and deepest levels possible. It begins when students master critical and vital competencies for productive and meaningful lives. It begins with research that responds effectively to the needs of the world. That's the confidence I feel so strongly this morning.

That's our job as a great Christian university: To make the world a better place for all of God's children. That's the way to describe our work together: This is the place where world change begins.

Last week I had lunch with our dear friend Matt Whitehead, one of our trustees and a leader in the Free Methodist Church. We went to lunch with another friend, Bishop Joab Lohara from India. I am so impressed with this man, Bishop Lohara, calm, articulate, and passionate about providing opportunities for the untouchables to make their lives better. He wants to see them climb out of their desperate, seemingly intractable situations in an iron-clad caste society. He believes the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer. And he believes as well that the ability to read and write is also the answer. And so he and his band of partners have established hundreds of literacy centers across central India, and the people are flocking to them. Bishop Lohara is changing the world.

This dear man, who lives in the midst of terrible poverty, in the midst of often brutal and violent persecution of Christians, lives and does his work with this powerful notion: "I believe God is doing a new thing in the world," he says, "and I want to be part of it."

He quotes from that marvelous text in Isaiah that we know so well. I've used this text before, but I think it is worth framing our work in the year ahead.

Stop dwelling on past events
and brooding over days gone by.
Be attentive. I am about to do something totally new;
this very moment it will appear.
Watch for it. Can you see it? Isaiah 43:18

This is exactly where I am this morning: energized as ever, full of optimism, full of an incredible sense of confidence about what happens on this campus day in and day out. I am ready to trumpet our story with appropriate pride and overwhelming enthusiasm. I am ready, with each of you, to try to take our work to the next level of effectiveness and influence.

But in it all, throughout this coming year, let us seek to be attentive to the new thing that God is doing in the world. Let us seek in all ways to participate in that new thing. Let us roll up our sleeves and go to work—and then, *let us watch and wait attentively for the new thing God may choose to do among us.*

May God go with each one of you in your valuable and important work in the year ahead. May God be with all of our new students arriving tomorrow and all of our students returning. May God go with us all *as we seek to be the place where world change begins.*

Thank you. Thank you so much for the chance to talk with you this morning.

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