

Hi All,

Welcome to the 17-18 academic year! I hope that your summer provided some opportunity for rest and renewal. It was great to see many of you at our opening convocation and Faculty Development/Scholarship days. As you may know, I was scheduled to miss the opening day due to an AICCU meeting in San Francisco, but gratefully, my flight was canceled so I “had to” stay home and attend our convocation. In the past, I have always tried to set a little time aside during convocation to speak about our Mission as we begin the year. I did not do that this year because I was not supposed to be there, so I thought I would jot down some things about Mission that I have been thinking about and send them out in written form instead.

I was so thankful that Gabriel Salguero was able to be with us for our two main events to open the year, and for the extra time I was able to spend with him personally in dialogue and discussion. I come away from those two days both challenged and encouraged at the same time. That might seem a bit paradoxical, but for me, I think the reason why it isn't is because of where his message and themes were grounded. Unlike what we so often hear as motivations in conversations with friends, interactions on social media or what gets played out in mainstream media outlets, Gabe's message was not grounded in political correctness, identity politics, political rhetoric from either party, expressive individualism, nationalism or any other of society's many currents...it was grounded in the liberating and transformational power of the Gospel found in Scripture. It was clear from both his public message and the personal conversations that he was very well aware of the diverse culture shaping influences that are at play in our society around the challenging issues that we face today...but also that he was not bound by them or beholden to them because of the paradoxical freedom granted through the Gospel. Society thinks of freedom as being independent and unrestricted, able to do whatever they want whenever they want. The freedom that comes through the Gospel comes through constraint and occurs when we die to that independence and become fully dependent upon Christ's atonement for our sins, freely given, and bind ourselves in obedience to him out of love.

In my dinner conversation with Gabe, I asked him what, from his perspective, is the biggest challenge for Christian Higher Education institutions with respect to maintaining their Christian Mission. His answer, which was touched on some in his convocation address, was “secularization”. He further elaborated that it is often not intentional but comes with the natural impulse to assimilate (remember the Borg?...Trekkies unite!) with the culture...to be “in the world” vs. the Gospel impulse to be transformative to the culture, which requires us to be “in, but not of, the world”. Of course, from a historical perspective of faith based institutions in the US, this has in fact been what has happened. In the 2014 book, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches*, the authors (Greer, Horst and Haggard) make this same point after a historical analysis of faith based organization across several sectors.

Without careful attention, faith-based organizations will inevitably drift from their founding mission. It's that simple. It will happen. Slowly, silently, and with little fanfare, organizations routinely drift from their original purpose, and most will never return to their original intent.

They go on to identify the two most important characteristics of Mission True organization as being Clarity of Mission within the organization and Intentionality of keeping Mission on their daily radar. One of their key conclusions is that “Mission True organizations recognize that the Gospel is their most precious asset”. In my conversations with Gabe, he seemed to think that “Gospel at the center” of why and what we do and teach is the “secret sauce” that makes us different from, and not beholding to, the cultural streams of political correctness, expressive individualism, partisan politics, nationalism, racism, bigotry, etc...(sadly, I could go on and on...). He pointed me to his dialogue with Rev. Dr. Tim Keller about what it means to be a “gospel-centered” church in urban centers like NYC in *Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City (Center Church)* as an example of how dialogue between diverse perspectives can lead to mutual growth and learning (Keller’s Redeemer Presbyterian Church context and Salguero’s Nazarene Lamb’s Church context). For further context, here is a short definition of the Gospel from an article that summarizes the larger ramifications of Gospel as used in Keller’s *Center Church* book.

God has entered the world in Jesus Christ to achieve a salvation that we could not achieve for ourselves which now 1) converts and transforms individuals, forming them into a new humanity, and eventually 2) will renew the whole world and all creation. This is the ‘good news’—the gospel.

Sometimes when you boil things down to “nutshell”, you can lose the richness of a full understanding, so if you want to see how he unpacks this further and the implications that the Gospel has for our lives, here is the link to the article (http://extendingthekingdom.org/?page_id=17)

Let me pause at this point and address some questions that you may be thinking... Why is the Provost talking about Mission drift? Where is he going with this? Does he think we have drifted? First of all, there are both individual and corporate aspects to the question. I know that as I look back on my own time at PLNU, I have not always maintained a clear and intentional connection with our Mission. So on the individual level, perhaps I am not alone in this and this message can inspire individuals to reconnect where appropriate. At the corporate level, data suggests from Greer, Horst and Haggard that Mission True institutions are constantly attuned to the possibility of Mission drift and regularly have conversations about how to prevent it. So at the corporate level, perhaps this message can serve these functions of “keeping it on our radar” and “sparking further thought and conversation”. Secondly, at NSO I moderate a panel with some of our faculty colleagues for a general session for parents and new students titled *Living Point Loma’s Mission*. In this session we unpack the PLNU Mission and talk about what it means, how it plays out in our learning community and impacts the student experience. Your faculty colleagues always do a fantastic job and the positive feedback that we get from parents is overwhelming. The idea of an institution that is intentionally Christian and authentically committed to an in depth embodiment of its Mission is so valued and appreciated by them that many are in tears as they articulate gratitude for what they heard and how confirming it is to them that PLNU is their right choice. Helping students become who God has called them to be is the center of our University Promise and our ability to fulfill that promise rests with our commitment keep our Mission front and center. As Bresee put it in his last General Assembly address (in language fitting for that time)...

Our young people will go forth to our pulpits, our counting houses, our farms and our homes, full of the hallowed fire of the indwelling Spirit, only as they have been dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty in the classroom, chapel and social life of their college years.

A couple of years ago in a Faculty chapel, I summarized my understanding of the “whys” that led to our Founders’ Vision based on my readings of and about P. F. Bresee, his ministry and his engagement with three institutions of higher education (Simpson College, USC, and PLNU) and H. O. Wiley, who served as an academic dean under Bresee and three terms as President at PLNU. Here was my simplified summary below and I will also attach a document that I put together that traces our Mission over time through Presidential Addresses:

- The world is a broken place that is in need of the liberating good news of Jesus.
- A Christian Higher Education in the Liberal Arts Tradition will open doors for students to enter all walks of life and society, as holy people, so that they can be the hands and feet of Christ to this broken world.
- The reason for a Christian university is to train and equip disciples to that end. In fact, Bresee’s foundational verse for the university...“Therefore **go** and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19)...led to our school’s first slogan... **“Go...Disciple...Teach”** (emphasis mine).
- This will not happen unless we intentionally capture the hearts of our students in addition to their heads.

The point is, Bresee and Wiley had a particular “telos” in mind for what the university could accomplish and it had to do with the spread of the Gospel...in the lives of the students while at university and, through them, to the communities they would join after leaving the university. The transformations that they envisioned were brought about by the power of the Gospel in the environmental context of an institution of higher learning (see the aforementioned attached document). This place was never intended to have higher education as the ultimate end...only a means to a higher end. This place was never intended to have Liberal Arts as an ultimate end...only a means to open more doors for students, providing them education and development so that they could take the liberating gospel with them into all walks of life as holy examples. While the initial slogan of “Go, Disciple, Teach” bears a strong resemblance to our current language of “Teach, Shape, Send”, unless we understand the “telos” from which these simplifications were based, our aim might fall unintentionally short. “Teach” might simply become focused on content and pedagogy... “Shape” might simply become about character development in a general sense to turn out a “good” or “civil” citizenry... and “Send” might simply become about employability or acceptance into graduate schools. Likewise, while I mentioned the concept of a T1 university (Transformational) that Allen and Badley mention in their book that we will be discussing this semester, understanding the “telos” as a transformation

empowered by the Gospel is important to remember lest we settle for a lesser substitutional end. Consider this oft repeated idea from our early founders, this one from Wiley.

It has also been shown how a school could be a center of holy fire and a constant disseminator of revival spirit and power.

Again, our founders used different language that was appropriate for their context, but this was the idea that through the power of the Gospel, a school could have a transformative impact on its students that could spill over to the broader community. What if PLNU could be the center of renewal movement that sent out students that were so transformed by the Gospel themselves that they became constant disseminators of Gospel transformation wherever they went? Dr. Ron Kirkemo summarized the founders' vision this way in his history of the college, *For Zion's Sake*.

That was the core of the institution---training the heart and character as well as the mind, recognizing that attention to natural data alone gives a distorted picture of reality, and that revival spirit and power can be permanently organized and successfully promoted among young people....Wiley was attempting to integrate three different elements of a person---the quiet and searching intellect, the wise and cultured character, and the revivalistic emotion. In Bresee and Wiley's view the three were not incompatible. Each one alone was dangerous; balanced, they would produce a whole person, fit for the work of Zion.

My traditional "start of the year" message that focuses on our Mission is in no way an attempt to de-emphasize the training of the intellect that must happen at an institution of higher education. Because higher education is our natural thing, the training of the intellect is always on our radar and we, in my opinion, do a great job at this and we have regular practices that ensure this (assessment, program review, curriculum committees, development opportunities, departmental conversations etc...). It is also not a message intended to imply that we are not staying true to our Mission. It is a recognition that if we are to keep the balance that is present in our Founders' Vision (and implied in our current Mission), we also need regular reminders that the familiar words of the Mission or simplified slogans that we use have a rich depth and particular "telos" connected to them...and if we ever lose sight of that, we cease to be clear about our mission and intentional in keeping it.

Over the past several years we have talked about what it looks like to embody our Mission and have used a variety of means to explore and encourage these discussions (Vocation grant, Our Wesleyan Tradition paper, Teaching and Christian Practices book, Desiring the Kingdom book, curriculum development for Honors program, etc...). We have emphasized that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach but have offered many different "on ramps" for intentionally exploring what embodying Mission looks like. I encourage all of us to intentionally continue in these explorations as we discuss Allen and Badley's *Faith and Learning* book and begin our conversations around revisiting General Education in the coming year. Perfection is not the expectation...intentional effort offered up as an act of worship is all that is needed for God to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine!

Thank you for the ways in which you seek to embody the Mission of PLNU in your day to day engagements with our community! I look forward to an excellent year together and am excited to see what God will be doing in our midst...

Kerry

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See: [*Our Mission in Our History Handout 8-21-17 PLNU*](#)