

# State of the University Address

## Launch 2008

August 27, 2008

Let me begin by addressing an elephant in the room. I know you all join me in feeling a deep sense of loss in the announcement that our Executive Vice President, Alfred Branch, will soon be leaving our University. Al will be with us until sometime in early August and we will find an appropriate time and manner to thank Judy and him and to wish them godspeed. That announcement leaves a huge gaping hole in our leadership that will not be easy to fill and it comes at a time when your president is scheduled to leave on a working sabbatical to do research at several other universities. I want to assure you all that I am working diligently on a transitional or interim plan that will get us through this semester with minimal disruption of our progress. OC is blessed with some highly capable leadership, and we will organize an effective and functional team before I begin my journeys. I have asked for suggestions from throughout the institution this week and expect to announce a plan sometime in early next week.

Everyone has a story. May I share what I have seen and what I foresee in the future as my story has intertwined with the story of OC.

“The year was 1946” begins Dr. North’s *Soaring On Wings Like Eagles*. It was a momentous year. The Greatest Generation returned home from WWII, and not being a group to rest on their laurels, set to work in earnest to—among other great accomplishments—create the Baby Boomer generation. That’s how it all began for me—with the big boom theory—in the small southeastern Oklahoma towns of Hugo and Antlers.

My loving parents tell of how I was instrumental at a very early age in the creation of this college on the Oklahoma prairie. Apparently, about the time I reached the terrible two’s, leaders of the churches of Christ concluded that this generation is going to need a reform school someday!

Thus, in 1950, Central Christian College was founded in Bartlesville in the beautiful LaQuinta Mansion—which, by the way, cost only \$150,000 initially. Pioneers on that campus included L.R. Wilson, James Baird, Harold Fletcher, Stafford North, Joe McCormack, and others who understood that the most important things in Christian higher education are not the facilities, the endowments, or the perks of

office, but rather the explosive combination of a compelling vision, fertile minds, and willing hands.

Along came two men of great courage and foresight – James O. Baird and George S. Benson—who believed in the dream, didn't mind hard work, and did not care who got the credit. Soon it became evident that the new school could not reach its potential in the bucolic, but remote setting of Bartlesville. With essentially no assets, and many naysayers, but with faith and the promise of help from the civic leadership of Oklahoma City, they took the courageous step to acquire 200 barren, wind-swept acres in the middle of nowhere to build their dream. This campus began to take shape and was built largely during the combined 42 years of leadership of Dr. Baird and Dr. J. Terry Johnson. That was 50 years ago this fall that our University opened on this campus. Watch for announcements about our celebration and thanks to the cities of Edmond and Oklahoma City for their half century of hospitality to OC.

Much like several hundred eager young minds on our campus today, I will never forget arriving in the August heat of 1964 to make my home on the campus. It was on that day that my OC story really began as the OCC faculty and staff shaped and polished this rough stone from the country.

Much has changed in the world; Oklahoma is emerging as an important part of the future of America and the world, and OC has changed dramatically since that summer day in 1964. Many of us can remember the treeless, wind-swept, dust-bowl days on this campus. In a remarkably short period of time as the life cycles of universities go, OC has established itself as a reputable institution of higher learning.

I remember even then the little college that could – that was willing to dream bigger than Texas and had an enlarged heart for the work of the kingdom and was thus willing to take on challenges that more timid souls would not consider. The move to Oklahoma City with no fiscal resources, the development of a master plan that still instructs us today, the hiring of a first-rate faculty, among the first to integrate racially, the partnership with Ibaraki Christian University, the early pioneering in international studies programs, the sending out of more missionaries pound-for-pound than anyone, the cutting edge and futuristic Mabee Learning Center, the futuristic Enterprise Square, the adoption and nurturing of the Christian Chronicle and Cascade College, and on and on, this place demonstrated an indomitable entrepreneurial spirit in the face of humanly insurmountable odds.

**I wish time allowed us to recite all the great accomplishments of our faculty, staff, students, and campus environment just in the past few years. May I just share two observations about where we are today. You have no doubt heard that our enrollment will be down. First, I compliment our recruiting team and those in the faculty and staff who partner with them for helping us to have the second largest enrollment in our history in the face of some substantial changes in admissions and financial aid practices. And, second, I compliment our financial leadership for the excellent fiscal stewardship of the past few years that will enable us to weather this enrollment dip without major budgetary adjustments affecting the entire campus.**

**Today the campus reaches around the world, from Cascade College in Portland, Oregon, to our European studies campus in Vienna, Austria, to our longstanding partnership with Ibaraki Christian University in Japan, to several other study abroad opportunities.**

**The OC story is about dedication. Decade after decade – OC has been blessed with committed faculty and staff, whose legacy of hard work and devotion you continue today.**

**The OC story is about vision. The beautiful and functional campus we enjoy today is the result of the vision and sacrifice of those who were willing to think about the future.**

**The OC story is about progress. Over the past five years, the campus has been transformed with of new and modern housing options and in the addition of the magnificent Freede Centennial Tower, University House, the McGraw Pavilion, and Lawson Commons.**

**The OC story is about faith and service. Across America and throughout the world OC students, faculty, staff, and alumni are making a real difference for good in a hurting world.**

**The OC story is about heroes. From my perspective – OC is a community filled with men and women who are living heroic lives. You are attempting to make a difference in the world and your efforts are inspiring the leaders of today and tomorrow. Last year at this time we listened to the voice of Dr. Tony Alley as he urged us ever onward and upward while fighting his own losing battle with brain cancer. This year – he is gone – but his voice is still in our ears and his spirit is still in our hearts.**

**You are the OC story. You are what makes OC special. Your faithful service – your courage – your commitment – is what makes the OC story worth telling. I have no doubt that some great thing will**

happen this year because of your efforts, and I eagerly wait to see what God will do through you.

For some in the audience – today is the beginning of your OC story – and we are thankful you have chosen to be a part of this place. For those who have been at OC for years – those who have invested a great deal of their lives here –we are thankful for your commitment to this community. As we now think about the possibilities for the future, may I encourage you to think back on your vision and your hopes when you decided this is where you can make a difference with your life.

Why am I telling you this? Because I want us all to be reminded of the great legacy we have inherited by choosing to be a part of the OC family. I want to remind us of the importance of our noble calling. I want us to approach this year with the confidence that comes from knowing that God is preparing each of us, and all of us collectively, to do something great this year.

As we now look into the future I want to share with you the results of a project that has required a great investment of time and effort from throughout the campus. This project is to clarify our purpose, our defining values, our vision, and our goals for the future.

The OC purpose is not complicated and yet it is ambitious, it is timeless, and it is clear. Our purpose is to “transform lives for Christian faith, scholarship, and service.” I believe this purpose is one worthy of this university and worthy of our individual life commitments.

Our Defining Values are the lenses through which we will make decisions about the future of this great institution. They also should be familiar as they have been around for several years as “core values.” They are faith, scholarship, integrity, stewardship, and liberty. Those great values are given further explanation in the handout that you will receive as you leave.

We now look to the more immediate – our vision. OC’s Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century represents our aspirations for the coming years. The OC vision, crafted after many hours of consultation, is that “Oklahoma Christian University will be a leading Christian university, continually pursuing comprehensive excellence and effectively serving our community and the world.”

The world needs OC to be a leader at this time of great lostness, wandering, and searching for meaning and purpose. The constant, unrelenting pursuit of comprehensive excellence is worthy of our very best efforts. We must be spiritual entrepreneurs – using the wisdom

**and resources God has bestowed upon us to seek innovative ways to serve our community and the world. If we will do this, the world will take notice of what is being done at this place.**

**Our vision will be informed and supported by a set of six core commitments which deserve much more time than we can give them. I encourage you to carefully read the detailed explanations in the handout because they will be part of the accountability process for our strategic and budgetary planning.**

- **Search for truth – We must continue to create a culture where our students, faculty and staff alike are encouraged to ask the big questions of life. Society and our students are demanding better answers than our rationalistic, modern age has given to them. Our destiny is to answer that call. We have not, and we will not lose our way. We have a precious commodity sought by many, and we must step up and take leadership in the world of scholarship, ideas, and solutions.**
- **Faithfulness – We must prepare students and others we serve for Christ-centered and productive lives in an increasingly secular world. In the words of biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, “all scholarship should be witness.”**
- **Excellence with purpose - Our quest for excellence is a byproduct of our stewardship over the gifts bestowed upon us by the Creator and r reflects our commitment to bringing honor to God.**
- **Human and Capital Resources – At the heart of any great endeavor are people committed to one another and to a cause, and the collective must also be committed to the support and enrichment of the individual. Everyone is worthy and will be cherished and affirmed at OC.**
- **Global Engagement – Alumnus Dr. Jerry Rushford paid us a high compliment when he said to me in 2002: “OC has the imprint of world on its heart.” It is my hope that we will not shrink back from the calls of desperation and hope and continue to expand and enhance our efforts to engage the world.**
- **Transformed Lives – That’s our business. To transform the lives of our students and our world – we must model the humility that would let them know that we consider ourselves a work in progress. Our learning did not end with a terminal degree. Our learning did not end when we shifted from sitting in a classroom to standing before a classroom. We must be a people who are willing to grow and learn and be changed into the likeness of God’s Son.**

So, what do all these words mean to us day-to-day? “What’s next?” What will OC be doing in the coming years? As we conclude this morning I want to share with you three large, institution-wide strategic goals that will guide our planning for the next five years and will contribute to the accomplishment of the OC Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is important to note however that these goals will be supplemented and amplified by departmental, college, and additional institutional goals that emerge from the strategic planning processes.

- **Goal One - Academic and Spiritual Excellence.** Increase OC’s academic and spiritual excellence by:
  - a.** Enriching core academic offerings and strengthening existing degree programs.
  - b.** Expanding opportunities for faculty and student research and for student internships.
  - c.** Evaluating and revising admissions, retention, and student services to increase alumni satisfaction and graduation rates by 10% or more.
  - d.** Encouraging and empowering all students, faculty, staff, and alumni to follow their dreams and to identify and use the gifts God gave them with courage and determination.
  - e.** Revising the curriculum, co-curriculum, and delivery systems to be more intentional and effective in spiritual development and in accomplishing “The OC Graduate.”
  - f.** Extending OC’s local and global reach through expanded and enhanced international studies, missions, vocational ministry, distance learning, and graduate programs.
  - g.** Evaluating and implementing a new vision for the future of Cascade College with a view to greater integration within the OC system and to economic sustainability.
  
- **Goal Two - Enhanced Impact.** Improve OC’s influence and impact by:
  - a.** Strengthening commitment to and nurturing the relationship with the churches of Christ, while welcoming and serving effectively people of diverse religious backgrounds.
  - b.** Exemplifying the biblical and restoration ideals of unity, love for all, being Christians only, and a humble and honest search for truth, and embracing a Christian worldview in every aspect of our work.

- c. Completing the Lipman Hearne image enhancement and name review studies and implementing recommendation as appropriate.**
  - d. Repositioning the University by helping our audiences recognize OC for what it is—a beacon of truth, faith, liberty, and love, and an institution of excellence in scholarship whose students, faculty, staff, and alumni are making a difference for good in our community and our world.**
  - e. Encouraging and supporting outreach programs that share OC’s intellectual capital and service impulses throughout the communities we touch.**
- **Goal Three - Human and Fiscal Resources. Exercise responsible stewardship by:**
  - a. Attracting and retaining creative, energetic, passionate faculty and staff, and empowering and caring for them well with competitive compensation, professional development, transparency, accountability, and enlightened human resource practices in all academic disciplines and support areas.**
  - b. Increasing endowment to over \$100 million and achieving Board goals for fiscal stewardship.**
  - c. Expanding and remodeling the following facilities: Herold Science Hall, Enterprise Square, Mabee Learning Center, Gaylord University Center, unrefurbished dormitories and apartments, Tealridge Manor, and campus roads.**
  - d. Developing and implementing master plans for campus landscaping and hardscape, athletic facilities, and adjacent properties owned by the University (e.g., Eagle Crest Shopping Center; vacant land south of Memorial Road; Heritage Plaza, etc.).**

So we draw our story to a close. We have seen a wonderful past, we are experiencing and seeing a great present, and we foresee an even more glorious and influential future. OC is a very, very good university, and I want to thank each of you for your part in bringing OC to this point in her story. I sincerely believe that OC stands on the verge of greatness. Our generation of faculty, staff, and trustees is now being asked whether we have the courage and the faith to make the hard decisions and become the unified team necessary to reach for that greatness. The OC story continues and I am glad you are part of it. Will you join with me in anticipating great things in store for OC’s

**future. To achieve the goals that have been shared with you today will not happen without a great deal of faith, sacrifice, unity, and commitment.**

**For these goals to become reality we must believe in our purpose. We must commit to community. We must act on faith and we must give God the glory.**

**May God bless all of you and may He bless Oklahoma Christian University with a great year as we seek to love and serve our fellow man.**