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The Vision Unfolds State of the University Address

September 22, 1999
Seattle Pacific University

Philip W. Eaton, President

Welcome. This is our official beginning of the 1999-2000 year at Seattle Pacific University. Welcome to all of you. **You are the team.** Think about it: you are the leaders for this extraordinary enterprise. You are the ones that make it all happen. Think of the amazing things that can happen from the gifts gathered in this room. **You are a fantastic team.**

Welcome to the new faculty and staff, to the student leaders, to the board members that are present. My thanks to Tim Dearborn for planning and leading the communion service, and to Jacqui Smith Bates for taking care of all the details for this day and on into the student orientation.

The State of the University address is a time to talk about where I think we are and where we are going in the year ahead and the years ahead. It is an important moment to gather as a community — to set the tone for the year, to set specific directions, to continue always to articulate the vision, to say thank you to so many people.

I come now to my fourth State of the University Address. Can you believe that? I want you to know I am as enthusiastic as I have ever been about what we are doing and where we are going at Seattle Pacific. I know you have come to expect this enthusiasm from me (someone called me a cheerleader a while back—I have a bit of ambivalence about that title, a little like a car salesman). But how come I again have such confidence and enthusiasm about Seattle Pacific? I've been at this thing long enough for that enthusiasm to die down. The honeymoon is over and the challenges are clear.

But as I come back from the summer, renewed and re-energized, I feel as focused as I have ever been. I think I have some real clarity about what needs to be done. From time to time I break out in cold sweats (I'll tell you about a few of the things that bring on the cold sweats). But I want to be clear: I have an extraordinary amount of confidence that we are going to reach our goals.

Where do I get my confidence? Three things: 1) Our vision is right. I believe we are on the right track. We will keep working all the time to sharpen and refine—but we are moving in the right direction. 2) Our team is in place. What a terrific team we have gathered in this room. An outstanding team that is channeled by a worthy vision. 3) If we are faithful, and obedient, I believe God has in store for this community a flourishing beyond our wildest dreams. So let me talk about these three things: our vision, our team, and the possibility of flourishing.

Last year at this time I outlined our goal for the year to complete the *Comprehensive Plan* and have it affirmed by the Board of Trustees by the end of the year. I called last year "a year for focusing." We mapped out a very intentional process to complete the *Comprehensive Plan*: the contours in November, the confirmation in February, and the pledge from the Board to the campaign in May. That is done! In fact we culminated that process when the Board stepped up with a financial commitment to the vision that is eight times what they ever committed before. We appreciate the way the Board is standing with us. And so we concluded our work last year with a vision and a plan and a growing sense of support.

So buckle your belts. Because here we go. This is a year when the vision unfolds. This year it all begins to happen. This is the year to keep aiming toward the vision, to be guided by the plan, and then celebrate the early success stories of the *Comprehensive Plan*. And that in part is what I want to do this morning.

We now enter a new stage of our work, a very critical stage of transition toward implementation. This is a critical seam point. The steam could go out of the vision. We could put it on the shelf.

Let me say very, very clearly: We will not put the *Comprehensive Plan* on the shelf. Get ready to get tired of me talking about it. We will keep the vision out in front in everything we do. This plan will never gather dust.

I have called each member of the President's Cabinet to covenant with me to give leadership for the vision in their respective areas. And so the story I have to tell today: with the vision out front, guiding and informing, the vision now unfolds.

So, I want to talk about where I get my confidence: the vision, the team, and a new sense of flourishing.

The Vision. Let me remind you of what we are trying to do. We are committed to Engaging the Culture/Changing the World. Not just a slogan. This is what we do. This is the way we do things around here. Our focus is outwards, always. We seek to make a difference, not for ourselves only, but for our community and the world. Graduates of competence and character, becoming people of wisdom, modeling grace-filled community. Grounding everything we do on the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

I was writing a paragraph last Saturday to state our case and prepare our strategy to approach the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This second largest foundation in the world, at \$17 billion and growing, is dedicated to making a difference in the world. They too are engaging the culture to change the world. And I thought that is exactly where we are, in alignment, in vital congruence with what many are trying to do. And we have an added advantage: we are a part of God's sweeping desire to see his world flourish.

I have talked in the past about individual gifts. Finding, cultivating, growing, supporting individual gifts is a part of what we are all about. But we are not just a group of scattered individuals, with purposes that are separate. It is individual gifts channeled by vision. It is my small contribution leveraged by community. It is our community leveraged as a part of God's larger movement in the world.

That's what it means to have the vision out in front, guiding us, drawing us, channeling our energies and our aspirations.

I hope you will come to say with ease, confidence, and enthusiasm: Engaging the culture/changing the world—"oh, that's our vision. That's our vision."

The Team. We will not be effective with our vision without a great team. No matter how worthy the vision, we will not succeed unless we learn better all the time how to work together. And boy do we have a great team in place. We are past a transition. Those who are staying with us have stayed. We now have the players.

Bob McIntosh and I, dragging Sharon and Donna along, went out to the Evergreen Fair to see the Clydesdale horses of one of our wonderful alums and potential supporters for the campaign. This alum is an incredible story himself, but as I watched the team master of these incredible animals, I thought it was an apt image for what I often feel. I have got the reins, but any moment one of these big and independent minded animals could take off on their own. What a delicate touch it is to hold those reins. What power is available when the team is pulling together.

This is what it feels like to work with a great team.

The Cabinet. The finest senior leadership team in the country. We wrestle and we grapple and we seek to become better leaders all the time and we seek to know how to work better together—but these folks are the greatest (Bruce Murphy, Provost; Marj Johnson, VP for University Relations; Bob McIntosh, VP for University Advancement; and Don Mortenson, VP for Business Planning). These are extraordinarily competent people, they are focused, hard-working. They care for their people. They are loyal to me (which is critical if we are going to be effective as a team). They get the vision and are deeply committed to their people.

One of our tasks this year is to ensure that we have a coalition of leaders who are able to gather around the vision and make it happen. I am calling all of the leaders of this institution—senior leaders, staff leaders, deans, faculty leaders—to catch the vision. Leaders need to understand and talk the vision. Followers have the luxury to voice skepticism, and sometimes that is helpful. But leaders bring hope. Leaders bring momentum. Leaders buy in to the common vision.

We have formed a new President's Staff this year to broaden the leadership team (the new President's Staff includes the chair of the faculty, the Dean of Student Life, the Dean of the Chapel, the academic deans, the student body president, various key leaders from across the university). We will be doing some leadership development activities to strengthen this coalition of leaders, to deepen our leadership culture, all gathered around the vision. I want to talk about what it means to be a leader at SPU.

Let me mention a few groups that I think are doing their jobs well. I want to thank the deans for their good work. A dean's job is not an easy job, but we have a great team of deans. I commend Provost Murphy for working hard to shape a real leadership team with the deans. Thanks to Tom Trzyna, Alec Hill, Mark Pitts, Lucille Kelley, and Martin Abbott for their fine work. I want to thank Martin Abbott for his superb service to this institution. As we make a change in CAS we will miss Martin's cheerful, positive, loyal, hardworking presence at the dean's table.

I am excited about the appointment and new energy and vision for Kathleen Braden as Associate Provost/Dean of Student Life. As you know Kathleen will be working under the Provost in an effort to bring new synergy between our student life and academic areas. Kathleen seems truly called to this new role and is discovering new gifts each day. It is great to see the team in Student Life come together under Kathleen's new leadership.

I am tremendously excited about what Tim Dearborn will bring to our community as our new Dean of the Chapel. We have envisioned this position for a long time, and now it is filled, and we could not ask for a better fit than Tim Dearborn. Look for great things to come in this area. Tim has a broad vision, an excitement, energy, and a deep heart for Jesus Christ. As we envision a grace-filled community, let us also commit to being a worshipping community. We look forward to Tim's leadership.

The faculty is the critical core of our vision. I want to call the faculty to gather around the vision. My great hope is that we will give you all the support in the world for your critical role in engaging the culture and changing the world. I was thrilled to see the new faculty introduced at faculty retreat, a great new class of faculty joining our outstanding team.

One of our senior faculty members, my good friend Rob Wall, came up to me late last spring and said "you know you can believe in your faculty, Phil." That brought tears to my eyes, not that I didn't already believe it to be true, but that he had come to believe in himself. My sincere thanks to the faculty for all that you do, for your loyalty to the vision, your loyalty to your students, and for your loyalty to me.

To the faculty: I want you to believe in yourselves. I want you to know that I believe in you, and I will do everything I can to support you in your calling, not a calling that is separate and marginal and independent, but a bringing of your gifts to the common vision.

I would say once again thanks to a number of teams as they have prepared for the beginning of the year: 1) to Janet Ward, Ken Cornell, Vicki Rekow, Jennifer Feddern and all the admissions and financial aid staff for bringing in another outstanding class; 2) to Kim Campbell and all the residence life staff for their preparation, and for Jim Korner and the housing people for finding space for more students who are choosing to live in the residence halls; 3) to Kerwin and the Marriott/Sodexo team for preparing the food for the new Gwinn so creatively; 4) to Darrell Hines, Dave Church, Wayne Elling and all of our plant services and grounds people for their care with our facilities; 5) to Dave Tindall and the CIS folks for getting all of our information systems running well, providing upgrades and training. What a team we have working behind the scenes.

And it takes everyone of you, administrative assistants, support people, craftsmen, gardeners, food service people—it takes each one of you to pull off the quality enterprise to which we commit ourselves. I hope you feel you are part of the big-picture. I hope each one of you feels you are part of the vision to make a real difference in the world.

Let me thank as well Karen Jacobson, my able assistant. Without her I could not function. You can't believe how complicated my schedule can be, and Karen manages it with grace and skill.

And thanks to Sharon, also a part of the team. What a partner she is in this work. I could not do it without her support, counsel, and assistance.

The Tasks For Me This Year. Let me briefly tell you what the focus of my work needs to be this year. This is a part of the goals I have presented to the Chair of the Board (you might want to know that I am evaluated each year by the Board and that I conduct a thorough performance evaluation of each of the President's Cabinet).

The four broad areas of focus I have planned for myself include:

- Vision. Vision work. Keep the vision out in front. I need to keep articulating the vision, both externally and internally. This vision needs to become the fabric our community, the guiding light of our energy and aspirations. We need to be understood externally by this vision. We need to understand ourselves by this vision. I bear significant responsibility for this vision work.
- Positioning. Positioning is critical to our success. I know some people don't agree with this, and I just can't understand that. Get your act together and your reputation will follow, some say. No, I feel you have got to shine your light (I believe this is theologically correct, by the way). Don't hide your light under a bushel (I entitled one version of our planning documents "Let It Shine"—some of the VPs thought that was a bit corny). Tell your story. Get it out. One of three great institutions in Seattle and a leader in Christian higher education nationally. Marj Johnson will be leading her team to complete a positioning plan. Under Marj's leadership we will be conducting a first ever comprehensive image research and have hired a firm to conduct this work.
- The Campaign. Here is where I really wake up from time to time in a cold sweat. We have a lot of work to do. Bob McIntosh has assembled a great team of young development officers and they are ready to go. We are aiming very high. We have not had the base of support sufficient to complete such a campaign in the past. But we are going to run right at this challenge.
- Management Culture. We are putting the pieces in place at the top so that we can be more effective with our management processes. I will be asking Don Mortenson and Marj Johnson to take some clearly defined and

delegated responsibilities to assist me in correcting and cleaning up some of our management systems, policies, and procedures. They will be assisting not only me, of course, but Bob McIntosh and Bruce Murphy in the significant responsibilities they bear.

I have a whole set of strategies for presidential activity and communication for the year to focus on these four areas. I want to meet with students in a new way. I want to meet with smaller groups of faculty. I am launching a Presidential Symposium Series on Moral Leadership for the New Millennium (with the help of Tim Dearborn). I will be speaking downtown several times. I will continue to write and speak as widely as I can.

I will continue to position myself as active downtown, involved, engaged. (I realize I have to be smart here. I now have myself on so many boards and involved in so many groups that I will need to be careful to stay focused. I have felt it necessary to get really in touch with the downtown community—be visible, be of service, be involved—but there are limits.)

I also feel a need to position myself nationally in Christian higher education (I am now on the national board of CCCU, an active member of the President's Council for the Christian College Consortium, President of the AFMEI board). All of the VPs are serving in leadership roles nationally and many of our faculty (I would note especially Susan Gallagher for her important work on faculty development and the hugely recognized voice of Randy Maddox). Our staff hosted two CCCU conferences on campus this summer: Technology and Communications and Alumni.

I think all of this signals a new stage of what it means to be a president. I am learning that there are different phases to the work of the president and I have gone through two: budget alignment reorganization and vision work. Now I move into another phase: the unfolding of the vision.

The Unfolding Story. So those are the things I will be working on this year. Now let me tell you some of the things that are happening all across campus.

- AACSB accreditation on the line this year. Under the able leadership of Alec Hill, Gary Karns, and the team in SBE, they have now submitted their final self-study report for accreditation. This will put us in an elite category of schools, among the top 20% across the country.
- The Campaign. Thanks to Bob McIntosh for his leadership to build the foundations for this campaign. We have an all new advancement team in place, an outstanding group of people (out of twelve people when Bob took over, there are now ten new people in Advancement). The Leadership Gifts Team is in place and ready to go. I asked Bob last year to become our chief strategic thinker for fundraising, to build a shop, and to build a strategy to support me in my role as a fundraiser—and he has stepped up to the challenge. Steve Anderson and I made 39 visits for the campaign since May. By the way, I have raised \$50 million on paper. This campaign is critical to our success as an institution. Our legacy will be, if we can pull it off, not just the \$50 million, but to leave the institution with a broader base of support. It is not broad enough. We had a banner year for giving for last year, but we are just getting started.
- We were awarded recognition in the 1999-2000 Templeton Guide to College & Character Honor Roll for such things as Overall College of Character, Spiritual Growth, Student Leadership, First Year Programs: The Common Curriculum, Character and Sexuality Programs: Center for Relationship Development (the work of Les and Leslie Parrot).
- Under Don Mortenson's capable leadership, we will seek tax-exempt bonding this coming year. This will be our first time ever. We have felt

hemmed in here by church/state constitutional issues. But we are going after it. Believe me I want to see this happen. This will give us an important tool to structure our debt as we move through our many projects.

- The ACLU suit moves forward to the Supreme Court of the State. We are confident about the outcome, but who knows.
- As we have envisioned in CP21, we maintain our commitment to the best in technology possible. We must invest in what it takes to support a premier, national Christian university. My thanks to all the CIS team, under Dave Tindall's guidance, and to David Wicks and others—these guys are keeping us on the cutting edge with the latest Microsoft products and the latest equipment.
- Sprint teams went this summer to 21 different sites around the world. 143 students participated on a SPRINT team and the students themselves raised \$230,000 to fund this work. Many faculty and staff participated in the fabulous program. This is truly a successful program of engaging the world to make a difference.
- On another global front, our nursing students, as a part of our Costa Rica summer nurse's program, were seeing some 300 patients a day. SPU students and graduates are making a difference all over the world.
- A word about Sabbath Culture. We will be working to define something concrete about what it means to live and work in a sabbath culture. I have asked Tim Dearborn to give leadership to an extended discussion with the leadership team that will culminate in some concrete actions.
- The new Gwinn is finished! Well, almost. A premier facility. Kerwin and his team seek to rise to the challenge to provide the kind of food and service commensurate to this great facility. Thanks to Dave Church, Wayne Elling, Darrell Hines, Don Mortenson, to LMN architects and McCarthy Construction—all of whom have worked under extraordinary pressure to get a two year project done in six months. Thanks to the students for their patience in this transition from one of the worst facilities to clearly one of the best in the country.
- We were ranked 15th out of 112 as best universities in the West with *US News and World* (despite our self-selecting admissions process). The *US News* rankings comparing 1995 to 1998 (current data), indicates sizeable improvement in persistence and student selectivity rankings. In student persistence, SPU moved from #34 to #20 of 112 institutions in the West; in student selectivity, SPU moved from #30 to #6 of 112 institutions in the West. Since 1995, the average SAT scores for new students have improved from 1110 to 1145, or 35 points, and the percentage of students scoring over 1000 increased by 22% to 95% of the total new students. National Merit scholars increased from 15 in Fall 1995 to 26 in Fall 1998.
- A word about our pricing strategy. We have been in the top 10 Best Values for the past three years and are noted for the low indebtedness of our graduates. We have kept our promise to be reasonable and predictable. Our pricing strategy is paying off. (Letter from the parent of one of our graduates comparing us to George Fox). We are now five to six thousand dollars less than Westmont.
- Enrollment is on target to meet our projections, yet another record year. Net revenue is exactly on target. Thanks to Marj Johnson and her team. This complex, very competitive task of bringing in the right numbers, increase selectivity, and at the same time meet net revenue targets—this is remarkable. We have a very sophisticated team in place to reach these goals. Holding the price increases down since 1995 has resulted in

stabilizing the financial aid discount factor to around 30% of UG tuition (during these 4 years, the average total SPU gift aid to a student has risen by \$1000), and more important, we have kept the average net cost to the student within \$50 of the 1995 level.

- A word about capacity pressures—we have had 6% more students for two years running sign up to live in our residence halls. That has presented us some capacity issues. Our housing staff and our residence life team are doing a great job. We have a two-year plan to bring more housing on line, a new residence hall that is under design (called Emerson Hall). And we have a plan to accommodate our students well until that time (Kathleen Braden, Jim Korner, Don Mortenson, and Marj Johnson will be meeting soon to create a very clear plan for housing for next year). As we work through these next two years, we must maintain a sense of working well with what we have. We may be bit cramped—but we are okay.
- I was asked to give a keynote address at the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church. Our University Players represented us with distinction there. Gene Keene, Delia Neusch Olver, and so many others on our faculty and staff represent us to the denomination. We continue to cultivate a grace-filled partnership with the church.
- The Common Curriculum. Thanks to the leadership of Joyce Erickson, our Common Curriculum is developing very nicely. You may recall that the Teagle Foundation gave us \$350,000 to launch this program. Our cannon is emerging. I would commend the work of Les Steele for his work on the Foundations curriculum (truly a departmental endeavor under Les' leadership). Don Holsinger's work on leading the UCOR 2000 planning team has been above and beyond the call of duty. Luke Reinsma has taken over leadership of UCOR 1000 and what he calls our "second draft" of the course (on the analogy that even a good paper requires more than one draft, and so does a good course). Student appreciation of the cohort model is a highlight of the first year; I think the faculty's and staff's enthusiastic response to reading another common text (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*) is another. The impetus working on these courses has given to faculty to talk to each other about teaching and learning has been extremely significant in reaching our goal to be a learning community.
- A word about athletics. Thanks to Tom Box for this good, new leadership as Athletic Director. Thanks to our coaches for their commitment to their sports and to their athletes. Thanks, by the way, to Bill Woodward for serving as the Faculty Athletic Representative and for being a champion of our athletes. Soccer and volleyball are off to great starts. Our scholar athletes are distinguishing themselves all over the place. You can be proud of our athletic department, our coaches, and our teams. As they seek to be more involved and integrated into the larger SPU community, let's seek to support them.
- The Education Plan unfolds. Further refinement work is going on through this year. Budget alignment is taking place. I want you to know and recognize that we are investing in the Ed Plan (\$300,000 new budget for this year; new amounts emerging for next year). Thanks to Provost Murphy for his leadership and the team of faculty leaders who are doing this work. Susan Gallagher, Bob Drov Dahl, Bill Woodward, David Wicks, Delia Neusch Olver, and Kevin McMahan will lead teams to bring forward four initiatives in the Ed Plan as recommendations for adoptions and action.
- Faculty who are in the news engaging the culture: Les Steele and Rob Wall just returned from Oxford and the British Bible Society International

Summit on Engaging the Culture with the Scriptures. John Thoburn and Tami Anderson-Engelhorn just returned from Kosovo where their Sprint Team provided counseling assistance in that troubled region. Chris Sink will be editing the major journal in school counseling and Jeff Fouts is doing research on how restructuring in the schools influences student learning. Jeff's work will be used by the Washington state education leaders as they continue with reform work throughout the state.

- Compensation plans for both staff and faculty. We must pay our faculty and staff commensurate to our aspirations as a premier, national Christian university. This is a goal. I think we are steadily gaining. We need to know what our targets are and then go after them. Our challenge is this: when you bring our pricing strategy together with high goals for salaries, you are on a collision course. But we will get there.
- Indicators of Success. I have promised the Board that we will bring forward a set of Indicators of the Success for the *CP21*. How will we know when we have arrived? How can we measure and mark our success? I will share this list with you as it develops further.
- Budget aligned with the vision. The President's Cabinet has already begun the budget planning process. They are an able team. We will commit to pricing—we will stay the course: reasonable and predictable. Outstanding resources. Outstanding salaries. And new sources of revenue. My thanks to Don Mortenson and Craig Kispert for extraordinary competence managing the budget.
- New sources of revenue. Once again my philosophy on new sources of revenue and R&D—our budget envelope requires that we seek new sources of revenue/new markets. We are forming a new R&D supportive/collaborative structure to assist our deans and faculty to bring new programs with new markets on line. We will also need an investment fund to jump start these new ideas. I appreciate Provost Murphy's work to push this forward, to the deans who are accepting the challenge, to Tom Trzyna and Michael Roe and Nathan Brown who have collaborated to make this happen. I appreciate Marj Johnson and her team for bringing marketing expertise and support services understanding to this process. We have now hired a fantastic new director for our first Degree Completion Program, Rob McKenna, and we are looking for a great start here. New ideas are cropping up all over the place. We will also be launching a new masters degree program in Education through distance learning.
- Academic grants. I have been calling for this since I arrived and finally we have an official grants person for academic grant-making. Bob McIntosh and Bruce Murphy are helping to supervise this new dimension of fundraising. Michael Hamilton is a great new addition to this work. Michael will be working with our Advancement staff to significantly increase our grants support in the academic area. He will be a noted history professor on the side.
- The new science project is in full design process. Thanks to Dave Church, Don Mortenson, Darrell Hines, the Miller Hull architectural group. And special thanks to Martin Abbott, Bruce Congdon (and the science faculty), and Bruce Murphy for their academic/ faculty input to this design process. Critical to me is that a clear vision for the sciences has emerged throughout our planning process. The science project (including the renovation of MSLC) is by far the largest, most expensive project SPU has ever tackled.

- Emerson Hall is being designed and is scheduled to begin construction next summer. Gwinn (a critical need for a number of years) is being completed. We are in the vision stage for a chapel/concert hall (a gathering/worshiping center, engaging the arts community of Seattle), and continue to look toward the possibility of a fine arts complex. We have to prioritize, but we are moving these projects forward. What an incredible staff we have working on the master plan and these projects: Darrell Hines, Dave Church, Mark Guy, Wayne Elling, all supervised by Don Mortenson. This team is stretched to the limits. And of course the pressure is on for fundraising. We have to be both patient but at the same time very aggressive to get these projects planned and funded. We are going after these challenges, Big Time.
- A word about endowment. Our endowment grows rapidly: we are growing at a \$5 million clip a year. For the year ending December 31, 1998, the Foundation grew by \$16 million. In the ten years between 1988 and 1998, we grew by \$50 million (625%). By the end of 1999 we should sit at about \$63 million for the foundation and our endowment currently generates proceeds from a balance of \$43 million. Thanks to Gordy Nygaard and Don Mortenson and a fabulous Foundation Board. Thanks to Gene Keene and his team for enhancing the endowment with new gifts of trusts and bequests.
- Our choral program was recognized late spring by the prestigious American Choral Directors Association as among the premier programs in the West. Thanks to David Anderson and Vern Wicker for their leadership. We will be showcasing the choir as much as we can throughout the year, including a downtown Christmas concert and a performance at the Business Breakfast and Downtown Rotary.
- A word about diversity. We are at 19% international and ethnic minority. We welcome these students as a part of our community. We seek to reach out to the minority part of our city. We need to know how to bring these students into our community and how to help them succeed. We are on target for this goal in our *CP21*. We appreciate the addition of Delia Neusch Olver and her vision of Cross-cultural studies and urban ministry, the work of Gwen Spencer, Rich Okamoto, and Kevin McMahan.
- We have taken the story downtown: the Business Breakfast is a smashing success. I will be hosting this next year a series of President's Seminars on Moral Leadership. We hope to draw a very select group of leaders, both local and national, for stimulating sessions. We will indeed be engaging the culture.
- *Response*. I would like to thank and commend Jennifer Gillnet for her superb work editing and creating a quarterly *Response*. We win all sorts of awards for our magazine. Others from other campuses (my sister at Westmont and my friends at Whitworth) tell me that our publication is the envy of their communications offices. I am so proud of this magazine and Jennifer is the force behind it.

Reflections for the Year. Let me conclude with a few personal reflections about how important I consider our work. Two encounters over the summer frame my perspective as we begin this year.

Nicole Brodeur, of the *Seattle Times*, reported that 91% of all Americans own a Bible. This was astounding to her. She quickly needed to say that two-thirds of those people didn't read the Bible, and she was among those folks. She was among the hip majority who owned dusty Bibles. And then she went on to invalidate and marginalize those of us who regard the scriptures as the truly big story of God's transforming work in history and in our lives.

And then I encountered the opening ten verses of 1 Corinthians (immensely aided by Richard Hays new commentary). I got in touch with the sweeping sense of "God's story of grace," a worldwide movement in which we have the privilege to participate.

There are some requirements in order to participate effectively: we have got to stop fighting with each other (grace-filled community); we can't be proud; let love be your guiding value; we can't be just individuals (rather we are part of the unity of the church, the community, these are critical). But if we can catch the vision, we will never be the same. We will know that we are part of that larger story, and then the petty differences will fall away.

Richard Hays says: Paul wants the Corinthians to believe, to imagine, that they "are caught up in a cosmic drama, and they must play a distinctive role in God's action to rescue the world." What a deal, what a calling, what a purpose.

"They are to serve as a covenant people," Hays says of Paul's vision, "representing God's kingdom within a world that does not know God." Paul invites the Corinthians, he invites us, to "learn to see ourselves within the story of God's grace in such a way that despair, and pride and petty conflict should fall away."

We are called to a "conversion of the imagination." We are called to imagine a different world.

To use the language of another young theologian I am reading, Ellen Charry, God wants his world to flourish. God wants his people to flourish. I believe that with all my heart.

And that's what we are trying to do at SPU: to align ourselves with God's flourishing. That's the mandate and the opportunity of the gospel. That's our great privilege, our calling. Where the world does not flourish, we should be sad with God. Where there is hunger, we should bring food. Where there is darkness, we should bring light. Where there is hopelessness, we should bring hope.

That is our purpose here at SPU. Engaging the culture so that God's world may flourish. We can make a difference. I am going to call the students next week to become a generation of hope, to let us help them shape an imagination of hope.

In closing, let me share with you one of the texts I have selected to guide me through the year. I will meditate on these often. You will hear me speak from these texts from time to time. But listen to these thoughts and join me as I seek to live out these aspirations.

"I pray that your inward eyes may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope to which he calls you, how rich and glorious is the share he offers you among his people in their inheritance, and how vast are the resources of his power open to us who have faith." (Ephesians 1:18-19)

With enlightened inward eyes, let us join the sweeping movement of God's grace. Let us participate in flourishing. Let us know the hope to which we are called, and let us claim the vast resources of God's power.

What a venture we have here at SPU. We can, with all of our individual gifts growing and blossoming, all channeled in the same direction—we can make a difference.

We are on the right track, folks. No question about it. And we have the right team in place. There is a lot of work yet to be done, but if we stay focused as a community, if we stay obedient and faithful to our calling, God will give us his surprising blessing. We too will flourish. Not just for our own flourishing, but so that God's world will flourish.

I would ask you to pray for me. I want you to know I pray for you, regularly. I thank God for each one of you. I thank God for this extraordinary privilege of working with you. Pray for us all that we may remain faithful and then that we will have the imagination and the courage to accomplish great things at this place, in this city, in this time, for the kingdom.

Thank you all for being here. Now, let's go have a picnic.