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**Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
President's Conference
Washington DC / Virginia
January 31, 2005**

“Go Where the Fish Are”

C. William Pollard

Scripture Reading: Luke Chapter 5

If I were to give a title to my devotional thought this morning, it would be “Go where the fish are”.

We are called to be fishers of men and women. What does that mean for a leader of a Christian college?

Now, the subject of leadership provides the content for many books and the field is full of experts. My focus this morning is seeking to learn something more about our leadership from Jesus as he taught and prepared Peter for a leadership role in the church.

Leadership is work. It can be mundane, unromantic, repetitive, and boring. It has little to do with so-called leadership qualities and even less to do with charisma. It is about results, not just efforts.

In and of itself, it is not necessarily desirable. Leadership is a means. To what end? is the crucial question.

Leadership is about knowing where you are going and taking the people who will follow. It is about responsibility for others, not just a title, position or a name on a parking space. The buck stops with the leader. It is about earning trust so people will follow. It is about taking the risk of moving into the deep water where the fish swim.

At this point, some of you may be saying: Bill, just what are you saying? You are too abstract. What is the application? Well, my application starts with a question: What is your presidential priority? Now, I did not say: **What are your priorities?** I said: What is your priority? The word priority came into the English language in the 14th century. It was used only in the singular and stayed that way until the 20th century, when we had so much to do that we decided there could be a plurality of priorities, all of equal value. But what is your priority - your focus on the most important responsibility you have? In response to the call to be fishers of men and women, I suggest that your priority, and the priority of every person working in your institution, should be the student. The work of your leadership and your institution is all about learning. The student is the worker, not the work product. The performance or the result of your leadership is measured in their changed lives, As Arthur Holmes so aptly put it - **in the shaping of**

their character, in their ability to integrate learning with faith, and in their preparation to serve, embrace and engage the world God so loved.

Is it reasonable to assume that the mark of a Christian education, the result of the combined leadership in this room, should be represented in the lives and service of your students as they go forth to transform a lost and needy world, a transformation in the growing number of people who come into the kingdom; in the growth and health of the church; in the civility, morality, and justice of our society? Are we making a difference? Now, I understand that one of the speakers you will be hearing this week is Naomi Shaefer, the author of the recent book *God on the Quad*. The book is about her study of various “religious educational institutions”, including several that are part of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. In a recent interview about her book, she made these statements about what she found.

The students don’t spend their college years experimenting with sex and drugs. They marry early and plan ahead for family life. They oppose sex outside of marriage as well as homosexual relationships. Most dress modestly and don’t drink, use drugs or smoke. While they would disagree among themselves about what it means to be a religious person, they all

assume that trying to live by a set of rules, generally laid down in Scripture, is a prescription for a healthy, productive, and moral life.

She then went on to say: “There are about 1.3 million students in religious colleges today, and that number is growing fast and cites the schools of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, indicating that the growth of students in those schools has jumped a remarkable 60% from 1990 to 2002. She concludes that these students are not like their parents. They dream of living in the cultural and political centers of the world and know that they don’t see their primary role as working with churches. They go on for advanced degrees and aim at becoming professionals in every walk of life. They become lawyers, doctors, politicians, college professors, business people, psychologists, and accountants.

They don’t want to live in communities with people who are just like them. They want to have an influence on the culture as a whole. They are involved in community service organizations, politics, and running businesses and schools. Her view is that their missionary work is much more subtle and more powerful than the previous generation.

Interesting conclusion by someone who is of the Jewish faith, educated at Harvard, and who took the time to study our schools, as well as

schools like Brigham Young, Notre Dame, and Bob Jones. Her conclusions indicate that your leadership is making a difference. Are her conclusions valid? Is there room for improvement? Carefully listen to her views on diversity or the lack thereof among our students. Despite the *The New York Times* review of her book, overall I come away encouraged by her views.

But there is another side – listen to this letter I received from a recent graduate of one of our schools:

“I am very happy to report that, by God’s grace and fullness, I actually did graduate. For the first time since age five, I am not a student.

It’s been a good four years of learning. I can now read in the Hebrew Testament. I know phrases like: inaugurated eschatology and hermeneutical fallacy. My interpretation of scripture has increased in both caution and confidence. I have seen God in his word and in his people.

I have made wonderful friends here, in breakfast Bible studies and noon prayer for missions, in afternoons on the Frisbee field and late nights in the dorm. The farewells will be very difficult.

So, what’s next? I am moving to Kansas to stay with my family. I’ll find a job and pay off my student loans. What kind of a job? I really don’t know – secretarial? tailoring? road construction? I also will continue my application process with Wycliff. In a year or two, I hope to be heading to

the mission field. Where, I don't know – Ethiopia? Papua New Guinea?
India?

Please pray for me in these next couple of months. It is going to be quite a transition and, frankly, **I am not looking forward to it**. For the first time, I am leaving the Christian community to live among **ordinary, working Americans**. I am expecting a considerable amount of uncertainty and loneliness, but our God is a faithful companion. May his guiding presence give you peace.”

Has this student been prepared to serve? To go where the fish are? To engage and embrace those ordinary working Americans that God so loved that He sent His son to die for them?

Our communities can become a cloistered world of protection – where we define our faith to separate the sacred from the secular, to exclude rather than embrace.

As you know, for me the market place has been my ministry – a place where ordinary people work - where profits and wealth are both created and lost and where God and fish are present.

Focus on your priority. Although much of your job may be pulling and demanding you in many different directions, remember it is the student who is your priority. They represent the multiplying factor of your

leadership. As they leave your institutions, they must know how to fish and go where the fish are if we, as leaders, are to respond to the calling of our Lord and Savior.

Thank you.

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1/27/05