Pro Deo et Veritate . . . For God and Truth

This statement, which appears on the official University seal behind me, has been and will continue to be a symbol of Stetson University’s commitment to integrate the pursuit of education and truth with the search for meaning in one’s personal faith quest and spiritual life. Over the last 126 years, we have embraced this motto in an increasingly expansive way to fully encompass our core values, our relationships, and our service to the community at large. Though customs may come and go -- hemlines creep up and down, the Dow Jones index and our home values increase…or decrease -- let us remember the bedrock of our beliefs as articulated by the founders of Stetson University:

Pro Deo et Veritate!
Chairman de Armas, members of the Stetson University Board of Trustees, faculty and staff, distinguished members of the academy and guests representing other institutions of higher learning, government and community leaders, students, parents and family of students, and alumni and friends of Stetson--Hatters all--welcome and thank you for gracing our wonderful University with your presence today. Thank you as well to my family and friends who have come to DeLand and Stetson to witness this day in our University’s life and to stand by me as I accept the honor and responsibilities that come with being your president.

I’d like my family members and friends to stand as I introduce them:

- My very dear husband, Dr. Richard Libby
- Our sons and their families:
  - Glenn, Ginger, Kyle, and Blake, and Kyle’s fiancé Mallory
  - Gregg, Lori, Loren and her daughter Cali, Austin, and Leia
- My siblings:
  - My brother, Mark
o Brother Andrew and his wife, Penny
o Sister Caroline and her husband, Michael, and their daughter, Julie
• Our Missouri daughter, Laura, and
• My cousins Martin and Lisa
• And my wonderful friends who have been a part of my life from as early as kindergarten to as recently as our arrival in DeLand.

Please stand and be recognized . . .
Thank you all for coming to this celebration.

Today’s inauguration could not have come at a better time than Homecoming Weekend. As we were thinking about what would be a time to have this installation, it just seemed right that it be combined with Homecoming so our alumni could share in its significance. I am overjoyed to have you here to partake in this somewhat arcane, formal, full-of-pomp-and-circumstance ceremony. After all, this is your university, to love, to advise, to question, and to support. So welcome all of you on this Homecoming weekend, and thank you for allowing me to be the
interloper, so to speak, on the weekend specially set aside to celebrate your lifelong relationship with alma mater!

I have been interviewed countless times and the most frequently asked question is, “What brought you to Stetson University?” That’s an easy question to answer! When I first heard that I had been nominated for this position, I thought, “Why would I do this?” Richard and I were perfectly happy at Stephens College and in Columbia, Missouri. I came for the interview; it was our 23rd wedding anniversary and Richard flew in that afternoon. Over the next two days, we visited all four of Stetson’s campuses (this was the romantic tour of Central Florida) and started to feel that maybe this was the right place for us. I had another few conversations with the Chair of our Board--Nestor can be a pretty persuasive guy!--and then I visited again for two and half days.

The answer became clearer with every new Stetson group with whom I met. This was my kind of place -- set in values against the backdrop of rich history, faculty as strong and committed as any I have seen, students for whom our rigorous
and intense experience is just right, staff who are all about student success, alumni who give of their time and resources because of the lasting impact Stetson has made on their lives, and the wonderful communities we call home; communities that have embraced this University for all she offers their citizens.

I knew this was where I needed and wanted to be, and on November 6, 2008, I was positively thrilled to be offered and to accept the opportunity to lead Stetson University. I am so proud to be your president. Thank you, trustees, for giving me the opportunity to serve this great institution.

So where do we find ourselves today? In this world of shifting finances, uncharted waters, social networking, demographic changes, moving tectonic plates . . . where are we and where do we want to be?

As I look around this world, this nation, and this state, I am struck by how many individuals are experiencing grave challenges, reducing them to focus solely on survival. In the face of the most trying of circumstances, our human instinct is to
do what is necessary -- to get by. Not one of us has a family that has been totally immune. Just as the Stetson community has reached out internationally through our “Hearts for Haiti” benefit and locally through our Trustee-funded “We Believe in You” scholarship program, our focus is on immediate needs – actions now that can help our brothers and sisters to survive from minute to minute, day to day.

As we look around the higher education landscape today, too many institutions are all about survival. Plagued by the financial fallout, colleges and universities are looking at the immediate, securing what they need to get by. They are looking for ways to cut costs, to increase revenue, and to be more efficient. Once operational efficiencies are maximized, many institutions look for efficiencies in how students are educated. . . . The more students the better. . . . The quicker the better. . . . The more narrow the better.

Efficiency is fine, but it is too often measured by dollars saved and revenue earned, rather than by outcomes
accomplished. Is this what we want for Stetson? Is survival in these tumultuous times--times for which no trend line fits--enough? Is it enough for Stetson University and those that love her to see her just survive today’s challenges?

In my mind, the answer is an unequivocal, NO. It is precisely in these times that we need our “vision” to be broader . . . our ambitions greater . . . our commitment more resolute. It is our collective responsibility to assure that Stetson emerges stronger and well positioned for the future. Indeed, it must be our task to lead Stetson beyond survival, to significance!

Let us take a moment to remember Chancellor Doug Lee, who left us way too soon, and to thank Doug and Margaret Lee for keeping Stetson true to this trajectory toward significance. Thank you, Margaret and Gregory Lee, for being here today. Doug Lee often said, and I quote, “It is only education and competency with wisdom and values that can save us as persons and as our world. And, we must act upon our wisdom and values to make the world a better place.” End quote.
His passion for this institution’s core values, his personal commitment to social justice, and his people-centered philosophy are what brought us to this day. Borrowing from Hindu teachings, we must all be aware that to be successful, we must carry forth our vision with conviction, honesty, love, and a sense of justice.

There are others who have come before us who have done great things for Stetson University. We have a rich heritage and a strong foundation upon which to build. The lives of Stetson graduates tell the story best:

- Max Cleland has had a long and distinguished career in public service. He has shown all of us how to be --to borrow the title from his book--“Strong at the Broken Places.”

- Recent graduate Matt Morton, a doctoral candidate at Oxford and one of last year’s recipients of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award, is an international leader in youth empowerment and advocacy programs.

- Dolly Hand, a College of Law student when it was located here on the DeLand campus, was the only woman in her
class and the youngest student ever to complete the law program. Her life as a philanthropist has been dedicated to those in our world who have less.

- Immersed in international law, Sarah Cohen, a third-year law student, recently interned with the Supreme Court of Uganda and has decided, because of that transformative experience, that her life’s work will be about international human rights.

- Donald McCullough was commissioned by the Polish and German governments to compose the “Holocaust Cantata: Songs from the Camps” for Europe’s commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War Two. In addition, he established an all-city chorus program for underserved children in Washington, D.C.

- And young music alumnus, Wes Whatley, is the creative manager for Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. One of his musical compositions, “I Believe,” was nominated for an Emmy.

- Former trustee and alumnus Mark Hollis, the former President and Chief Operating Officer of Publix
Supermarkets, has dedicated his life to improving education for all in Florida and the nation.

- Jessily Ramirez, a business alumna, is using her management skills and her heart in her work with Florida Hospital SHARES, where she takes medical teams to impoverished communities in Latin America to provide reconstructive surgery to children suffering from physical and emotional distress by facial deformities.

These individuals--young and old--are truly inspiring, and they make Stetson what it is today. The wonderful thing is that there are thousands more just like them. And, this is why we are destined for even greater things.

All one has to do is walk into a Stetson classroom anywhere across our state and observe the intense, engaged interaction between our faculty and students. Our excellent and dedicated faculty members are changing lives daily. There is a passionate classroom experience here.
For the alumni in our audience today--do you remember that moment, the moment when a faculty member opened your world, enriched your soul, and caused you to think about life in a new and different way? Isn’t that why you are back with us today? Isn’t that when you knew you could lead a life of significance?

I’ve got to tell you, there is not much that looks easy right now for those of us in higher education. But this year, I have witnessed our beloved University coming together to confront some uniquely difficult and challenging issues. We’ve agreed and disagreed; we are noting our academic strengths and identifying areas where we need to re-invest and improve; we are seeking out best practices in enrollment, student mentoring and advising, communications, fund raising and friend raising to enhance our position in the market place; and we are rethinking and reimagining our campuses, insuring that we show the pride in ourselves in part by how we look. Through this work, we are rediscovering some things about ourselves.
• We are a community that is not content to rest on its laurels.
• We are a community that celebrates the student experience.
• We are a community that thrives on civic engagement.
• We are a community that honors our stewardship for this world and for one another.
• We are a community that stands for significance in this world.

There is a greater purpose for this place which is larger than all of us, but which requires something of all of us. I commit to you today that I will do what is required of me. I challenge and invite each of you to join with me in embracing a vision for Stetson University that is enriched and informed by history and tradition, but which requires our courage and determination to always seek the higher good, the deeper commitment, the brighter future--to be a university of significance.

Pro Deo et Veritate!