

## INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Dr. Michael L. Frandsen

Wittenberg University's 15<sup>th</sup> President

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Thank you, Jonathan, and thank you, Don, for that introduction. Thank you, Dr. Bass, for sharing your thoughts on education for the future and how we think about the work we do. Thanks to all who have shared greetings and to everyone for sharing in this special day, for Wittenberg and for me.

I want to recognize the inauguration steering committee, and especially co-chairs, Brandee Bates and Karen Gerboth, for all their creativity and energy in connecting a series of events this week to celebrate Wittenberg in all its dimensions – teaching and learning, scholarship and creativity, athletic and artistic performance, and service. We had some fun along the way with “popcorn with the President” and a series of videos, including carpool karaoke. So many people helped prepare for this day and, at the risk of overlooking others, I want to be sure we all don't forget those who are behind the scenes, our Physical Plant staff and our partners at Parkhurst and Alpha & Omega.

I truly appreciate the students who are sharing their musical talents with us today. I was asked what music I would like to have as part of the inauguration ceremony and my only request was that it be performed mostly by students.

I want to thank the members of the Wittenberg University Board of Directors, both those who are here today and those unable to join us. I remain honored and humbled by the trust you have placed in me and awed by your commitment to this place.

I also want to thank the many friends who are here. I'm not sure of the final count, and a few had plans change at the last minute, but know it is around 75 who are with us and who have made a difference in my life, supported me and helped me become who I am. There are high school and college classmates and teachers, teammates from my swimming days, co-workers from my finance years, and colleagues from Juniata, Albion, Oberlin, the GLCA, and the Ohio Five. Though this will leave out many who are here, I want to acknowledge those who are serving as delegates – Marvin Krislov, representing Yale, who was President at Oberlin during my time there and is now President at Pace, Mark Kohlman, representing Kenyon, David English, representing Denison, Bill Barlow, representing Oberlin, Jim Prince representing Kalamazoo, Doug Goering, representing Albion, President Rock Jones,

representing Ohio Wesleyan, Bob Armstrong, representing Heidleberg, Randy Deihl, best man in our wedding, representing Penn State, President Emeritus Tom Kepple, representing Juniata, Jim Fredrickson, my dissertation co-chair, representing Texas, Kathy Wilson, who introduced me to Sharon, representing Bank Street College of Education, and Juniata Provost Emeritus, Jim Lakso, Wittenberg '67, representing United Lutheran Seminary. A special thank you, too, to Christy and Dale Dowdy, who were co-pastors at Stone Church of the Brethren in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, home of Juniata College, who will deliver the benediction.

And, of course, I want to thank the members of my family who are here – My mother, Susan Frandsen Doran, my sister, Mary, Sally Rotchford, and my father, Ken, who is representing his alma mater, Ohio University, as a delegate. Sharon's mother, Martha Thompson, and Sharon's siblings and their spouses, Melanie and Ron, Jennifer and David, and Keith and Christy, and my niece, Hannah. I also want to remember Sharon's father, William Thompson, whose presence is certainly with our family and all of us today. And my immediate family. Our daughters, Janie and Kate, I am so proud of the young women you have become. And Sharon, who is the love of my life, my best friend,

and an absolutely amazing presidential spouse and first lady of Wittenberg. I am so blessed by the loving support of my family.

In these early days, our entire family has been so welcomed by Wittenberg and Springfield. It did not take long at all for us to really feel as though it is home. We have been able to enjoy some of the things Tom Loftis shared and look forward to experiencing the others.

Over the course of these first nine months at Wittenberg, I have learned more about the grit and the passion for this place that are reflected when one says “Tiger Up!” and more about the ways in which we pass our light on to others. There have been highs and lows, with far, far more of the former.

Among my great memories are a glorious Homecoming weekend, celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, a national runner-up finish by our women’s volleyball team, the making of a welcome video from the community, student performances of theater, dance, and music, the magic of Lessons and Carols, recognition of faculty colleagues by their professional peers, a 22 game win streak by our men’s basketball team, eating in the Central Dining Room (yes,

really, because of the food and the company), and having functions at the Benjamin Prince House. As a first-year student of Wittenberg history, it has also been wonderful to hear the many, many stories from alumni about how this place changed their lives, including from so many who met their spouses here.

Over those nine months, I have said that the first things on my agenda each day are three Rs – retention, recruitment, and resources. The three Rs align with the three key initiatives identified in our strategic plan – grow steadily, enhance the student experience, and expand and deepen our relationships. Before I came and since I’ve been here, we’ve made some investments in all of these areas, building on positive momentum already in place. While early indications are good, it will take some time to see if they pay off. We have launched a campus master planning process and we are in the early stages of developing plans for a comprehensive fundraising campaign. Progress on the Health, Wellness, and Athletics project continues and that exciting renewal of and addition to our campus will really begin to take shape this summer. We are close to announcing the details of a major gift that will enhance our facilities. And we have embarked on a 31 city tour (17 down, 14 to go) to connect with and engage our alumni. At

the most recent of these events, in Sarasota, we were joined by the choir as part of their spring break tour.

In those hours, and I say hours because it is never full days, when the highs take a back seat and the lows are getting to me, the best way for me to re-energize is to spend time with our students. They are why I am here. They are why Wittenberg exists. While as a community we pass our light on in many ways, first and foremost it is to illuminate the way for their learning, growth, and change. My service to, and leadership and stewardship of, this institution are driven by my desire to help our students succeed. I daresay I found my vocation a long time ago as a teacher-coach, and the current manifestation of that is my role, my many roles, as President. As each of us thinks about our stewardship of Wittenberg, we should remain student-centered and student-focused.

Wittenberg has a long record of success, but this time of transition may be a particularly critical time as we build on our history for the future. We have our own, local challenges, but we also hear questions about all of higher education and its value. We face an increasingly competitive marketplace, demographics that are shifting dramatically, technology

that is advancing rapidly, and family incomes that for the vast majority are stagnant. We read about disruption and hear speculation that some institutions will close. More specific to our curriculum in the liberal arts and sciences, based on its research, Gallup has suggested that “putting the words *liberal* and *arts* together is a branding disaster.”

So what does being a student-centered, residential, liberal arts and sciences institution like ours look like for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How do we educate the whole person across the whole campus? How do we all find the places in our work that contribute to the shared responsibility for student success? How do we go about our work and how do we talk about it? We have to start with our mission and values.

Back in the day, when I taught strategic management, we would examine organizational mission statements. I asked students to look for three elements: 1) a definition of those who the organization exists to serve, 2) a definition of the needs of those persons or entities, and 3) an explanation of the process through which an organization will meet those needs. Let’s examine Wittenberg’s mission statement:

*Wittenberg University provides a liberal arts education dedicated to intellectual inquiry and wholeness of person within a diverse residential community. Reflecting its Lutheran heritage,*

*Wittenberg challenges students to become responsible global citizens, to discover their callings, and to lead personal, professional, and civic lives of creativity, service, compassion, and integrity.*

Who – Wittenberg challenges students.

Needs – to become responsible global citizens, to discover their callings, and to lead personal, professional, and civic lives of creativity, service, compassion, and integrity.

Process – a liberal arts education dedicated to intellectual inquiry and wholeness of person, within a diverse residential community, reflecting its Lutheran heritage.

I think our mission statement is in pretty good shape. If we were looking at this in my class, we'd talk about whether students is a precise enough definition. Here, for a long time, that has meant "traditional-aged" students. We've done and do other things through the School of Community Education, and now through Graduate and Professional Studies, but at our core we serve 18-22 year-olds. While there might be some flexibility gained from a loose definition of students, it might also



lead to a loss of focus. We should test the question of who we serve as we look to the future.

Do the needs we identify resonate as we look ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? I think so. They address the both needs of individual students and also the needs of society. We have a responsibility for the greater good and part of passing our light on is to instill an appreciation of that. We know that meeting these needs involves understanding things from a diversity of perspectives. We ask our students to study a breadth of disciplines. We strive to help them integrate those perspectives and disciplines and to see connections that may not be obvious. We also endeavor to help them to appreciate, understand, and accept differences – in background, in life experience, in point-of-view.

What about process? That starts for us with people – leaders who have served before; dedicated, caring, and accomplished faculty and staff; amazing students; passionate alumni; neighbors in Springfield; and partners around the world. From that strong foundation, process may be the place where it is most important for us to constantly evolve. As we think about our processes, we need to practice what Georgia Nugent, former President at Kenyon and now Senior Fellow at the Council of Independent Colleges, calls “thoughtful and steady renewal.” We must ask: How can we get better? Is the way we’ve always done

things the right way to do them now? What can we stop doing? What must we start?

We need to be sure to meet students where they are, in terms of their preparation, their use of technology, their expectations about our responses to the issues of today, and the level of services we provide.

Process, how we go about meeting needs, may be the place where we define how we will compete for students and for resources. This is where, I believe, it is most important to think about the bundle that is a Wittenberg education.

Our stated values expand upon the process by which we will meet the needs of our students. The first one we mention is liberal arts. We explain that as “an education that develops the individual’s capacity to think, read, and communicate with precision, understanding, and imagination.” We say “we are dedicated to education in the core disciplines of the arts and sciences and in pre-professional education grounded in the liberal arts.” That sounds pretty good to me, and I think it is timeless. Gallup’s research is telling us we may want to re-think some of our words, but it is not suggesting that we change the basics of what we do.

We identify ten other values:

1. Intellectual inquiry
2. Wholeness of person
3. Community of learners
4. Lutheran heritage
5. Global citizenship
6. Calling
7. Creativity
8. Service
9. Compassion
10. and Integrity

I don't think we'd get much argument about these. But I think we might need to think more and say more about the "So what?" We are in an outcomes-focused time and we cannot stop at saying we do these things; we must explain why doing them is important. In articulating these values, we may need to link them more clearly to jobs, careers, and fulfilling lives.

What are some other elements of our process? We talk about engaged learning and high-impact practices such as – student research, internships, study abroad, service-learning, and writing-intensive

courses. We need to be sure all students, as Elon's Center for Engaged Learning describes, "have opportunities to engage deeply in their own learning, to practice the transfer or application of knowledge across contexts (whether among courses or between courses and off-campus contexts), to interact with other perspectives and voices, to receive frequent feedback about their performance, and to reflect on both that feedback and their learning."

And this is really what I think we can do best at Wittenberg. We're already very good, but I want to help us get even better. And I think the place to get better is in how we think about the about the learning, growing, and changing in all the places in which it is occurring. How we make sure that what happens in the residence halls, or on the stage, or in the community, or on the court, or in the classroom is connected each to the other. How we make sure that the education we provide is intentionally integrated, bundled in all its dimensions. How each of us fulfills our roles as educators in a community of learners. As we illuminate that, we will continue to pass our light on to others well into the future, and continue to be an important and exciting place for learning, growth, and change.

Thank you.