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Installation Address [excerpted by permission]

David Eubanks, as scholar preacher, exemplifies the historic DNA of this school, both in its ancestry as Florida Christian College, and its newer—or should I say older—ancestry as Johnson Bible College. What was formerly, for both schools, in large part a regionally-focused response to the need for an educated pulpit ministry, has become in our day a globally-focused response to the continuing need for pulpit and other familiar forms of congregational leadership **plus** strategic breakthrough forms of ministry. President Gary Weedman is speaking about strategic ministry when he says, “We value our heritage from the 19th and 20th centuries, but our vision is for the 21st century.” Dr. Eubanks has promoted and enabled that expanded vision, and you need to know that as I assume the duties of my office I enthusiastically embrace it, and I commend it to you without reservation.

Johnson’s breakthrough programs are designed to deliver the Biblical message in creative ways to a hurting world. That world has shrunk and continues to shrink in ways that bring both opportunities and threats from faraway places to our very doorstep.

The **primary** instrument of meeting the needs of humankind remains what it has been from the beginning of the Church: The apostle Paul spoke for the entire apostolic age when he declared that his consuming passion was to declare the gospel of Christ, for as he explained in Romans 1, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. He wrote in I Cor 15 that he had preached the word of God to the Corinthians, they had received, stood in it, and were saved by it, if they held fast the word he preached. And as he was leaving the guidance of the Ephesian congregation in the hands of his younger protege Timothy, he instructed him (I T 4) in the priority of the public reading of Scripture, of exhortation and teaching.

We come back to such passages time and again to gain inspiration and an understanding of how to keep the main thing the main thing in the life of the Church. Who more perfectly embodies the priority of the proclamation of the gospel than Paul? And yet Paul also had a strategic vocation that enabled him to establish relationships with new people and gain legitimacy in a frequently hostile culture. He made tents that met a need for shelter and security; and although I can’t offer evidence, I am morally certain that his tents were among the very highest quality and the very best designs anywhere in the Roman world.

The mission statement of Johnson University reflects both our historic commitment to the primacy of teaching and preaching, and to the development of specialized, accredited professional training in fields that have been carefully chosen precisely for their promise of opening new doors of opportunity for the declaration and influence of

the gospel. *Johnson educates students for Christian ministries and other strategic vocations framed by the Great Commission in order to extend the Kingdom of God among all nations.*

As carefully and concisely worded as that mission statement is, I realize that for some hearers it lacks clarity and force. Most of us get the “Christian ministries” phrasing that is so familiar in the context of the Bible college movement. It’s the “strategic vocations” phrasing that is less familiar to many, and which suggests to some ears a weakening of Johnson’s commitment to leadership ministry rather than a concentration of it. But the **entire** mission statement deserves our unqualified enthusiasm, particularly today as faculty and students begin a new academic year to study and work together toward the **future** of ministry.

A number of years ago, supported by Faith-promise donations from the FCC family of students and employees, Pam and I visited several teams of Bible translation and literacy specialists working with Pioneer Bible Translators in Guinea West Africa. Our understanding of the kinds of service those missionary couples actually perform on a daily basis was changed dramatically by that experience, especially in the way they responded to the medical needs of people in their host villages. I don’t believe there was a single family not involved in delivering life-saving medical help to their local populations. The reason was simple: although these missionaries could not meet everyone’s physical needs, they often had found that certain medical emergencies were so demanding and frequent that it was difficult to make progress in Ig learning and translation b/c villagers so often needed help in either curing or transporting victims out for long distances to a medical clinic. As one missionary said to us, “I’m tired of having kids die on us in the middle of a trip out.”

One nagging problem in the country is serious burn injuries to toddlers who, while they are playing, fall into the open charcoal fires that are kept burning day and night next to many huts. These translator missionaries have developed specialized techniques to treat the excruciatingly painful and life-threatening burns that often cover large portions of a child’s body. Keep in mind that the poverty and remoteness of people in most of these villages makes it all but impossible for them to get the burn-injury treatment to save these kids’ lives in many instances. It is easy to imagine Jesus coming to such a village, and out of compassion and what we in our limited vocabulary might call a holistic perspective on human need (imagine what that would mean to Jesus), healing those toddlers, and then teaching the onlookers about who he was that made it possible for him to do that, and why.

One of the missionary families we visited lived in a swampy coastal village on the Western edge of the country. One morning Pam and I stood with Tina Ganong, the missionary wife, in front of their home as she greeting a woman bringing her infant granddaughter for treatment. The little girl was bandaged over nearly her entire leg. This was to be her final visit to the missionary house for one last bandage change before being released from care.

Pam and I watched and listened from inside the house while the little girl fussed and screamed during treatment on the front porch and at last calmed down with the final application of ointment and bandages. Tina gave her a little candy treat which made her smile. As the grandmother rose to leave she hugged Tina and spoke softly to her in the local unwritten language that was the life's work of these Bible translators. Tina told us later what she had said, "May God keep you here a long time." Now that may sound unexceptional, even trite; but this is a predominantly Muslim village under the strict rule of Muslim imams who regard Christians with suspicion and are on constant alert for proselytizing. The legitimacy of the missionaries' presence is always in question. Eventually the power of the Bible in steady use will have its effects in the hearts and shared culture of that village. But as a strategy to engage those people, and exhibit the compassion and spiritual significance of the gospel, and build bridges of love, Tina's burn treatment would be hard to improve upon. So often advancement of the missionary cause is not a matter of pulpit ministry OR medical, educational, agricultural, small business, literacy efforts. It is a matter of AND.

One element of the Johnson University Florida 5-year Strategic Plan is to introduce a bachelors degree in Global Community Health in the School of Intercultural Studies. The curriculum is already developed; implementation will require approval by the Florida Department of Education, recruitment of professionally credentialed instructional staff, adequate donor support to help us with instructional equipment and scholarships, and other elements in order to inaugurate a high-quality professional program. It will have the same 33-hour Bible/Theology core requirement as our preaching program, and all our programs. I don't know what you think when you hear that news, but the missionary in **me**, the preacher in **me**, the theologian in **me**, all say, Bring it on!

I referred earlier to a passage in I Timothy where the apostle Paul urges the young preacher at Ephesus to give attention to his preaching and teaching. In the middle of that passage, he admonishes Timothy not to neglect the spiritual gift within him. In words that echo that admonition and drive it home, he writes again, at the beginning of his second letter to Timothy, 1:6, "I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you by the laying on of my hands." I hope you're paying attention, because those few words capture our shared calling as faculty and students at JUFL. The phrase "Kindle afresh" expresses a single word, as Paul wrote it, that carries the idea of freshening up, or fanning into a bigger flame, a fire that is already lit and glowing. The CEV has "revive." The Modern English Version has "stir up." I like that; I know you get it.

You students, you come here already gifted. Some of you have clarity about what your gifts are; others of you have only a dim sense, or maybe, as it was with me when I entered Bible college, you have not a clue! But here you are; you have a sense of calling and purpose, you love the Lord and you want to do ministry with your life. You're glowing, some more faintly, others more brightly; but all of you alike needing to stir up your gifts. You have come to the right place. We will help you, although I give you fair warning it will not always feel like that. When you are in English Comp, or introduction to psychology, or World Civ, or History of the Restoration Movement, or The Parables of Jesus, the Missionary Methods of Paul, or Ministry to Children, or Biblical Teaching and

Preaching, or Financial Management & Accounting, it may **look** like the teacher is lecturing, grading, testing, dreaming up yet another impossible assignment or more busy work, and testing some more; but really, he or she is standing beside you with a giant bellows, pumping more and more air on you to stir you up, fan the glow of your giftedness into a steady flame.

Paul paints a picture of what the full flame of the exercise of gifts for ministry looks like, in three poignant terms: he says the spirit of that gifting is not in timidity, but in power, love, and discipline (practical wisdom—wise self management). I do not have the time to offer evidence that we are justified in generalizing Paul's personalized instruction to Timothy so as to extend it to our modern situation; but we are, and it is not hard to see. The master theme of the Bible, the message of the cross and the empty tomb, is the most powerful message in history, and we need never be hesitant to declare it. Every man, woman, boy and girl on earth needs to hear it, and there is no shame in telling the story of the one who died to save us, conquered death and shattered the bonds of the grave. The Psalmist's conviction gains force from a New Testament perspective: We rejoice in our firm foundation and we sing a hymn of praise to our God. We pray that many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. We pray that many will desire to do God's will. We pray that we will proclaim righteousness and speak of God's faithfulness and salvation, and never conceal His love and His truth. (Psalm 40: 2,3,8,9,10)

Paul says the full flaming of our gifts is distinguished by love, which is a reminder that ministry is far, far more than technique or a skill set, or personal ambition. When Paul wrote in I Cor 11:1, "imitate me, as I imitate Christ," he was speaking of more than a method; he was speaking of the heart.

And then he says that an essential element in the flaming of Timothy's gift is the use of good judgment and the exercise of self discipline—Paul develops this theme fully throughout his two letters to Timothy—so that Timothy's behavior will advance, not retard, the message and mission of the Kingdom of God. There's a prayer request for all of us. In fact we are given here three prayer requests to stir up our spiritual gift this year: Power, love, and discipline—and to tell you the truth, I simply have absolutely nothing more important to share with you today about why we are all here. Except to illustrate.

In 1995 Judah Tangshing came to FCC from his home all the way around the world in the country of Burma, Myanmar, one of the most troubled nations on earth. Judah already had a bachelors degree from Univ. of Mandalay and was active as a Christian evangelist and teacher; but heard about FCC and was convicted by the Lord to deepen his capacity for Bible study by moving here to learn New Testament Greek. For that purpose he left his home, a very different home from Kissimmee, to live and study here and enroll in a Bachelor of Theology program so he could increase his qualifications to teach the Bible to his people. Judah was from a tribal culture deep in the Burmese jungles, accustomed to wearing very different clothes and eating very different things. I don't want to get into details; let me just say that when he and his FCC roommates saw

a dog, the roommates looked at it in one way, and he looked at it in another. He did however develop a love for pizza while he was here!

Judah was in my New Testament Greek classes. He was happy. He worked tirelessly. He excelled. No student of New Testament Greek was ever more highly motivated to learn. He was an inspiration to his fellow students and his roommates, and they, to him. That's how it is supposed to work with fellow students and roommates, btw, as iron sharpens iron. Other students went to their homes for weekends, and breaks and holidays; Judah couldn't. He was stateside for the duration. It was hard for him to be separated from home and family and friends and familiar foods and bed.

It was not until late in spring term that I learned that he had come to FCC with the impression that he could complete the Greek program in one year; but now he had learned it would take two! Unable to afford the travel home and back to FL, he remained here through the summer and through the end of the following academic year. It was not until then that I learned that he was married and his wife Caw was missing him as badly as he was her and home. Think about that the next time you drive to campus for class and get annoyed because you aren't able to park as close to the building as you want. Or you have a bad hair day. Or you are ready to file an official complaint because the professor asks a question on a quiz you didn't expect.

Judah completed the requirements for his BTH in Preaching and graduated, Class of 97. You can see his picture on the wall. He returned home to his wife and church and immediately picked up his work teaching and preaching. I knew a little about his ministries of church planting and Bible college teaching. I knew they were conducted under the constant scrutiny of the military and police and often suffered serious setbacks. I knew the Christians there were poor and suffered from many illnesses and dangers.

Then came a letter to me one day from Judah, about a year after he had returned home. He explained that it had become clear that all of the Greek text books and study tools he had so carefully packed and shipped home from Florida had been confiscated and probably destroyed by the military; he was asking my help in replacing them. I gathered everything I could and sent them to him, with additional copies of some items with our librarian Linda Stark's help and handouts and other teaching aids. And that was the last I heard about Judah and New Testament Greek.

Until one day several years ago an e-newsletter from Judah found its way to me, in St. Louis, where I was at the time working for St. Louis Christian College. A few photographs accompanied the text of the newsletter. One stunned me. It was all I could think about for the rest of the day and to the present hour is one of the reasons I get out of bed in the morning thanking God for the joy of work in a Christian university. You know how it is with missionary newsletters. They tell of things, and often include photos of things, that are routine for them but frankly jaw-dropping to the rest of us who have prayed for them and cared about them and are already in awe of where they are and what they are doing. It was a photo of Judah, standing in front of a modest

classroom, book in hand, addressing his students, young men and women intent on their work at tables, and in the background, on the wall behind Judah, a blackboard covered with Greek verses. Of course, Judah teaches other things besides NT Greek; all of his former teachers share in the affirmation of the power, love, and wise self management that were stirred up in Judah, fanned into a steady flame at Florida Christian College. I am merely bearing personal testimony to the wisdom, necessity, and joy of these things.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the historic flow into which we step today as faculty and students, and the rest of us who support this enterprise. Students are here to stir up the fires of their giftedness; teachers are here to pump the bellows like crazy. And the rest of us? Parents, Registrar, Financial Aid director, coaches, maintenance workers, fundraisers, friends of the university, prayer partners, Board members, volunteers, Chancellor, all; we are support staff.

Well, I thought it was important to get all that straight as the curtain rises on a new academic year. May God add His blessing to our work, faith, dreams as they conform to His plan for the world. Welcome, Everybody, welcome.
