WHEN YOU COME TO A FORK IN THE ROAD, TAKE IT
The late New York Yankee catcher, Yogi Berra, was not only one of Major League Baseball’s greatest Hall-of-Famers, he was one of the most amusing and endearing figures of his time. Yogi’s trademark malapropisms transcend his sporting fame and have made their way into our 21st century lexicon of North American popular culture. They can leave you simultaneously scratching your head in puzzlement and shaking your belly in laughter.

Here are a few memorable examples:

- You can observe a lot by watching.
- It ain’t over till it’s over.
- In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is.
- Baseball is ninety percent mental. The other half is physical.
- I’m not going to buy my kids an encyclopedia. Let them walk to school like I did.
- Half the lies they tell about me aren’t true.
- Always go to other people’s funerals. Otherwise, they won’t come to yours.
- It’s like déjà vu all over again.
- The future ain’t what it used to be.

And last but not least, drumroll please …

WHEN YOU COME TO A FORK IN THE ROAD, TAKE IT.
MEMBERSHIP MILESTONE: BEYOND ACCREDITATION TO AFFINITY

You might say ABHE has come to a fork in the road as we cross the threshold into our 8th decade of existence. For more than two years, ABHE’s executive leadership team, Commission on Accreditation, and Board of Directors have been discussing strategic challenges and opportunities and their implications for the nature and composition of our Association in the days ahead. At their October 29-30, 2017 meetings, the Board and COA officers voted to recommend Delegate Assembly adoption of substantial Constitution and Bylaws changes to enable these strategic proposals. The proposals have been communicated to and thoughtfully discussed among our members in a series of regional Town Hall gatherings during December 2017 and January 2018. We stand on the threshold of a historic vote to adopt these proposals at our February 23, 2018 Delegate Assembly gathering.

Why are we proposing these changes at this time? Because we believe these changes best position ABHE to confront some of the strategic threats and opportunities we face.

In brief, we are embarking upon a change in ABHE’s historic membership definition to the effect that ABHE-COA accreditation will no longer be the exclusive basis for ABHE membership. Instead, ABHE membership will in the future be rooted in missional compatibility or, as some would put it, brand affinity. We will actively seek to strengthen and enlarge our membership by forging an alliance that encompasses any carefully vetted, accredited North American postsecondary institution that shares commitment to our brand.

What do we stand for and promise to our stakeholders? How might we describe ABHE’s brand? ABHE is the quality and credibility resource partner that connects efforts among Christian postsecondary educational institutions and with others invested in serious Bible learning that shapes a life of godly influence and service to the most effective means for maturing, thriving, and sustaining.

- We will lead in the development of a fresh, robust, and compelling biblical higher education brand that represents the unifying basis for association membership and we will serve as the primary driver of brand equity on behalf of our members.

- We will actively seek to serve as an incubating agent and peer-to-peer catalyst, connecting our members to opportunities for successful innovation that leads to maturing, thriving and sustaining.

* * *
CLARIFYING AND PROJECTING OUR IDENTITY

The past year has seen a great deal of ink and a great many web browser clicks invested in the question of Evangelical identity. Were the 80% of American “evangelicals” who voted for Donald Trump evangelical in any meaningful, historic sense of the word? Should evangelicalism be defined doctrinally? Culturally? Ethnically? Morally? Politically? Research by the Barna Group and Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life, and thoughtful essays from persons like David Guretzki, Tim Keller, Lacrae, Russell Moore, John Piper, Philip Yancey, and Christianity Today editor Mark Galli have made constructive contributions to enlightened and irenic dialogue.

In the context of ambiguity and anxiety within our culture as well as within Christian higher education, I believe it is vital that ABHE reassert that it is a fellowship of Christian higher educational institutions unified in their commitment to serious Bible learning that shapes a life of godly influence and service. Perhaps we will not agree on the degree to which we are comfortable with the label, “evangelical” but we remain unified in our mutual calling to the evangel, to Gospel-centered higher education that calls students to …

- Look in — taking a deep discovery dive into the Bible’s meaning and message
- Lock in — to a life-giving and life-transforming relationship with God
- Lean in — to a life of destiny, a life on mission with the God who is determined to make all things new through Christ

RESOURCING OUR VISION

Financial support. Under the vigorous and infectious leadership of Executive Vice President, David Medders, the last major pledges to our historic Rising Tide capital campaign were fulfilled by the end of 2017. Our annual Leadership Development offering set an all-time record in excess of $55,000, allowing us to subsidize delivery of training and leadership development events for presidents, academic officers, enrollment officers, advancement officers, assessment and accreditation leaders, and faculty members—and to provide more than $13,000 in scholarship grants to members who most need but can least afford this training.

Partnerships. Our sponsor/exhibitor program continues to break previous records. Total sponsor/partner revenue exceeded $104,000 in FY16-17, contributing to total FY16-17 resource development revenue of $233,000.

Leadership development. The participation levels and quality of training and professional networking/development events continues to gain momentum, breaking all previous records. Aggregate enrollment in our 2017 Leadership Development training events exceeded 200 participants and presenters. Once again, participant accolades regarding program content, faculty, efficiency, and exemplary hospitality continue to register in the superlative range.
COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION (COA)

It is impossible to overstate the magnitude of COA Director Ron Kroll’s accomplishment in leading our COA members and staff in achieving US Department of Education recognition renewal in 2017. A comprehensive renewal petition and accompanying exhibits, submitted in January 2017, was subsequently reviewed by USDE staff. At its June 2017 public review and recommendation proceedings, the National Advisory Council on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) granted unconditional 5-year renewal of the COA’s recognition—a rare achievement for any accreditor in the current political and regulatory climate. Dr. Kroll, Associate Director Shane Wood, and the entire COA team are due our profound gratitude and hearty commendation.

IT/WEB/COMMUNICATIONS

IT Audit/Help Desk. We owe a debt of gratitude to Lancaster Bible College’s CIO, Vincent Johnson, and his team for their service to ABHE in conducting a comprehensive IT systems audit this past year. In light of audit recommendations, we have transferred ABHE’s file servers to a Tier One secure cloud server. We have contracted with LBC for ongoing association staff IT consultation and help desk services.

Web Development. Director of Communications and Events, Carol Dibble, has not only overseen our IT cloud server transition, but also has once again collaborated with our web and social media partner Bart Caylor and team to conduct a comprehensive ABHE website refresh and to design a new, searchable Knowledge Center professional information reservoir database which we anticipate launching in 2018.

GOVERNANCE AND OWNERSHIP

Board of Directors. We have not only added to the board’s number in the past few years, we have also strengthened its leadership structures. Board policies regarding the composition and rotation of the Board Executive Committee have been clarified and Ohio Christian University President, Mark Smith, who chaired the board for more than three years, passed the baton in 2017 to Grace Bible College President, Ken Kemper. A new standing Board Nominating and Review Committee was established to work
with the President and Association Nominating Committee in assessing collective and individual board member performance; advising concerning re-election of incumbents; and cultivating and vetting potential “external” board members capable of expanding ABHE’s capacity, credibility, and connections. A new standing Board Resource Development Committee was established with a mandate to work with the Association president and chief advancement officer to establish resource development policy, strategy, and goals and to work with the Association president and chief advancement officer to identify and cultivate donors and sources of financial support to sustain and expand ABHE and member institution mission fulfillment.

Membership Community. Not only has our series of twelve 2017-2018 Town Hall member meetings been instrumental in the process of contemplating major change, it has been illustrative of the true nature of our association. Each meeting has been characterized by a palpable sense of grass-roots member ownership of the association’s nature, composition, and mission. ABHE is not populated by members, it is populated by owners.

DESTINY, NOT A DETOUR

The long-awaited final Barna Group monograph documenting ABHE’s two-year research effort in partnership with David Kinnaman and his team is aptly titled: What’s Next for Biblical Higher Education? I hope you and your key stakeholders are continuing to delve into the report’s findings and implications. I assure you I and my team will continue to exhort you and seeking to marshal human and financial resources in support of your efforts. Not least among these efforts is the initial cohort launch—in partnership with CREDO and Senior Fellows Tim Fuller, Jeremy Lord, and Chant Thompson—of a new ABHE Enrollment Growth Initiative.

The overall state of North American higher education is not strong. Conventional college enrollments have declined for a sixth straight year. News of college closures trickle out month by month and ABHE members are not excluded. Mergers and other forms of collaboration are on the increase—and should be, in my judgment. I hope ABHE will be able to act as a strategic broker and facilitator.

Our culture—and most of our Christian community—has abandoned a morally-centering and citizen-forming vision of higher education for a commodified one that favors gainful employment and economic security above all. Our institutions share responsibility for complicity in galloping student debt and we must urgently re-examine our policies and business models to prevent students from incurring future ministry—and employment-inhibiting debt burdens. Threats to religious liberty continue to lurk in matters ranging from hiring practices, to health care mandates, to sexual orientation and gender identity (aka, SOGI agenda). Our churches in general and the emerging millennial generation in particular suffer from an endemic ethic that some are calling slacktivism (i.e., sentimentality, superficiality, self-expression) rather than the biblical personal ethic of substance, sacrifice, and self-denial.
I believe we are indeed at a fork in the road. Concerted prayer, collective strategic thinking, and collaborative dialogue have led us to conclude the changes we are contemplating represent our destiny, not a detour.

Perhaps another of Yogi Berra’s aphorisms applies: *If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.* Of course, our confidence is not in our infallible capacity to know where we are going, but in our abiding faith in the One who orders our steps—individual and collective. I remain convinced our best days are ahead. The education to which we are called has never been more relevant or urgently needed. Let’s roll.

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**2017–2018 FINANCIAL REPORT**
Alberta Bible College, AB — I met President Stan Helton and members of his team on their campus in a Northern residential section of Calgary, Alberta. The college is experiencing enrollment growth as they move into scheduling and instructional delivery modalities more welcoming to non-traditional students.

Ambrose University College (AB) — President Gordon T. Smith, whose career in educational leadership includes service at Canadian Bible College (SK), Alliance Theological Seminary (Philippines), and Regent College (BC) is one of ABHE’s most thoughtful, scholarly, and prolific educational, personal spirituality, and theological thinkers. A major capital campaign is in the works in order to grow Ambrose’s campus to meet the aspirations and challenges of a growing enrollment. Dean of Theology, Dr. Jo-Ann Badley, joined Dr. Smith and me for stimulating discussions in the midst of a very full day of pre-school year student welcome and faculty organizational meetings.

Bethany Global University (MN) — President Dan Brokke welcomed me on my first visit to Bethany Global’s suburban Minneapolis (Bloomington) campus, shared with its family of mission and publishing ministries. Although Bethany is relatively new to the ABHE accreditation process, it has been engaged in dynamic and fruitful mission endeavor for decades. Its roots go back to a 1940s-era revival prayer community at Saint Olaf College. I enjoyed the opportunity to offer a chapel message and then to join in discussions with Bethany’s cabinet officers and members of the board.

Bethlehem College & Seminary (MN) — I enjoyed the privilege of sharing in Bethlehem’s August faculty retreat. I was deeply moved by the testimonies, mission compatibility, and professional qualifications of new faculty and staff members as well as the admissions team’s brief profiling of each new 2018 entering student, followed throughout the day by seasons of small group prayer for each entering student by name. Remarks by President Tim Tomlinson and VP for Development, Rick Segal, reflected deep godly wisdom and passion to keep biblical higher education deeply grounded in biblical principles.
Boise Bible College (ID) — Outgoing President, Terry Stine (a member of ABHE’s board who moved in June 2018 to assume the presidency of Saint Louis Christian College) welcomed me for a brief visit and campus tour. Under Terry’s leadership, the college experienced enrollment and program growth and resolution of financial indebtedness. I had the privilege of interacting briefly with members of the cabinet, including President-elect, Dr. Derek Voorhees.

Clarks Summit University (PA) — I visited the beautiful and beautifully manicured Clarks Summit University campus in late summer. President, Jim Lytle, offered a tour of the historic campus. I was especially impressed with the 65,000 s.f. Phelps Student Center that houses student services, athletic and fitness facilities.

Columbia Bible College (BC) — At the invitation of President Brian Born, Academic VP Doug Berg (who retired in 2017) and, along with my co-facilitator, Dr. Wendy Guthrie (Johnson University-FL), I had the privilege of facilitating an ABHE Faculty LIFE workshop attended by more than 25 faculty members from Columbia Bible College (BC), Summit Pacific College (BC), and others. During the three-day workshop, I and other participants were given a tour and orientation of the Metzger Collection, a museum-quality collection of over 1,200 pieces of art and artifact replicas that sets the biblical story within the broader context of human history, from pre-history to the modern period.

Columbia International University (SC) — I had the privilege of speaking at the November 3, 2017 inauguration of Dr. Mark Smith, CIU’s 7th president. I also participated in my 45th college class reunion, spoke at the annual Presidents Banquet and an alumni fellowship/devotional breakfast.

Emmaus Bible College (IA) — I enjoyed dinner with President Phil Boom and his leadership team, including ABHE Board member, Lisa Beatty. I also had the privilege of speaking in chapel, touring the beautiful and aesthetically pleasing Emmaus campus (formerly a Catholic college facility) and meeting with a variety individuals and groups of faculty and staff members.
Faith Baptist Bible College & Theological Seminary (IA) — I enjoyed a late afternoon conversation with President James Tillotson, Accreditation Liaison, Don Long, and others, followed by a brief tour of the college’s suburban Des Moines, IA campus, including the beautifully refurbished Gray Hall that houses seminary classrooms, labs, and faculty offices.

Hope International University (CA) — I visited both of Hope International’s LA-area campuses (the university has other campuses in Nebraska and Washington). The Fullerton campus is located directly across the street from Fullerton State University and the Anaheim Campus—home to the university’s Adult Learner programs and Counseling Center, among other things—overlooks Angel Stadium of Anaheim, home of Major League Baseball’s Los Angeles Angels. President John Derry and Dean of College and Ministry Studies, Joseph Grana, graciously hosted me.

Institute of Lutheran Theology (SD) — President Dennis Bielfeldt and CFO Leon Miles welcomed me to IST’s Brookings, SD campus, home of nearby South Dakota State University. The institution hosted a Fall 2017 evaluation team visit in view of a February 2018 initial accreditation decision. The physical campus is home to an impressive library collection, but most of IST’s instruction is “virtual” since they serve students across the US and Canada.

International Reformed University and Seminary (CA) — Accreditation Liaison, Grace Kook, coordinated and hosted my visit to the institution’s historic Los Angeles Koreatown area campus. The campus, housed in a former bank building, is famous for its use as a film location in the 1970s hit movie, The Sting. I had the opportunity to meet and interact with several members of the institution’s board and administration.

Kingswood University (NB) — At the invitation of President, Stephen Lennox and Provost Janet Starks, I had the privilege over two very full days of speaking in chapel, addressing students in the college’s integrative weekly interactive and experiential learning program called Pulse, conducting faculty professional development sessions, and hosting student, faculty, and administrative leadership conversations.
Life Pacific University (CA) — Located in picturesque San Dimas (near Pasadena) CA, Life Pacific was founded in 1923 by and remains affiliated with the Foursquare Church. President Jim Adams and ABHE-COA member, Brian Tomhave (Dean of Institutional Effectiveness) welcomed me to speak in chapel and to interact with the institution’s executive and educational leadership team.

Moody Bible Institute/Moody Aviation – Spokane (WA) — Campus Dean, Jack Lewis, offered me the royal welcome—including the unique opportunity of an airplane orientation flight compliments of Moody Aviation, which produces half of all missionary aviators. The college’s symbiotic campus sharing arrangement with historic Fourth Memorial Church is worthy of emulation. Dr. Jonathan Armstrong, Director of Moody’s Center for Global Theological Education, demonstrated some of his Virtual Reality and global classroom connectivity innovations.

Montana Bible College (MT) — My visit to Bozeman, MT included a drive through breathtaking mountain passes and an April snowfall! President Ryan Ward welcomed me to the well-appointed MBC campus, shared with Grace Bible Church. I had the opportunity to speak in chapel and to interact over an extended luncheon period with a group of administrators, faculty, and trustees.

Ohio Christian University (OH) — I attended and offered brief remarks on behalf of ABHE at a farewell gala for outgoing OCU president, Mark Smith, whose 11-year tenure saw the university’s enrollment grow from 300 to nearly 5,000. Chief Advancement Officer, Craig Brown, oversaw the event which featured dignitaries such as alumnus John Maxwell, NBA all-star Michael Redd, and numerous other local, state, and national civic and political luminaries.

Olivet University–Riverside (Anza), CA — Olivet Board chair, Andrew Lin, COO (and ABHE Board member) Walker Tzeng, and Dean of Olivet Theological College & Seminary, Matthias Gebhart welcomed me and showed me around the university’s 1,000-acre campus. Nestled in a California desert mountain cove, the campus was formerly home to a construction equipment operators trade union training facility. I spoke in chapel, reviewed the ambitious campus development plan, and interacted with campus leaders.
Olivet University–Dover, NY — Olivet Board member and World Evangelical Alliance COO, Christopher Chou hosted my visit to OU’s 900-acre “branch” campus that encompasses a two-decades dormant state psychiatric hospital complex. In addition to receiving a campus tour, I had the privilege of addressing members of the WEA’s initial Fellowship of International Leaders cohort on the subject of “The Leader as Lifelong Learner.”

Olivet University–Manhattan, NY — Olivet’s Manhattan extension site, home to Theology and MBA educational programs and entrepreneurial internship opportunities, is located just one block from the World Trade Center. I had the privilege of speaking to faculty, staff, and students at a 7am early morning chapel/prayer service and accompanied campus leader John Xiao on a tour of instructional facilities and an innovative retail store operation on the doorstep of Wall Street.

Prairie College (AB) — President Mark Maxwell (ABHE board member) and CAO Glenn Loewen arranged for me to address a summer-intensive leadership class of approximately 75 students. I subsequently enjoyed strategic interactions with groups of administrators and faculty. Under the leadership of Mark Maxwell and his team, the college is enjoying momentum and financial outpouring that resulted in an unprecedented 2016-17 operating surplus.

Presbyterian Theological Seminary in America (CA) — I briefly toured the Fullerton, CA facilities of PCSA, a ministry training institution primarily serving the Korean Presbyterian Church’s Western Presbytery. President Sang Myeng Lee and CAO Kyung Moo Ko offered gracious hospitality and I interacted with a group of administrators and faculty members. PTSA is expanding its degree offerings to the Ph.D. level in the near future.

Southeastern Baptist College (MS) — I attended the inauguration of Southeastern’s new President at its Laurel, MS campus. Col. (US Army, Ret.) Dr. Scott Carson may be ABHE’s highest ranking executive officer! The college is associated with the Baptist Missionary Association whose affiliated postsecondary institutions include the BMA Theological Seminary (Jacksonville, TX) and Central Baptist College (MO).
Vanguard College (AB) — I had the privilege of sharing a devotional message with Vanguard’s faculty and staff members as they assembled for their annual pre-Fall retreat and in-service day. President Eric Derksen, offered a warm welcome and I enjoyed extended interaction with him, his cabinet officers, members of the Vanguard board, and various administrative teams. I will return to Vanguard to conduct Board professional development sessions in May 2018. Hint: August and May are ideal months for visiting Edmonton.

Yellowstone Christian College (MT) — President Bruce Cannon welcomed me to the college’s 13-acre campus located in an upwardly mobile area of suburban Billings, MT. The college, though small, has enjoyed substantial enrollment growth in recent years due to its athletic program opportunities. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak in chapel and interact with a number of students, faculty and staff.

Welch College, TN — I had the privilege of attending and offering remarks on behalf of ABHE at the dedication of Welch College’s beautiful 90-acre Gallatin, TN campus. The realization of the college’s decade-long vision quest to relocate from an aging, land-locked venue to its new 60-acre Gallatin campus is a triumph of faith on the part of President Matthew Pinson and the Welch family, including trustees, alumni, and donors.

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Ralph E. Enlow, Jr.
ABHE President
February 2018