

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY 2023

This is Messiah's Moment

The ancient Greek Heraclitus, the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes and the legendary singer Bob Dylan offer a similar conclusion: change is inevitable. Heraclitus explains that you can never step into the same river twice because the river is in constant flux (Heraclitus). In Ecclesiastes 3, King Solomon notes that there is a time and season for everything and lists expected changes like planting and uprooting, weeping and laughing, silence and speaking. And perhaps many of you know the familiar tune penned by Bob Dylan in the turbulent 1960s that reminds us, “the times, they are a-changin.”

We've experienced significant change at Messiah University during the last few years. Many of the changes have been positive—such as adopting university status, launching new programs and partnerships and constructing buildings and renovating spaces. Some changes have been very complicated, such as swiftly adjusting to a global pandemic; remaining a community characterized by civility and hospitality as our national discourse devolved; recruiting students amidst increasingly unfavorable demographics and mounting economic pressures for families; and saying goodbye to beloved colleagues who have retired from long-held leadership positions. When individuals have invested decades of their lives to service at Messiah, it is not easy to imagine the institution without their daily presence; yet we also enjoy the enthusiasm, expertise and excellence that new colleagues bring to our community.

As Christ-followers, I believe that our attitude and response to change reflects the maturity of our vocational understanding established in a faith defined by hope – a hope that rests in knowing and trusting the promises of God. Anticipating that something new is emerging instead of mourning what is changing honors the Biblical charge to “set our minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2) (Warren).

Meeting challenges and changes requires intellectual rigor, compassionate empathy and creative adaptability — virtues and skills our community certainly possesses! Because of my confidence in each of you and God's continued faithfulness to Messiah University, I believe that this particular season in time is Messiah

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we educate our students to become thoughtful, loving models of service, leadership and reconciliation.

This is Messiah's moment – a statement rooted in the historical evolution of our institutional identity and the present status of our educational mission. While

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her teammates. By putting her muscles and joints under deliberate, ongoing tension in the weight room, Esther developed stronger muscles and increased joint stability, which helped prevent injury and enabled her to gain speed, strength and confidence. As an elite student-

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approach of engaging opposing ideas with a spirit of curiosity and civility, designing a series of “ligatures” that visually unite two seemingly incompatible ideas that co-exist here. Those ligatures, along with the invitation to “See Anew,” invite prospective students to anticipate their thoughtful engagement of new ideas and perspectives at Messiah University. Let’s examine a few of our ligatures as examples of how we—as Messiah employees

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Provost

needs to be a place where people who disagree on matters regarding heaven can still work together on important issues here on earth” (Patel).

Our mission also demands that we perceive the brokenness of human relationships and widespread injustice through a lens of Biblical reconciliation. As we learned during our institutional Year of Reconciliation: God’

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In a recent New York Times

transformational education while serving as formative communities for people to be reconciled with God and each other (George Pickens, Emerson Powery, Cynthia Wells).

The third and final ligature I want to address this morning illustrates that when preparation and imagination are fused together real-world creativity results. This past May, our graduate program faculty and staff utilized both preparation and imagination when a vendor's error significantly delayed the creation and shipping of the appropriate regalia for the Doctoral Physical Therapy and Nursing graduates. When Dr. Julie Gomboc-Hellam, director of graduate and adult student services and compliance, became aware that students had not received their ordered regalia in the promised timeframe, a cross-divisional team began devising and implementing a creative back-up plan. Recent alumni of the graduate physical therapy and nursing programs were contacted and agreed to ship their regalia overnight to be used by this year's graduating class; local alumni and their family members dropped off regalia; Messiah staff drove to area physical therapy clinics and picked up regalia; and Julie was on standby to drive to the vendor in Virginia in case orders were completed too late to be shipped. The vendor delivered the robes within hours of the Commencement ceremony! Julie and her team sprang into action unpacking, steaming and setting up each waiting graduates' regalia, and by the time I arrived for the Commencement ceremony all seemed well; I had no idea that acquiring the regalia had been such a stressful ordeal!

Solving "the Great Regalia Challenge of 2023" required employees from the graduate school, the registrar's office, the campus bookstore, conference and event services, and the division of finance and planning to assess the situation, think creatively, rely on trusted relationships and execute a plan. This anecdote is just one example of Messiah employees rallying together by using their knowledge, experience and creativity to problem-solve on behalf of students.

Every day the preparation and imagination of individuals in our community is evident as we engage creative opportunities which expand Messiah's circle of influence. For example, as you travel Interstate 83 across the South Bridge, the work of Art Professor Daniel Finch and his students is evident in a 445-foot mural depicting the history of Lemoyne. Finch's mural—along with a series of five mini murals recently installed on the exterior of borough hall—demonstrate the power of art to build community, celebrate history and imagine the future (Gleiter).

We are also establishing partnerships to seize opportunities that will increase tuition and non-tuition revenue to the university.

- The offices of University Partnerships and undergraduate admissions are establishing intentional long-term relationships with schools and organizations whose goals align with Messiah's mission and vision. These partnerships have yielded increased dual enrollment (239 high school students for this fall – last fall it was 140!) through our Pathway Partners Program with private k-12 Christian schools and agreements with regional public school districts. (Note: 53 of FY24 first year enrolled students took a DE course)

- The Messiah nursing department will implement Nurse Aide training for Messiah

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- Our FY24 enrollment goal of 580 incoming first year students was exceeded by 28 and we are on target to meet the established annual graduate enrollment target.
- Our first-year to sophomore student retention rate remains strong at 86 percent, even after the disruption of COVID.
- Our 32 percent matriculation or yield rate is 10 percent higher than many of our competitors.
- The Office of Development reports the highest year of giving (22-23) in the past five years. The generous alumni and community friends who support Messiah represent a breadth of personal opinions and perspectives, but they are united in their faithful support of our Christ-centered mission and efforts to improve facilities, enhance programs and offer scholarships for students. For example, the expansion of the Engle Health and Counseling Center is complete! This renovation affords critical spaces designed to better meet the increased mental and physical health needs of our students.
- We maintain an impressive A- stable credit rating with Standard and Poor's.
- New program development continues: MSW and DSci in Physical Therapy.

Purposefully navigating tension between seemingly opposing ideals or perspectives is a hallmark of a Messiah University education. For encouragement and hope, we can look to the life of Jesus and how he purposefully lived amidst tension—living as a man while embodying the power of God; inviting a zealot and a tax collector to be among his closest companions; and elevating personal holiness over traditional Jewish law. Jesus was faithful to his mission, despite critique and

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been called for such a time as this and it is my prayer that we will enthusiastically embrace the call. This is Messiah's moment!

Ward, Micah. *Surgeon General: Social media needs a warning label, a key driver of depression*. 9 June 2023. <<https://districtadministration.com/surgeon-general-social-media-needs-a-warning-label-a-key-driver-of-depression/>>.

Warren, Tish Harrison. "The Global Transformation of Christianity Is Here." *The New York Times* 26 March 2023. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/26/opinion/christianity-global-demographics.html>>.