

# Southwestern Christian University Presidential Inaugural Address May 7, 2010

Good afternoon. I would like to open my remarks today by simply saying... "Thank You."

Thank you to Chairman Beller and the members of the Board of Regents of Southwestern Christian University, to Bishop Carpenter and all our neighbors from the Global Ministries Center next door, to the visiting academicians from other universities and educational institutions, to the various political and governmental dignitaries, to my musical friends from the Oklahoma City Symphonic Band and the Oklahoma Home School Choir, to the faculty, staff and students of Southwestern Christian University, and to family and friends who have made a special effort to be here today, either in person or through the world of technology. I would especially like to recognize and thank the most beautiful first lady in the world...a woman who has been my first and only lady for almost 40 years...Latricia Hucceby would you please stand and be recognized. This is a special day in our lives...and, we pray, a special day in the history of Southwestern.

It was in the fall of 1946 when the first class of approximately 100 high school and junior college students started their journey at what was then *Southwestern Pentecostal Holiness College* in the renovated facilities of what had been the infamous "Abe Hale Nightclub." That's right...this Christian University had its original beginnings in a facility that had been a dance hall. Because the property on Tenth Street, just a few miles from here, was near the church campgrounds, it seemed logical to the church leadership of the time that those facilities and the almost eight acres on which they sat, would be a real bargain at the thirty-seven thousand dollar negotiated price. According to the recently published history of Southwestern, which was compiled by a special History Committee of the University, the nightclub itself had been converted with volunteer labor to living and dining spaces...but probably even more unique, the nearby mule barn, had become

dorm space, office space, a library corner and classrooms. For the church leaders of the early and mid-1940's, including Oklahoma Conference Superintendent, C. H. Williams, pastor L. E. Turpin, founding President, R. O. Corvin, and a young Pentecostal Holiness preacher by the name of Oral Roberts, the vision was for the denomination to have (quote) "an accredited high school, an accredited junior college, and a theological course that would provide certificates or diplomas." This was, by the way, over two decades before the opening of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, so Southwestern was truly the first higher education institution on Brother Roberts' radar screen. As a matter of fact, in the April, 1946 edition of *The Oklahoma Conference Herald*, he wrote (quote) "As the school grows, we hope to enlarge the Bible Institute into a four-year Liberal Arts College." So, this founding of a Christian educational institution in what had been a "local hot spot" nightclub is a true testament to these early visionaries' faith in being able to change and mold lives through Christian higher education. Yes, Southwestern's historical path has been blazed by great men and women of the faith. The foundational cornerstones of the institution were laid by these dedicated individuals who saw the need to educate and train ministers...and laymen...in the fundamental tenets of the Pentecostal faith, traditions of the church and the basic principles of servant leadership.

The sixty-plus years which followed the auspicious founding of the University presented monumental opportunities...as well as significant challenges. Again, according to the official University history, the school name transitioned to *Southwestern Bible College* in the 50's, *Southwestern College* in the 60's, and *Oklahoma City Southwestern College* in the early 70's. The political and social opportunities of the 60's and early 70's allowed Southwestern to expand and grow as a junior college to an enrollment of just over 2,000 students, approximately half of whom were enrolled in a dynamic adult education program. However, the fiscal and political challenges of the late 70's brought about the school's move from the Tenth Street campus to the

present location here on the infamous “Route 66”...as *Southwestern College of Christian Ministries*, a bible college redesigned specifically for the education and training of ministers. Less than a decade ago, the institutional vision and name were again changed to incorporate the intent of the future...and to fulfill that original charge defined by Oral Roberts in 1946...to become a Christian liberal arts university, *Southwestern Christian University*...affectionately clinging to the religious cornerstones upon which the institution was built, but boldly exploring expansive horizons...opening the doors of the institution to a multitude of students from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, many of whom have become our new generation of ministers, our new business leaders...and our new visionaries.

As the first non-preacher President of Southwestern Christian University, I would like to share with you one of my favorite stories about “little Johnny” who, after having sat through an hour-and-a-half sermon on Sunday morning, greeted the pastor at the back door by saying, “Preacher, I want you to know that, when I grow up and get a job, I’m going to give you half of everything I earn!” The preacher, thrilled that Johnny was so attentive to his sermon, asked “Johnny, what was it I said that inspired you so much?” “Oh, it wasn’t what you said,” Johnny answered, “it was what my Daddy said...he said you are the poorest preacher we’ve ever had.” Although Johnny may have missed the actual point of his Dad’s comment, I can assure you that I am both humbled and honored to have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of ten great men of God, my predecessors, and, although there is no doubt that I would most certainly qualify as the “poorest preacher” Southwestern has ever had as President...since I’m not a preacher...I do accept the sacred responsibility that comes with this office to see that both the educational and spiritual components of the institution are protected, uplifted and enhanced during my tenure.

Having now completed my first 100 days as President of Southwestern Christian University, I would like to share a few observations which have become apparent to me during this time.

First, I am truly impressed by the quality of the faculty, staff and students. There is a level of dedication and loyalty amongst the faculty and staff which is unparalleled. These people truly love Southwestern and are absolutely dedicated to making the institution the best that it can possibly be. And, having spent my entire 40+ year career in education at various levels, I can honestly say that the students at Southwestern are, without question, the friendliest, most supportive and most genuine young people I have ever been around. Ever since seeing it on a t-shirt during our first visit to the campus, Latricia and I have thought the slogan "*This is MY University*" is really "cool" and meaningful. We have truly fallen in love with the people of *Southwestern Christian University*...and we are proud to be able to say "*This is OUR University.*"

Second, I have come to appreciate the incredible level of talent which exists on this campus. Having an extensive arts background myself, it is exciting to see young people who have a passion for their gifts, whether it be in music, drama, ministry, speech, poetry, writing, or other areas of the academic community. We have also been both impressed and captivated by the level of athletic prowess which exists at Southwestern...an observation supported by the fact that Southwestern has had multiple national championship teams during the past decade in men's basketball, women's basketball and soccer. With the recent expansion of athletic team opportunities to complement our induction into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, we are very excited about the future of competitive athletics at Southwestern.

Third, we have been absolutely thrilled by the way the students, faculty, staff, Board of Regents, the church and the community have opened their arms to us as “newcomers.” We have been truly overwhelmed by the kindness, love and hospitality shown to us.

Although I was not in attendance at the IPHC 26<sup>th</sup> General Conference held in Greensboro, North Carolina last July...as a matter of fact, I wasn't even “on the radar screen” at the time (so to speak)...I would like to borrow from Bishop Carpenter's comments at that event. In his first sermon as Presiding Bishop, he indicated that he is (quote) “believing God for a church that is Relevant, Dynamic and Demonstrative.” I truly believe that those adjectives can just as appropriately be applied to the future of Southwestern Christian University. It is essential that the education we provide our students...and the environment in which it is provided...be relevant to their needs and the needs of today's society and culture. We must meet the students on their turf and take them to a level of understanding which is relevant to the world in which they live. They must be able to live and function in today's world, but taught, through Christian education and principles, to reach a plane of comprehension and discernment that they do not have to be of the world. I have already spoken of the exceptional quality of the students here at Southwestern. They have abilities and talents which can and must be shared with their fellow man in a dynamic and demonstrative manner. Students at Southwestern Christian University can be proud of the education they receive here and must be openly passionate about their love for Christ, their love for lifelong learning, their love for the University, and their love for their fellow man...all of which is summarized in the University's motto of “Scholarship, Spirit and Service.”

It is our common and shared vision that Southwestern grows well beyond the boundaries of this physical campus...and even beyond the boundaries of the community. We envision a university which has no real boundaries...a university with multiple campuses...a university with classrooms

across the state and around the country...and even around the world...a university found online...and in the airwaves via videoconferencing or videostreaming...and even on your telephone. We envision a university where our students will have an undeniable influence on their peers and their communities, while integrating faith, learning and living...as defined in the institution's mission. This vision for the university will not be easily or immediately achieved. However, in the words of the English writer, Samuel Johnson, "Great works are created not by strength, but by perseverance." We will persevere to see this University evolve into a great work...a "World-Class University of Excellence."

As an added testimony of our commitment, I would draw your attention to the scripture in your program, a well-know verse from Romans, Chapter 8, verse 28. This has long been a favorite for Latricia and me, even before we were married almost four decades ago. We have even created a personal paraphrase which you are welcome to take with you today..."It's All Good!" Adopt that simple paraphrase as your personal motto and you may be surprised how it will change your perspective.

Finally, our real challenge for the future will not be in simply growing the university...but, rather, our challenge will be in determining how to accommodate the growth which will come, through innovative ideas generated by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and...as importantly...ideas generated by, and (I might boldly add) funded by, devoted alumni and friends, who have assimilated the spirit and vision of this university through their own experiences here. It is essential that we develop and nurture an alumni culture which is committed and dedicated to "giving back."

Very few days go by that I do not hear this comment from former students..."Southwestern *changed my life.*" That is our mission...that is our purpose...that is our goal...that is the reason we are here...and that must be our legacy....*to have changed lives.*

And that is the legacy to which I, as President of Southwestern Christian University, commit myself wholeheartedly. We will be about the business of *changing lives.*

Thank You...and God Bless *Southwestern Christian University!*

*Dr. Ed Huckeby*  
May 7, 2010