

In most convocations, I try to keep my comments brief because I believe President John F. Kennedy had it right when he said public speaking is the art of diluting a two minute idea with a two hour vocabulary. If you think about it, there is a lot of truth to that statement. How many times have you sat through a long speech or sermon and thought to yourself afterwards that you could have said all that in about two minutes? Don't worry, I am not going to use any names. But today is our last convocation, and I do want to take a little time to review the events of the last year and report on the state of the university. I want you to leave here today with a clear understanding of what Liberty University is doing to ensure that we fulfill this university's mission of training Champions for Christ to take their Christian worldview into every profession and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in the next generation.

We want to produce graduates whose primary calling will be service to Christ and to their fellow man regardless of what profession they choose. In order to achieve that lofty goal, we have to constantly assess and reassess whether we are using the assets that God has given us as efficiently and effectively as possible. We do not take lightly the sacrifice that you and your families are making to provide you with a private, Christian education here at Liberty. We don't ever want to waste or mispend one penny of your tuition and fees.

When this academic year began, this country had been blessed with two or three of the most prosperous decades in its history but the U.S. economy was beginning to show a few signs of distress. Many people my age and younger in this country had never experienced an economic downturn, had never seen family members lose their jobs or watched banks close and life savings evaporate in a tumbling stock market. A bank in San Diego collapsed early in the fall and a Liberty donor warned us to move the university's operating funds into safe, government backed investments. We did so in August and September and watched as the price of oil and gas soared throughout the national elections in the fall and we watched as the stock market spiraled downward after the election. That donor was Michael Dodak of southern California. He has supported this university since the 1970s. He is a financial advisor and has spent most of his 85-plus years studying the performance of the stock market. He built a model based on his observations that almost perfectly predicted the magnitude and timing of the collapse that we saw this past fall.

God protected this university as he has done so many times in the past. We took this as another sign of the awesome responsibility that we have as Liberty's second generation to protect this university's sacred mission. About one week ago, Becki and I were sitting at Worthington Field watching the Liberty Flames baseball team take on Virginia Tech. Liberty led for a while 1-0 but soon Tech was up 3-1 and we were quickly running out of innings to turn it around. We got down to the bottom of the 9th, LU was at bat and two of our players had ended up on base. We had two outs. Then, a freshman, whose father was a star here at LU back in my day, came to bat. Tyler Bream had already hit a stand up triple earlier in the game. This time, the pitcher threw three balls and two strikes. Tyler then hit a couple of fouls and we were all about ready to call it a day and hope for better results next time. The pitcher wound up one last time and threw the ball. Tyler swung and hit the ball high in the air toward right field. The wind seemed to be working against the ball so we thought

it would be caught but it sailed right over the fence and the game was over. LU beat VT 4-3. I was thinking to myself later how many times over the years LU had found itself as an institution in the bottom of 9th hopelessly behind and, at the last minute, God gave us a home run that made all the difference.

The financial struggles that we faced in the early 1990s took us right to the edge so many times. But, I believe God allowed us to suffer as an institution so that we would learn how dependent we are on Him for our existence and so that we would be better equipped to deal with the prosperous years that we are experiencing now.

In those difficult years, God showed us that He had his hand on this university as He stepped in time after time and hit those three-run homers in the ninth inning for Liberty University. During the financial uncertainty that we faced as a nation over the last year, you as a student body reacted exactly as you should have. You took seriously your responsibility to exercise your civic duties and you made national news by registering to vote by the thousands. I spent many hours over the last few days working with the Liberty Champion staff. They have published the best issue in the history of the Champion.

After the economic downturn, I learned that many families that had been wealthy for generations had seen their wealth disappear in just a few weeks. I spoke with other college presidents whose endowment funds had lost hundreds of millions of dollars. These funds had been built up over generations and were suddenly gone. These schools were considering deep budget cuts, salary reductions, hiring freezes and layoffs, employee furloughs and other drastic measures to deal with the losses. At LU, we called our leadership together and discussed how the national economy might impact our university and what steps we should take to prepare for the worst.

Earlier this spring, our applications for this fall were running ahead of the year before as were the number of confirmation deposits we had received. The only danger sign we saw as an institution was the fact that students were taking much longer to complete financial check-in than they had in years past. Unlike other colleges that were increasing tuition to deal with the economy, we lowered the tuition rate we had published in our catalogs for this fall by about \$6 million or a little over \$500 per student. We also extended the deadline for financial check in until the end of May and I am pleased to report that the number of students checked in for the fall has now surpassed last year's numbers. This will allow us to continue with our plans to upgrade the academic programs and increase faculty compensation. We have much to be thankful for as an institution in these difficult times nationally.

The 1970s were the formative years for LU, the school's childhood. In the 1980s LU came into its own as a liberal arts college, became accredited, built a respectable athletic program, moved onto its own campus. In the late 80s and early 90s LU experienced financial difficulties but still moved into the NCAA, became more solid academically and continued to build its campus. LU achieved financial stability in the mid 1990s and developed a management philosophy that was sound financially but still allowed for future growth. The 2000s saw explosive growth at LU from 5000 students in 2000 to over 11,300 today. The online program saw even more explosive growth and is now ranked among the top ten online colleges in the nation. The size of the campus tripled, recreational facilities and infrastructure were added. Now we are entering a new phase of LU's history, holding the line on growth.

The focus now will be on academic excellence both in facilities and programs. We have the infrastructure in place now.

Last summer, we made the decision to hold our enrollment at 11,300 students to give us the opportunity to upgrade our academic facilities and programs. The original vision of Liberty University was to create a world-class university that is distinctively Christian. The vision was to have academic excellence, world-class facilities, NCAA Division I athletics, everything that is offered by major secular universities but with an overriding commitment to biblical truth and morality. The vision for LU was not to create another Bible school but instead to build for conservative Evangelical Christians what Notre Dame is for Catholic young people or what Brigham Young is for Mormon youth.

Even in the early days, chapel at LU was also a forum for speakers from all walks of life to share their experiences with our students. In 1990, chapel was renamed convocation in recognition of this fact. Most of our commencement speakers beginning in 1983 were leaders from the political and business worlds. They were not invited here because of their doctrinal beliefs but rather for their support of social and religious issues important to conservative Christians. That is why we continue to conduct a baccalaureate service where a clear gospel message is preached as part of the graduation ceremonies. I hope all of you realize that an invitation to speak in Convocation here at LU does not amount to an endorsement of the speaker's political or religious beliefs. We try to expose students to speakers who are relevant to LU's mission. We want our students to be well-rounded and exposed to a variety of viewpoints but we certainly do not endorse the views of every speaker who visits LU.

We believe we are well on our way to realizing the fulfillment of the original dream here at LU. I was interviewed by a reporter from *Christianity Today* last week. The reporter last visited Liberty in 1996 when we were in the throes of our worst financial crisis. He said that faculty members told him then that they were concerned about the school's future. On this visit, he said he detected none of that concern but only high expectations and optimism about LU's future from faculty and staff. We have gone from a school with too much debt in the 1980s to a reasonable level of debt in the 1990s to a debt free institution in 2007.

Now we are building endowment and in just the past two years, we have invested \$38 million in capital improvements without borrowing one penny. Not included in that investment are the three newest additions to campus this year because they were funded in large part by donors and outside sources. For example, Barnes & Noble paid most of the cost associated with the construction of the new bookstore at the main entrance to campus, the indoor soccer fields that we will dedicate in a few days was funded by a gift from an alumnus and Snowflex will be completed before your return for school in the fall. That project is also being funded by a donor and that brings me to why we have this bear in front of the stage today.

Last year in our final Convo, you might remember that I recognized Greg Clendenin and Glen Thomas, two alumni who were making major gifts to LU and I stressed to you how important it was to give back to your alma mater after you leave here. Well, today, I want to recognize another alumnus and his family who are doing great things for LU. DR. Al Barrick is a dentist. All three of his children, John, Andy and Jan, attended LU about the same time I did. The Snowflex project I mentioned is

the first of its kind in the United States. It is a new technology that was perfected by Briton Engineering of Great Britain after decades of research and testing. It will allow LU students to snow ski year round on a turf-like surface that is cushioned and kept wet by misters. We have students already forming winter sports club teams to compete against many other universities nearby that already have competitive winter club sports. We are building a lodge at the bottom of the new slope. It will have the look and feel of a mountain chalet with exposed wood beams and wood paneled walls.

Dr. Barrick is a big game hunter. Over the last 40 years, he has hunted every species of mammal in North America and collected at least one of each. He had the trophies worth hundreds of thousands of dollars mounted professionally and we have pictures of some of them to show you. Well, Dr. Barrick donated all of these trophies to LU and we plan to display them all in the new lodge. Some of the animals like polar bears for example can no longer be hunted legally. We wanted to name the lodge in honor of Dr. Barrick but the day after I took him on a tour of the lodge recently with his son, John, to show them where the mounts would be displayed, John called me and talked about how much loyalty and respect he has for his alma mater, LU, and for the pioneers like my father and his father who sacrificed so much to make LU a reality. John asked that the lodge be named in honor of both his father and my father. This is fitting, I believe, because Dr. Barrick donated the trophies that took him 40 years to collect and Snowflex was actually the last project that was officially announced by my father here one week before he died. In fact, the day before he died, I was riding over the mountain with him and I asked him if he really wanted to build that ski slope. He said, absolutely and I took his statement as sort of a directive. Dr. Barrick is here today with his sons, John and Andy. Please give them a hand of appreciation. We are not completely politically incorrect here. I have asked Sodexo to sell a veggie burger up at the lodge so, if any of you are animal rights activists or vegetarians, you can sit and eat a veggie burger while all these animal corpses look over your shoulder. I am sure they will appreciate it.

Projects like the bookstore and the new recreational facilities enhance student life by providing services and activities but these projects are not mission critical so they are only built when others provide the funding. Another set of projects that are not mission critical are the road improvements that we are planning for the campus. The tunnels out to Wards Road, for example, would make it more convenient to move around the area but, in times of economic distress nationally, they will be the first projects to be put on hold. Socialism has never worked anywhere that it has been tried in the world. But our leaders in government seem to be bent on moving America toward socialism. Even if that happens and our economy does continue to worsen as a result, projects that are critical to our mission of achieving academic excellence rooted in biblical truth and morality will always be our top priority. That is why, even though we do not have gifts committed, we have decided to proceed with many academic improvements this summer.

Just this week, we decided to fast track the new theater in the tower that I announced this spring. I am hoping that performances will be held in the new theater in the next academic year before so many of our drama students are scheduled to graduate in 2010. The seminary is being expanded. We are renovating academic

space in the Visual and Communication Arts area with new classrooms, studio, and gallery space on main campus.

Communication Studies—New Oral Communication Lab, New Ad Agency facility, new and expanded space for English and COMS graduate student assistants (GSAs)

School of Education—new furnishings and electronics in several classrooms

Career Center—new and larger center on ground floor of DeMoss in area recently vacated by bookstore

Seminary—New and expanded Seminary office and seminar space at Campus North

Center for Counseling and Family Studies—new office facilities (including space for graduate assistants) at Campus North

Engineering and Computational Sciences—Larger lab for network engineering in DeMoss

Nursing—Critical Care Lab with debriefing rooms; renovations to OB lab.

Sewing Lab (Family and Consumer Sciences)—larger sewing lab to be constructed on third floor of DeMoss

Law School—Complete Phase III construction, focusing mainly on student services areas.

We are also working with major donor to build and equip a named School of Business on the fourth floor of DeMoss. By August of this year, Charles Spence, our Construction Manager, tells me, every residence hall will have been renovated in the last few years. New tile in the bathrooms, new windows and other improvements were badly needed in our older residence halls. Dr. Boyd Rist, our Provost, works constantly with faculty to identify where improvements are necessary to enhance Liberty's academic quality. We are committed to providing the resources necessary to implement those improvements. For these and many other reasons, we believe we are on track to continue to grow and improve academically. Our commitment is to continue to improve Liberty's academic reputation so that, as you go through your careers, your Liberty education will become more and more of an asset to you.

We need you to give back when you become alumni to help us achieve that goal. Athletically, we see evidence every day that LU is moving forward. Just this week, our own Rashad Jennings, was drafted by the Jacksonville Jaguars. Megan Frazee was drafted into the WNBA in the second round. Sam Chelanga broke the all-time NCAA record for the 10,000 meter run this week in California. We are winning more Big South championships than ever before.

Spiritually, our students are demonstrating growth and maturity. Over the last few days, as I mentioned earlier, I have been reading over the new special edition of the Liberty Champion and it was so encouraging to read about how Liberty students are serving the local community through programs like Campus Serve, Special Olympics and the Jubilee Center for Children. Our students perform hundreds of thousands of hours of community service in the Lynchburg community every year. We have mission campaigns next month in North Africa, Peru, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Brazil, France, India, Nepal and Senegal. Even Kevin Roose, the student from an Ivy League school who spent a semester here and wrote a book about it, was impressed by the Christian love he encountered at LU and spoke favorably about how the moral purity of Liberty's students made dating a more enjoyable activity than the hookup culture he had been exposed to.

You should be proud of your reputation as a student body. You really are salt and light to this culture. I would like to read to you some of the feedback we received from seniors in the annual assessments we collected recently.

“I would like to advise freshmen to study hard and know that college is serious. I would tell them to get involved in their major quickly and to build friendships with their professors. I would tell them not to have premarital sex and not to play too much Halo. I would tell them to do Campus Serve and to know themselves before they start dating. I would tell them to talk to God a lot and to take pride in their country, to love their friends fiercely, to challenge their own perspectives, and to fight against injustice. I would tell them to develop themselves into something respectable.”

“I think that the faculty-student interaction is phenomenal! I always feel as though I can go to my professors and honestly and openly ask them questions about academics or life in general. Having professors truly care, ask personal questions, and become involved in their students’ lives makes a huge difference.”

“I think it’s very important that we interact with the world around us, as believers, because we are still to be in the world even though we are not of it. I like that Liberty offers Campus Serve and numerous missions opportunities, as well as internships, to expose us to the outside world and to equip us with the necessary skills to spread God’s word.”

I know not everyone is perfect here at LU. We have faculty and students who make mistakes every day. We try our best to deal with those situations with as much sensitivity and compassion as possible but our first priority has to be the safety and well being of our student body. Today, I have touched on many of the areas where I believe we are affirmatively achieving our mission of training champions for Christ but, before I wind up today, I want to talk to you about another indicator that tells us we are achieving our mission and that is based on what we are NOT doing. I heard a statistic recently that was mind-boggling – over 50% of born again Christians who attend secular universities no longer claim to be born again Christians when they graduate.

I want to read to you several paragraphs from a column by Ryan Anderson of the Witherspoon Institute. Most students arrive at college knowing few, if any, of their classmates. No longer living under their parents’ roof, no longer in a supportive school, neighborhood, or church community, students no longer have external supports encouraging them to strive to meet the demands of ethical living – and holding them accountable when they fail. Instead, they find themselves subjected to new forms of pressure.

Apart from some religious campuses and religious enclaves on secular campuses, the late teens and early twenties are a bit of a wandering. From liberal dogmas on homosexuality to liberationist agendas on sex, feminism and marriage, from the social pressures put on guys and girls to be sexually active – college campuses aren’t a pretty sight.

Mr. Anderson goes on to say that after his own four years as an undergraduate at Princeton, the problem was readily apparent, and a potential remedy seemed worth trying: rather than cowering away from the liberal orthodoxy on human sexuality, he decided to build a social network to oppose it. At Liberty, the fact that we don’t need a social network to oppose such evils is further evidence that

we are fulfilling our mission. At Liberty, we are proud to be the alternative to the secular world of education. What I appreciated about Liberty when I was a student was that Liberty provided me with the opportunity to take ownership of the faith of my parents. It was the perfect environment to critically examine why I believed what I had been taught and come to my own conclusions. I focused my studies on the teachings of Jesus and, at the end of my years at LU; I had built a solid foundation that served me well. I found that Christianity at its core is simple: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus also gave us parables to help us understand how to live our lives.

We want to get the word out to young people everywhere that there is an alternative – that there is a place where they can obtain a quality education without compromising their morals or values but we need your help. My father stated over and over that the purpose of Liberty University was to train champions for Christ in every profession. Our Department of University Advancement has concluded that nobody can tell the story of Liberty University better than its students. That is why we want you to be the focus of our next big recruitment campaign. On the screens, you will now see examples of the types of ads we want to produce featuring many of you and your testimony of how LU has helped you become a Champion for Christ.

You will see the couch featured in the video around campus over the next couple of weeks. We invite you to come tell your story, either on camera or by typing your story at a computer kiosk that will be located next to the couch. We would appreciate it greatly if you would be willing to tell your story of what LU has meant to you. Here is the T-shirt that will be given to all who participate. I want to close today on a personal note. Becki, Trey, Wesley, Caroline and I want to thank all of you for the warm reception you have given us over the last two years. We love and appreciate all of you. Last year was a year of extreme transition for us but getting to know you made it a pleasant experience. We even took a relaxing week of vacation this year. This institution would probably not exist if my father had not been a workaholic but, for us, that meant being on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, whether on vacation or not. That's why this is the first time I have had a tan since college. Becki commented recently that she had noticed that those faculty and staff at LU who had the most direct contact with students seemed to be the happiest people around. I have commented often how I did not understand why my Dad enjoyed his position here at LU so much until I took his place. When I was General Counsel and Vice Chancellor, I did not have the opportunity to interact with students like he did. Now, watching LU students mature spiritually, academically and socially makes this the most rewarding job on Earth. Johnnie Moore and I talk often about how we believe God is doing something historic here at Liberty University. Thank you all for playing a role in helping Liberty change the course of history. Have a great summer and we look forward to welcoming many of you back in the fall. Finally, to show our appreciation to you, the free ice cream truck will be back Monday through Wednesday of next week during exams.