



FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

PRESIDENT'S SPRING ADDRESS

APRIL 15, 2021

I had hoped to deliver my first Spring Address as the President of CBU back in March of last year. Unfortunately, that wasn't to be. And, in the 14 months since then, we have found ourselves confronting a remarkable set of challenges.

An unprecedented shift to remote learning. A once-in-a-generation snowstorm. A once-in-a-century pandemic.

Together and by association, though, we have managed to somehow make it to today. Offering our students a full array of in-person or hybrid classes. With nearly 500 students living on campus. With all of our sports teams competing against conference rivals. With commencement ceremonies for both the Classes of 2020 and 2021 set to take place in late May. And, perhaps most encouragingly, with the very real prospect of our having a fully open campus in August.

These are all very hopeful "shoots of green" as we emerge from what has been a long and difficult winter for our campus community, and I want to thank each of you for being there for one another this past year.

As we prepare to move forward, I would like to use today to do some things that I haven't always done as well as I would have liked to this past year. To better communicate as a servant-leader. To set the stage for an ongoing constructive dialogue with you. And to propose a framework for our working together to realize our shared objective of a stronger and more vibrant university that even more effectively serves the needs of our students.

Reflecting upon the symbolism of the Signum Fidel star on the façade of Barry Hall, there are five questions that I try to ask myself when making a decision or taking an action.

The first question, "Is it Lasallian?"

If we are to be successful as a Lasallian community, we must inspire and infuse our daily work – together and by association – with our core values of faith in the presence of God; concern for the poor and social justice; respect for all persons; a quality education for our students; and an inclusive and supportive campus community.

Those Lasallian values have motivated the investment being made in the work that the Center for Community Engagement is doing in partnership with our neighbors in Binghampton and Orange Mound. Those Lasallian values have spurred the recent creation of the Commission for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusive Excellence. And those Lasallian values have prompted the planning for a future Lasallian Institute for Social Justice here at CBU.

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The second question, “Does it support the development, growth, and success of our students?”

If we are to be true to the teachings of De La Salle, our students must always be the focus of our actions and thoughts. We have been called to educate and support our students as we walk alongside them in their journeys. Through their academic studies and research interests. In their athletic, extracurricular, and campus activities. As they provide service to our community and society. And, ultimately, in making their timely progression to earning a degree and starting a career.

This focus on meeting the needs of our students is why we have a Career Services Center, along with similarly exemplary programs for Dreamers and First-Gen students. It is the reason for our investing in the Starfish student success platform, along with a dedicated cadre of academic advisors, and an expanded array of health, wellness, and counseling resources. And it is the motivation for creating the Division of Student Development & Campus Life.

The third question, “Does it help with more effectively telling ‘the CBU Story’?”

Emulating the Christian Brothers whose name we share, our university has tended to hide our lamp under a bushel. While admirable, such an approach is no longer a viable one in a marketplace where we must compete with other universities and colleges for what will be a decreasing number of new high school graduates over the next decade. Instead, we must more effectively and more strategically elevate and broaden public awareness, appreciation, and recognition of our university and the life-changing work we are doing.

The CBU Story must be told by us and our supporters. Each of us need to be cheerleaders for our university. Within the Mid-South region. Across the nation. And throughout the Lasallian world.

This is why we have invested in a recently upgraded website, which serves as a virtual front door to our campus for prospective students and their families. It is the reason why we are in the process of selecting a marketing firm that can help us better inform the world about CBU. And it is the motivation for our publishing a twice-a-year university magazine beginning this fall.

The fourth question, “Does it help the bottom line?”

While our Lasallian mission is our greatest asset, we also must confront and address the age-old conundrum of “No money, no mission.” As we prepare to soon celebrate our sesquicentennial, we cannot take for granted the university’s fiscal health and future viability.

If we are to make high-quality educational opportunities accessible for more students and their families, we must continue to invest in things that will drive enrollment growth. That will improve student retention, persistence,

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and graduation rates. That will dramatically increase annual fundraising and substantially grow the endowment portfolio. That will derive the greatest possible benefit from our scarce available resources.

The fifth and final question, “Is it a smart, strategic, and necessary investment in our people, our programs, and our campus?”

The people of a university are its most important resource, closely followed by the quality of its facilities. Going forward, we therefore need to support, develop, and equip our faculty, staff, and administrators with the necessary resources. While this will not be easy, it is something that is long overdue and absolutely essential for us, as a community of Lasallian colleagues, to do the important work we have been called to do.

I believe that these five questions can provide a useful framework as, later this year, our campus community embarks upon a number of important initiatives. The development of a new five-year strategic plan for the university. The creation of complementary and aligned plans for each of the schools. The formulation of a new master plan for the campus. The completion of faculty and staff compensation surveys. The reaccreditation of the School of Engineering. The consideration of new academic offerings – at the undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral levels – along with a holistic assessment of our existing degree programs. And, last but not least, the celebration of our sesquicentennial anniversary.

This will not be easy work for us as we continue to emerge from the throes of a global pandemic. It will require a community-wide effort in which we each will have an important role to play. It will require the resiliency and innovation, the empathy and compassion, the powerful sense of community we have demonstrated these past 15 months. It will require us to remain true to our Lasallian identity as we endeavor to build an even better university for our students and our community.

In spite of these considerable challenges, I believe that CBU’s best days lie ahead of us, and I look forward to our working together and by association to making the most of the opportunities presented to us.

Thank you for all that you do for our students and for each other, and may Saint John Baptist de La Salle continue to protect, inspire, and guide us in the important work we are doing for the betterment of our world.

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