

Continuing the Journey Toward Reconciliation, the Common Good, and Learning for Life
2022 State of the University

Since the ninth century, people have traversed the Camino de Santiago, a network of rolling footpaths meandering through Portugal, France and Spain. Hundreds of thousands of modern-day pilgrims and adventurers journey the narrow, dirt paths. Pilgrims representing different cultures sometimes travel alone and sometimes in community; they share the common goal of reaching the Santiago de Compostela, the revered Spanish cathedral that houses the remains of the Apostle James, according to tradition.

This summer, 40 Messiah University students along with Director of Choral Activities Joy Meade, Assistant Dean Timothy Dixon and Dean Peter Powers, celebrated their arrival at the foot of the cathedral after walking 65 miles along the Camino. Our Messiah pilgrims started each day's 10-18-mile trek in the early morning hours. They spent three days walking in rain—including one day in a relentless downpour. Their feet became blistered and raw. (Will I ever erase the image Pete shared on Facebook of his blistered feet, minus a few toenails, from my mind? I can only hope!) The journey required physical stamina, mental fortitude and spiritual discipline in order to reach their destination.

Joy Meade notes, "One of the outcomes of this journey was the power of just putting one foot in front of the other. We learned that we could do a lot in our weakness and when we were hurting. Many of us felt like we achieved more than we thought was possible."

In some ways, our students' and colleagues' walk along the Camino parallels the challenge of our individual and collective journeys as Messiah University employees. We, too, are pilgrims on a journey, committed to educating our students toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith

Listen as our Concert Choir sings the last refrain:

(My feet cry out, but my soul is singing.

I'm walking for the glory of the Lord. Hallelujah.)

Our journey as Messiah employees is often exhausting; however, it is also exhilarating and delivers in its own way a form of praise like that of this song. Although you may be weary this morning, I hope you can still seize the joy of this current moment, value the companionship of your fellow travelers, appreciate the resources that support your efforts and embrace the vision for transformational Christ-centered education. It is not overstating the claim to say that we, too, are “walking for the glory of the Lord” as we seek to fulfill our institutional mission.

This morning, let's consider the mileposts along our path that serve the purpose of indicating progress while simultaneously offering future direction. First, we must review the situational context for our journey prior to examining how we best equip ourselves and our community to overcome the obstacles that might impede our progress.

Understanding the Context

An important part of undertaking a journey is understanding the environmental conditions and preparing for them. Just as our faculty and students anticipated the terrain and weather along the way, we must also anticipate the challenges ahead.

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We are encouraged by signs that others embrace our mission and seek to accompany us on the journey: strong undergraduate and graduate enrollment for FY23 and the successful completion of the \$75 million fundraising Campaign for Messiah University are indicative of the interest in and support of Messiah's explicit promise to provide educational rigor in the

Milepost: Reckoning and

we may journey forward. We will only be able to progress if we have the courage to confront our collective past and present.

Allow me to offer an inspiring example of two individuals going forward together. One of the places we visited on the tour was the town of Selma—site of the 1965 Voting Rights March which resulted in the Bloody Sunday massacre. We were privileged to hear from two sisters who marched as youngsters aged 11 and 15. Following their presentation, our tour group boarded the bus and drove a few blocks to where we disembarked to make the sacred walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in honor of those who had gone before us. Jeremy Lippert, a Messiah safety officer, was on the tour and so was Miss Nancy, a Pittsburgh native who labors every day cooking for the children at a neighborhood community center. The weather was oppressively hot and the experience of standing in a hallowed space where individuals were met with horrific violence as they advocated for their constitutional voting rights proved to be overwhelming. As Nancy stepped off the bus, she was overcome with emotion—standing still with tears streaming down her face. Jeremy approached her, gently took her arm and said, “Come on, Miss Nancy, we’ll do this together.” And they did.

An institutional highlight of last year’s Reconciliation events was the Alumni of Color reunion. More than 100 alumni representing different decades returned to campus to participate in panel discussions, worship opportunities, social gatherings and times of candid, truth-filled discussion. I led a public “Q&A” session with our alums and listened to their stories of pain and marginalization. It was vitally important to provide time and space to not only listen but also to lament. A 90s alum, prior to leaving campus, expressed this sentiment: “Thank you for this weekend. I feel heard. I feel as if I finally belong.” Every Messiah student and employee should experience true belonging and genuine reconciliation as valued members of our community, and it is our shared responsibility to make that happen. Results of the 2017 Campus Climate Survey and employee focus groups indicate that we have

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domestic service trips and two international trips, the compassionate service of Messiah students and staff was realized far beyond the greater Harrisburg region.

The mileposts that direct our commitments to reconciliation and promoting the common good will continuously help us review our efforts and point us toward next steps. Our work in these distinct spaces

complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction” (Zinn 208). Whether students look to Messiah for dual enrollment, an undergraduate degree, a graduate degree, certificates or professional development, we are committed to providing educational quality in every learning context, resulting in alumni who will send this spinning top of a world in positive directions. In March we will experience a reaccreditation site visit from Middle States. I am confident they will affirm that Messiah is meeting the standards necessary to ensure that all of our students are receiving a quality educational experience.

Theme 4 of Messiah’s institutional strategic plan emphasizes the need to develop an array of institutional partnerships that will benefit learners of different ages in different contexts. These partnerships are important to our financial plan which requires us to increase net tuition revenue, expand opportunities to increase non-tuition revenue and seek creative ways to reduce expenses so that Messiah will continue to thrive.

One partnership that has been finalized is an agreement between Messiah and North American Integration of Manual Therapy, LLC (NAIOMT) to provide continuing education for health care professionals. These sessions will be held at Messiah's Winding Hill location and will feature nationally recognized content experts as guest faculty. In addition, Messiah and NAIOMT will be forming a joint Accredited Orthopedic Clinical Residency Program. Finally, a Doctor of Health Science (DsC) degree is being designed by Messiah educators and NAIOMT with the goal of presenting the proposal to campus governance bodies in 2023 and implementation planned for FY24.

Beginning in 2023, Messiah and Phoenix Physical Therapy and Health Services are initiating a partnership that will allow Phoenix to operate an interprofessional clinic at Messiah's Winding Hill location. This partnership will serve community needs while simultaneously providing valuable opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in clinician-related research.

Dr. Pepper and Dr. Jenn Fisler, dean of the graduate school, are also providing creative oversight to the development of a continuing education training program for the house parents and early childhood education staff at the Milton Hershey School. A model for partnering with regional Christian high schools to increase dual enrollment opportunities (we have high yield of recruiting undergraduate students who were previously dual enrolled) is being finalized with two schools already identified as Spring 2023 partners. And just last evening,

In addition, we continue to develop undergraduate academic programs and specialized certificates that respond to societal needs and equip students to lead and serve. In collaboration with Baltimore Urban Studies program, Messiah is now offering a public health minor with a "study away," experiential learning component. Additionally, undergraduates can now attain certificates in financial planning and hospitality and tourism, to complement their academic major.

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Today we walked into the main square of Santiago de Compostela, bordered on all sides by the buildings of church and state, dominated by the sublime architecture of the cathedral itself. One of our students, as it happens one of the last into the square, burst into tears as she walked toward the center where we were gathering for the requisite selfies and group shots. Tears of joy.

She had sometimes struggled throughout the hike, sometimes, not always, trailing behind the pack, like many of us limping through blisters, sore muscles, and a lack of sleep. I'm sure that more than once she thought she would not make it, was tempted to stop short. There would have been no shame in it. Many do. Stop short. But she persisted.

She may not know it, but she was my best teacher on this pilgrimage. She broke into tears at the joy of arrival. Not winning. On her pilgrimage, on all our pilgrimages, it is not winning that matters. Not being the fastest or the first. The most fit or the best prepared. It is the arrival that matters. One foot after another for 65 miles, it is the arrival that matters. And the joy.

This academic year and the years ahead will not be easy—our journey will require each of us to persist – persist as we educate our students toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith – as we inspire them to love our churches—our communities—our nation—our world. That is our destination! May there be joy as we continue to journey, occasionally stumbling but always moving forward—together, confident in God's never ending faithfulness to Messiah University!

Works Cited

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