

Ohio
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University

ROCK JONES' INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Friday, October 10, 2008

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Rock Jones, Ph.D., 16th President of Ohio Wesleyan University
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Madame Chairman, Congressman Tiberi, Bishop Hopkins and Bishop Ough, members of the Board of Trustees, former Presidents, faculty and staff, the best students anywhere, distinguished guests, alumni, citizens of Delaware, family and friends: Words are not adequate to express my gratitude for your presence today, for your passion for this University, and for the warmth of your support over these past months. Melissa and I and our family are honored to take our place among you in the life of Ohio Wesleyan University.

In 1840, the leaders of the Methodist Church in Ohio sent to Delaware a circuit-riding preacher named Adam Poe. Times were hard, and, by today's standards, life was difficult. But, in the words of the hymn, Adam Poe arrived with "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."

Like so many of his generation, Adam Poe thought not so much about the difficulties of the present as about the promise of the future. His hope for the future was grounded in his abiding faith, faith in his God, and faith in the goodness of the human spirit and the potential of the human mind. Poe believed that the growth of this community, and indeed the growth that would make this nation great, would come through the formation of a society of educated citizens whose lives would reflect the moral foundations of their faith and the intellectual reach of their learning.

Shortly after his arrival in Delaware, Adam Poe learned that the Mansion House Hotel, located by the Sulfur Spring, was available for sale. Poe enlisted the support of the founding families of Delaware and the first families of Ohio Methodism to raise money to purchase the hotel and establish a university "of the highest order" in central Ohio. One hundred sixty-six years later, that hotel, now known as Elliott Hall, sits in the center of our campus.

In addition to funds for the building, Adam Poe raised money to provide subscriptions for students who would not have the resources to pay for their education. Adam Poe envisioned an institution where education was affordable and accessible for every qualified student. Affordability and accessibility are important parts of the conversation in American higher education today, but these are not new concepts for Ohio Wesleyan University. These are founding values; these are values that drove the vision of Adam Poe and have sustained this institution for 166 years.

Today, we stand on the shoulders of giants. We stand on the shoulders of those women and men whose names grace this campus – names like Poe and Elliott, our founders; like Thomson and Merrick, our first presidents; like Mary Monnett, whose generosity established our longest-lasting residential facility and whose name recalls the legacy of the women's college that became a part of the coeducational Ohio Wesleyan University in 1877.

We stand on the shoulders of those with us today whose names grace our campus and its programs that sustain us, and whose generosity has advanced this institution beyond the wildest imaginations of our founders. And we stand on the shoulders of the three men behind me, whose leadership in the past four decades set the stage for what I believe to be the season of greatest opportunity in the history of this institution.

Tom Wenzlau was the longest serving of our modern presidents. An economist by training and a Bishop at heart, he served his alma mater as president in the most turbulent social period in American history. Dr. Wenzlau brought a breath of fresh air and an innate understanding of the changing times. He immediately connected with students, calming the waters in an era of student unrest on American campuses. And he gave us the Chappellear Drama Center, one of the finest theatres on any American liberal arts campus.

David Warren brought a season of energy and vitality, marked initially by his live-in presidency in the residence halls. He saw the grandeur of the aging Austin Hall and envisioned Austin Manor, a gloriously restored intergenerational home to students and senior citizens that remains a unique model in American higher education. He gave us the Honors Program, one of the first of its kind in the country; the National Colloquium, which continues to unite the campus in thought, conversation, and action around topics of relevance to the wider world; and a campus center designed to bring together the academic campus and the residential campus, the curricular and the co-curricular.

Tom Courtice arrived at the alma mater of his grandparents with a warmth and compassion for students that excited the entire campus. He focused his energies on renewal of the academic core of the campus, including the remarkable Conrades♦Wetherell Science Center, new facilities for the fine arts, the Ross Art Museum, and the conversion of the old MUB into the R.W. Corns Building. He also completed the most successful campaign in the history of OWU. Most importantly, he solidified our financial position, creating the great opportunity for the future that we enjoy today.

We stand on the shoulders of these men. And we express our deepest gratitude.

We stand on the shoulders of our faculty. The reputation of this institution was developed first as a result of the teaching and scholarship of a stellar faculty. This well-deserved recognition continues to this day. The teacher-scholars of this faculty are this institution's greatest asset, and they are our students' greatest resource. We must work to increase the size of our faculty, building on our core strengths and diversifying the range of expertise represented here. I am thrilled to announce that this morning, our Board of Trustees approved two new tenure-track faculty lines, affirming the important work of our faculty both now and in the future.

This institution enjoys an association of alumni who have risen to the top of their chosen fields of endeavors. They are leaders in business, the professions, science, the arts, public service, religious organizations, education, and virtually every other sector of American society – and increasingly around the world. Perhaps the most notable contributions made by alumni of this University are reflected in their commitments to serve the common good. Among us today are alumni who have devoted their energies and resources to building a school in Tanzania, to building a school and home serving 1,800 boys and young men

in Haiti, to volunteering as a full-time teacher in a charter school in the heart of one of the poorest cities in the country, to providing volunteer medical care for those who lack resources, and to raising venture capital for social entrepreneurship where the return on investment comes not in quarterly dividends or IPOs, but in lives made better and in communities rebuilt.

These same values are reflected in the lives of our students. Our students are creative and bright; they are budding scholars drawn to an institution that blends the rigor of the classroom with an education gained in the world. In the prologue to our centennial history, Henry Clyde Hubbart wrote more than six decades ago of the “practical idealism” that characterizes the understanding of the liberal arts at Ohio Wesleyan University. That practical idealism is reflected today in the Summer Science Research Program, the Sagan National Colloquium, an off-campus learning program that includes internships in major cities and study-travel experiences around the world, and a deep commitment to community service and service learning.

The mission statement of Ohio Wesleyan University indicates that we fulfill our mission when we are successful at three things: imparting knowledge, developing and enhancing certain important capabilities with our students, and placing education in the context of values.

Never before has our world stood in greater need of an institution with this mission. Our world needs individuals who possess capacities of the intellect refined by a liberal arts education and sharpened by experiences in the world. We must prepare graduates empowered with the capacity to think critically and to communicate with clarity and depth; prepared to interact across the boundaries of culture and history; gifted with powers of empathy and discernment; and grounded with moral foundations and a keen understanding that there are better and worse ways to order one’s life and to order the life of one’s world.

Today, with a legacy grounded in the liberal arts and rooted in a practical idealism that connects the lessons of the past with the experiences of the present in order to prepare leaders for the future, we at Ohio Wesleyan University have much to offer the world. This is our time.

In this opportune moment, let us think together about what it would mean for Ohio Wesleyan University to set the liberal arts standard for educating moral leaders for a global society. More than 10 percent of our students are international students, coming to us from every continent and from a rich array of cultural backgrounds from around the world. The world has come to Ohio Wesleyan University. It is equally important to take OWU to the world. We must provide greater opportunities for our domestic students to cross cultural boundaries and to travel the world, experiencing for themselves the variety of cultures, histories, and perspectives they ultimately must be prepared to engage, in order to flourish in the professional lives that await them. We can imagine together experiences created by members of this faculty, in every discipline, to offer our students the benefit of a more global perspective and the enrichment that comes from immersion in cultures different from one’s own.

We should expand on Henry Clyde Hubbart's articulation of our practical idealism by providing even more opportunities for our students to test the theories of the classroom through engagement with the world. We could build on the Summer Science Research Program, one of the premier programs of its kind, to establish similar experiences in other disciplines. We could build on the internship and mentoring programs offered through the Woltemade Center to develop summer internship experiences for students in all sectors. We could further develop our highly regarded programs in the fine arts, understanding the fundamental role played by the arts in the cultivation of a democratic society and in the preservation of the freedoms that we so deeply cherish. And we could build on the mission trips offered by the Chaplain's Office to develop further service-learning opportunities that challenge all students to reflect on the values that give meaning to their lives and hope to their futures.

While we build on an academic program that has long been our guiding light, and while we seek to enrich the educational experiences of our students beyond the walls of the classroom and the boundaries of the campus, we must also examine the way we order our lives together and the community we seek to build on this campus. We will always be enlivened by a creativity that generates differences of opinion and by the dynamic of competing values. But let us order our work together in ways that reflect on this campus the civility we hope our graduates will work to create in the world beyond this campus.

Let us further examine the life we order for our students beyond the classroom. It is no secret to those who know this campus well that we have significant work to do in our residential facilities. We have an even greater opportunity to expand our thinking beyond the facilities themselves, to a reflection on the kind of residential community we want to create, the ways we want to interact, the lives we want to lead, the values we want to embrace, and the programs and facilities that allow individuals to flourish and community to thrive.

It is not new to imagine that Ohio Wesleyan University has a unique role to play in educating moral leaders for a global society. But it may well be the case that now, more than ever before, our world has a need for just such leaders. Our world needs leaders who innately understand that which is good, and who have the capacity to cross cultural boundaries and open long-closed doors. Ohio Wesleyan University has been preparing such leaders since the doors of this University opened in 1842. No story in our institutional saga exemplifies this more than the story of Branch Rickey.

In the spring of the first decade of the last century, the Ohio Wesleyan Methodists traveled to South Bend to play a baseball game against the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame. When the team arrived at its hotel in South Bend, one of the players, Charles "Tommy" Thomas, was told he could not stay in the hotel because of the color of his skin. Thomas was humiliated, and his coach, Branch Rickey was outraged. Rickey, who would gain a reputation in his life for being a very tough individual, stood nose to nose with the clerk at the hotel desk and insisted on a room for his teammate. When the clerk resisted, Rickey threatened to return the team to Delaware without playing the game. Finally, the clerk relented, if Thomas would agree to stay in Rickey's room.

Hundreds of times in the years that followed, Branch Rickey told the story of his experience

that day, of the pain on his teammate's face, of his own outrage, and of the commitment he made as the team returned to the campus in Delaware, saying to himself that someday, somehow, he would do something more about that. Four decades later, in the spring of 1947, nearly a decade before the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, and nearly two decades before Congress acted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Branch Rickey opened the doors of Major League Baseball and invited the courageous Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier of America's pastime.

More than a century ago, on this campus, Branch Rickey had the benefit of an education designed to form moral leaders for a global society. When he saw human indignity and human mistreatment, he knew it was wrong. In due time, he did what no other American had yet done. With his leadership, a cultural barrier was broken and a long-closed door opened wide.

This is the legacy of Branch Rickey and the legacy of all those like him who have stood at the Sulfur Spring, entered Elliott Hall, gathered here in Gray Chapel, studied in Slocum Library, crossed the JAYwalk, competed on Selby Field, stepped on the stage of Chappellear Drama Center, climbed the steps of Monnett Hall, or passed any of the other venues where education occurs on this campus. This legacy is a reflection of the aspirations of our founders, an echo of the church that gave us birth, a manifestation of the ideals of the academy, and an indication of our practical idealism – all made real through the decades, and all coming to life again today.

Adam Poe might not have imagined precisely what would be accomplished by Branch Rickey or by the tens of thousands of individuals who, with the benefit of an Ohio Wesleyan education, have collectively touched every facet of our common life. And Adam Poe might not have imagined precisely what we will have the opportunity to accomplish in the years just ahead of us. But Adam Poe would have agreed with Henry Clyde Hubbart, who wrote in the prologue of our centennial history in 1942, "our practical idealism, in its best form, has always stressed the unrealized possibilities of the college" With Henry Clyde Hubbart, Adam Poe would acknowledge the unrealized possibilities of an institution whose best days are still to come. He would encourage us to claim strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Today, all of us with responsibility for this institution – trustees, faculty, officers, staff, and alumni, students, and friends – stand where those who have gone before us have previously stood. We stand as stewards, entrusted for a time, with responsibility for a treasure. This treasure, made tangible in the buildings on this campus and in the lives of those who live and study here, reflects an even greater and even less tangible idea – the idea that an education makes a difference in the life of an individual, that educated citizens make a difference in the life of the world, and that a liberal education grounded in our practical idealism has a singular opportunity in this age to raise up a new generation of moral leaders for a global society. With humility, let us embrace this high calling and let us dedicate ourselves to these noble aspirations.

I am honored today to be inaugurated as your 16th President. Thank you for your commitment to Ohio Wesleyan University, and thank you for your confidence in the future we will share together.