

Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary & College President's Report to the Canadian National Baptist Convention • July 2014

By Rob Blackaby, CSBS&C President

INTRODUCTION

Life is transformed when students are immersed in the learning community of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College. The resounding theme of graduating students in recent years is that God accomplishes life changes in the day-to-day interaction enabled by the authentic relationships fostered in genuine community between students and their professors and classmates, as well as members of our administration and staff. This is a defining mark of how we set about training God-called men and women for twenty-first century leadership in tough places.

We are committed to our founding philosophy of education that promotes a resolute commitment "to achieving excellence in theological education, while maintaining a proper balance of zeal with knowledge, prayer with action, and dependence on God with the development of practical skills." (Seminary Bylaws, Article 1, Section 7) To accomplish these objectives seminary personnel are now, as they have always been, absolutely committed to the authority of God's Word in faith and in practice, and by their example and exhortation lead students to a like commitment.

Through our college we orient recent high school graduates to God, His Word, and His mission. We believe it is crucial that our young people are firmly rooted in their faith and develop a Christian worldview that will guide them throughout their lives. This cannot be done apart from a comprehensive study of our biblical text. It is imperative for these young spiritual leaders to be able to interpret God's Word accurately, to understand how to make appropriate applications in their personal lives and in our twenty-first century world, and to celebrate its contemporary relevance.

Through our seminary we orient students to ministry that is rooted in love for God, His Word and His people. They need to know how to study and accurately apply God's Word to issues of paramount importance in the midst of life circumstances that are often complex. We believe it is imperative for each of them to be rooted in the Bible and to be equipped to be catalysts for the advancement of the Gospel of Christ in Canada and around the world.

I believe our school has a specific niche in preparing leaders for ministry in challenging arenas both in North America and globally. I am convinced that it is not enough to produce generic Canadian National Baptist Convention or Southern Baptist Convention leaders; we must work to deploy rugged spiritual entrepreneurs who are willing to be dispatched wherever, whenever, and however God desires. I contend that schools that train classic Baptist pastors are many; schools that are willing to accept the challenges of frontier ministry are precious few. We need to remain a school that is willing to be stretched and challenged until we reach our full potential.

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In the Report that follows I will begin with Ministry Highlights that have occurred since our fall trustee meeting, followed by comments related to two of the Critical Issues affecting our institution.

MINISTRY HIGHLIGHTS

With the beginning of our 2013 fall semester we began offering classes for our newly developed Bachelor of Christian Studies Degree (BCS), with its accompanying one year Certificate of Christian Studies and two year Diploma of Christian Studies. Having reached the end of our academic year we are evaluating ways to strengthen further our college programming through the BCS, and we continue to make necessary adjustments in campus development and student services. We are still working to find new ways to think about campus community life. The faculty is working diligently to evaluate course and curricular development and implementation. The Business Office, Student Services Office, Facilities Department, and Admissions Department are working together to address all other campus and community provisions from housing to safety to recreation.

In the seminary we continue to deliver quality training for students wherever they live. Nonresident students can complete the Master of Divinity degree (MDiv) without relocating to Cochrane through a combination of online courses (two-thirds of the degree) and on campus intensives (one-third). In addition, the two-year Master of Biblical Studies has been redesigned, along with a soon-to-be-approved Master of Christian Studies, both of which can be completed 100% online. We have also successfully piloted having distance students participate live in an on-campus course, an option which we hope to expand in the future.

Early in our fall semester we enjoyed our annual Spiritual Renewal Week, and Dr. Frank Lewis (senior pastor at First Baptist Church Nashville) was our speaker. Again this year the week was a powerful and impacting charge with which to start a new academic year. I encourage you to listen to this series of messages that can be easily found through the link to Online Chapel Services on our website at www.csbs.ca. First Baptist Church Nashville has been in a consistent partnership with our school longer than any other SBC church, and their Missions Committee secured funding to cover travel and associated costs for Dr. Lewis to be with us.

Before our second week of classes was complete in our spring semester we were already benefiting from the focus of our 2014 Academic Lectureship, "The Book of James—No String of Pearls," by guest lecturer Dr. Donald Sunukjian. Attendance was healthy in each session, with an encouraging number of participants from our local Canadian National Baptist Convention churches and the more general Christian community in Cochrane. Dr. Sunukjian was wonderfully used by God to open our eyes to the unified and radically contemporary message of

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the Book of James. His messages can be found through the "Online Chapel Messages" link at www.csbs.ca.

During the first weekend of March, a collection of students and faculty spread out across Canada's six time zones for Seminary Day (and the president spoke in First Baptist Church Nashville). They came back from serving with our Canadian National Baptist Convention churches with amazing stories. They have talked about how God gave them effectiveness to preach, teach, and share the Gospel. We rejoice with them in the stories of how God saved people by His grace found in Christ. I encourage you to listen to their testimonies accessed through the link to chapel messages on our website (www.csbs.ca).

At our recent Preview Weekend, March 14-15, we had over 150 youth and young adults gathered in our chapel to worship together, to make commitments to follow Christ with abandon, and to consider if God intends for our school to play a significant role in shaping their whole-life development. Seminary and college shirts were emblazoned with the determined words of martyred missionary Jim Elliot from over a half-century ago, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." That is it! That is our settled goal!

Early this May we were pleased to welcome Dr. Frank Page, Executive Director and President of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, to be the commencement speaker during our Graduation Ceremony. We have already received confirmation that Dr. David Dockery, President of Trinity International University (former President of Union University) will be our commencement speaker in 2015. If your travel plans permit, we invite you to join us May 8 and 9, 2015 for our next Graduation Weekend.

We continue to prepare to place on our campus a log home that has been gifted to us. The foundation is in the process of being poured and soon the building can be moved to the western boundary of our property to serve as guest housing for visiting professors as well as a place for meetings. Ed Allen has been strategic in minimizing costs for this project.

We received word during the last week of April that our school has been approved by the Alberta Government for inclusion on the Designated List of schools that will be recognized by Citizenship and Immigration Canada as eligible to receive international students. An agreement has been processed by the Alberta Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education.

As of May 16, 2014 our Mountainview Christian Bookstore has been closed. This was a sad decision and it was not made without a thorough investigation throughout the past year of alternative options. The market for bookstores in general, and for Christian bookstores like ours in particular, has been shifting dramatically over the past decade. Because of the service offered to our community we have been willing to take annual losses during the past many years. However, since 2012 these losses have reached levels that are unsustainable. This in no

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way reflects poorly on Marion Brunning, who has been our wonderful Bookstore Manager since 2008. She has worked diligently and passionately to ensure that our store runs as efficiently and effectively as possible. We are simply experiencing now the same dynamics that have resulted in the closure of most other Christian bookstores in Calgary since 2009.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Since the beginning of the 2013/2014 academic year our school has been focused on three Critical Issues. These are: 1. Student Discovery and Enhancement; 2. Institutional Advancement; and 3. New Initiatives. I will focus on the first two issues in this section of my report.

1. Student Discovery and Enhancement

As of April 30, 2014 Al Landriault no longer serves in the capacity of Director of Admissions. God has given him a rare opportunity to lead the development of a sports complex in Greely, Ontario, and we rejoice with him in this new adventure. Al has worked for our school for five years, and was hired as our first Director of Recruitment while his wife, Shannon, was a resident student with us. If you would like to read more on the venture that Al has undertaken, please see <http://t.co/oWgSBgGSKU> and <http://t.co/NBdHL6oErS>.

The search is well underway for a new Director of Admissions. During the summer months Matthew Rowley (one of our MDiv students and our current part-time Cochrane Campus Recruitment Coordinator) is working full time as our Admissions Counselor. He will ensure continuity of contact with students in the admissions process as well as manage recruitment events and initiatives throughout the summer. It is my intention to hire our next Director of Admissions in time to begin work on our campus by August 2014.

2. Institutional Advancement

Many ministers in Canada make great financial sacrifices to serve God. These financial hardships are tough for our seminary graduates, especially those who are still carrying student loans from their undergraduate degrees. Some seminary graduates are ready to serve the Lord as full-time missionaries, but they must first work to pay off their college and seminary loans because it will be almost impossible to service their debt on a minister's salary. We see two solutions for this reality, and CSBS&C has created two opportunities designed to free our students from the high cost of education: Our Student Scholarship Endowment and The Seminary Fund.

Our Student Scholarship Endowment will provide funding for tuition benefits that are offered to students. Ever since CSBS&C's founding in 1987, we have sought to provide tuition assistance and scholarships for our students. We offer a tuition benefit to students from any of our Canadian National Baptist Convention churches. In addition, students who have participated in mission opportunities through our convention, or the International Mission Board (IMB), or the

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North American Mission Board (NAMB) are eligible for a tuition benefit. We also have close to twenty named scholarship opportunities for students and we are soliciting other endowed scholarships.

Our second important strategy is The Seminary Fund (formerly Annual Fund). The Seminary Fund will strengthen annual giving to our operational fund so we can keep tuition as affordable as possible. We need gift income to balance our budget every year. If we raised tuition to charge students what it actually costs us to provide an education, tuition could more than double and become out of reach for many students—even those with scholarship help. The Seminary Fund closes the gap between what students pay in tuition, fees, room and board, and what it costs CSBS&C to operate. The Seminary Fund also includes some unfunded student aid that we distribute to help needy students.

Tuition only covers approximately 15% of the overhead of providing the quality education and training that we offer to students. We raise annually approximately 45% - 50% of our operating budget. This money comes from generous donations, large and small, from people who are excited about investing in what God is doing in Canada.

Student Scholarships and The Seminary Fund work together to graduate debt-free students ready to become servant leaders. We are encouraged by the meetings we have had with donors over the past six months as we have travelled in Canada as well as to Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Texas. We are also encouraged by the meetings we have been able to schedule with donors to take place within the next two months. Already one couple has given an extraordinary \$25K gift, another couple has committed to sending a \$50K+ gift for multiple years, and another has given a \$50K gift to help offset student indebtedness and underwrite a number of the unfunded tuition benefits that our school provides.

I am heartened by our trustees' covenant to fast and pray together, recognizing that God can supply our needs, but we must cry out to Him. I appreciate the posture of the members of our Board of Trustees toward fund raising. Their intentionality is encouraging.

Barry and I continue to work closely with Ron Haas (who presented at the fall meeting of the Board of Trustees in our fall 2013 meeting) of The Timothy Group. He has been a valuable resource to us in the development of a strategy and materials to effectively fund raise for our Annual Fund (now most often referred to as our Seminary Fund).

We continue to benefit greatly from our partnership with the Woman's Missionary Union Foundation. David George, the CEO of this foundation, has worked diligently to connect personally with our donors as well as bring awareness of our school to the larger Southern Baptist Convention constituency in the United States.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I reflect on my past seven years of service as the President of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College (as of April 1, 2014), I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given to participate in the worthy goal of **training God-called men and women for twenty-first century leadership in tough places**. I still feel the burning compulsion of this vision intensifying with each passing year. I am convinced that we are on the cusp of a huge movement of God toward the accomplishment of our vision.

I feel privileged together with all of our faculty and staff to provide theological education for those called to lead in churches, marketplace ministry, and other Christian ministries seeking to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Canada and around the world. It remains my honour to serve as the President of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College at such a time as this.