



Report for 2016 Annual Convention

Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary & College • President • Rob Blackaby

Introduction

In recent years I have been reflecting afresh on what it means to be a Christian leader in today's cultural context. To get that right will dramatically influence how we function as a theological school in Canada today. To get that wrong will result in our school being swept up in confusion and chaos as we rage against the winds of societal change and shifting cultural values.

There is no greater calling in this life than to be a child of God. Everything else we will ever do of any worth hinges on our commitment to this. Every choice we make matters, because it is always part of a sweeping set of choices that will either lead us closer to Christ (and therefore into deeper fellowship with Him, acquaintance with His Word, affection for His people, and identification with His purposes) or further from Him (and therefore into the shallows of human existence and selfish indulgence). In light of this, Jesus' difficult words in Luke 17:1ff are searching with regards to obedience in the life of a disciple. We say that we exist to train God-called men and women for twenty-first century leadership in tough places. We say this knowing that the fulfillment of such a vision will cost us much! We seek to live our lives in such a way that at the end of it we can say with integrity, "I am an unworthy servant; I have only done my duty."

If that is to be the case, we need daily to put into practice three critical and counter-cultural lessons. First, obedience is not optional. I believe that the only right I have left in this earthly life is the right to obey King Jesus, Who is my Lord and my Master. Second, obedience is not easy. Sometimes we are confused and think that if obedience is right then it should happen with ease. But most often obedience to Jesus is stretching and involves pain in our offerings, and disobedience can seem to be the more attractive option. We must resolve now as a school to choose obedience regardless of the cost (real or perceived). Third, obedience is never wasted. In God's economy no act of obedience is ever squandered. It all matters to Him and is useful for the expansion of His Kingdom.

As we chart the course for our learning community, our lives, our ambitions, and our dreams, we are determined to remain rooted firmly in Christ. We want our ambitions to be always and only for significance with Christ, and our dreams to be marked by the vision of Jesus alive in us. The contours of our journey with Christ can often be surprising to us, but for His glory we embrace His lordship and adjust to His lead.

In the Report that follows I will outline Ministry Highlights that have occurred since our fall trustee meeting, and forecast significant events for our fall 2016 semester. I will then address five Challenges that confront us and stretch us as an institution.

Ministry Highlights

There is much to celebrate this academic year. In particular, we have enjoyed positive developments in academics, admissions, and institutional advancement.



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Academics

From September 8-11 we enjoyed our annual Spiritual Emphasis Week, with Danny Siquefield (and his wife, Rhonda) speaking on “Beauty from Brokenness.” The week was a timely, precise and powerful 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. The cost of travel for the Siquefields was covered by their home church, Faith Baptist in Bartlett, Tennessee (just north of Memphis).

We had a variety of guests in attendance during our Spiritual Emphasis Week. Kim Margrave (Missions and Volunteers Coordinator for the Tennessee Baptist Convention) brought special greetings from the TBC as well as a gift to our library as we prepared to wrap up our nine-year partnership last November. David George (President of WMU Foundation) made his first trip to our campus with his wife (Allyson) and was encouraged in his promotion and support of our school. James and Nancy Westbrook (long-time friends of our school) accompanied the Georges.

Last fall our faculty launched a blog, entitled “Mercy and Truth.” Kevin Peacock is working with Barry Nelson on the timely collection and posting of articles. The intent of the blog is to spread our teaching and influence to a wider audience beyond our classroom walls. Faculty members are encouraged to think through what they are already teaching and grab a piece of something that we could share with a broader audience: scripture insight, ministry advice, “guides for the perplexed” into contemporary issues, best practices, sermon ideas, and so on.

Early in our spring semester (March 2-3) we welcomed Paul Copan to our campus for the Dr. Garry Owen M.D. Memorial Academic Lectureship. Dr. Copan is a noted philosopher and apologist, and is a Professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He brought a series of addresses on the theme, “Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God.” Session topics included: Is God a Moral Monster?; Is the God of the Old Testament the God of the New?; Is the Old Testament Anti-Women?; Does the Bible Endorse Slavery?; and, Did God Really Command Genocide? Not only were the lectures well attended by members of our school community, but they were also well attended by people from both Cochrane and Calgary. His messages can be found through the “Online Chapel Messages” link at www.csbs.ca.

This May we recognized 15 students during our graduation ceremony. Also, we were pleased to have Dr. Frankie Rainey deliver the commencement address during our May 7, 2016 graduation service. After a decade of ministry in our school community and on our faculty, Frankie officially retired at the end of May, after which he and Sue have relocated to the Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas.

Early in our fall 2016 semester we will welcome Gary Smith (newly appointed NAMB Church Planting Catalyst for Southern Alberta) to be our speaker for Spiritual Emphasis Week. The special chapel services will run from September 13-16. It is our hope that Gary’s presence on our campus will further encourage students to consider church planting with the CNBC and NAMB Canada.



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Both this academic year and next academic year our school enjoys the blessing of quality guest professors. For example, Jimmy Cobb spent the spring semester with us. It was wonderful to have him back with our faculty, and to have his Christian character once again directly impact our learning community. In May we will welcome Duane Garrett (an original member of our CSBS&C faculty and current faculty member of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) to teach on Zechariah, Peter Blackaby (returning for a fifth time) to co-teach Effective Ministry Management) and Ant Greenham (from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) teaching on Islam: An Evangelical Approach. In the fall we will welcome Bob and Martha Bergen from Hannibal-LaGrange University in Hannibal, Missouri. Together they account for half of the university's religion department; this is a significant sacrifice on the part of a peer institution to bless our school. Also this fall we will welcome Calvin and Devra Morris. In December 2015 they accepted the International Mission Board's offer for voluntary retirement. Even though they are at retirement age, they are not ready to retire from the Lord's calling to train leaders in the cross-cultural context. They will spend the entire academic year with us, and are open to consider a longer commitment than that should the Lord lead us all in that direction.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) sent a visiting team to our campus from October 27-28, 2015 for a Focus Visit. The visit went very well, and the Board of Commissioners took the advice of the team to extend our accreditation through 2020 without requiring any extraordinary reports in the interim. This is the best-case outcome for the visit. In the future, then, both ATS and ABHE site visits will coincide in a single semester.

Admissions

Matthew Rowley has worked diligently to establish Articulation Agreements with schools in BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan. He has travelled throughout the provinces to strengthen relationships. We have formalized agreements with Millar School of the Bible (both the main campus in Pembrun, SK and the extension site on the campus of Sunnybrae Bible Camp in BC), Nipawin Bible College (Nipawin, SK), Eston College (Eston, SK), Peace River Bible Institute (Sexsmith, AB), Prairie Bible Institute (Three Hills, AB), and Living Faith Bible College (Caroline, AB). After Matthew's most recent trip he noted an encouraging number of prospective students already showing interest from these schools. Schools like Millar and PRBI confirmed again that we are the place they encourage their students to attend. We will continue to nurture relationships with "feeder schools" like these. We are also experiencing an increase in awareness and interest from Alberta home-schooling networks.

Again this year, during the first weekend of March (March 6), a collection of students and faculty spread out across Canada's six time zones for Seminary Day. Students came back with wonderful stories of serving in our Canadian National Baptist Convention churches, and celebrating with them the warmth of comradery as we together train leaders for ministry. I encourage you to listen to student testimonies accessed through the link to chapel messages on our website (www.csbs.ca).



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In February our school participated in a Disciple Now weekend for Calgary-area youth groups. Four of our professors (Don McNaughton, Kevin Peacock, Glenn Watson and me) were invited to present breakout sessions. These were received very well. We had a good level of exposure to youth. It was encouraging to once again have college and seminary-age young men and women consider if God intends for our school to play a significant role in shaping their whole-life development.

Institutional Development

As of April 1, 2016 our school is debt free. The loans that were taken out between 2000 and 2002 to build some of our student housing units are now paid off. Our long-term debt in 2002 was \$1,257,788. We anticipated paying off the loans by November 2017. We were actually able to do so in a shorter period of time than expected. We praise God for His provision throughout the years. Despite a difficult financial environment for our school in the last decade, we never had to reduce loan payments, but rather were able to consistently pay a flat amount each month. This is the first time since the late 1990s that our school has been without debt.

In April 2015 a group from the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma visited our campus. Among the members of that group were David Whitlock (president of Oklahoma Baptist University) and Gaylen Jones (then a professor of church planting at OBU). Over the past year we have been working on a partnership between our schools. Barry Nelson and I travelled to OBU from February 9-13, 2016 to work further on the details of a partnership. The four areas of linkage with our school will be: offering a MBA on our campus; sharing online course material for our college programs; annual spiritual leadership/church planting lectureship; and, members of OBU school of religion faculty teaching adjunctively for our seminary (for example, this spring Edmonton-native Tawa Anderson taught an apologetics course for us over three weekends).

We continue to make progress in the development of a RV storage park. The time has never been more pressing to get this project completed, and yet the process with the Town of Cochrane remains slow and laborious. The application process is being expertly handled by Phil Davidson (Timko Developments Inc.). Once we have final approval for the project from Cochrane Town Council, the establishment and operation of the business will be assumed by the Alberta numbered company that has already been set up, with Rob Blackaby and Gerry Taillon as directors and the school as the sole owner. Until then, Phil Davidson will continue working for us with the Town of Cochrane to clarify what steps are necessary and what is the sequence of those steps.

Progress continues to be made on the log home on our campus. While limited resources are currently available in our annual budget, there is some interest among donors in purchasing needed supplies. For example, First Baptist Church Clinton, Missouri has sent \$3,000.00 USD (exchanged for \$3,795 CDN) to purchase supplies necessary for the construction of a porch for the building. When their mission team arrives this summer they will build the porch. Also, after hundreds of dump trucks full of dirt were donated and poured around the building, there is a dramatic improvement in landscaping. We expect soon that one of the people storing equipment on our property will finish at his own expense the chimney on the house.



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For a period of nine months to a year we have agreed to rent space on our campus to Cochrane Alliance Church. Their church building is being remodeled and renovated, and they need temporary office space. This will not only result in needed revenue for our school, but it will also provide us with a valuable public relations opportunity with a strategic local church.

Challenges

There are five challenges that we are in the midst of working through as a school. Each of these has required and will continue to require significant attention, often impacting multiple departments of our school simultaneously. The challenges are in the areas of admissions, academics, and institutional advancement.

Admissions

The imminent turnover of personnel in our Admissions Department must be managed well. We need to maintain the momentum that has been building. As has been noted, we now have a promising array of “feeder schools.” Future admissions personnel will need to carefully and skillfully walk over the bridges that Matthew has built. Also, we need to follow the growing network of relationships spreading throughout our CNBC, largely spurred on by our alumni and trustees (both current and past members of the board). A job posting for Director of Admissions was circulated early in May, with interviews commenced in June. The completion of the hiring process is anticipated for early July. This timeline will allow for some overlap with Matthew so that there is continuity in the Admissions Office and joint travel can take place to feeder schools.

Academics

Our school has a gnawing need to add at least one new faculty member. The need for a theology/apologetics/history professor grows more urgent with each passing school year. And despite our work toward funding a position, it seems to remain frustratingly out of our grasp. With our current faculty aging, it is important that young faculty members are added soon in order for them to mature into trusted future guardians of our CSBS&C culture.

Changes in the Canada Immigration and Citizenship (CIC) requirements for international students to obtain student visas has created both an opportunity for us to recruit from a broader range of countries and a burden of sometimes having students arrive on campus with little or no financial means and limited linguistic skills to thrive in Canada. Whereas the CIC used to be prohibitive in its treatment of international students, it seems that the government agency is now more inclined to place the onus on receiving schools to carefully vet students who are admitted. As a result we are establishing a set of new protocols for international students. For example, international students will begin studies with us only in the fall semester, and will have a fixed early arrival deadline. There will be assigned to each international student a Student Ambassador who will help them with their adjustment to Canadian culture and ensure that they get established in Cochrane.



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Institutional Advancement

With the almost complete withdrawal of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) from our school, we are faced with a tremendous increase in our fund raising goal. While I am genuinely grateful for the years of support our school received from NAMB, I am also aware that the withdrawal of funding has had a staggering effect.

In order to address the decrease in revenue we are pressing the Town of Cochrane to give us approval to begin the development of the scheduled RV Storage business. Also, as of fall 2016 we will begin raising tuition in both the seminary and the college. For the first time in our history we have made a distinction between college and seminary tuition. Tuition rates will be: college \$325 per credit hour; seminary \$345 per credit hour. Because of the larger increase in tuition for seminary students, we will start to offer the following tuition benefit: all students enrolled in a seminary program are eligible to apply for the DK & Brenda Hale Tuition Benefit, which would be \$20.00 per credit hour awarded annually for the following school year for any courses taken for credit. An application form must be submitted by July 1st in order to receive this tuition benefit. A student must re-apply for every new school year. This tuition benefit can be combined with all scholarships and some of the other tuition benefits.

Concluding Remarks

As I reflect on my past nine years of service as the president of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College, 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 do not believe there is another school in Canada like ours. We have been given a jewel by God to guard carefully and share liberally. The students increasingly drawn to our school from other denominational families bear witness to our unique blend of biblical fidelity, missional intensity, and real-world practicality, all nurtured in a community through which students are transformed. LIFE CHANGES HERE!

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. As always, it is my sincerest honour to serve as the president of our school during times such as these.