



An Opportunity to Serve

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Chairman Andreas of the Mennonite Education Agency and Chairman Wyse of the EMU Board of Trustees, I am both honored and humbled to accept this responsibility as president of EMU.

It has been my privilege to have known each of the past four presidents--John R. Mumaw, Myron Augsburger, Richard Detweiler and Joseph Lapp. President Mumaw was retired from the presidency when first met him as a homiletics professor in the seminary. I shall never forget a pointed debate in one of those preaching classes. Professor Mumaw believed that the preacher should always deliver a homily from a complete, written text. And he taught us to prepare a text--he was not keen on preaching from notes only. One of my fellow students, coming from a charismatic tradition, challenged Brother Mumaw on this particular day. "After all," he said, "I just depend on the Holy Spirit to tell me what to say when I am in the pulpit." And Prof. Mumaw's kind but firm response was, "Herb, the Holy Spirit is just as present in the study as in the pulpit!" Herb had no immediate response!

Dr. Augsburger was president when I first entered college here in the fall of '68. His hair was thicker and blacker in those days, and we always enjoyed coming to chapel to hear him speak. Later, I had the wonderful privilege of traveling with him for week-long preaching missions all over the country, and I count him a personal friend and mentor. Myron modeled for me that it is possible to articulate the Gospel from the foundation of a particular theological tradition, in our case Anabaptist, while being respectful of those whose roots go deep in other traditions. Like Myron, I enjoy pancakes and ice cream; unlike him I don't enjoy them together for breakfast!

Richard Detweiler came to EMS as a visiting professor in the mid 70's and I took systematic theology from him. Later, as a young pastor in his home area of eastern Pennsylvania, I needed to take three courses to finish my M.Div. work. Two were at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, missiology with Tony Campolo and Liberation Theology with Ron Sider. The third was an independent study with Richard. We met several times a month over lunch to discuss readings and issues of pastoral theology.

His wise and calm demeanor was a healthy antidote to my inexperience and impatience. He even had the nerve to ask me if *he* should accept the call to serve as president of EMU!

During those same years I met Joe Lapp as an attorney. He offered wise counsel on several occasions for legal issues I was facing as a pastor. For the past 16 years we have participated in the meetings of Mennonite college/university presidents, and Joe's experience, love of this institution, and commitment to the church has always been evident. I want to say publicly that Joe and Hannah have extended their friendship to Pat and me for many years, and during these transition discussions they have been warm, gracious and superb models of professionalism.

As I prepare for this new role I do so with a keen awareness that I stand on the shoulders of these predecessors. They and their spouses have given so much of themselves to make this the strong and vibrant institution that it is today. Only another college president can fully appreciate the personal and family sacrifices that they have made over the years. Pat and I are grateful that Myron and Esther, and Joe and Hannah will continue to reside in this community and that we have a relationship with them which will allow us the benefit of their wisdom and friendship.

EMU is a dynamic institution. As parents of soon-to-be three university graduates, we are indebted to the faculty and staff of EMU for your academic excellence, your skills as professors, and for your personal interest in all students. We parents are sometimes entirely too invested in the lives of our children, even into their young adult years. I know it takes considerable wisdom and patience to find your way between the need to challenge our students and not to set up unnecessary barriers between parents and students. I applaud you for your finesse in that regard, at least in our family's experience.

To the current and future students of EMU you should know that I am most interested in you as unique individuals, each endowed with special gifts and abilities. It is our privilege to be engaged in assisting you to uncover those talents, to fan the fires of your intellectual and spiritual capacities, to walk with you in dreaming big. I think Sir William Haley was right, "Education would be so much more effective if its purpose was to ensure that by the time they leave school, every student would know how much they don't know, and be imbued with a lifelong desire to know it."

But education is about much more than gaining a certain level of knowledge. In the somewhat humorous words of Lord Shaftesbury, "When you educate people without giving them moral principles, all you produce is clever devils."

To the EMU board of trustees and the Mennonite Education Agency, I accept this leadership responsibility only with the awareness that we share a common commitment to make this the strongest institution it can be in service to the church and the world. As I said in response to a question during our campus visit several weeks ago, I have not felt called to serve as a college president, so much as I have sensed a call to offer my

gifts in service to the church. For many years, it has been evident to me that our church schools, from kindergarten through seminary/graduate programs, are critical for the future health of the church. We who are called to offer our gifts in education participate in a holy enterprise.

Today we live in a very tense time. Someone recently wrote, "We are living in a world in which if we are not confused we probably aren't thinking clearly." Our country is poised for a war--a war that that would devastate an entire nation and, no doubt, bring unimaginable misery and grief to people on all sides of the conflict. A war that would almost certainly not reduce the level of hatred that is already focused on us in the U.S. We should not underestimate what a university like EMU can offer during these days. I invite us all to be a people of prayer and of action. EMU can, indeed, be a beacon of light even in a very dark world.

Finally, I make very few promises for the future, and I make only those over which I have reason to believe I control. One promise I do make is to act with utmost integrity to the best of my ability.

A second promise--to not take myself too seriously, while taking my responsibilities very seriously. Pat and I invite your prayers on behalf of all of us as we begin a new journey together.

A third promise--to do my best to cultivate a community that knows great joy and hears much laughter. Because if we can't laugh together, we won't be able to cry together. And without both, we really aren't a community.