

**Remarks of Dr. Thomas S. Yow, III**  
**Eighth President/CEO of the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation**  
**To the Board of Trustees at the Annual Board Meeting**  
**Saturday, September 18, 2004**

Mr. Chair, Members of the Board,

I will try to move through this quickly because I know you are tired and have been here for a long time. We express our gratitude to you for your service on this board, appreciation for your commitment for what we are about in serving students at our United Methodist colleges and universities. It is my privilege to serve with you and I am grateful for that privilege. We acknowledge our gratitude today, so that it is entered into the board Minutes, our appreciation to Peggy Townes for sixteen plus years of faithful service to this foundation.

Since coming on board I have visited with many of you and look forward to visiting with the rest of you before the conclusion of this year. I appreciate the candor of the comments in those conversations.

I also express appreciation to the staff of this foundation for the gracious way that they have both received me and accommodated my working style, which is a little disjointed. I appreciate the many ways that they have come on board and been helpful in the transition process.

I am grateful to you for the decisions that have been made at this meeting. This has been a sobering yet important conversation as we move to define what we are about. I know that these are difficult decisions, but I am grateful for the spirit in which they have been made. I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this foundation at this exciting time in our history and to working with you and our denominational leaders as we endeavor to serve our United Methodist students, and through them, our United Methodist schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries. I think it is important for us to remember that our obligation now is to provide ways that our United Methodist students can take advantage of the opportunity for a holistic educational experience offered by our institutions.

I have spent all my life on the campus and I am a product of what we are all about. I went to undergraduate school at one of our institutions. I went to seminary at one of our institutions, and I received my graduate degree at one of our institutions. I spend most of my career at our institutions. I was in the pastorate very briefly, then was institutionalized early in my career, and have been there the rest of the time. So, I am your product. I believe that what we do is important as we endeavor to offer for our students' quality academics, in an uncompromising atmosphere of good teaching and good academics. Our institutions also address the issue that Ken Yamada talked about yesterday, the crisis of leadership within our denomination, and the need for institutions that affirm the importance of values as a part of the educational experience. We endeavor to provide students an opportunity to grow in their leadership skills and to do that in the context that intentionally affirms the values of the Christian faith. We are about that

business across our denomination in various forms, which vary from small colleges in small communities to multi-faceted universities. In our institutions we are about the business of providing good academics, affirming the importance of Christian values in leadership, and affirming the values of Christian faith. Ours is an important mission and I appreciate the opportunity to be about it with you.

I also am grateful for the opportunity to continue working with the staff of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry as together we work to find the ways of service. I appreciate the counsel of Dr. Yamada and of Dr. Bigham, and also the privilege of working with Dr. Jerome Del Pino who steps out and leads as we need him to. We also now know that we have some important tasks before us of generating additional gift dollars for our scholarship endowment. This is essential if our scholarships are to have impact as tuitions increase. As Terrell has pointed out so vividly, with tuitions of seventeen to twenty to twenty-two thousand dollars, sometimes our one thousand dollar scholarship can get lost. We need to look for ways that we can increase our endowment funds so that we can increase the impact of these scholarships on students and their educational decisions.

You wanted a fundraising president and that's what you got. All I have really ever been is a beggar for United Methodist causes, and I will be coming to see you. So you can expect me. Your financial support is appreciated and important.

We also hope that you will open opportunities for us to see other people. We don't expect you to become fundraisers. If you want to do that we are happy for you to. We need for you to open doors for us and to become friend raisers as you introduce us to other persons who may be involved in what we do.

The Resource Development Committee has given to the staff the challenge of preparing some ways to do that. In the interim, however, I am going to be calling on all of you. We will ask you not only about your own gift to this foundation but to help us meet other people. We need you to be helpful in that process.

As Henry Gilchrist has suggested, over the next three years forty percent of our current board members will rotate off because of our regulations. We have an important task of carefully selecting new trustees. In light of what we have discussed in the last two days, we need to keep that in mind. We also will be seeking your counsel and advice as we are about to visit some crucial vacant slots on our board. We need people who can provide positive affirming leadership for our mission as we move forward and continue our service to students.

We also continue our concern for making ourselves better known throughout our denomination. It has been and remains a challenge. But let me suggest that if we lose ourselves in service through aggressive fund raising and through providing additional support to students, and as we increase our contacts with our local churches, we will be recognized. Certainly we need to tell our story. But, the best way to tell our story is by serving our students. When we walk the walk of service, we will be recognized as an

entity that reaches out to serve and one that is a servant to our colleges and to our students.

As a college president I would remind our trustees annually that all our institutions really needed was three things: friends, funds, and freshmen. I would remind us today that all we really need, as a foundation, is two things: friends and funds. As we increase our friends and funds, we can help more of our United Methodist students become freshmen at our United Methodist institutions. So we are about the business of seeking friends and funds so that there may be more freshmen.

I also would remind our faculty each year that we were not really in the education business, but were in the people business. Our service to people carried us to the education business. And I would remind all of us today that we, as the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation, are not really in the foundation business. We are not really in the church business. Nor are we really in the fundraising business. We are in the people business. We are about the business of helping people achieve all the potential that God has given to them. That mission carries us into the fundraising business and the foundation business. We are really about the business of enriching the lives of people as we help them become a part of Christian value-centered educational experience. This commitment to serving God's children takes us to where we go. We don't raise money just for money. We don't create scholarships just for scholarships. These functions point beyond themselves to something else. They point beyond themselves to the people that receive those funds, to the students whose lives are enriched, and to the lives that these will touch. We are about the business of affirming God's children on the journey of faith throughout their lives.

In Genesis 12 the story is told of God's calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans and begins the great covenant story that culminates in the resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our entire Judeo/Christian story hinges on what happens in Genesis 12 when Abram and Yahweh come to an understanding that I will be your God and you will be my people. And in that story Abram responds to and establishes his covenant, moves out and leaves Ur and begins his great pilgrimage. At each step along the way Abram stops, as we read in Genesis 13, and builds an altar in celebration of his relationship with Yahweh.

May I suggest to us that we, too, are building altars. Unlike the altars that Abram built, our altars are not rock and wood. Our altars are the lives of people who are blessed forever because of the experience they have at United Methodist colleges and universities. Each student becomes an altar that reflects God's glory and God's creation. But, unlike Abram's altars, our altars are not stagnant. Ours are vibrant, alive, with all the energy, enthusiasm, and wisdom of an eighteen- or nineteen- or twenty-year-old. And in that process sometimes they are going to make mistakes. Nevertheless, we are enriching those altars and we are empowering those altars to be about God's work. We are about the business of helping altars, if you will, address the process of leadership, address a rusty pipeline, address all those things that the church so badly needs, as we empower God's children. Our altars are vibrant, and alive, and screaming and shouting,

and breathing, and doing all those things that we want eighteen to twenty-year-olds to do and becoming the leaders we so badly need.

Our altars are like rocks in a lake. They make ripples. And those ripples impact other ripples. Not only do our scholarships enrich the lives of the recipients, our scholarships enrich the lives of every life touched by those people. What we do enriches the lives of untold people. We provided a scholarship for Paul Edwards, one of our board members, to go to Duke Divinity School, (the best divinity school in our denomination), and think of how many ripples that investment makes as Paul reaches out in ministry to touch other persons through his service. We provide the scholarship to help a young adult to go to college and go to law school, we provide a scholarship to help a young adult become a teacher, and we provide a scholarship that helps a young adult become a business and community leader. Think how many lives we enrich with that altar that we have built and the ripple affect of good that is accomplished through these lives.

What we are about is truly important for we touch people. We, like all connected Methodists, touch people we will never know, never see, will never hear of, nevertheless, their lives and the lives of their communities, the lives of their local church, and the lives of our nation are enriched because we made that investment, because we touched those lives.

What we do is important and the impact for good that we have is untold. We build altars that move, and scream, and breathe, and reach out to love and care and make the world a better place.

So together, we all thank God for the privilege that we have been given to be altar builders as we fund scholarships for students. And we all pray that God will continue to bless the work of this foundation as we invest in human beings, God's children. Thank you for the privilege you give me to be a part of this with you. May God continue to bless our United Methodist Church.