

## **Chapter 1**

### **"Olivet Nazarene University . . .**

#### **a denominational university in the Wesleyan tradition."**

The purpose of this section is to . . .

- (1) introduce the historical and theological heritage of the University
- (2) note how this heritage is expressed in the daily life of the University
- (3) engender an understanding and appreciation of the mission of the University
- (4) evoke a sense of responsibility to the fulfillment of its mission
- (5) note the responsibilities and opportunities available to students who seek to become productive members of the broader university community.

#### **A Denominational School**

Olivet Nazarene University is an educational ministry of the international Church of the Nazarene. Each year, Nazarene congregations throughout the Midwest give generously to support the work of the University. Olivet is one of eight such colleges and universities in the United States and one of 59 Nazarene schools worldwide.

One cannot fully understand or appreciate the mission and purpose of the University without recognizing the important relationship that exists between Olivet and its sponsoring denomination. Olivet is more than a "church-related" school or a Christian university in a generic way. Olivet is a Nazarene university. The theological understandings, traditions, values, and ethos of the University are shaped by this relationship. Although there are many denominations represented within the student population, the majority of students come from Nazarene homes and churches.

#### **The Wesleyan Tradition**

The Church of the Nazarene, from its beginnings, has identified itself as one branch of the historic church of Jesus Christ. Its particular mission is to promote the Biblical teaching and experience of personal holiness through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women. Theologically and historically, the Church of the Nazarene is part of the tradition fostered by James Arminius, a Dutch reformation theologian, and by the English minister, John Wesley. The preaching and teaching of John Wesley, along with his brother Charles and others, sparked a revival of spiritual piety and fervor throughout 18th century England that manifested itself in the establishment of the Methodist movement.

British Methodism's early missionary emphasis spread to America and resulted in the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784. Its stated purpose was to "reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands." This "holiness" movement spread quickly throughout the United States and soon extended beyond the bounds of Methodism in the form of a variety of independent holiness congregations and associations.

The Church of the Nazarene was established as several of these groups came together in denominational unity and identity. Although the first local Church of the Nazarene was founded in Los Angeles, California, in 1895, the Church of the Nazarene began as a nationwide denomination through the uniting of various holiness groups at a meeting held at Pilot Point, Texas, in 1908 (MANUAL, 1997, pp. 14-19).

The Church of the Nazarene embraces the traditional teachings of the Christian Church that are rooted in the Bible and expressed by the ancient creeds. The Church of the Nazarene expresses its doctrine through its sixteen articles of faith that can be found in the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene. In summary, the Church affirms:

- That there is one God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- That the Old and New Testament Scriptures, given by divine inspiration, contain all truth necessary to faith and Christian living.
- That each man or woman is born with a sinful nature and is, therefore, inclined to evil.
- That those who do not repent and yield themselves to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, are hopelessly and eternally lost.
- That Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, has provided salvation for all who repent and believe in Him and that this free gift of salvation is available to the whole human race.
- That through faith in Jesus Christ, any person can be forgiven of his or her sins and made spiritually alive and thus saved from the dominion and penalty of sin.
- That in addition to forgiveness and the new birth, believers are to become holy people (sanctified). Through this experience, one is cleansed of the inner sinful nature and filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. From this flows a lifetime of spiritual growth and maturity toward Christlikeness.
- That Jesus Christ will return to Earth, the dead will be raised, and a final judgment will take place (MANUAL, 1997, pp. 26-34).

The Church also affirms that holiness is to be manifested through a life of Christian piety expressed in righteousness and love.

## **An Education With a Christian Purpose**

Olivet, as a university, is part of a great tradition of learning that stretches back to the 12th century with the founding of the universities of Salerno, Bologna, and Paris, followed soon after by Oxford, Cambridge, and dozens of others throughout Europe. The first universities were religiously centered communities of scholarship, learning, and professional formation. These were not merely centers for acquiring professional skills, but included education in the liberal arts with the study of literature, mathematics, science, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, and the queen of sciences, theology.

The university (the name taken from the Latin word *universitas*, meaning "the whole") intended to prepare the intellectual, spiritual, and moral leaders of society by giving them a broad, deep, wise, morally sensitive, unified education. In the 17th century with the founding of Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale, the first three American universities, this tradition was transplanted on American soil.

During the 18th century, new universities at Princeton, Columbia, and Pennsylvania added pragmatic studies in geography, applied science, navigation, and other fields to this liberal arts core. Specialized professional schools of law, medicine, and theology were set within the structure of the university as an alternative to the tradition of professional apprenticeships.

In the 19th century, Johns Hopkins University was the first American university to follow what was then a newer German graduate research model of education that featured the seminar system. In the same era, the establishment of federal land grant universities, the rise of the elective system, academic majors, and a general democratization of higher educational opportunities all contributed to the beginning of the end of the traditional notion that the university was to be a religiously centered exercise in intellectual wholeness. But, even with the changing nature of the American university, most schools continued, at least at the undergraduate level, to pursue a holistic, integrated, morally sensitive set of objectives. This was reflected not only in individual classes and lectures, but was also seen in a common requirement for all senior students to take a course (often called "moral philosophy"), frequently taught by the college president, that drew together the undergraduate body of learning and honed the ethical sensitivities of the students about to enter the marketplace.

Over time, however, the rise of the elective system of course offerings, the rapid growth of specialization throughout society, and the growing influence of the methods and epistemology of the natural sciences all continued to erode the traditional ideal of a university. As a result, moral values as a part of university education retreated and were replaced with descriptive objectivity.

Most universities abandoned their quest to provide a unified, much less Christian or ethical, education. It was in response to these changes that schools such as Olivet were established as places of learning that would once more provide a holistic education.

Olivet Nazarene University was born during the first decade of the 20th century in the hearts and minds of a handful of devout Christian men and women of east central Illinois. The world around them was in flux. Winds of change were blowing in every direction. Technology was exploding

with the coming of electricity, the automobile, and the continued industrial revolution of society. New ideas from individuals like Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and a host of others were flourishing. Many of these new ideas challenged much of the traditional understandings of life and faith (Parrott, 1993).

In response to these challenges and at the threshold of a new century, the founding families of Olivet began to cast a vision for the establishment of a school. These were holiness people who wanted to provide a first-rate education for their children, an education they themselves did not have.

Their dream was to build a university where faith and learning would meet, a place that would provide an education with a Christian purpose. The earliest catalog of the University records their resolve:

We shall aim to have a school of university grade in arts and sciences and music and theology. Yet the Bible will be the honored book in all courses of study, and the constant rule of daily life (Catalog, 1915).

The catalog goes on to tell how a small group of individuals including Elvin Judd, Edward and Will Richards, and Orla Nesbitt joined together to purchase a farm on which they proposed to build a university. The catalog reads: "It was their purpose to have an institution at the front in educational facilities and scholastic attainments, and yet to make it `a distinctly spiritual school'"(Catalog, 1915).

In 1907, classes were begun in a home in the community of Georgetown, Illinois, and a year later the founders acquired several acres of land in the nearby village called Olivet. Here they raised a modest building and added the secondary level of instruction. A College of Liberal Arts followed in 1909 along with the first name for this fledgling, but ambitious, institution, Illinois Holiness University.

By the 1911-1912 school term, the student body was gaining numerical stability with students from 12 states, Canada, and England. The founders and trustees were aware of the school's need for a wider constituency and offered to give their educational work to the Church of the Nazarene, which accepted it with the pledge of continued support.

The 1915 Catalog was the first document to carry a section titled "Purpose." It reads in part as follows:

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The great purpose of any true educational institution must be to assist men to meet successfully this end. Our desire is to provide opportunities that will develop all that is best in man; to establish a strong center of spiritual power and holy culture that will flow forth as a mighty stream of influence to the four quarters of the earth; to help young men and women to an equipment that will enable them to successfully fill the different vocations of life and promote the kingdom of Christ. While exalting the intellectual we magnify the spiritual. We seek the strongest scholarship and the deepest piety, knowing that they are thoroughly compatible.

The officers and teachers seek to impress upon the students the necessity of obedience to Christ, as well as high scholastic attainments (Catalog, 1915).

Throughout its history, Olivet Nazarene University has sought to be a place where the best in learning is fully integrated with the best of faith. It has not always been easy. There have been moments of testing and trial, and several moments of high drama, such as June 10, 1926, when the college was sold at public auction in a bankruptcy sale. That afternoon, in a striking move, Dr. T. W. Willingham, a member of the Board of Trustees, stepped forward from the crowd and purchased the college back, in an effort to keep the dream alive (Parrott, 1993).

There were the wee hours of the morning on Sunday, November 19, 1939, when fire destroyed most of the original campus south of Danville leading to the relocation of the University to its present location in Bourbonnais. There was the afternoon of Thursday, April 17, 1963, when a tornado swept down upon this campus, taking with it the top floor of Burke Administration Building, the smoke stack, "Trailerville" and more. Yet, through it all, the dream became a lasting legacy of faithfulness, sacrifice and success.

The story of Olivet is the story of the passing of an Olympiclike torch from one generation to the next. It is a people story of men and women who invested their lives in this great endeavor. Many of these individuals are now remembered throughout the campus in brick and mortar, stone and steel. Folks with names such as Nesbitt, Larsen, McClain, Strickler, Gibson, Ide, Snowbarger, Hills, Reed, Burke, Chalfant, Kelley, Parrott, Hopkins, and others. These have now rested from their labors, and new individuals now fill their shoes, their classrooms, their offices. Olivet today is the inheritor of a great dream. We drink from wells we did not dig and eat from vines we did not plant. Our responsibility is to be good stewards of this treasured past and lasting legacy.

### **The Past Informs the Present**

The theological and historical roots of Olivet inform and shape its present identity. Olivet continually strives to provide a learning environment and curricular structure that seeks to educate the whole person. This is clearly stated in the University's Mission Statement:

Olivet Nazarene University, a denominational university in the Wesleyan tradition, exists to provide a liberal arts 'Education With a Christian Purpose.' Our mission is to provide high quality academic instruction for the purpose of personal development, career and professional readiness, and the preparation of individuals for lives of service to God and humanity. "We seek the strongest scholarship and the deepest piety, knowing that they are thoroughly compatible [and] . . . a Christian environment. . . where not only knowledge but character is sought (Catalog, 1998, p. 11).

In addition to providing an education designed to help students get ready for a career, Olivet also seeks specifically to help individuals prepare for life itself, life beyond the workplace. As a reflection of this commitment, students are required, regardless of their academic major, to take a core of general education courses. This core is described in chapter two of the University

catalog. The general education requirements include courses in the study of Christianity; the art of interpersonal communication; the social sciences such as history, sociology, and psychology; the natural sciences and mathematics; as well as courses in literature and the fine arts. This core is designed to provide a broad-based educational foundation for specialization in a particular major.

One particularly important component of the core curriculum is a set of courses that deals with the Christian faith. Four particular courses are required for all students: Christian Doctrine, Bible I and Bible II, and a course titled The Church and Christian Living. This set of courses is a specific attempt on the part of the University to provide the ethical, moral, and spiritual training that was traditionally an integral part of a university education (Catalog, 1998).

Beyond the academic expressions of our mission, the general and specific nature of campus life are designed to help foster the development of Christian character. Chapel services and a variety of other activities provided by the office of the University chaplain and the dean of student development's office help create and foster Olivet's values and traditions.

Knowledge and decision making within this community of faith and learning rest upon our collective understanding of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. Community life, by its very nature, demands respect for others and the sublimation of some of one's personal freedoms for the good of the whole. An individual's willingness and ability to live in community is a genuine mark of maturity.

Students are encouraged to actively participate in a wide variety of campus activities, academic, social, recreational, and spiritual. Olivet seeks to blend the free exchange of ideas, the serious pursuit of knowledge, and a variety of campus events and activities with a vibrant commitment to God. The students, faculty, or staff members who flourish and succeed here are those who willingly embrace the mission and ethos of this university, take full advantage of its many opportunities, and accept the responsibilities of community life.

## References

Catalog of undergraduate programs and courses. (1998) Bourbonnais, IL: Olivet Nazarene University.

MANUAL/1997-2001: Church of the Nazarene. Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House.

McClain, C.S. (1983). I remember my fifty-seven years at Olivet Nazarene University. Kansas City: Pedestal Press.

Parrott, L. (1993). The Olivet story. Bourbonnais: Olivet Nazarene University.

