

## Chapter 7

### "Olivet Nazarene University . . . in a Christian environment."

The purpose of this section is to . . .

- (1) help an incoming student to realize the long-term goal of Olivet's spiritual environment
- (2) address a holistic, balanced Christian lifestyle as it relates to service of God and humanity
- (3) challenge students who attend with minimal interest in Christianity to rethink their decision
- (4) provide an opportunity for personal spiritual reflection to incoming students

#### **Christian Environment**

The home you grew up in has shaped you. For better or worse, you are a product of the environment in which you lived. Take a quiet inventory of your habits. Are you tidy or messy? Do you resolve problems by withdrawing, sulking, screaming, or attacking? Are Christmas presents meant to be opened the evening of the 24th or the morning of the 25th? Who is responsible for keeping gas in the car? Are shirts tumble-dried, ironed, or cleaner-starched? The home you grew up in has shaped you. For better or worse, you are a product of the environment in which you lived.

And now, you step into the world of Olivet Nazarene University . . . a Christian environment. Without apology, our intention is to create, manage, and sustain an environment that will shape you for a life of service to God and your fellow humans. Four years from now, when you walk down the esplanade capped and gowned, when you move across the open air stage to receive your diploma, we hope to have cooperated with God in shaping you.

Students choose to attend a university for a variety of reasons. We would love to assume that you chose Olivet for its Christian environment. But for many, that's not the case. We are aware that many students do not place a high value on the role of God in their lives. If you are one of these students, let me address you directly. You may tire of being required to attend weekly chapels.

You may find our conservative values restrictive. You may feel that too much emphasis is being placed on spiritual things. You will definitely see hypocrites who perform religiously but fail to display resemblance to Jesus Christ. You may feel at times that God is being shoved down your throat. The simple truth is, Olivet is a place where chapel worship, Christlike values, and spiritual life are important. Spiritual people started this place, lead this place, and love this place. Are we flawless in living out our faith? No. You'll see us at our best and worst. But please know

that we are devoted to the establishment of a Christian environment. We hope you will find the God who has found us.

Others come to Olivet primarily because of its Christian environment. The idea of weekly chapel, dorm prayer, Christian professors, and spiritual devotion is energizing. You have been looking forward to this! Welcome! We hope your life is shaped by God as you live here.

Since we're talking about shaping lives in a Christian environment, exactly what is the pattern? Is this about producing cookie-cutter Christians who all march out of Olivet looking and thinking alike? What does an Olivet-shaped person look like? Just what is the grand scheme of this Christian environment?

I'm glad you asked. Walk with me out into your future. Sooner or later (hopefully later) you will stop breathing. You will stand before the God who created you. You will give an account for your life. You will hear one of two things: (a) "Welcome home! You've been a good, faithful servant!" or (b) "Sorry, I don't know you." This is the ultimate final exam. This is about where you will spend eternity. Our goal is to help you live in such a way that when you stand before God, you will be greeted by a huge smile and an open-armed welcome. We are interested in more than equipping you for a 40-year career. We hope to equip you for a 40-billion-year eternity.

To accomplish this, we have looked at the Bible and asked, "What type person will be greeted by God with affirmation and open arms?" Our answer? The person who fully devotes his/her life to following Jesus Christ. This involves loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. It involves loving our fellow humans as we love ourselves. It involves truth-telling, promise-keeping, mercy-giving, justice-doing. When we try to boil it all down, we think there are five descriptors of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

- **They are avid worshipers of God in public and private.**

Olivet strongly encourages you to develop a life of private worship. Developing a private devotional time may be difficult in a noisy dorm. While some roommates find it easy to read the Bible and pray together, others need solitude. Our encouragement is that you intentionally schedule a time each to be alone with God. If this is not possible in your dorm room, the doors of Kelley Prayer Chapel and College Church of the Nazarene stand open, inviting you to spend time with God. In a noisy world, God has chosen to whisper. Only those who quiet themselves before Him will hear Him. A life of Bible reading and prayer will enable you to experience the God who right now is seeking you. A Christian environment is not established because a policy says so. It is created by people who are daily opening themselves to God. We want to encourage you to be an avid private worshiper of God.

We also gather for the public worship of God. The opportunities may overwhelm you. Weekly chapels, prayer bands, revivals, midweek services, weekend involvement in a local congregation, there is no shortage of worship events. Find a pattern of life that connects you with other believers who are worshipping God.

Patterns of worship will help you live in a world with problems. You will make personal decisions about dating behavior, race relationships, alcohol, entertainment, use of money, treatment of the elderly, social justice, abortion, and a thousand other issues. As you live in the Olivet community, you will hear our take on these issues. But that is not enough. We want you to hear the voice of God guiding the development of your conscience and values. We want you to learn to listen to God as you form your lifestyle. We want you to become a God-shaped person. We pray that your times of private and public worship will be transforming.

- **They are devoted friends spiritually connected to other caring believers.**

A Christian environment assumes Christian friendships. We learn from each other. The Bible gives us a long list of what we do for each other: encourage, affirm, help, serve, advise, pray for, build up, warn, strengthen, speak the truth, and restore.

Until these things are happening between people in a community, there is no Christian environment. Christ occupies the space between two people, drawing them together in Himself. As you develop your network of friends, we want to encourage the kind of friendships that will help you mature as a follower of Jesus Christ. Most of your friendships will develop naturally -- during a class, eating in Ludwig, playing ball together, a common midnight craving for Taco Bell. We celebrate your ability to find and maintain close friendships. But, we believe a Christian environment can strengthen these bonds into God-honoring relationships that enrich your life beyond your imagination. When you look back over your life as a Christian someday, it will come down to who you loved, who loved you, and what you built together. With Christ at the center of your life, your relationships will be deepened.

We encourage you to take advantage of Olivet's small group ministry, SALT. These weekly peer gatherings are designed to help you grow together in God. You'll also find other connecting groups in the local church: Sunday School class, Bible study groups, and other ministries. Plug in. Connect with other believers. Don't stand on the sideline and miss the chance to enrich your relationships.

- **They use their God-given spiritual gifts to meet specific human needs.**

We believe that every child of God is given the capacity to serve his/her fellow humans in a specific way. Some of you have the gift of encouragement. Others, the gift of organizing. Still others, counseling. The gift list is long. In a Christian environment, we want to help you discover your giftedness and offer you opportunities to use your gift in the service of people with needs.

What might this look like? It's a political science major debating the justice of governmental economic policy for the poor. It's a sociology student volunteering on the local Hospice program or helping on Saturdays at the Crisis Pregnancy Center. It's an athlete mentoring a 13-year-old boy whose father left the family when he was four. It's a freshman lacing up his Nikes to participate in the annual CROP Walk. It's a football player working with the Kids for Christ choir at College Church. It's a nursing student going to Costa Rica on a summer Work & Witness trip.

These students are using their God-given gifts to meet specific human need. A Christian environment is one where a servant-spirit reigns. People help people. Selfishness is laid aside. "Me first" is left behind. An environment like this shapes you for a life of service in your career, church, neighborhood and world. Our prayer is that you will graduate from Olivet with a passion to serve others.

- **They are credible Christian witnesses in the eyes of believers and non-believers.**

Authenticity is a non-negotiable for your generation. You can smell a phony or spot a fraud a mile away. We want the Olivet environment to enable you to be a credible follower of Jesus. Not only do we want to influence you to follow Jesus, we want to help you become an influencer of others to follow Jesus. Our goal is to help populate this world with Christians who are third grade school teachers, small town doctors, junior high coaches, big city social workers, local politicians, downtown bankers, high rise architects, low rent housing managers, next door neighbors. We want your experience of sharing Christ with friends here at Olivet to prepare you for a lifetime of influencing people toward God. It takes more than a verbal presentation; it takes a credible life. You must be believable, authentic, genuine, real. The worst witness is one whose walk and talk do not match.

One of the great joys of eternity will be to see people who are in heaven because of your influence. Your investments in the stock market and real estate will yield you nothing 100 years from now. But, your investments in people who become Christians because of your influence will pay dividends forever.

- **They are generous givers of time, energy, and resources for God's work, both here and around the world.**

Olivet is about creating "givers." The world has its share of takers. They are here to get all they can as fast as they can to spend it on whatever they want. In a Christian environment, God is shaping givers. You may not view yourself as having the capacity to be a "giver," yet. You are doing all you can do to afford being a university student. You live on a meager budget with little left over. What can you do? Let God stretch your heart. Offer God what you have, not what you don't have. Like the little boy in the Bible with only a sack lunch, offer God your time, energy, and money.

It's not the size of your bank balance or available time that matters most to God. It's the size of your heart. Find ways to get involved in causes that stretch you. There will be plenty—political campaigns, the fight against pornography, the abortion march, world hunger, food drives, working with children, repairing the homes of the elderly. Kankakee County abounds with need, and there's a whole world working just over the county line. Let God begin stretching your heart here and now. Our delight is that Olivet graduates would be viewed as generous people.

I've described the kind of person we are seeking to shape. Take a few minutes and evaluate your life. Locate yourself on the scale.

**1. I am an avid worshiper of God in public and private.**

Really failing

Doing great

I-----I

**2. I am a devoted friend who is spiritually connected to other caring believers.**

Really failing

Doing great

I-----I

**3. I use my God-given gifts to meet the specific needs of my fellow humans.**

Really failing

Doing great

I-----I

**4. I am a credible Christian witness in the eyes of believers and non- believers.**

Really failing

Doing great

I-----I

**5. I am a generous giver of time, energy and resources for God's work.**

Really failing

Doing great

I-----I

**6. What do I intend to do to become a more fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ?**

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

D. \_\_\_\_\_

As an incoming student at Olivet, you have plunged into a new environment. As you encounter things that seem strange or wonderful, realize the reason. We are seeking to cooperate with the God who made you, by shaping you into the person he meant you to be. We are interested in your next four years. And we are interested in your next 40 years. But we're also interested in your well-being 100 years from now.

