Awakening to Destiny

The Inaugural Address by
Robert G. Duffett
9th President of Eastern University

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Awakening to Destiny

I. INTRODUCTION
With joy and thankfulness I gratefully accept the responsibilities of the presidency of Eastern University. It is a privilege to do so. I have and will give my best efforts with all my heart, strength, mind, soul and talent that I possess to better achieve our unique and glorious educational vision. Also, I shall do all in my power to identify, develop, and untether the vast talent we have at Eastern University among faculty, staff, students and our Board of Trustees. If we unleash, focus and deploy this talent to fulfill our mission, there will be no limit to what we together may accomplish and the impact we shall enjoy.

II. GREETINGS
I want to thank all church groups in attendance today, especially the General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches/USA, Dr. Roy Medley. From the beginning, Eastern University has been in covenant with this Baptist group.

I wish to acknowledge the presidents and delegates from sister institutions. Thank you as well for coming. We have with us this afternoon four former presidents of Eastern University: Dr. Daniel Weiss, who later became the General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches/USA; Dr. Wallace Smith, who was president when the Seminary returned to the University; Dr. Manfred Brauch who served as interim president of both the University and Seminary; and Dr. David Black, my immediate predecessor, who was so very helpful to me during the transition.

I want to thank and acknowledge the Board of Trustees; Board Chair Art Hill and Vice Chair Delores Brisbon who planned this extraordinary ceremony and inauguration week, our faculty, staff, platform guests and my administrative team. I could not do this work without your support, encouragement and participation.

Thank you Eastern musicians. I so appreciate your talents. Thank you Mr. David Kim, artist in residence at Eastern University and concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra. I am honored by your presence.

Thank you to all of you on the platform with me who have shared remarks.

Students, thank you. We place all our chips on your intellectual success.

I also want to thank and acknowledge my many family and friends from around the country: my mother, Uncle Jim and brothers, Ray and Dick, are here, as are my wife, Connie, and children Allison and David. I love you all. We share a great adventure. My mother-in-law appropriately put the Eastern University medallion around my neck. Her two brothers, who married us, were life-long American Baptist ministers and graduates of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
III. AWAKENING TO DESTINY

Our task today is to lift up those enduring theological and educational values that gave rise to Eastern’s founding, sustain us today and awaken us to new destiny. The best way to the brightest future begins with an understanding and appreciation of the past. What came before informs the present and illumines our future. Thus, according to Gordon Baker, there were two reasons for the founding of the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (EBTS). He should know; he was one of six founders, attended the founding meeting of the Seminary and was a charter board member who served from our inception until his death in 1963.

Baker argued there was a Baptist minister demand-supply problem at the turn of the last century. Simply put, there were not enough qualified Baptist ministers. And, even more problematic, those who were qualified based on education and culture lacked an adequate “message” for the people. The result was lackluster preaching at best or drivel in the pulpit at worse.1 Eastern was founded to “fix” this intellectual, theological and psychological void among Baptist clergy and provide Baptist churches with pastors who were winsome, biblically informed, culturally relevant and doctrinally sound. Baker did not mince words.

From the beginning, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary was a confessional seminary as was the college it later founded, Eastern Baptist College, now Eastern University. This means we are intentional and clear, not occasional or episodic, about our Christian identity. We are a community of memory where the Orthodox intellectual tradition of the Christian faith is confessed, affirmed, practiced and interpreted for today. Our faith is sustained through debate, discussion, readings, lectures, disagreements and analysis. Gordon Baker hoped Eastern graduates would be scholars and believers. Both are excellent goals today and into the future.

Today, I want to call us to a more expansive, comprehensively rousing vision and destiny. Yes, we still educate effective leaders for Baptist churches and other church groups. We seek more than staking a claim to be a Christian university that improves over time. Our chief goal is not to help students form a Christian worldview - as laudable as that is. Our highest destiny is not to Christianize the academic disciplines or seek some type of integration - too Hegelian for my thinking - as much as I value and have benefited from Christian epistemic perspectives on important issues, questions and academic disciplines. Rather, the chief reason, the cardinal meta-purpose, for Christian higher education is found in a conflict narrative in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-29.

A lawyer in the Matthew and Luke pericope asked Jesus a penetrating question: of all your teachings, what is the most important? Jesus answered quoting the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy (6:5) and Leviticus (19:18), underscoring his self-understanding as a Jew; “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself.”2 The apostle Paul continues in the same trajectory when he writes,

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1 Gordon H. Baker, Why the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary? (Eastern University Archives, Founder’s Day Address, March 17, 1933).
2 This pericope is found in all synoptic gospels with no parallel in John. Luke and Matthew agree against Mark on the identity of the inquirer, a lawyer (scribe in Mark). The question itself is slightly different between Luke and Matthew but radically so in Luke:
   - “Which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew)
   - “Which commandment is first of all?” (Mark)
   - “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke)
“the greatest of all things is love.” And even one of our own, Professor R. J. Snell, argues in his very recently published book, *Authentic Cosmopolitanism: Love, Sin, and Grace in the Christian Community*, that love ought to be the primary purpose of Christian higher education. Why? Snell contends that human beings are more than disembodied minds seeking disembodied information and ideas. Before we are learners, we are human beings with desires, affections and seeking love.³ Our meta-purpose, the end of all of our teaching, learning, service, faith, reason and justice, is in the service of love. Perhaps we ought to say that well informed faith, reason and justice are a practice or application of love.

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How then do we awaken to our destiny as a learning community of love? I think there are three ways.

1. **We Awaken to the Importance of Teaching Well the Liberal Arts**

If love is our goal, as Jesus taught, teaching the liberal arts is our missional means to that end. Although Eastern University began as a seminary in 1925, its faculty soon offered college classes and a correspondence course of study, followed by a college division, and then in 1952 a full college – Eastern Baptist College. The goal of both the college classes and ultimately the college itself was to upgrade the academic quality of seminary students in Philadelphia, as well as for those in ministry who could not move to Philadelphia. Academic quality has long been an important educational priority. Long before the Campolo College of Graduate and Professional Studies, Esperanza College, online education, for-profit colleges and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), the faculty of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary saw access as a way to enhance academic excellence for those who could not come to our campus in Philadelphia.

On the day the Seminary opened, Eastern consisted of four schools: theology, religious education, missions, and sacred music. A careful look at the early curriculum of EBTS reveals its educational vision and values - a divinity curriculum steeped in the liberal arts. Included within the curriculum of the four schools were; ancient languages, rhetoric, philosophy, theology, history, psychology, sociology, careful literary methods of interpreting ancient texts, music theory, composition and history. The liberal arts, within theological education, were viewed by our founders and first professors as the best way to form Baptist students into effective leaders with a “vital message” for our Baptist churches.

The liberal arts tradition traces back to the classical Greek period as a small set of intellectual skills that later became academic disciplines. Some of these skills are grammar, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, astronomy and music. The term “liberal” is not the opposite of conservative and does not define or describe a particular political or religious viewpoint. Rather, the term “liberal” means freedom. The vision of liberal education is audacious. Those who earnestly study these subjects will acquire insight and habit of mind that frees them to better become the person they were created to be. Math and science develop analytical skills; history, understanding how past events influence the present; sociology, how social systems shape us and our values; psychology, human development, personality and who we are and will become; ethics and philosophy, how we shall live; and the arts develop our creative capabilities. Add courses in speech and writing and a student is well on the way to establishing an intellectual and interpersonal foundation to acquire a first job, life, and become a free person.4

This type of education reclaims personal and social virtue, through readings, discussion, writing, conversation and dorm debates. Great ideas arouse us to better discern the good, right, beneficial, true and beautiful.5 Maybe this is what St. Paul meant when he said, “whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, excellent and good;

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think and ponder these things.” Philippians 4:8. The result of this pondering is freedom, hence the word liberal arts - freedom to think, be, do, pursue opportunities beyond dreams, and free to love God and humanity. As early as 1765, the second President of the United States John Adams contended that education is a prerequisite for freedom - civic and religious. From the ancient Greeks to the Apostle Paul to John Adams, Eastern University’s curriculum is grounded in the liberal arts. Our faculty makes a constructive difference among our students teaching these liberal arts. According to Eastern University institutional research data, our students rate our faculty as exceptionally knowledgeable in their field, great advisors, and Eastern students are more satisfied with their education here than most others attending national four-year private colleges.

The wisdom of the ages attests to the power of teaching and the transformation begat by liberal learning. Curriculum does not teach, assessment does not teach, the syllabi do not teach, presidents do not teach, Massive Open Online Courses do not teach, technology does not teach. Teachers teach! Teaching, research and service are kept alive by living, breathing individual teachers who explain, dialogue, question and interact with students.

To my teaching colleagues, let me affirm the importance of your role, encourage your efforts, and strengthen your spirit for the transforming task of teaching. Research clearly demonstrates that student/faculty interaction has a substantive and significant positive correlation with every, note, every academic attainment outcome as measured by college GPA, degree completion, graduation with honors, and matriculation in a graduate and professional school. The correlation between academic achievement and hours per week students spend with professors, especially out of class, is so high, I sometimes wonder why officials from the federal Department of Education don’t spend more time considering how faculty may spend more time interacting with students. Perhaps the educational reform we seek as a society is right in front of us in the form of professorial time with students. Eastern University faculty keeps alive faith, reason and justice by their presence, which challenges and supports our students to better love God and humanity.

6 The main verb in this text is best translated “to think about or consider or ponder.” A careful analysis of the language reveals something about the intent of the author. “Think about” is a present tense, middle voice, imperative mood, second person, plural verb. The imperative mood in Greek, like English, is that of summons, command, exhortation or appeal to the will. The middle voice has no real parallel in contemporary English verb structure. It denotes that the subject, somehow, participates in the action of the main verb. In this case, Paul appeals to the Philippians (the community, thus second person plural) to indeed ponder, consider and think as a way to acquire the virtues that follow. A translation giving careful attention to the nuances of the Greek language might be something like this: “Finally brothers, (i.e., the church of Philippi based on to whom the epistle was addressed 1:1, and the second person plural of the main verb), ponder anew whatever is true, inspiring, right, pure, admirable, noble, virtuous and praiseworthy. [that you might acquire them, implied but not stated]”

It would be a stretch to suggest the apostle Paul was embracing the outcomes of liberal education. In this parenetic section of the epistle, the list is the expected attitudes, focused intent and behaviors of those touched by the Gospel. However, the link between the ends of liberal learning and Christian discipleship as enumerated here is strikingly similar and intriguing.

2. We Awaken Our Destiny to Better Love God and Humanity by Recapturing a Sense of Vocation

In his book, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, Studs Terkel interviewed scores of people about their jobs – masons, steelworkers, stockbrokers and educators just to name a few. Nora Watson, who Terkel interviewed, best summarized both the problem and hope people hold for their jobs and careers. Most of us, said Ms. Watson, “are looking for a calling, not a job. Our jobs are too small for our soul.”

Nora Watson gets at the yearning for a sense of vocation; something more than a paycheck and selling one’s labor from 9:00 to 5:00. Vocation is the Latin translation of the Greek word “call.” Both words have a theological hue, shaped in the West by Hebrew and Christian scripture. The terms “call,” “calling,” or “called” are used over 140 times in the New Testament. Various Old Testament writers, throughout time and literary genres, portray God calling the patriarchs, including Abraham (Genesis 12) and the nation of Israel for God’s own purposes. God’s work and will via calling the nation of Israel and the church is to benefit “all tribes, nations and tongues.” The writers from four different New Testament letters in four pericopes (I Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:4-10; I Peter 4:7-11); affirm God as the source of individual gifts for the purpose of serving communal human need. In its most basic form, call or vocation, is the promise of Emmanuel; God with us in all aspects of life, including our work.

I see two primary elements of vocation. First, as noted above, as far back as canonical Scripture, all human beings have gifts, talents and strengths which are foundational to excellent performance and vocation. Second, our experiences are signposts to vocation, especially yearnings, burdens, passions and interests about something - human need, a deeply felt cause, wanting to lead, fixing something. Vocation is the blending of talent, passion and insight to some role. Vocation is talent fueled by the heart’s cry. Pay attention to both. God may be drawing near.

Focusing on vocation may have a positive and unintended consequence for Eastern University. Perhaps we ought to aspire to a national role in mitigating the increasing cynicism among college students, university faculty and business leaders regarding the significant disparity of perspectives on the outcomes of higher education. Unfortunately, such cynicism has demonstrable roots. For instance, according to the 2013 Cooperative Institutional Research Program that surveyed more than 165,000 first-year college students last fall, the top three reasons first-year students, ours included, came to college was:

- 1) To acquire a job (86.3%);
- 2) To learn more things they were interested in (81.6%); and
- 3) To receive training for a specific career (77.1%).

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In a faculty survey by the same group at UCLA, the top goals faculty noted as essential or important for undergraduates to achieve were:

1. Developing the ability to think critically (99.5%);
2. Assessing the quality and reliability of information (95.7%); and
3. Mastering knowledge in a discipline (94.1%).

Wharton Professor Peter Cappelli adds to the discussion in his book, *Why Good People Can’t Get Jobs: The Skills Gap and What Companies Can Do About It*. He tries to dispel the frequent lament of business leaders that they can’t find skilled workers and have difficulty filling positions due to lack of talent in the workforce. Many blame colleges for this lack; some question the very need for a college education.

Recapturing a sense of vocation may, perhaps, resolve this disconnect for all groups. Challenging college students to vocation stirs them to serious study and to raise their academic expectations and performance for at least two reasons. First, if vocation is a sense of awakened destiny, as the church has affirmed for centuries, then a college education is the intellectual process that sharpens one’s talents and gifts and thoughtfully focuses passion. If better fulfilling one’s vocation is not sufficient motivation for students to study “long and hard” then, hopefully, a second reason may motivate students to “burn the midnight oil.” Potential employers say skills acquired from a liberal arts education are essential to acquire a job, be promoted to increasingly responsible positions and to effectively perform one’s vocation.

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14 Sylvia Hurtado, et al., *Undergraduate Teaching Faculty: The 2010-2011 HERI Faculty Survey* (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA) 48.

15 Peter Cappelli, *Why Good People Can’t Find Jobs: The Skills Gap and What Companies Can Do About It* (Philadelphia: Wharton Digital Press, 2012). Cappelli points out business itself, not university education, is the chief culprit on why good people can’t get jobs. With the downturn in the economy in recent years, business has been more selective, demanding increased skill sets from all applicants. Also, over the years, American businesses have reduced both their budget and role in job training. They expect universities to fill this void.

Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey of 318 employers. Respondents were executives, owners of the companies, CEOs, presidents and vice presidents. This study reported their perceptions on what kind of learning college students need in order to succeed in today’s economy. The results sound as if they came from a faculty meeting of a liberal arts college. Chief findings include:

1. 95% want graduates who will innovate.
2. 93% seek candidates who can think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems.
3. 90% want employees who demonstrate ethical judgment, integrity, intercultural skills and the capacity for continued and new learning.
4. More than 75% want college graduates who are able to accomplish five learning outcomes on the job: critical thinking; problem-solving; written communication; oral communication; and the ability to apply knowledge to real world settings.

SOURCE: "It Takes More Than a Major; Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success." Hart Research Associates, April 10, 2013

Hart, and to a lesser extent Cappelli, demonstrate that many business leaders value the outcomes of liberal education. Quite clearly and perhaps surprisingly to some, faculty and business leaders seek the same outcomes from college graduates. However, they perhaps use a different language to express their similar expectations. A renewed emphasis on vocation might pull together the disparate worlds of business leaders, university faculty and college students (see below for further explication of this theme).
Education for vocation is not a “ticket” to a better job with more compensation. Rather, grades, education and, most importantly, one’s learning are indispensable foundations for successfully accomplishing calling, vocation and fulfilling one’s awakened destiny. A college education is not a trifling matter!

My call for Eastern University faculty to focus on vocation does not diminish the value of liberal education, but rather enhances it. Let me reaffirm to my faculty colleagues the wisdom of the ages. The liberal arts are important means to discover, prepare and successfully accomplish vocation. The power of ideas, intrinsic to liberal education, and the great teaching within Eastern classrooms will set off a chain reaction of intellectual illumination among our students, serious about their vocation, that will change the world in small and perhaps large ways. Eastern faculty members; your teaching is much more than preparing lectures and grading tests. Your teaching and life forms students morally, spiritually and intellectually for vocation.

A sense of vocation challenges business leaders, too. Vocation in a secular sense points toward work that is meaningful, significant and of service to society. If a job is merely a transaction-time on task for pay - no wonder millions of employees report being disengaged from their work and clock watch until the weekend. The challenge of vocation to employers is to exhibit how employment in their organization is more than just a paycheck and helps make a positive contribution to society.

Could it be that the results of accomplishing the challenge of vocation may be motivated students, passionate professors and engaged and productive employees?

Brother Lawrence, centuries ago, provides an instructive example. Excluded from more important roles due to lack of education, he demonstrated how mundane work like kitchen duties and cobbling shoes were an important vocation. Likewise similar types of jobs are still vocations and are important for our communities today, sacred or secular!

Finally, do not mistake a sense of vocation for vocational or vocationalism. Yes, all relate to careers after graduation but they are vastly different. It’s like comparing a water hose to a raging waterfall - not the same thing at all.

Maybe the best way to understand call and vocation is to see it lived out. To that end, consider Bill and Joyce. Both are graduates of Christian liberal arts colleges.

Bill is a third grade teacher and defensive coordinator at a small school in downstate Illinois. His father is a Baptist minister but he heard a different call to be a third grade teacher and football coach, ultimately for the Fighting Falcons in small-town Midwest. He made a vow to God. For the next 30 years (he already has 10 years of experience), every student in his class, not just the smart, motivated, and those with intact families, will learn to read better, know their numbers, like science and feel loved before the last day of class at the end of the year. He wants each player on his football team to learn to compete, play as a team and lose graciously. He hopes football, as fun as it is in and of itself, will be instrumental to larger ends. His players will become better people, students, employees, husbands and fathers.
Think about the impact Bill will have over the course of a lifetime - 20 third graders a year and 40 football players per season. Bill is a teacher and football coach but lives out vocation even though few know him and he only garners headlines in the small town Illinois weekly newspaper when his team wins.

Joyce was the first person in her family both to attend and graduate from college. She grew up on a large Colorado grain and cattle ranch. She never thought about going to college until a traveling group from a nearby Christian university sang at her church camp. With that positive influence and her good grades in high school, she decided to go to that college. In her first year she had a spiritual awakening through a campus ministry Bible study and opted to major in nursing. Biology and chemistry came easily to her. She was around animals and plants all her life. And, all the discussion on genetic manipulation only reminded her of kitchen table conversation about what type of seed should be planted this spring and breeding plans for the herd. She finished her AA nursing degree and got a job at a community hospital where she sensed a call to oncology. She finished both her BS and MS in nursing and gravitated to a large hospital attached to a research university. Now, about 40 years of age with two children, she works with the most difficult cancer cases and patients in the region. She noticed while working on the cancer ward that some of the sickest patients seem to almost die alone. Perhaps both family and medical practitioners knew nothing could be done. But Joyce decided to do something. Her vocation was healing - the body, if possible, and the soul when necessary. Her vocation is a paradox. She plays chess with the disease, hoping for a checkmate, but also provides love, compassion and dignity during the last hours of life. I would say Joyce is more than a health care professional and a nurse. Joyce discovered and lives out vocation for the significant benefit of her patients and their families.

Eastern graduates, men and women like Bill and Joyce, every year—quiet, not in the public eye, yet in small ways they change the world.

3. **We Awaken Our Destiny to Better Love God and Humanity by Affirming the Possibility of Hope**

A college education is an expression and experience of faith and hope. Students pay tuition, delay gratification, and acquire student loans - in hope. The meta-vision of an Eastern University education – to better love God and humanity – is also an affirmation of hope and commitment to the future. All Eastern University students, whether in the College of Arts and Sciences, Campolo College of Graduate and Professional Studies, Esperanza College or Palmer Theological Seminary, look to their future hopefully, anticipating meaningful work with good pay, someone to love, supportive and fun friends, making a difference in the lives of others and shaping our community.

If tomorrow looks foreboding or if one’s only vision of the future is something like Dante’s inscription on the gate of hell – “abandon all hope, you who enter here” – or all you see is mayhem complete with a slim possibility to survive, no one would bother to attend Eastern University or any college. All would join the writer of Ecclesiastes named Qoheleth and sing his chorus, “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. There is nothing new or good under the sun.” But that is not our vision or lot in life. Our liberal arts education, incarnated through our great faculty, attending to vocation, is a searing challenge to the writer of Ecclesiastes and the gaggle of critics who think we are wrongheaded intellectually and theologically. The many Qoheleth critics of higher education
today, almost for the first time in American history, wonder if a college degree is overrated, too expensive, a big-hat, no-cattle endeavor, whose chief goal is to provide jobs for college presidents, bloated administration and the best union in America - tenured faculty - all paid for by financially stressed parents and indebted students. Other critics seek to gut the liberal arts. It goes something like this: what can you do with a fill-in-the-blank major? Some public officials seek to pare the curriculum in some state school systems and support only majors that have an immediate economic benefit to the state. Their goal, unlike our goal for you, is to train students and fit them, not to educate them for vocation.

The evidence is compelling and clear: a college degree is good for society and for the individual.

Sociologist Robert Putnam, in his book Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, cites obtaining a four-year college degree as the most important predictor of civic engagement - the stuff that makes democracy possible. What is civic engagement? Simple things like voting, giving blood, writing Congress about an important issue, volunteering, attending a public meeting, membership in a church or civic groups like Rotary or Kiwanis. Surprising to me, Putnam's data says education, i.e. a four-year college degree, is a more important predictor of civic engagement than social status or economic advantage. No wonder the author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of United States, Thomas Jefferson, was so passionate on the importance of education for democracy to flourish. In a letter to Charles Yancey in January 1816, Jefferson wrote, "if the nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was or never will be. Education will rescue us from Toryism, fanaticism and indifference." I wonder if Jefferson had college education in mind when he wrote this letter. Three years later, in 1819, he founded the University of Virginia.

If hope motivates us to study, and those with a college degree are disproportionately engaged in civic life, a college degree will also enhance employment prospects and economic status. A recent study concluded that liberal arts majors, those who graduated with a major such as philosophy, psychology, communication, or the fine arts, are as likely to do as well financially as those who graduated with majors in business, finance and accounting. Additionally, a Pew Research Study analyzing the most recent Census Bureau data on income vividly demonstrates the growing income accruing to college educated households. College grads earn nearly double compared to workers with a high school diploma.

As far as the value of a college degree is concerned, the Qoheleths of today are dead wrong! As Warren Buffett has frequently said to college students in his traveling caravan to university campuses, “The best investment you’ll ever make is in yourself.” The hopeful promise of a college education still pays remarkable financial dividends.

18 Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly, How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment (Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014).
IV. CONCLUSION
These proceedings today, and concert tonight, occur during the Christian calendar of Lent - Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday. It is a time in the Christian liturgical year that encourages prayer, reflection and self-denial. Lent is a journey toward what Christians attest as the meta-hope of the cosmos. The epicenter of this hope is the story of Jesus. He spoke good news of the coming reign of God. What does that future look like?—Healing, blessing, community and inclusion. Easter faith asserts the ultimate triumph of God over alienation, death and evil. This meta-hope is so consequential that canonical scripture authors resort to metaphor to describe it. The triumph of God is like: a new birth (John 3:3); a new day; a new identity (II Corinthians 5:17); a new creation (Rev.21:1); a new covenant (Heb. 12:24); a new song (Rev. 5:9); an open-door (Rev. 3:8); a new hope (Eph.2:12-13); a new community(Acts 2); and a new beginning (II Corinthians 5:17).

From the founding of the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary 89 years ago last month until today, the triumph of God still guides, shapes and gives us hope. In the end, all of our efforts and educational outcomes point to the meta-hope of the universe: God has the last word. There is a good future and good destiny for all.
Dr. Robert G. Duffett is the 9th President of Eastern University in St. Davids, PA. A Christian university with about 4300 students, Eastern University integrates faith, reason and justice into all of its undergraduate, graduate, professional, international, urban and Seminary programs. Dr. Duffett began his tenure as President on July 1, 2013, after serving in a variety of leadership roles in Christian higher education for the past 27 years.

Dr. Duffett says, “Eastern University’s commitment to integrating faith, reason and justice aligns with my passion for promoting education that blends spiritual formation, intellectual substance and social action. My life has focused on fostering faith and resourcing creativity that strengthens institutions of the church.”

Dr. Duffett’s long relationship with Eastern University began when his pastor, an Eastern University graduate, encouraged him to pursue a career in ministry at his alma mater. Duffett reported, “I looked seriously at Eastern, but I wanted to play football even more, and Eastern didn’t field a football team.” He landed instead at Bethel College where he played football for two years and found his future wife, Connie, a life-long American Baptist. Her two uncles, both Palmer Seminary of Eastern University graduates, married them.

Before coming to Eastern University, Dr. Duffett served for 13 years as President of Dakota Wesleyan University (DWU) in South Dakota. While there, he achieved national prominence for establishing the George McGovern Library, Museum and Center for Leadership and Public Service. Other key initiatives included the Kelley Center for Entrepreneurship and the DWU Center for Talent Development, a collaboration with the Gallup Organization to strengthen student success by coordinating personal talents, educational goals and post-graduate planning. Dr. Duffett completed the largest comprehensive fundraising and building construction campaign in DWU history, exceeding $40 million. Academically, DWU added programs and locations, increased its academic profile, enhanced diversity and expanded student enrollments during Dr. Duffett’s tenure.

Dr. Duffett took a leadership role in advocating for greater government support of students at South Dakota’s private colleges. In opposition to the governor’s position that state funding be limited to students at public universities, Dr. Duffett successfully argued for funding that attached to students rather than institutions. Additional efforts at the state legislature contributed to the passage of the LEAP legislation, which provides scholarships benefitting lower-income South Dakotans.

While serving as President of DWU, Dr. Duffett was a frequent contributor to newspapers throughout the state and region. He wrote dozens of columns and editorials on academic, religious and historic subjects, including the “Faith of our Founding Fathers” series which ran in Mitchell, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Watertown, SD. He has written extensively about the GI Bill, the need for scholarships, and reducing student debt. Dr. Duffett has continued this publishing outreach with opinion pieces in Pennsylvania newspapers on these important topics. His most recent publication, ”The Gospel According to George McGovern,” appeared in the March, 2014 issue of Sojourners Magazine. In addition to writing and speaking engagements, Dr. Duffett has taught religion classes.

Prior to DWU, Dr. Duffett served as Provost and Academic Dean at Ottawa University, and as Director of Doctoral Studies at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, IL. He also served as Campus Pastor and Dean of Christian Faith and Life at Bethel University in St. Paul, MN. A native of Youngstown, OH, Dr. Duffett attained his Bachelor of Arts in psychology and Greek from Bethel College, St. Paul, MN. His Master of Divinity degree was earned at Bethel Theological Seminary. His Master of Theology degree in theology and communication was earned at Princeton Theological Seminary, and his PhD in organizational theory/management and historical theology was secured at the University of Iowa. Bob and his wife, Connie, reside in Paoli, PA. They have a son and a daughter, both in college.
THE MISSION AND VISION
OF EASTERN UNIVERSITY

MISSION
Eastern University is a Christian university dedicated to the preparation of undergraduate, theological and graduate students for thoughtful and productive lives of Christian faith, leadership and service. The mission is confirmed and celebrated when graduates believe their way into knowledgeable action that influences the world in substantive ways.

VISION
Eastern University is dedicated to ideas, inquiry, and the development of people of faith who will enhance the quality of society and the church. Toward that end, Eastern will continue to expand its formative role in the world as a university in which knowledge and wisdom are imbued, Christlike engagement is inspired, and stewardship is modeled.