

# EARLHAM

Office of the President

September 1, 2008

Dear Friends:

The rising energy is unmistakable and infectious. In early August, the campus is languid in the summer heat. And then, in the space of a few days, the pace picks up, the passions that energize Earlham's commitments are again everywhere to be seen. Students and faculty who have been away on distant adventures return, eager to share what they have seen and done, and just as eager to greet old friends and welcome newcomers.

Excellence, integrity, justice, truth-seeking, community: these are all Earlham-defining terms. And passion runs through them all, giving everything we do an extra intensity, a vitality that becomes a hallmark of this very special college. From a president's daybook at the very beginning of this new academic year, here are some glimpses.

August 19. I am walking to Runyan Center for the faculty dinner that, for many of us, marks the true beginning of the academic year. Even half-way up the drive from the G Street entrance, I can hear the animated buzz of people delighting in one another's company. As I come into view of those gathered on the patio, I can see big smiles and hugs. The delight in one another's company, in this gathering, is palpable. This is passion for community.

August 20. The next morning, the faculty is gathered in the Hancock Room for Faculty Retreat, which this year is on liberal education. The room is filled, and electric. We always begin Faculty Retreat with a time of silent gathering, and because there are always newcomers to the community, we ask someone to explain why we begin with silence. This year it is Professor of Spanish and Hispanic Studies Kathy Taylor. "The silence helps to frame our discussions and deliberations with a generosity of spirit and trust in ourselves and each other to discern the best way forward to work toward our common goals," she says. This "centering," she adds, "suggests an inward focus of concentration and balance by letting go of the many distractions and demands of our daily lives. Yet this apparent pulling inward also creates a deeper openness and outward listening. This kind of openness and trust in the process of seeking truth together is at the core of Quaker values in education and is, I believe, at the heart of our mission at Earlham." This is passion for listening.

August 27. It's the first day of classes. Using the faculty's e-mail listserv, Professor of English Mary Lacey writes to her colleagues to share a particular experience in one of her classes. And she adds this reflection, "But I think what makes me love this kind of course most is the passion I feel to learn about others' minds and hearts, on my way to becoming both a better thinker and more generous person. Working to know [what the author really cares about], or to understand what other members of the class make of it, stretches my intellect, my imagination and my capacity for empathy. I learn from books as well as from people in my world..., and everything I encounter has the potential to push me beyond my previous limitations." This is passion for thinking and passion for caring.

August 28. A student comes to tell me about her summer Project for Peace. Safia Ansari was one of five Earlham students awarded grants for such projects with funds from philanthropist Kathryn Wasserman Davis

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and from the College. She spent 10 weeks in a rural Nicaraguan village helping its residents plant 500 fruit trees to help this community recover from hurricane damage. A short while later, a colleague stops in to tell me about a presentation that two other Projects for Peace grantees, Jamie Utt and Dan Mahle, had done for new students entitled “Change from Within: A Verbal Vehicle for Peace and Youth Empowerment.” She urges that we invite them to do the same presentation to new students next fall. This is passion for service, and passion for justice and peace.

August 29. I am in the Coffee Shop having lunch and enjoying a number of brief conversations with faculty colleagues about how their first week of classes is going. To a person they are excited about these first class meetings. “My group seems unusually willing to take risks,” says one. “I like the questions they’re asking, right at the beginning,” says another. Still others share interesting ways they’ve revised their courses over the summer. This is passion for learning.

August 30. I am sitting in the stands of the new Darrell M. Beane Memorial Stadium watching our football team scrimmage against Hanover College. I ask the woman sitting next to me if she has a son on the field. She points him out (points out his roommate, too) and tells me how excited he is to be at Earlham. (I can see how proud and excited she is.) This is passion for new challenges, and passion for being the best you can be.

August 31. I am at College Meeting for Worship; the speaker is senior Joe Trueblood, and his topic is “respect.” Director of Campus Ministries Kelly Burk has arranged a series of College Meetings for Worship this fall to address the testimonies that organize “Principles and Practices of the Earlham Community.” Joe talks movingly about the difficulty of showing respect to those who carry race hatred. Out of the silence, someone talks about respect meaning “to see again,” to see more deeply and more truly that of God in others. This is passion for the deepest of truths.

September 1. Director of Libraries and Coordinator of Information Services Tom Kirk (entering his final year before retirement) sends out an e-mail to faculty inviting them to a series of Technology, Instruction, Pizza (TIP) Workshops. “We are making a special effort this fall to make sure faculty get the information they need to make wise choices whether to use a technology in their teaching,” he writes. “To do that we have created a series of pizza lunches each with a focus on a particular technology and how it might contribute to your teaching.” This is passion for lifelong learning.

And so it goes at Earlham still in the earliest days of the semester: our commitments to excellence everywhere to be seen, our purposes unfurled, our passions ablaze.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Doug Bennett