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Our First Augustana Christmas | Augustana College

Christmas Reflections 2003

Steven C. Bahls, President of Augustana College

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"
Isaiah 9:6

What a season this is to celebrate! These words from Isaiah, which Handel set to such inspiring music in the Messiah, remind us of the majesty of Christmas. As the Augustana College community celebrates Christmas, we are thankful for the gift of our Savior.

This is a very special Christmas for my wife, Jane and me - our first at Augustana College. As we think about this season, we are grateful for our abundant blessings.

Jane referred to a Bahls family tradition during her homily at the Joy of Christmas service at the Augustana Lutheran Church in Andover. We see our Christmas tree and its eclectic decoration as a way of counting our blessings. Each ornament on our tree--family heirlooms, things our children have made, gifts from friends, mementos from our travels--represents a different blessing in our lives, with the light of Christ shining through them all. This Christmas, we are very prominently reminded of how deeply blessed we are. We needed a ten-foot tree for all of the ornaments!

I'd like to spend a few minutes with you reflecting what "blessings" I would hang on the Augustana College tree, if I had a symbol or ornament for each of them. Each blessing is embodied by a moment when I have seen the light of God shine on the college. Here are ten blessings, represented as ornaments that I've been thinking about.

The first ornament would have Greek letters to celebrate student organizations and social life at Augustana College. Student social organizations build friends and support groups that last a lifetime. This past summer, Bruce Milligan, one of our beloved trustees, suddenly died of a heart attack. He left a young family behind. How heartening it was to see his fraternity brothers from decades ago surround his family with their love and support. On a more upbeat note, if you haven't been to the raucous Homecoming Sing contest and the crowning of the Vi-King and Vi-Queen, you should do so. The friendships celebrated there will stay with those students through whatever joys and heartbreaks come their way.

The second ornament would be a football, to symbolize the blessing of having a strong, competitive athletic program with coaches who support the school's broader mission of helping students grow in body, mind and

spirit. Though I have never been much of an athlete, it is clear to me that athletics builds character. This year's football banquet was a case in point. Future scientists, dentists, teachers, and businessmen gave moving tributes to how football helps them focus on personal and academic excellence.

The third ornament would be a miniature chef's hat and a miniature garden rake on a bright red ribbon. The pride that our hourly employees have in the college is awesome. I've watched food service workers consistently greet our students with a smile and a kind word, each and every morning, noon and evening. Our grounds crews were asked to make the campus look good for my installation. They went further - they made the campus shine. Members of our secretarial staff consistently walk the extra mile for Augie students. The pride our staff throughout this campus shows is an inspiration to me and to the faculty.

The fourth ornament would be a cross, to symbolize campus ministries. Whether it be our own campus ministry programs or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, we are blessed with strong ministries and a campus-wide commitment to help students grow in body, mind AND spirit. About the time of my inauguration, I was consistently working into the evening to address the many details of the fall term. One Wednesday evening, two students stopped by to say that they had noticed my long hours and invited me to join them at Wednesday Evening Prayer. I agree to do so. The presence of the Holy Spirit was abundant in that service - students lifting up their joys and concerns in a loving Christian community.

The fifth ornament would be a trumpet. What a great music programs we have! From the flute choir concert to the Messiah, each concert we've attended at the college has been heavenly. Few can doubt the presence of God at Augustana concerts. The recent production of Godspell was an inspiring theatrical production where students shared their talents and faith with others. Like the founding presidents of this college, I love music. We are blessed with so much of it, so beautifully presented.

The sixth ornament would be a pine tree, to symbolize the beauty of our campus. We've had a chance now to see the campus abloom in the spring, lush and lazy in the summer, aglow with color in the fall, and serenely snowy in the winter. The college is also blessed to have three nature preserves. One, Green Wing, is particularly special. I had the opportunity to hike through the preserve with some of our biology, botany and zoology faculty members. I felt like a student again as they discussed the relationship between their disciplines and how those relationships were evident at Green Wing. Marguerite of Valois was correct when she said: "Science conducts us, step by step, through the whole range of creation, until we arrive, at length, at God"

The seventh ornament would be a cell phone! It would represent the relationships our students have with parents and friends back home. What memories Jane and I had as we watched tearful departures of family members and friends who had just dropped off their students. We were reminded of the years of love, support and nurturing each parent had given their students and our special responsibilities to continue to provide our students with a caring environment. That evening dozens of students were standing outside their dorms using their cell phones. I image that most were calling parents and other loved ones to say "Yes, I am going to be all right here."

The eighth ornaments is a gavel - to symbolize faculty meetings and meetings of the administrative team. What a

faculty and administrative team we have at Augustana! Tom Tredway assembled this great team. We have a loyal, independent, tenacious faculty committed to using the tools of faculty self governance to build an outstanding college. We are indeed blessed to have experienced administrators who view their job at Augustana as a calling, to help our students grow in body, mind and spirit.

The ninth ornament is an apple, to symbolize the enterprise of teaching. Our faculty is second to none. I was moved by a story I heard earlier this week from a member of the religion department. One student did a research project on how Paul's writings were used, rather misused, by neo-Nazi groups. He printed the pages of several hateful websites, glued them to a large board and used those pages as a background for images he drew of men and women in a concentration camp. The professor learned, as did I, from this student's passion. In moments like this, I see the hand of God and remember why he places us here. Our faculty is second to none in their commitment to our students.

The tenth ornament is a star for the top of the tree. The star represents our graduates and friends. I've met so many graduates and been invigorated by their descriptions of the role Augustana has played in their lives. We judge ourselves by how the world views our graduates. Our graduates share not only their time, talents and treasure with us, they share their enthusiasm and commitment. I even met a 91-year-old graduate in Texas who wears her Augustana sweatshirt while she lifts weight and does Tai Chi. I've visited with countless graduates who were inspired by individual Augie faculty members to take courageous stands at work or in their communities. Our graduates are using what they gained at Augustana in the service of God.

Thank you all for your part in supporting Augustana College. Best wishes for a blessed Holiday Season.

Excerpted from a December 2003 presentation to the Old Main Society of Augustana College



Accounting	Communication Studies	Geography	Music	Pre-Optometry
Africana Studies	Computer Science	Geology	Music Education	Pre-Pharmacy
Anthropology	Creative Writing	German Studies	Music Performance	Pre-Physical Therapy
Art	Economics	Greek	Neuroscience	Pre-Physician Assistant
Art History	Elementary Education	Graphic Design	Non-Profit Leadership	Pre-Seminary
Asian Studies	Engineering	History	Development	Pre-Veterinary Medicine
Biochemistry	Engineering Physics	International Business	Philosophy	Psychology
Biology	English (Literature)	Japanese	Physics	Religion
Business Administration	English (Writing)	Landscape Architecture	Political Science	Scandinavian Studies
Chemistry	Environmental Management	Latin	Pre-Dentistry	Secondary Education
Chinese	& Forestry	Library and Information	Pre-Law	Sociology
Classics	Environmental Studies	Science	Pre-Medicine	Sociology (Social Welfare)
Communication Sciences	Ethics	Mathematics	Pre-Music Therapy	Spanish
& Disorders	French	Multimedia Journalism	Pre-Nursing	Theatre
		& Mass Communication	Pre-Occupational Therapy	Women's & Gender Studies