



TO: SPU Faculty, Staff, and Students

RE: One Last Message for the Year

DATE: June 4, 2010

One Last Opportunity for the Year. As we head down the stretch of another exciting year, I want to take one last opportunity to communicate with our campus community. I have a few things on my mind that can't wait until fall. So bear with me.

Our Aspiration Toward Christian Community. Throughout the year, I have been thinking a lot about our signature commitment *to model grace-filled community and practice radical reconciliation*. I've had a chance to talk with any number of people on this topic. I've also been reflecting and reading and writing about how we might get even better at building a *community of grace and trust and love, a community of openness and transparency and honesty*. This is hugely important to me.

Part of this involves our standards of behavior, and in what follows I want to offer some new clarity about those standards. We talked about this at our May Board of Trustees meeting, and the Board affirms what I am presenting here today.

First, a Guiding Text. I have written recently about that rich text in Romans 12 where Paul issues an extraordinary call to live and work in Christian community.

Let love of the Christian community show itself in mutual affection. Esteem others more highly than yourself. With unflagging zeal, aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Let hope keep you joyful; in trouble stand firm; persist in prayer; contribute to the needs of God's people, and practice hospitality. . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in agreement with one another. Do not be proud, but be ready to mix with humble people. Do not keep thinking how wise you are. . . . If possible, so far as it lies with you, live at peace with all. Romans 12:12-18 (REB)

Surely we fall short of this high standard all the time. Most certainly we are tested by a culture that runs in very different directions. But this is it, isn't it? This is our guide, our hope, our aspiration. We've got to anchor ourselves in texts like these again and again.

But, How Then Shall We Live? Along the way we have also asked this question: What *standards of behavior* are important as we reach toward Paul's powerful vision for Christian community? Why such standards? Why define standards at all? And here's the point: The Christian community over time has sought to define certain standards of living because we want to live and model healthy lives and flourishing communities.

So What Standards Do We Hold High? First of all, we have always tried to call ourselves to high standards of integrity and honesty, openness and transparency. When we violate these things, we need to hold ourselves accountable.

Second, we have called ourselves to become a worshipping community. We want to place the Scriptures at the center of who we are as a university, embracing the Christian story, becoming biblically and theologically educated. This is another one of our signature commitments.

Third, over time we have called ourselves to counter-cultural commitments about human sexuality, lifting high the biblical ideal of marriage.

These are some of the things that help to define a flourishing community at Seattle Pacific.

But Here's the Challenge. As we set standards of behavior, we must also seek new clarity as we move through new moments in time. *I believe we are in one of those moments where we need to clarify our standard on the use of alcohol.*

As we think about the use of alcohol, we must recognize immediately the huge national crisis roiling campuses across the country surrounding the use and abuse of alcohol. And so we must design this standard carefully, with an eye on the dangers and damage that alcohol can cause in our lives and our families, in our churches and on our campuses.

At the same time, though, students have come to me often over time saying they don't understand the restrictions on students of legal age. They feel our policy is out of touch with students' lives, out of touch with the practices of most of their families and their churches. One student told me last week that students want to be trusted. She got the danger part, she said, but she felt students deserved to make responsible choices on their own.

And So It Is Time for Some New Clarity. We want to continue to be proactive with our program of alcohol education. We will continue to encourage moderation and responsible choices -- from faculty, staff, and students. We have always been a dry campus, and we continue to believe this is the better, alternative way in the mix of campuses. We continue to ask that alcohol not be served at official SPU sponsored events and that faculty and staff refrain from drinking with undergraduate students.

And here is a new clarifying point: Students of legal age will now be able to make their own choices about use of alcohol off campus, but using the same kind of discernment as our faculty and staff and graduate students, seeking to be guided by the teaching of their families and their churches.

That's it. We believe this simple change will encourage trust and maturing and discernment, even as we continue to reach toward healthy lives and flourishing Christian community.

This newly clarified policy will begin July 1, 2010.

Continuing Conversation. Perhaps we can begin a new year in September with fresh and open conversation about these issues and our aspirations toward community. I would like that.

In the meantime, may God bless each one of you as you rush toward the conclusion of an exciting year. I am so grateful for all you are doing to build a community of grace -- *for this place and for our time*. This can be, remember, the place where world change begins.