

"A Cord of Three Strands"

Excerpts from the speech by
F. Dominic Dottavio
on the occasion of his inauguration as
13 th President of Heidelberg College
October 8, 2004

Friends of Heidelberg: Thank you for your confidence in me and, most especially, for your loyalty to Heidelberg College. I have been entrusted with a solemn and yet joyous responsibility to steadily guide Heidelberg's passage toward the new horizon of this young century.

I am encouraged in this task by the committed leadership of the Board of Trustees, whom I thank for this opportunity.

I am inspired by a faculty dedicated to our students and a staff devoted to the mission of the college.

I am energized by Heidelberg students - their dreams, their creativity, and their many talents.

I am enlightened by our alumni and friends who so generously share their memories and hopes for Heidelberg College.

I am sustained by my family and my friends who have traveled near and far to share this special day with us

And, I am moved by the people of this supportive community who have welcomed the Dottavios with such warmth and grace.

Thank you, thank you all for being here and for being part of the Heidelberg family.

What a wonderful occasion! This is a beautiful and inspiring ceremony, and for that I thank the Inauguration Committee and the Board.

It seems entirely appropriate that we should be in the gymnasium. This is the site of much cheering, applause, and great 'Berg pride -- and, I don't just mean at volleyball and basketball games. This is the site of our freshman convocation welcoming our newest students. It is the site of our spring Commencement exercises launching our newest alumni. So it is, indeed, the right spot for this new president to chart our course toward the new horizon.

As we look for a beacon to guide us, the Book of Ecclesiastes (4:12) provides direction:

"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Everything I have seen and experienced since first setting foot on this campus makes clear that three strands are woven throughout the college's history. A Heidelberg College education is inspired by faith, enhanced by the study of the liberal arts, and engaged to meet the challenges of this world.

Together, these three strands - faith, the liberal arts, and engagement - support us as we journey toward a brighter future. To chart our course, we have identified four priorities: the student experience, academic excellence, community engagement, and resource enhancement. Three strands. Four priorities.

The first strand of our foundational strengths is faith. Heidelberg College was founded in faith, and it lives out that heritage to the present day by our commitment to God and community. Our German Reformed church heritage, now the United Church of Christ, adds hope that our graduates' lives will be informed by purpose.

We are a values-centered institution, a place of decency and dignity, morality and purpose. Ours is a place where inquiry is protected, integrity expected, and faith respected.

Today's students, faculty, and staff represent many faith communities and points of view.

Together, we are inspired by the faith of our founders to prepare educated and ethical leaders for our world.

Because many of the lessons of leadership, ethics, and life are learned beyond the classroom, one of our four priorities is to enhance the quality of the total student experience. From matriculation to graduation, we must live up to the promise of Heidelberg as a learning community.

This fall, I welcomed our largest entering class in three decades. This growth in numbers and quality will continue, but not unabated. We will safeguard the personal character of the student-teacher relationship that distinguishes this college, while growing to 2,000 students by the year 2010.

To ensure greater persistence to graduation, we are committed to making student life at Heidelberg more fun - or, as one trustee said, "Let's get the starch out of the collars!" We will expand campus programs and services, not only for first-year students and those at risk, but for all members of the Heidelberg community so that ours is a vibrant and dynamic campus.

The second strand of the three part cord that binds this Heidelberg community together is the study of the liberal arts.

There is much discussion today about what is an appropriate curriculum in this new century. Some - including me - are calling for a new and practical liberal arts education that enlightens students with knowledge of the liberal arts, but also empowers

them with life and career skills and engages them in civic responsibility. If this is, indeed, the mission of the New American College, then Heidelberg is the model.

Coeducational from the beginning, Christian by heritage, and decidedly democratic in nature, Heidelberg College has known and embraced change through its history.

In the late 1800s, the college expanded the curriculum when it became a university for some three decades. Today, we are revisiting our curriculum for relevance and excellence as we question again: Are we a college or are we a university? Is there a difference between the two? Does the name really matter?

To navigate successfully through this young century, another priority is to develop a relevant liberal arts curriculum and to enhance academic excellence. These are the underpinnings of our reputation, the source of our stature. By raising standards, supporting quality, and developing a 21st century curriculum, we will elevate learning and we will enrich the experience of students and faculty.

As we increase our expectations, we will also provide more out-of-class learning experiences, more leading-edge educational technologies, and more opportunities to understand the diverse and rich cultures of the world. These are building blocks of a first-rank academic program.

The integration of the practical and philosophical, the liberal arts and professional preparation remains a hallmark of our curriculum.

The third strand that weaves strength into Heidelberg College is engagement with the wider world. Much is asked of colleges today. The nation and the world look to higher education to fuel the intellectual, cultural, and economic engines of the future. Heidelberg answers that call as a partner, extending our influence well beyond this campus.

For example, students in our honors program and Greek societies become stronger citizens by giving thousands of hours of service to our campus and our community.

Our Water Quality Lab was designated by the U.S. Congress as the National Center for Water Quality Research. And, our American Junior Year Program at the University of Heidelberg in Germany has made a global education available to students from more than 300 colleges and universities.

Engagement is a beacon from our past that illuminates our future. Because of this, we must retain as another of our priorities that the college be connected within and beyond the campus. While maintaining the character of a private liberal arts college -- and all

that suggests -- we also must develop a broad-based community of support. To that end, we are renewing our relationships with alumni, recasting our ties with parents of students, and reaffirming our commitment to faculty and staff and their families.

Heidelberg College must prepare itself to step up on the national stage, while increasing its visibility and viability as a partner right here at home in Seneca County and Ohio.

This college opens the door to many opportunities and experiences on the campus, in the community, and around the world.

To achieve academic excellence, to enhance the student experience, and to be an engaged campus requires greater resources. Therefore, our fourth priority must be to ensure the financial stability and growth of the college.

Our physical campus must continue to provide a learning environment that both celebrates our history and meets the needs of the 21 st century. Focused and energized, this college is building upon the rich legacy of its founders.

Our new Science Complex includes the nearly completed and quite remarkable Gillmor Science Hall as well as renovations to Bareis and Laird Halls. Ladies and gentlemen, it my great pleasure to announce today a \$2 million challenge gift from four of our Trustees to complete Gillmor and the renovations to Laird and Bareis Halls.

Beyond the hard-hat and orange-barrel improvements so visible on campus, we are also committed to growing the endowment in order to support academic chairs and student scholarships. We must attract the resources to match our ambition, for we will not be deterred from our path to excellence.

Our beloved Heidelberg College is a remarkable institution. It is time for this very fine college to step up from what Garrison Keillor calls "the state of pretty good," to move to the front ranks, to grow from good to great.

The opportunity is before us. Our plans are in place. Our priorities are set. They serve as the compass and chart for our journey to excellence. With the help of Heidelberg's many friends and partners, we will move - we must move the college toward that horizon of a brighter future.

In all of these efforts and ambitions, please know I remain mindful of the title of our alma mater, "Sweet Alma Home." Heidelberg is home to our students during their campus lives. Heidelberg College remains in their hearts long after.

It is our responsibility to provide a curriculum and climate that creates opportunities for our students. It is our duty to prepare them for a life of purpose with distinction. It is our privilege to serve a college inspired by faith, enhanced by the liberal arts, and engaged to serve the world.

Heidelberg College is, indeed, a remarkable place. With your help, so shall it ever be.

You have my commitment to work diligently, tirelessly for our Sweet Alma Home.

Thank you for your support for Heidelberg College.