

Farewell

What follows is an excerpt from former Chaplain, Rev Gary Brower's remarks at his Farewell Reception on June 1st, 2018.

I came to DU fully hoping that I'd be able to stretch myself beyond the bounds that I'd had the prior 17 years — as an Episcopal campus minister. In that role, I had a very focused community. In that role, I was always "across the street" from campus, both literally and figuratively. That is, I was employed by the Church, not by the campus. And that meant my access to the universities was somewhat constrained. At DU, the campus, from groundskeepers to Trustees, faculty, staff, and students — regardless of their religious/spiritual affiliation — all were my "flock". And I loved moving among those various constituencies. I learned so much!

I learned, for example, to love lacrosse. Susan [my wife] said, after our first DU game, "They get to hit each other with sticks? And it's legal? I LOVE this game!" And so do I! I now understand how the scoring in gymnastics works, and that "wins" in a match are much less important than the overall score.

I learned, through my association with Jimmy Wicket — a program that pairs volunteers (students, faculty or staff) with Alzheimer's sufferers — not only about Alzheimer's disease, but also croquet (not the backyard variety!). And I learned how much joy the volunteers gained through playing with the seniors — some of those senior citizens were DU grads!

Speaking of croquet, I learned that hockey players weren't as good making the transition to croquet with seniors citizens as was the women's golf team.

I learned that despite the Registrar's reservations with the course title, honors program students LOVED taking my class on human-animal interaction: "Pets, Partners or Pot-roast".

I learned that Trustees, Vice-chancellors and Deans loved entering a pool at commencement on how long conferring the degrees would take, and was surprised that they thought it odd that the University Chaplain was the book-maker.

On the more sombre side, I learned how to respond to tragedies, whether the death of a coach's son, to student deaths as a result of car accidents, to faculty/staff deaths from natural causes. And I learned that marshaling the resources of the university to deal with national/global disasters helped provide ways, not only for people to be involved, but also to process the ways of the world with others.

And, of course, I learned an incredible amount about different religious traditions, their holidays, and how those traditions interacted with university life. Negotiating religious obligations and accommodations, whether dietary restrictions or the need to miss class for a holiday, gave me an insight into the collision between the "secular world" and the various "sacred worlds" that I might never have gotten otherwise.

I've been asked what's next. First, let me say that I am not retiring, although my logo at DU will be retired, and maybe I'll leave my hat with Special Collections/Archives. In keeping with the logo, however, I will say that I am "changing hats". Final details are still being worked out, but the high likelihood is that I will be taking charge of an Episcopal church in the area — because Colorado is INCREDIBLY awesome! Between my last day on campus (June 15) and the start of that next adventure, I'll be able to spend some time cycling, fishing, hiking, bird-watching, camping, and, oh yes, Susan, putting on my "Tim Allen hat" for some home-improvements..

I'd like to close in a semi-unusual fashion (at least for these kinds of events); I'm going to resort to the intersection of my academic training with my ministerial training. Many of you know I have a Ph.D. (from another Methodist "DU" — Duke). You may not know that it is in Early Christian History. Before you ask, my dissertation was on "Eunuchs in Early Christianity" . . . and I'm not talking about a computer language. And, if you don't know what a "eunuch" is, google it: "E-u-n-u-c-h".

In the middle of the 2nd century of the Common Era, a letter — an "epistle" — was penned by someone called "Mathetes" (which simply means "disciple") to someone else called "Diognetus. The Epistle is a defense of Christianity against its accusers. Some 1800 years later, a portion of that Epistle was summarized/translated into a hymn by an Episcopal priest named F. Bland Tucker. From the time I learned that hymn until now, it has remained one of my favorites, not only for its poetry, but also for its underlying theology.

It begins:

The great Creator of the worlds,
The sovereign God of heaven,
His holy and immortal truth
To all on earth hath given

Then follow four verses that describe the way that truth was made "flesh". But it is the first two lines of the last verse that I want to leave with you.

Not to oppress, but summon all
Their truest life to find,*

"To summon all" — not just some, not just one sub-population — to summon all their truest life to find. That has been my goal at DU for the last eleven years, and it is my wish for us all: May we all go forward not only to find OUR truest lives, but, wherever we find ourselves, to summon . . . to help others, THEIR truest lives to find.

So be it! And, thank you.

Namasté

Gary

*The full text of the hymn can be found at <http://ehymnbook.org/CMMS/hymnSong.php?id=pd09749>