

The Heart and Soul of SMU

There are **two cardinal rules** in public speaking in a setting like this: Stay away from politics and avoid religion. **I am getting ready to break one of those rules.**

I am going to open with a story called “The Rabbi’s Gift”. It does not come from my tradition; thus, I am not proselytizing. Rather, I am trying to offer an ethics of interpersonal relationships.

There was a monastery that had fallen on hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution in the 17th and 18th centuries and the rise of secularism in the 19th, the order was decimated to the extent that there was only one abbot and four others, all over 70 years of age, left in a decaying mother house.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. It occurred to the abbot to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if he could offer some advice to save his dying monastery.

When the two met, and the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. “I know how it is,” he exclaimed. “The Spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore.” So the two men wept together. They read parts of the Torah

and quietly spoke of deep things. Time came for the abbot to leave, and they embraced one another. The abbot said, “I have failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me that would help me save my order?”

“No, I am sorry,” the rabbi responded. “I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.”

When the abbot returned to the monastery, the four monks gathered around him, eager to know what the rabbi had said.

“He couldn’t help,” the abbot answered. “We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say – just as I was leaving – and it was very cryptic – was the Messiah is one of us. I don’t know what he meant.”

Now, in the weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered the significance of the rabbi’s words. The Messiah is one of us? One of us at the monastery? Did he mean the abbot? Certainly he would not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people’s sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. Of course, the rabbi didn’t mean me. I’m just an

ordinary person. Yet, supposing he did? **O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?**

And so it went. As the monks contemplated in this manner, they began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. They also began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Now, because the forest around the monastery was so beautiful, families came to picnic on its tiny lawn, and people wandered along its paths. And as they did, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks, began to radiate from them and to permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something compelling about it, and they came back again and again to the monastery, bringing their friends.

Some of the younger men started to talk with the old monks. After awhile, one, then another asked to join them. Within a few years, the monastery once again became a thriving order – **thanks to the rabbi's gift.**

This is a story that takes the best of a religious tradition and translates it into what it means to be community.¹ It reveals what some might call “the heart and soul of that particular community” – that amorphous aura of a place that seeks to promote the ideals, the vision, and the ethics that are a part of the DNA of the

¹ Francis Dorff, O. Praeni, of the Norbertine Community of Albuquerque, New Mexico, wrote the original story in 1979. My version is adapted from The New Catholic World Magazine 222(March-April 1979), 53.

community. What might be the heart and soul of SMU? A week ago today, a group of staff, students, faculty, and administrators gathered to mourn the transition of Dr. Pamela Anthony, Vice-President of Student Affairs. The comments of tribute from all of these groups reflected her greatness. In the short 11 months she was with us, I believe she tapped into the heart and soul of this community, in no small way through the acts, letters, and words of **respect in interpersonal relationships**. The way Dr. Pamela Anthony related to each of us was not dissimilar from my opening story.

What is the “heart and soul” of SMU? In the Dallas Morning News, August 27, 1998, there was the public announcement of the 15-16 million endowment by Lester and Stella Porter Russell to provide an annual supplement for faculty at SMU. I quote:

“SMU president R. Gerald Turner, the bearer of this good news at the semiannual general faculty meeting....said, ‘The quality of interaction between teacher and student **forms the heart and soul of our university. The new resources of the Russell Fund will enable us to express appreciation to SMU’s outstanding faculty and to recognize their commitment to the students they teach.**’ Then, SMU Provost Ross Murfin added: “SMU has a longstanding tradition of **strong teaching. To maintain that tradition, we must retain the dedicated**

teachers already on the university's faculty as well as attract strong new members. The Russell Fund gives us a tangible way to express this priority."

In your booklet, you will see my six-page summary of the activities of the Faculty Senate in the Fall of 2016. Underlying all that the Faculty Senate has done this past semester is advocacy for the resources and respect faculty need to teach well and research with excellence. We honor in our committee work, our resolutions, and our meetings what has been called "the heart and soul of SMU."

INTRODUCE CHAIRS of Senate COMMITTEES

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members of Board of Trustees' Committees

ALL SENATORS

JULIE MAYNARD

"It takes all of these people to carry the weight of responsibility invested in the Senate." Thank you.

One of my greatest learnings as faculty senate president has been the misconceptions and generalizations we faculty have toward the Board of Trustees

and vice versa. I actually have heard the comment more than once – from faculty - that the Board of Trustees is not interested in our academic mission. Ironical, isn't it that in the years 2011-2016 alone, the Senate made numerous resolutions to honor Board members such as Caren Prothro, Carl Sewell, Gerald J. Ford, and Ruth Collins Sharp Altshuler. On the other hand, I have heard Board members say that the faculty is not interested in the sports program. Many of you attend basketball, soccer, tennis, football and other sports venues. You see, there are **misconceptions** on both sides, and that is why the Faculty Senate has asked for even greater shared governance: healthy shared governance has a greater chance of developing mutual respect & communication – as in my opening example.

In my monthly meetings with President Turner and with Provost Currall, I have always been treated with the utmost respect. President Turner and I do not always agree on the **means** to an end, **but then, I still have four months left to convince him.**

I want to thank President Turner and the OE2C (Operational Excellence) for creating a place at the table for the President of the Faculty Senate. There is a thin line that I walk on the Operational Excellence Committee. This line is **between** paralyzing pessimism and official optimism, and this line, I believe, is hard reality with harbingers of hope. I do want to acknowledge the unwavering commitment of this Operational Excellence Committee for their vision of what is best for SMU.

Julie Wiksten is the “minder” [a British term] of the Committee and does a superior job of keeping everyone on task.

I especially thank President Turner and Operational Excellence for recognizing the **immediate need** to increase the University Research Council’s budget so that more of you could develop your thoughts and research through travel and projects. According to Dean Quick and used with permission:

“Compared to previous grant cycles, the increased funds available to the URC enabled funding of more proposals while at the same time allowing awarding of grants that more fully funded the research and travel requests in the approved proposals.”

There should be 28 very happy faculty out there, and some more in the spring semester. I will say, that you going forth to disseminate your research and writing in academic venues can only raise the various poll rankings of SMU as we are evaluated by our peers and deans of other universities. **I have said to President Turner, “the infusion of \$100,000.00 to URC is one of the best investments SMU has ever made.”**

I want to thank Provost Currall for the speed with which he took up the Senate resolution to review the University Curriculum and for the alacrity with which he formed and launched the Task Force on Scholarly Research and Creative Impact. It is my belief that the Provost will make SMU a top tier research university.

Operational Excellence has carried out **some** cost-cutting measures and consolidation of services that evidently needed to be executed. However, we must make certain that the banner of efficiency does not eclipse goal one of the strategic plan for 2016-2025:” TO ENHANCE THE ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STATURE OF THE UNIVERSITY.”

The following slides will show glimpses of the Senate’s work in the Fall semester 2016.

1. The Executive Committee is **always** at work – sometimes harder – hardest – or none at all! We have been known to provide childcare. (Note: We are not in competition with the SMU Child Development Center.) We appreciate the support of our partners and spouses. We have a smooth plan of transition in place, and here is your next President.
2. To dispel the myth that the Senate is **not** interested in sports, here are a few snapshots. Abigail Pruitt accompanied the football team on an early out-of-

town game. Dennis Foster is standing on the sidelines for the Houston-SMU game although you cannot see him. I will vouch for the veracity of his presence because I took the photo. I have wondered if there is any correlation between our Senate presence on the sidelines and the huge upset in the score? [Or was it the three ministers present in President Turner box? I will say that after SMU's stunning victory, I heard a RC call the upset "a grace," an agnostic called it a "wonder," while the nearby Methodists just claimed it was a miracle. Perhaps we can just leave it as a mystery.]

The next slides show the networking and interactions we have had and will continue to have:

1. Lunch with Athletics Council members- In this photo, you see what became a productive meeting with Chair of the Athletic Council Dan Orlovsky, Paul Rogers (author of the Manual of Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics SMU), Dennis Foster (Chair of the Senate Athletics Committee), Paul Kreuger and myself met to discuss the lines of communication between the Athletics Council and the Faculty Senate. If you refer to Appendix B on the sixth page of my Fall report, you will see the protocol for more shared governance between these two bodies. For example, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate will be consulted by the President of the University when the chair of the Athletics Council is appointed. The Manual

of Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics SMU also states that six faculty members chosen by the Faculty Senate will serve on the Council. One of these six faculty members would serve as Vice Chair of the Council, although in the recent past, this provision has not been followed.

2. Lunch with PCSW-This slide illustrates the working relationship between the Senate and the President's Commission on the Status of Women as represented here by Dayna Oscherwitz, Sheri Kunovich, and Evelyn Day. We share concerns over possible gender inequity in salaries, the regressive system of the new structure of the annual merit awards, and the imprecise guidelines for the awarding of "significant accomplishments".

3. Annual Light Walk - Members of the Faculty Senate participated in the Annual Light Walk on Nov. 15, 2016, an event organized by the Women & LGBT Center. The Faculty Senate and the Student Senate have been involved in several meetings with the University's Emergency Management Team.

4. Stella Porter Russell- an informal lunch honoring our benefactors Stella Porter Russell and Lester. Education was important to this family. Stella's mother organized the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers in Dallas in 1909. Lester's brother, Clinton Russell, served on the Dallas School Board and was its President in 1924. **We faculty became the beneficiaries of this commitment to teaching.**

There is still work to do:

1. University Research Council – The additional funding of \$100,000.00 will be given annually to the URC as a “placeholder.” As additional savings are captured from the Bain initiatives, the Senate will be vigilant to recommend future augmentation of this critical resource for faculty.

2. Child Development Center- Several Senators serve on committees that provide updates on the Child Development Center, and watch over the progress. We are proud of this invaluable asset for faculty, staff, and their families.

3. University Benefits Council- The advantage of reinstating the Senate’s University Benefits Council for more shared governance is under discussion at the moment. This reinstatement will provide greater communication with HR regarding the process followed in making changes to faculty benefits, the possibility of enhanced coverage for SMU graduate and international students, and the possibility of university contributions to employee’s Health Savings Account (HSA). I would like to personally thank Helen Reagan, retirement specialist for HR, who met with a delegation from the Senate to discuss the impact of the large increase in premiums that were scheduled to occur in 2017 with CNA Long Term

Health Care Plans. You have surely heard the good news that there will not be an increase this year.

4.) Classroom Safety-The Senate continues to seek more assistance for faculty members who desire to learn “best practices” for their classrooms in the event of an active shooter in their building.

5.) Support for PhD Students at SMU-The Senate continues to advocate for improved support and increased stipends for PhD Students. Recommendations such as funds for their travel to academic meetings and “waivers” for full tuition and fees in all programs across the university are being considered.

5.) More Open Communication with the Board of Trustees – In the spirit of enhancing open communication across all levels of University governance, the Senate has been investigating the following:

- a.) establishing a liaison committee of faculty and trustees;
- b.) inviting Board of Trustees members to Faculty Senate meetings.

Although these measures have not been realized, we continue to seek ways to foster respectful collaboration with the BOT and to dispel some of the misconceptions we carry.

6.) **Raise and Bonus Pool** – After the efficiency experts' work is done, those of us who remain are working harder. Cornell University has coined the phrase, **shadow work**, which means tasks that previously would have been performed by someone else paid to do them. With the decrease of support staff, academics across the country find their professional lives increasingly subsumed by shadow work, which is unremunerated administrative and clerical tasks not in their job description of teaching and research.

We are in a competitive environment for stellar students. Tuition increase has been held at 4.5%. To accommodate this, the faculty salary bonus and raise system has been altered with long term regressive impact on faculty base pay. As tuition is further adjusted downward, predictably to 4.25% and then lower than 4 %, this shift should not be foisted on the backs of the faculty. [Some combination of re-examination of resource allocation, additional sources of revenues, and more aggressive use of the unrestricted endowment](#) will be needed to prevent this.

Just as we are in a competitive market for stellar students, we are in a competitive market for recruitment and retention of our quality faculty. The 2% growth wage pool is not sufficient. At our December meeting, on behalf of the

Senate, I respectfully asked President Turner asked for a cost of living increase for faculty/staff and a return to the previous raise and bonus pool system.

Understanding that such requests much go through numerous channels, I await – with hope – for a positive response.

I have wondered recently if top management consulting firms like Bain & Company can apply their cost-effective analyses under all conditions and for all universities. We at SMU live in three interlocking and overlapping communities, not one. We are a corporation (a not-for-profit), an academic community, and a community founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church South. With the last, the Wesleyan DNA in our heritage, comes **high ethical standards** of how we interact and how we respect the dignity of the individual. If we do not adjust our methods to the interaction of all three of these communities, we could fall prey to – what I have termed - the “insufficiency of efficiency.”

For January Term, I taught a course at Houston **Methodist** Hospital, which has been ranked by U.S. News & World Report as on the Honor Roll for Best Hospitals in the USA. Leading the prestigious list was Mayo Clinic; Houston Methodist Hospital was ranked 19th in the nation. You may know of this hospital due to Dr. Michael DeBakey who in 1965 implanted the first mechanical device to help a diseased heart. The Methodist Hospital Care System follows the Methodist Book of Discipline: “We treat every individual as a person of worth, dignity, and

value.” Under the rubric of the Texas Annual Conference of the UMC, this hospital strives “to treat everyone as a person of sacred worth and value, created by God.” The core values are summarized in an acronym: ICARE. Integrity/Compassion/Accountability/ Respect/Excellence. It is no wonder that the famed Dr. DeBakey would not leave Houston Methodist because he said it was a **hospital with a soul.**

“The quality of interaction between teacher and student **forms the heart and soul of our university,**” as **President Turner so wisely said.** Dr. Pamela Anthony knew this. Stella Porter Russell knew this. After listening to some of Marshall Terry’s students at the memorial service and reception last Friday, I believe Marshall Terry did, too.

In summary, in the Spring 2017, the Faculty Senate will work steadily in advocacy for the resources and respect faculty need to teach well, to interact faithfully with students, to conscientiously mentor students, and to research with excellence. We do this gladly - in the best interest of SMU.

In closing, this is the last time I will address you. As President of the Faculty Senate, I have spoken at events like commencement or gone through a receiving line and introduced myself: [My name]. I am President of the Faculty Senate, **and I represent 740 faculty.** Let me say **that** is a weighty honor, and I thank you for

the trust conferred. After all, you and I know, the faculty-student relationship **is**
the heart and soul of this university. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner