



President's Essay

The King's Herald, February 2017

One of the joys of being the new King president is getting to hear alumni stories about how their King years changed their lives. Usually set within King's beautiful historic campus, these stories are most often told with a broad smile and overwhelming gratitude, as memories flow forth of favorite professors, staff members, coaches, and classmates. Not only do I learn better with each of these tales the essence of King and its people, I get to share vicariously the joy that attends good memories and those treasured "ties that ne'er can perish, formed at old K.C."

King has always been at its best when its focus has been resolutely and relentlessly on students. And while these stories are varied, they all share a common theme: *King people cared deeply about me as a student*. King will change through the years, as it always has, to meet the needs of students and society, but it will only succeed if that steadfast focus on students is the touchstone for everything we do.

That does not mean that King exists simply to give students what they think they want. The value of a King education is in our time-tested ability to give students what they truly *need*: preparation in our intentionally Christian academic community to excel as thoughtful, resourceful, and responsible citizens with a passion for service. And we do this with talented Christian faculty and staff who care deeply for students in all dimensions of their lives, while at the same time challenging them to be their best.

This noble and historically successful undertaking has always involved others as well—because it has to. Every student who has ever attended King has been able to only because others they likely never knew helped underwrite that education. These others who built and supported King are alumni and friends, near and far—men and women who see in their own lives and those of others how transformative a King education can be. They—you—are the ones who have enabled King to reach our 150-year milestone and will ensure King thrives for another 150 years.

There is much work ahead for us all as we move forward together. As we renew our commitment to our students and keeping them always the focus, three areas call for our attention now.

First, King must strengthen its academic programs. Of course, everyone is in favor of stronger academics until the

test is handed out. Strengthening academics is much easier said than done, because it requires tough decisions and the resources, allocated properly, to make needed improvement a reality. But it is imperative the King diploma always reflect the highest quality, for the sake of our students, present and past. Strong academics allow that diploma to signal to employers, graduate schools, and potential students that King prepares its graduates well. In the months ahead, we will be reviewing all of our programs to ensure we are meeting this crucial test.

Second, we must improve our Bristol campus, not only for the benefit of those who live, learn, and work here, but also because the condition of our flagship campus is a visible indicator to others of our commitment to quality throughout all our sites and programs. We are blessed with facilities that were built to last the ages, but in truth they have not been maintained as they ought to have been. Dick Ray began the process of addressing these challenges, most notably with the magnificently reconstructed Oval and library renovation. The work ahead, with particular attention to our residence halls and classrooms, is considerable, and will take years to address. But we must start now and never again stop. This, too, will require commitment from all those who love this place.

Finally, we must reemphasize King's Christian character. King began 150 years ago and has continued since with a deliberate Christian purpose inexorably melded to its academic mission—both captured in our motto, *Ecclesiae et litteris*. Particularly in a world "loveless in strength and comfortless in pain" (as one of my favorite hymns puts it), we must unashamedly embrace the Christian call to excellence, service, and love that springs from a personal faith in Christ. We fail our students, Christian and non-Christian alike, if we do not live up to this high calling. I am pleased our faculty this fall voted unanimously to extend our Christian foundations course requirement to all bachelor's-level programs. We have also strengthened our chapel program. The commitment to being a demonstrably Christian institution is not an easy one in the current cultural context. But societal ambivalence or hostility toward the Christian faith underscores, not diminishes, our world's compelling need for the sort of education King provides so well.

Maria and I are delighted to have been welcomed so warmly into this extraordinary community of learning and faith, and we look forward to meeting those of you we have not yet met. All around us we see the love that you have poured into this place—most importantly in the lives of the King students we are all here to serve. With your commitment and prayers the future for these students and for those who follow them will be a bright one indeed. It is a high privilege to be your partner in this critically important and rewarding work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Alexander W. Whitaker IV". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "A".

Alexander W. Whitaker IV, J.D.
President