

Packing your Genes for the Journey

Inaugural Address, Oct. 13, 2017

Thank you, Dr. Ashenhurst. First let me respond to our shared covenant and, second, offer some remarks.

Part I - The Covenant

First, my response. Harry, thank you for leading the ceremony of covenant and the community commitment to Graceland University. Your words inspire and challenge all of us in the Graceland family to do our best for this great university and recommit to its mission and values each and every day. Collectively, your commitment to Graceland and support of me, as the 18th president, is a covenant. I am honored and humbled to be entrusted by the university with this responsibility.

In return, I commit to the Graceland community, through my solemn pledge, that I will serve Graceland and all its family – past, present and future – to the best of my ability. I promise to uphold Graceland University's mission and the core values of learning, wholeness and community. I will seek counsel and wisdom as Graceland's leader, and, as a caretaker of this great institution, I will continue to support all of you as generations of past presidents have done before me.

Graceland has had an extraordinary tradition of leadership throughout its history. The inauguration theme is *“Strong futures honor the shared journey of generations, an ongoing history of the Power of Together,”* and that theme will continue long beyond today. We will work hard TOGETHER for a strong Graceland today and a strong Graceland tomorrow. Why? Because the world so desperately needs more Graceland graduates to promote the longstanding values and principles we live here. We need Graceland graduates to go out and make positive change and make this world a better place!

Part II A - Gratitude

Second, let me share some remarks for today.

“Great” and “grateful” are my two words for this occasion. I feel great; what a wonderful day to share together, and I get to wear this awesome Graceland presidential medallion. Believe me, it is by far the best necklace in my collection. Second, I am grateful. I have so many people to thank for their work that has brought us to this moment. Let me second the Chair’s welcome to you (past and present board members, faculty colleagues, administrators and staff, alumni, friends, delegates, presidents emeriti and, of course, the reason we are all here – students). Thank you for coming to make this a special occasion.

Board Chair Ashenhurst, you deserve your own special thank you, as does Dr. Kay Mussell and the rest of the selection committee for your warmth and amazing hospitality during the selection and transition processes. I also want to thank Dr. Brian White, Dr. Katie Bash, and the entire inaugural committee, as well as the faculty, staff and students who were part of inauguration week activities. Finally, I express my profound appreciation to the person who has taught me the most about the inner workings of Graceland and who handles a million demands of a new president and an inauguration both calmly and cheerfully. Will you please give a round of applause to Ms. Jodi Seymour, Graceland executive assistant to the president and board.

Part II B - Family

I have spent much of my time these past several months getting to know you. Let me take a moment here to help you get to know me a little better by introducing some of the people most important to me – my family. It is wonderful to have so many of them here. First, my husband, life partner and best friend in every way, Jeff Draves. Our twin sons, Benjamin and William, who are amazing young men and the joy of our lives. My father, Tom Holland, who instilled the value of education in all of us; my sister Marybeth and her husband, Tom, my sister Margaret, my brother-in-law Phil, who have all been role models and

live lives of service. These people are doing outstanding things, and I am blessed to have them with me to share this special day. We miss having our nieces Kati and Kara, and nephews Thomas and Matthew, and a brother-in-law Michael, so a big hello to them, and we hope you get to watch this after school. Like most families, we have experienced loss, and on days like today, we deeply miss those who are not with us: Jeff's parents, Clyde and Jeanne, my mother, Veronica, and our precious daughter, Alison. Thank you all for being here in spirit.

Part II C - Marietta

Our inaugural theme includes the phrase "journeys of generations." Our family takes vacations and journeys seriously. We read, we plan, we research, we plan, we discuss and we plan some more. But when we go, we are sweatshirt and jeans kind of people. We travel casually, and jeans are always an important part of the wardrobe. Not just any jeans, the right jeans. The ones that allow you to be you. You know the pair! And yet, as a biochemist, when I hear the word "jeans," my mind jumps to another meaning of the word entirely — one that involves that DNA stuff or genes, G-E-N-E-S. Like the jeans that we wear on vacation, we also take along the genes in our DNA as an important part of every journey. Let me explain.

In my time learning about Graceland, I read the story of **Marietta Walker**, sometimes called “the mother of Graceland.” She gave the land on which the Lamoni campus of Graceland University now stands. Marietta was born in 1834 and had a tough life. As a child, she suffered the loss of her father and several of her 12 siblings, but she was determined to make something of herself. It was a bold move in those days for a woman to attend college, but she valued education and graduated from Oxford College for Women in 1859. After college, she moved to Texas, married and became principal of the San Antonio Female College. When her husband became ill as a Civil War soldier, Marietta was repeatedly denied permission to go to his bedside by military authorities, but with persistence, she found a way. In her own words, she said, *“It was always with me a very hard matter to give up as hopeless anything I greatly desired to see done, because it seemed to me it ought to be done.”* After his death, she made a courageous journey during the Civil War from Texas to the Midwest and was dedicated to her career as a writer, mother and family member. Years later, Marietta found her way to Lamoni and, being her resourceful self, became what else? a dairy farmer, and you guessed it, a good one. One day, the desire came into Marietta’s heart to start a college on these rolling hills where we stand today. A college for the young people of the

church AND for all people who wish to enter. Thus the beginning of our inclusive Graceland University.

The more I learn and the more Graceland people I meet, I realize that Marietta Walker's genes are still with us. The GENES of DEDICATION, PERSISTENCE, COURAGE, INCLUSIVITIY, TOGETHERNESS and RESOURCEFULNESS. Let me share examples of each of these genes throughout history.

Graceland Gene 1: The Gene of Dedication

It has been hard for me to walk into the administration building without spending time reading the bricks on the sidewalk in front of it — how many lives of Graceland faculty and staff are represented on and beyond that pathway! People like Jerry Hampton — a half century; Oliver Houston; Bill Russell, historian and Energizer bunny; Marybeth Evans, our centenarian educator; and the list could go on. But it is not just the length of service that is impressive. It is the dedication of so many who make their time here mean something by changing students' lives. Students, faculty, coaches, facilities workers and work supervisors establish relationships that last far beyond graduation. For so many, Graceland is not just a job; it's their vocation. They dedicate their lives to this place!

Graceland Gene 2: The Gene of Persistence

In the academic world, the word “persistence” has a special meaning. It is how we help freshmen “persist” to graduation. One story I read in the Horizons shared how Dr. Steve Murdock had a blind student who needed geometry to complete a teaching certificate. Think about it: dissecting angles, spatial relationships, measurements... all without being able to see them. Steve spent many hours with that student to assist her in being successful. Our TRIO programs, our faculty, our coaches, and efforts by Student Life and Graceland staff consistently care for and support students. We proudly carry the persistence gene in our efforts with students. We never give up!

Graceland Gene 3: The Gene of Courage

I have heard stories that during the Great Depression of the 1930s, sometimes there was just no money when it came time to issue paychecks. Yet, the work of Graceland continued. Local merchants extended credit, people planted large gardens and bartered for necessities. And the college survived. In the 1980s and 90s, Graceland had the courage to enter into distance education and online education before most colleges, and to purchase SkillPath, a professional training company. Both are both important and successful parts of our university today. They were courageous moves at the time, but remember, courage is in our DNA.

Graceland Gene 4: The Gene of Inclusivity

Two names from the past come up again and again when we talk about Student Life — Tom Powell and Marian Killpack. I hear comments like, “Tom taught me what it means to be a man.” “Tom and Marian cared for us – all of us – and showed us how to discover and live out our values.” I also heard some stories where people are still curious if Tom knew what mischief they were up to in the residence halls. From what I learned about Tom, HE KNEW — HE KNEW MOST EVERYTHING, but he sometimes let you as students learn more by letting you take the first step. So, if any of took those first steps but still owe damage charges to your Houses, we are happy to collect those today – with interest of course!

Tom and Marian were a huge part of the Graceland House system success because they instilled in each House, *“Everyone who is here belongs her just because you are here and for no other reason.”* You have heard from two students this morning, Melissa Sherer and Jimmy Jean, of how Graceland has impacted their lives. They have very different stories and backgrounds, they are Graceland students, they are part of our family. Like all of us, *“they belong here because they are here.”*

I am proud of the evolving diversity and inclusive history of Graceland with its nonsectarian beginning and values that reflect the individual worth of all people. At this university, we celebrate diversity, have difficult conversations about stereotypes, and work to discover the humanity of those who are different from us; it's an important part of our learning environment as we prepare graduates for the world. Thanks to Marietta for instilling the inclusivity gene! We all love belonging here.

Graceland Gene 5: The Gene of Togetherness

"The Power of Together." At Graceland, this is not just a tagline that looks good on our recruiting materials. I felt it from my first visit during the interview process, which has continued since my arrival. I inherited a strong leadership team and I appreciate their support, dedication and commitment to having us all work together in ways we have not done before. Together, the faculty led the university to develop and implement a visionary new curriculum, the Essential Education, while also growing our graduate program in nursing. Here, at Graceland, there is a recognition that learning happens in many venues, and by working together, we can help enrich the student learning experience.

I also want to share my deep appreciation for the partnership that Graceland has with the sponsoring church, the Community of Christ. At

a memorial service last Saturday for Graceland faculty legend Dr. Velma Ruch, the scripture on the front of the program read, “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” Students, my hope is that, at Graceland, you will not only master the knowledge and skills needed to be successful, but that you will be inspired, as Dr. Ashenhurst stated, to invest yourselves in causes that enrich and dignify human life as our founding church does. The world desperately needs such world citizens.

Graceland Gene 6: The Gene of Resourcefulness

Marietta was a writer, a principal, a music teacher, a dairy farmer, a caretaker, a church member, a mother, wife, and the mother of Graceland. She adapted. She changed to meet the needs of her family using the resources available. She did what she had to do! Marietta Walker gave us the resourcefulness gene. We needed that in the beginning of the college history when the women’s dorms burnt down. We needed that to figure out how to support online students, to work together across two campuses, and to take on aggressive capital campaigns. Over the past decades, Graceland began a transformation process on the Lamoni campus, which will continue. We are a university with four locations: Lamoni, Independence, SkillPath in Mission, Kansas and online. We have a diverse student body of all ages, races and ethnicities, and now offer a doctoral degree. We will never stop trying

to make improvements to be the best Graceland possible, for we have a vision of what can be accomplished when the genes of dedication, persistence, courage, inclusivity, togetherness and resourcefulness combine; we have it in our DNA.

Are these Marietta genes sufficient for the road ahead? In Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland*, the Cheshire Cat tells Alice, "*If you don't know where you're going, any road will do.*" For a university in today's world, "*just any road*" will not do. The world of higher education is in more rapid flux than ever before in its history, and relying on the ways we have always done things is a recipe for disaster. Therefore, we need to think through clearly what our destinations are and then chart the pathways by which we will reach them.

PART III - The Destination

- What are our destinations?
- What do we envision as key parts of our future success?
- How do we use our six genes and the journey of generations?
- How do we travel together? And...
- How can we best serve students and prepare them for a world that so desperately needs them?

Over the past months, I've been listening, collecting information and ideas on the future of Graceland. I have been an avid student of

Graceland as we form the vision together. While this is an evolutionary process, here is our map with six pathways for a strong future.

Pathway #1: Academics for the Future

Graceland will develop programs that are in demand, distinctive and exemplify the values of Graceland. We need to grow our academic programs and engage strategic partners, and we need to do it now!

Pathway #2: Holistic Student Experience

By integrating academic, co-curricular and professional learning experiences, Graceland will prepare students to become change leaders. We value wholeness, and we need to help students learn that way and help them be successful.

Pathway #3: Strategic Enrollment Growth

Graceland will establish and achieve strategic enrollment goals in recruitment and retention. We will find ways to retain students and add new pipelines of students by expanding our offerings. Today is a call to action. We need this entire community to engage in this work – alumni, faculty, parents, friends.

Pathway #4: Financial Stability and Learning Environment

Through organizational efficiency and the strategic allocation of resources, Graceland will ensure our long-term financial stability while improving the physical and online environment for students.

Pathway #5: Distinctive value

Graceland will share the value of its excellent academics and co-curricular programs in the arts, athletic, professional and co-curricular programs in a safe location and inclusive environment. We will become a university where students seek to enroll for our great value!

Pathway #6: Collaborative and Innovative Community

Graceland will look to develop a collaborative, innovative and productive workplace culture and improve operations to enhance the student and constituent experiences and keep Graceland education affordable.

Part IV - Closing

I am confident that, with **The Power of Together**, we can reach each of those destinations. Again, it is in learning about Graceland's history and meeting with the faculty, staff and students of today that I am discovering incredible resources. On Graceland's official seal is our motto, "Prudens futuri" — wisdom for the future. We have two past presidents with us today, who have demonstrated vision and leadership

with distinctive achievements. President William Higdon recognized the potential in the purchase of SkillPath, and I am happy that nine of the current leadership team of SkillPath is with us today. President John Sellars dared to announce a 75-million-dollar capital campaign in the midst of the nation's worst economic recession and is responsible for many of the beautiful buildings here. I regret that I did not have the opportunity to know President Barbara Higdon. So many of you have spoken of her keen intellect and truly gracious spirit that opened many doors and crashed many ceilings. Barbara, I wish I had had the opportunity to meet you. You are still very much missed here.

- How do I balance the thrill I feel to have this opportunity against the awareness of its immense responsibility?
- How do I describe the eagerness that Jeff and I feel to develop our own place in this amazing tradition?

Maybe it is best to remind ourselves again, as Dr. Ashenhurst did so eloquently in his covenant remarks, that this inauguration is about *us*. It's about the **Power of Together**. We have our genes packed, our map with our pathways and we are ready to go. May we move forward, trusting the genes of generations, to share the journey to a strong future. And remember, let's have some fun and adventures along the way!

May God have blessings on us on the path ahead! Thank you