

Hartford Sermon

Introduction

Thank you Dr. Adams.

It is a pleasure and quite a privilege
for my wife Anne and me
to be invited to worship with you today
in this great church.

I look out and see so many of our friends
and colleagues as members of your congregation--
including Regent Nellie Varner
and Chancellor Blenda Wilson.

Yet, despite the presence of so many friends,
I must also confess that it is a bit intimidating to
be a part of Dr. Adam's service
since he is widely recognized as one of
the nation's leading orators, teachers, and preachers.

Hence it seems only prudent to leave
the preaching to Dr. Adams...
...and to stick to subjects that I know something about
...education, universities...and our future...

As most of you know, I am an engineer.

While engineers may not be used to preaching.

Engineers and preachers do have some things in common.

- We tend to look ahead, to think a lot about the future,
- We are usually candid, we tend to tell it like it is,
- And we believe in change,
that we can make the world a better place.

What I have to say reflects these qualities.

This morning I want to talk about joining with you to address the most critical issue of our times-- namely, how to insure that our children have the educational opportunities so necessary for full participation in marvelously diverse, knowledge-intensive, world nation that America is evolving into as we countdown through the 1990s toward the 21st Century--a new millennium!

Further, I want to talk about building a University-- and, indeed, a society-- in which the genius of each one of us is welcomed, respected and valued as a contribution a new kind of community, a multi-cultural society in which people of all races and nationalities and beliefs can live and work together in harmony.

Here my vision is not of a big melting pot in which we are all forced or expected to become the same...

But rather a community that tolerates and celebrates diversity, a glorious mix of people bringing their unique talents, traditions, cultures, perspectives, and experiences together to enrich our collective life.

I want to talk, as the Verse says,

“about doing a new thing”

about “making a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert”.

Keys to the Future

Let me warn you at the outset of my remarks that I have a certain bias.

Indeed, through a variety of experiences both in Michigan and in Washington, I have become increasingly convinced that the dominant issue before our state and our nation during the 1990s will be our willingness and capacity to develop our human resources...that is, education.

Years ago our parents stepped up to their responsibilities by sacrificing to give us an opportunity for a better life through education.

Now it is our generation's turn.

Today we are called upon to demonstrate a similar commitment to our children...to the next generation...to the future.

But here I know I am preaching to the faithful.

For no people in America care more about education for their children than African Americans

From the beginning, African Americans have put their faith in education.

They have struggled and sacrificed, generation after generation, no matter how hard the way, how steep the odds. they have done what they had to do to educate their children, to build for them a better future than they could have.

And not just in America

In just a few days, we in Michigan will have the tremendous honor of hosting Mr. Nelson Mandela the great South African leader whose extraordinary example of courage and commitment to freedom has inspired the entire world with new hope.

When he left prison, some of his first words were to the children:

“We---your parents, your brothers, your sisters----
love you, and we want you to lead the country.
But you cannot carry out that responsibility
if you have not got the weapons.....
the weapons of education.”

No, I have not come here to preach about education to you.

Nor have I come with warnings about the great
challenges facing education in America today.

You know these all too well.

You know how many of our children
are being cheated of their birthright,
how many are deprived of the opportunity
for the education so necessary for their future.

As a nation we have been spending our children's future
to pay for greedy consumption and quick fixes.

Instead of investing in our schools

We have squandered money on junk bonds and
leveraged buyouts, on payouts and write-offs to people
who already have enough.....or more than enough.

The dilemma facing our nation was brought home to me
in very frightening and convincing terms at a recent
conference with the top leaders of Japan.

We asked them, “What do you think are America's
greatest strengths and weaknesses?”

They gave us an in interesting reply.

They said America's greatest strength is our system of higher education.

Then they said our greatest weakness was public education
at the primary and secondary level.

Quite a contrast! Quite a challenge!

Higher Education in America

These Japanese leaders were right
about America's colleges and universities.

They are the strongest in the world.

The state of Michigan has one of the finest systems of higher
education in the nation, including several of its great universities:
Wayne State University, Michigan State University
and our own University of Michigan.

And of course this is because of the commitments and sacrifices of
eight generations of Michigan citizens.

And perhaps the most impressive thing about Michigan education
is the desire of our people to build outstanding universities with
a public character--designed to serve the public interest--
designed to provide, as one of our early Michigan president's put it,
"an uncommon education for the common man."

The fact that we are supported and sustained by the public,
carries with it a deep obligation to the people of this State.

For as the Bible says in Luke, Chapter 12,
"For unto whomsoever much is given,
of him shall be much required;

I believe this deeply.

I also believe it applies not just to individuals but to institutions,
to our universities.

At the University of Michigan we accept this challenge, this public trust.

We know we are privileged to serve the people of Michigan.

and not just to serve some of the people,
but to serve all of the people.

With Michigan's other public universities
we are working more intensely than ever before
to serve the people of our State.

The University of Michigan

The University of Michigan feels a particular responsibility to
this city and its schools.

After all, you are the city of our birth--
we were founded in Detroit in 1817.

Further, just as our Detroit and the University of Michigan
have been closely linked in the past,
we believe it essential that we become more
closely linked together in the years ahead.

This is particularly important in the areas of K-12 education.

In particular, we seek to cooperate and collaborate with the schools
in Detroit to share our resources and knowledge.

You notice I didn't say we wanted to come in and reform the schools,
to tell people what to do.

I didn't say we have the answers.

We don't.

What we do have are resources of people and ideas
that we can share.

We have the determination to work together with the Detroit community
to enrich the education of Detroit children.

And whether it is through

...the King-Chavez-Parks program to bring students to our campus

...the Wade-McCree Incentive Scholarship Program

...the Detroit Compact

...the DAPSEP program

...or the over 60 individual projects the University now has running
with various Detroit schools

We seek to work with your schools to provide them
with the tools they need to assure each of their
students the education so necessary for the
21st Century.

A Glance Backwards

Yet, while such partnerships are critical,
it is also the case that the fundamental responsibility
of a university is the education of the students
enrolling on our campuses.

That is our primary mission.

Yet let me also acknowledge that here
our record is mixed...
both for higher education in general...
and for the University of Michigan in particular.

Of course by any ranking,
we at Michigan provide one of the best
educations available anywhere in the world--

But we have not succeeded in making
this marvelous education available to all.

Our Scripture lesson today says
“Remember ye not the former things,
neither consider the things of old.”

But I think we must look back to our past at least briefly ,
to acknowledge our past errors, real failures,
in order to learn from them as we move ahead.

It has to be said forthrightly and honestly that

we have failed to provide equal educational opportunity
to African Americans through much of our history

While the University has admitted Black students from its earliest days.

while many of the Black leaders of Michigan and the nation
have earned degrees at Michigan

while we have never had an official policy of discrimination...

It is also true that you don't need

to have an official policy to discriminate.

What you have to have is an official policy and a plan

if you want to overcome discrimination.

because its effects are so deeply rooted in our society.

And the fact is that for too long our universities

did not have a policy or plan

for enrolling more Black students,

and hiring more Black faculty.

There was unofficial but real racism and discrimination.

We were often blind to the pain of campus life

for all of those who were in some way different

from the dominant culture of the time.

However, as the Scripture teaches,

there is no point in dwelling too long on past failures.

But we can use the lessons of the past

to understand better,

to strengthen our resolve,

to help chart a new and different path,

to change and reform our universities.

And to make the change permanent this time.

The Michigan Mandate

That is what we are trying to do at the University of Michigan.
We are trying to “do a new thing” as the verse from Isaiah suggests to us.
We are trying to change, to bring African Americans
fully into the life and leadership of our University.
People sometimes ask me why the University
has made this commitment to change,
why I have made this change a cornerstone of my Presidency.

The reasons are simple.

First and foremost, it is morally right.

Second, we see this commitment as the cornerstone of our
capacity to serve a changing nation and a changing world.
America today is rapidly evolving into one of the most diverse,
multicultural societies on earth...

The America of the 21st Century will be a nation without
a dominant ethnic majority--and to serve this changing
nation, institutions such as the University of Michigan
must also change.

And third, for the University to achieve excellence in its
fundamental missions of teaching and scholarship,
it is clear we must reflect the growing diversity of America
and the world itself among our people and our activities.

To this end, over the past three years we have been developing
and committing ourselves to a new agenda
we call the Michigan Mandate.

Some of you may have heard of it.
many of you are a part of it.

The fundamental idea of the Mandate
is that the University of Michigan

must become a leader known
for the racial and ethnic diversity
of its faculty, students and staff.

A leader in creating a multicultural community
that will be a model for higher education
and a model for the society at large.

We don't believe we can serve this state and this nation,
unless our campus reflects the strengths,
perspectives, talents and experiences of people of color
in everything that we do.

But we know the Mandate is not by itself a magic cure---
that is not going to change our University overnight.

Instead it is a strategic plan,
it sets a direction and a points to a destination,

As the Scripture says
it is meant "to make a path in the wilderness "

The Mandate evolved over these three years
through literally hundreds of meetings
with people inside the University and outside.

Many people here helped it to evolve.
they taught me, helped me to understand,
they have stood by my side when things got tough,
and when I make a mistake, they let me know it.

You can't have better friends and colleagues than that.

And I thank all of them for their help and loyalty.

Signs of Progress

Today I can report to you
that the Michigan Mandate is starting to work.

From top to bottom, University decisions are now made
with our goals of diversity as a priority.

In fact, across the nation other colleges and universities
are using it as a guide for their own planning.

There are many signs of progress...

1. During the first two years of the Michigan Mandate we
have added 76 new faculty of color to the University,
including 40 African American faculty, a 50% increase
2. During this short period we have increased minority
enrollments by 25% to the point when students of
color now comprise 17% of our student body--
include over 2,200 African American students.
3. Our early projections for this fall are particular
encouraging, with a 35% increase in African American
representation in our freshman class and a 58% increase
in African American transfer students.
4. And our graduation rates among students of color are
among the best in the nation.

There are many other signs of progress,
ranging from action taken during the first month of my administration
to complete the University's divestment of stock holdings
in companies with interests in South Africa,

To major growth in financial aid for students of color

To major outreach programs to schools systems in
cities such as Detroit

We have now put in place the people, policies and programs
that will increase our representation of students of color at a rate
that will make our University community fully representative

of the national population during the 1990s.

By now you are probably asking yourself the question,

“If they are making so much progress,
why are we still reading about racial incidents
on so many of Michigan’s universities, including
at the University of Michigan?”

The reason is that increasing the numbers

of African American faculty, students and staff
is only the first step in the Michigan Mandate.

If we only needed numbers it would take great effort and resources

but with determination we will get there in reasonable time.

But numbers are the easy part.

We all know that you can have a lot of different people

living in the same locale, working side by side,
shopping in the same stores, going to the same classes.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean you have a community.

Just increasing the numbers and mix of people

doesn’t mean that you have mutual respect,
that you can work towards common goals.

To have this, you have to have a new kind of community.

At the University of Michigan we are determined to seek
the changes needed to build this kind of community.

That is the hard part of the task ahead of us...

This is the new path we must blaze “in the wilderness”.

Issues of Community

What we are seeing now on our campuses, I think,

are the birthpangs of this new type of community.

Our universities are confronting one of

the most painful and persistent problems in American history.
Because now, even as America's population is becoming more diverse,
it is also becoming more separated.

Tragically, students coming to our campus today have grown up
in communities that are separated by race and ethnic group,
by nationality and belief,
by occupational level and economic background.

Our communities and institutions have failed to create
a sense of community or to provide the models
for creative interaction that we need to build a new kind of society,
based on equality, mutual dependence, trust and respect.

The truth is that in America today
it is on our university and college campuses
that many students come together for the first time
and are expected to live and work together for the first time.

It is not surprising that they don't always get along,
that it is sometimes painful.

It also isn't surprising that this shows up in the newspapers
or on TV.

This is the price higher education pays because it is
one of the few institutions in the country
that is stepping up to the problem of racism and diversity in America.

Yet, I believe that such a mission is our destiny...our mandate.

For our campuses have become the crucibles
in which the multicultural, multiracial, world cultures
of 21st Century America are being brewed!

You don't get change without pain.

What we are experiencing is the first faltering steps forward.

We are seeing the effects of increasing the numbers of students of color,
and the early stages of creating a new kind of community
that is built on diversity.

Our job is to educate our students,
these world citizens of the 21st Century,
inspire them, and, if necessary, require them
to respect each other and learn to live together.

If the way ahead seems discouraging at times,
We should remember that we are not the only society
grappling with these problems of human failure.

Historians tell us that group conflict, discrimination, prejudice and oppression
have been with us since the beginning of human society.

It is a tragic part of human character to reject others.
in order to define oneself.

And we have only to look around us
to see that it exists today in all parts of the world.

Mr. Mandela's visit reminds of of the disgrace of apartheid in South Africa.
Elsewhere there is deep rooted divisiofn between Muslims and Hindus,
Jews and Arabs, Christians and Moslems in Lebanon,
Chinese and Malays, Eritreans and Ethiopians, Basques and Spaniards.
Catholics and Protestants.

Nearly every country and region is struggling
with the same problem we face on campus, in our State and nation.

But in today's world, we can't afford
to tolerate racism and prejudice and discrimination
any longer.

We cannot live divided from one another.

Our world has become one world.

Our people must learn

to accept our common humanity,
our common fate.

Just because a problem is old,

or widespread or complex ,or difficult

doesn't mean we have an excuse to ignore it or avoid it.

It may mean the job is harder to do.

But, I, for one, do not believe the task is impossible.

Maybe it is the engineer in me that makes me hopeful....

that makes me determined to try.

I know we can all draw inspiration from Nelson Mandela

in coming days and weeks

and from other great leaders and teachers

such as Martin Luther King, Jr.,

who have shown that it is possible to change the world

armed only with the power of faith and understanding.

We have to begin somewhere, we have to take a stand.

High Goals

At the University of Michigan, we are trying to do just that.

As the Scripture says, much has been given to us

therefore much is expected of us.

We believe we have a Mandate to build

a new model of a learning community

that thrives on the glorious and unique differences

of our human heritage

which uses its common sense of values and

objectives to bind itself together.

We have set for ourselves and our University the highest goals.

I don't know if we can make "a river in the desert".

I know that we will try.

Of course, I also know that we will sometimes fail.

We will take the wrong turn, stumble, lose our way at times,
be confused, not have all the answers.

But there is an old saying among engineers.

If you never fail you just haven't set your goals high enough.

So a few misteps or detours won't bother me
so long as we hold to our basic ideals and direction.

What will not change or falter is my personal determination to lead
the University in a direction that serves all the people of our society.

Of course I know that our University can't accomplish
its Mandate alone.

We are are determined to do our part.

But we also need your help
...your support...and your understanding.

And we ask you to join with us and others throughout this state,
in a commitment to provide the best possible education
for every child, for every citizen
to create the new models of multicultural communities
so necessary for the new century which lies ahead.

In years to come,

I hope our children can look back with pride and gratitude
and say that in this time and this place
the people of Michigan and Detroit took a stand;
they came together and worked together
to build a new model of community
for the good of the children.....

I hope that they can say that we that we made a difference.

That together we became a mighty force for change.

Let us, as the Lesson says

“Do a new thing; now it shall spring forth”

Nothing we do in our lives is more important than this.

Thank you very much.