

Hedgepath installed as 14th president of Wayland

November 19, 2024

PLAINVIEW—In a ceremony marked with tradition and faith, Donna Hedgepath officially was inaugurated as the 14th president of Wayland Baptist University, Nov. 18, in Harral Memorial Auditorium on the university's Plainview campus.

In her inaugural address, "Pioneering the Future," Hedgepath reflected on Wayland's legacy and outlined her vision for the university. Emphasizing Wayland's pioneering spirit, she highlighted key moments in the university's history.

She pointed to the advancements made by Bill Marshall, president of Wayland from 1947 to 1953, who "made several bold decisions that changed the trajectory of the university and in some cases the state of Texas."



President Donna

Hedgepath delivers her
inaugural address at
Wayland University.
(Wayland Photo)

Hedgepath explained Marshall “recruited international students to such a degree that by the time he left, Wayland had a higher percentage of international students than any other college or university in the U.S.” One vehicle for this growth, the International Choir, continues to exist today, she noted.

Likewise, when Annie Taylor, an African American schoolteacher from Floydada, needed some continuing education credits, she “was brave enough to ask Dr. Marshall about coming to Wayland, and he saw an opportunity for a new kind of pioneering,” Hedgepath noted.

“Not only did the board vote, so did the faculty and student body, and guess what? Of course, everyone said, ‘yes!’ Thus, Wayland Baptist College became the first college in the former Confederate South to integrate—voluntarily—three years before *Brown v. Board of Education* forced the issue on a national scale.”

Taylor commuted to class, but “George May came that fall as the first full-time Black student who lived in the dorms as an undergrad, she explained.

“His sister Janet followed him a few years later and by the middle of the 1950s, was our first Black Homecoming queen.”

Hedgepath noted additional historical moments in Wayland’s past, including the “reign of the winningest women’s basketball team in U.S. history—Wayland’s Hutcherson Flying Queens,” who won 131 consecutive games and hold a place in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame for that streak.

Hedgepath outlined plans to advance Wayland's mission, including upgrading technology, enhancing student success programs and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration.

Call to action

She also underscored her commitment to faith-based leadership, stating: "Wayland must meet the needs of an ever-changing workforce—and we can and will do this through creative programming and degree planning."

Hedgepath closed her remarks with a call to action for the Wayland community, urging everyone to work together to shape a brighter future.

"Let us commit to a future where our university is not just a place of learning, but a beacon of progress and, most importantly, hope. Together, we will pioneer solutions that transcend boundaries, inspire change and create impact on a global scale."



Grant Litton, Hedgepath's nephew, delivers his charge to the incoming

president, highlighting her importance to their family.
(Wayland Photo)

Hedgepath's inauguration marks a historic moment for Wayland. As the first female president in the institution's history, her appointment reflects Wayland's commitment to continue in the path of inclusivity and innovation the university historically has followed.

At the inauguration, Joe Hopkins, president of Campbellsville University; Grant Litton, Hedgepath's nephew; Paul Armes, president emeritus of Wayland Baptist University; and H. Keith Spears, chancellor emeritus of Campbellsville University; each offered a charge to the incoming president.

The investiture ceremony included the installation of Hedgepath by Mark Jones, a dedicatory prayer by Julio Guarneri and the formal presentation of the president by Jeanette Parker, interim vice president for academic affairs at Campbellsville University.

Beyond the inauguration

In a Zoom call after the ceremony, Hedgepath explained Wayland's mission and "its potential to grow" were part of what drew her to Wayland. Since she arrived in July, she noted she has discovered many similarities to her prior institution in Kentucky that have allowed her to feel at home.

Short-term improvements already are underway and include upgrades to technology and facilities, she said.

But, enrollment is always both a long- and short-term goal, "and so we're already looking at creative ways to get more students," she said. The best way to increase enrollment, "especially with undergrads" is to "have a campus that is aesthetically pleasing and modern, and offers top-of-the-line

accommodations,” she added.

Some of the dorms currently don’t meet that standard, but she said her goal is to develop a campus that feels like “an oasis in the desert,” noting the university already is raising money for improvements and will continue fundraising efforts to that end.



Inauguration attendees offer prayers for Donna Hedgepath, Wayland’s newly installed president. (Wayland Photo)

Strategic planning is underway, with the intent to begin implementation by next summer. She said the university would like to grow, “not by 40 or 50 but by a thousand or two, and we are working on some interesting programs and other ideas to bring in more students.”

“Once we establish and get our foundation strong, and a plan, our strategic plan, it’s easier to dream a little bit. And that’s what we plan to do,” she explained.

Hedgepath said she felt called to education when she served as a high school choir director, and as her path led her to the academy, when her

giftedness in training teachers to teach became apparent.

Her path to academic leadership began with that passion for teaching other teachers, and the leadership piece happened organically once she started working at the university.

Hedgepath explained her “heart for students” grew out of that calling and her own experiences of professors and administrators investing in her as a first-generation college student.

She said of students who might be anxious about college—whether the source of their anxiety is financial, relational, loneliness or whatever—“I want to help all of them” to succeed.

“Part of that is my testimony, as well. I want them to know that it’s OK to struggle, because there’s always hope.”