

Hoogstra: Called to build bridges in divisive times

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DALLAS—A mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue, pipe bombs mailed to political leaders, and a massive caravan of Central Americans approaching the U.S. border underscore the importance of Christians' calling to build bridges, the president of the [Council for Christian Colleges and Universities](#) told a Dallas Baptist University audience.



Shirley Hoogstra, president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, challenges students at Dallas Baptist University to become bridge-builders. (Photo / Ken Camp)

“Bridge-building work, by its nature, will be in the most vulnerable and contentious spaces of our times,” Shirley Hoogstra told DBU students in a chapel address.

Hoogstra delivered the [T.B. Maston Foundation](#) Lecture in Christian Ethics at DBU on Oct. 29. The lecture series, held each year at several Baptist universities and seminaries, is named in memory of a pioneering 20th

century Baptist professor of Christian ethics.

“We cannot escape talking about the news,” she said, pointing to the violence of the previous week and the ongoing situation developing at the nation’s southern border.

Build bridges, not resumes

In “complex times” characterized by polarization, Hoogstra voiced her belief Christian universities are positioned uniquely to become thought leaders and bridge-builders.



Shirley Hoogstra speaks at Dallas Baptist University. (Photo / Ken Camp)

She challenged DBU students to follow the example of Jesus, who noticed a tax-collector named Zaccheus and responded to him with love.

“Friendship with Zaccheus was not a resume-builder for Jesus,” she quipped.

Zaccheus was despised as a traitor to his people and as one who enriched himself by taking advantage of others, she noted.

“Jesus is a friend to the despised,” Hoogstra said. “Loving the despised,

loving the rejected, often has a cost. But Jesus came to seek and save the lost.”

Respect the dignity of each person

Hoogstra recalled an event from Holy Week in 2016 she called “Christ-inspired bridge-building.” In the wake of terrorist attacks by ISIS in Brussels, Belgium, Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of a dozen Muslim, Hindu and Christian immigrants and refugees.

“His mercy restored their dignity,” she said.

Today, Christians must determine how they will respond to the challenge of 70 million displaced people around the world, she said. More specifically, Christians in the United States must decide how they will greet the thousands of people from Central America who are making their way to the U.S. southern border.

Hoogstra, an attorney, pointed out the United States has a right to secure its borders, and she emphasized the importance of the rule of law. She also noted the law allows individuals who have a credible fear of persecution to request asylum.

She commended the [Evangelical Immigration Table](#) and its call to seek a solution that “respects the God-given dignity of every person, protects the unity of the immediate family, respects the rule of law, guarantees secure national borders, ensures fairness to taxpayers and establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents.”

She challenged students to follow Jesus by becoming bridge-builders in contentious times.

“We can serve the world lavishly and risk boldly, stepping outside our

comfort zones with our time, money and reputations,” Hoogstra said. “We have no reason to fear, because we know God holds our lives and the world in his hands.”

Seek the common good



At a luncheon for Dallas Baptist University faculty, Shirley Hoogstra emphasized the important role of Christian higher education in building bridges and seeking the common good in a pluralistic society. (Photo / Ken Camp)

At a luncheon for DBU faculty following her chapel address, Hoogstra continued to emphasize the important role of Christian higher education in building bridges and seeking the common good in a pluralistic society.

“Christian higher education must provide thought leadership to bridge the gaps that could undo the very institutions and principles we hold dear in a flourishing democracy,” she said.

She quoted from the eulogy former President Obama delivered at the funeral of Sen. John McCain, where he referred to his friend and former

political opponent as possessing “largeness of spirit.”

“What if the first thing that others said about Christ followers was that they seemed to have this ‘largeness of spirit’—a posture that because of the promise of Christ and our glorious salvation, we live with less fear, more love and generosity?” she asked.

Hoogstra cited John Inazu, author of *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving through Deep Differences*.

“We can make room for one another and our differences, even as we are holding strongly to our own beliefs and practices,” she said.

Hoogstra named four ingredients of confident pluralism:

- **Respect.** “Respect is not a synonym for agreement,” she said. However, it acknowledges each person as possessing inherent dignity as an individual who bears God’s image.
- **Humility.** The humble person approaches differences by acknowledging he or she does not know everything and is in a position to learn. “It requires patience and forbearance to listen,” she said.
- **Trustworthiness.** It means delivering on agreed-upon results. “Trustworthiness is built after investigating all of the facts that underlie the differences before opining publicly,” she said.
- **Love.** 1 Corinthians 13 provides the best description, she noted. “The opposite of love is fear,” she said. “And that can sabotage our best intentions.”