

Starr touts Christian education, announces \$100 million funding plan

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WACO—American higher education needs Christian institutions like Baylor University, and Christian higher education must find a better way to fund its programs, rather than continuing to increase students' financial burdens, Baylor President Ken Starr said.

In his inaugural address, Starr discussed the unique contributions of Christian higher education to a constitutional republic, and he formally launched an ambitious \$100 million fund-raising initiative to address the problem of rapidly accelerating tuition costs at Baylor.

Kenneth Starr, newly inaugurated president of Baylor University.

Starr, former solicitor general of the United States and a constitutional law professor, pointed to the significance of his formal installation falling on Constitution Day, Sept. 15.

"The story of America has been, in no small measure, the expansion of our constitutional republic, from those original 13 states along the Atlantic seaboard. From the beginning, education was seen as indispensable to a constitutional republic blessed with a government—in Lincoln's immortal words at Gettysburg—of the people, by the people and for the people," Starr said.

As the oldest continuing institution of higher education in Texas, Baylor has

been guided by its mission of “pro ecclesia, pro Texana”—serving both the church and the state, he noted.

“For 165 years, Baylor has stood firmly in the Free Church tradition. Quintessentially American, that tradition is deeply respectful of individual conscience,” he said. Starr pointed specifically to the contributions of one-time Baptist Roger Williams in creating a haven of religious liberty at Providence Plantation and Virginia Baptist John Leland’s influence on James Madison.

“Madison, the founder who gave authoritative voice to our first freedoms embodied in the Bill of Rights, sat at the feet of a Baptist pastor steeped in the intellectual tradition of the Free Church,” he said.

In a conference call with reporters prior to his inauguration, Starr elaborated on his desire to see Baylor honor its heritage by creating an Institute for Baptist Studies.

He noted the school’s board of Kenneth Starr was ~~inaugurated~~ as regents has not approved the Baylor University’s president Sept. 17. recommendation yet, Starr explained the proposal originated in Baylor’s department of religion. He envisions a comprehensive center related to the religion department that would examine Baptist roots in Amsterdam and England, explore Baptists’ key role in the championing religious liberty and look at Baptist influence on contemporary life.

Higher education in the United States needs a place like Baylor University

that can integrate academic excellence and Christian commitment, Starr emphasized in his public address. Too few universities address fundamental questions about human existence, he insisted.

“The modern academy is all too often seen as smugly remote and arrogantly aloof from the American people who support and sustain it,” he said. “An unprecedented gulf separates the American people from their leading institutions of higher learning. Americans, after all, are people of faith.”

Baylor’s Christian heritage and identity shape its mission, he insisted, pointing to five foundational principles:

- *All truth is open to inquiry.*
- *Human life has meaning and purpose that is not simply a matter of human choice.*
- *Humans are a created part of nature but have been given responsibility as stewards—made in God’s image—for its care and management.*
- *People find the highest order of personal fulfillment in working constructively for the betterment of others, and they have an obligation to do so.*
- *Humans flourish best in a functional and beautiful physical environment and among colleagues who respect, love, forgive and support one another.*

Baylor will continue its tradition of “superb teaching and mentoring,” Starr said, while at the same time increasing its commitment to research for humankind’s betterment.

“In the decades to come, we are called upon increasingly to do better as

discoverers of truth. ... With our gifts of intellect and curiosity, we are called upon to explore with energy and creativity. And thus, we are morally bound to deepen our institutional commitment to discover and inquiry, of the ordinary as well as the extraordinary," he said.

While Baylor has grown and prospered, in recent years tuition levels have continue to rise significantly, and the university must find a new model for financing, Starr insisted.

"As a moral imperative, we must address the fundamental question of the rapidly escalating cost of higher education," he said.

Starr announced the launching of a President's Scholarship Initiative—a fund-raising appeal to alumni, parents of alumni and friends of the university.

"The entire Baylor family must come together to address this crisis," he said. "It is no longer an issue simply for families, struggling alone in an uncertain economy, or for governments grappling with budgetary challenges of the highest order."

Earlier, Starr announced the campaign's goal—\$100 million in three fiscal years. He told reporters Baylor already had received \$7 million in gifts. The Baylor Lariat reported Starr and his wife, Alice, donated \$100,000.

An initial steering committee of parents and alumni already is in place, and the committee will be expanded in the future, Starr added.

In his address, he also pointed to the need for broad involvement in planning Baylor's future beyond its current Baylor 2012 plan.

As 2012 looms near, it is time to celebrate our achievements and begin to shape our future," he said. "A commitment to shared governance within our university community demands that faculty, staff, students, alumni and

friends participate in this important process."