

Remarks to the Alabama - West Florida Conference, presenting the 2019 Mary Mildred Sullivan Award to Bishop David Graves

The Reverend J. Cameron West, President, Huntingdon College

June 4, 2019

Psalm 133: A Pilgrim Song of David

How wonderful, how beautiful,

when brothers and sisters get along!

It's like costly anointing oil

flowing down head and beard,

Flowing down Aaron's beard,

flowing down the collar of his priestly robes.

It's like the dew on Mount Hermon

flowing down the slopes of Zion.

Yes, that's where GOD commands the blessing,

[that's where GOD] ordains eternal life.

Refrain: How wonderful, how beautiful,

when brothers and sisters get along!...

Yes, that's where GOD commands the blessing,

[that's where GOD] ordains eternal life.

Huntingdon College is one of a select number of Southern colleges and universities authorized by the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Foundation of Oxford, Mississippi, to recognize annually a non-student who possesses spiritual qualities such that the "spiritual standard of the institution may be judged by the character of the person to whom the award is made." In a few minutes

from now, Huntingdon will be honored to present the 2019 Mary Mildred Sullivan Award to Bishop David Graves.

Huntingdon is, first and foremost, a College of the United Methodist Church. Its mission encourages all students to engage in their own individual vocational pilgrimages, to discern their callings -- freely -- in the context of broad, historic Wesleyan practical divinity. Huntingdon is faithful to the United Methodist Discipline in a manner consistent with that mission. Huntingdon's mission marks it as a place of hospitality, where all are welcome for prayer, reflection, serious academic study, and ultimately discernment around the most important spiritual question of a person's life: "What are the gifts bestowed on me by God, and how am I to use those gifts to serve God and my fellow human beings?"

In this time of denominational turbulence, Bishop Graves has calmly embodied the ministry of hospitality, respectfully welcoming all and serving all under his pastoral care. He has encouraged us all to join him on a prayerful pilgrimage to discern the mission of the United Methodist Church and the Alabama - West Florida Conference in this new day. He has challenged us all to discern the gifts that the Spirit has apportioned to us individually for the upbuilding of the United Methodist Church and the Alabama - West Florida Conference. His faithful episcopal commitment to the unity of Christ's Body -- while recognizing and honoring the gifts within the Body -- and his focus on the authority of the episcopal teaching office in helping us discern the shape of that unity moving forward are windows into the spiritual mission of Huntingdon College.

Indeed, with the counsel of Bishop Graves, the College has forthrightly identified itself as a place for the denomination and the conference to welcome those of all theological positions in our current discussions, as a place where the direction of the United Methodist Church and the Alabama - West Florida Conference can be discerned and formed in the immediate years ahead. With the leadership of Bishop Graves, Huntingdon is honoring its long faithfulness in ministry, it is serving the present age in a manner reflecting that history, and it is fostering a spiritual environment conducive to discerning prayerfully the future shape of the United Methodist Church and the Alabama - West Florida Conference.

The spiritual standard of Huntingdon College may certainly be judged by the character of its episcopal leader, and the College's spiritual standard is being shaped for a new day through the non-anxious, bridge-building influence of its episcopal leader.

Bishop Graves, in presenting this richly deserved Mary Mildred Sullivan Award to you, we at Huntingdon -- and I have on the platform with me our Provost, Anna McEwan, and our Senior Vice President, Anthony Leigh -- we at Huntingdon express to you not only our appreciation but also our deep love. Your courage and your faith strengthen our resolve to embrace the trust that we have been given to serve the Church and the Conference and to listen for God's providential Word in this volatile season. And in that spirit, we hand this award to you prayerfully, echoing in our benediction the Wesleys' hymn from 1749, "For the Society, Praying." Let us pray:

1. Thou God of truth and love,
We seek thy perfect way,
Ready thy choice t'approve,
Thy providence obey,
Enter into thy wise design
And sweetly lose our will in thine.

2. Why has thou cast our lot
In the same age and place?
And why together brought
To see each other's face,
To join with softest sympathy
And mix our friendly souls in thee?

3. Didst thou not make us one,
That we might one remain,
Together travel on,
And bear each other's pain,
Till all thy utmost goodness prove,
And rise renewed in perfect love?

Amen.

Brothers and sisters of the Alabama - West Florida Conference: Bishop David Graves, the recipient of the 2019 Mary Mildred Sullivan Award.