

**The Power of Three (or more!)**  
**Ecclesiastes 4:12**  
**Back to School Faculty/Staff Dinner**  
**August 29, 2000**

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*I have enjoyed my devotional reading this summer from the Old Testament Wisdom Literature. One day I read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up...though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” What an impact it had on me! Let me give you the context on why this verse has been uppermost in my mind for the past five weeks.*

This summer I had the privilege of speaking to a group of Nazarene educators in Johannesburg, South Africa. Dr. Dumerzier Charles also attended the conference.



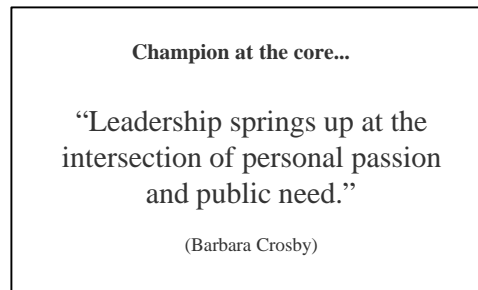
The setting was the first Consultation on Global Faculty Development. Nazarene educators, particularly from the two-thirds world spent a week together probing the possibilities of an Academy for International Education in the Church of the Nazarene. My part in the conference program was to lead two sessions on the subject of institutional collaboration. The title of my presentations was “Institutional Collaboration as Academy Strategy.”

I spoke on the need for intra- and inter-institutional strategy as foundational for the denomination to “maximize access” to the rich resources of the educational institutional institutions of the Church of the Nazarene worldwide, particularly in the two-thirds world.

It was a wonderful experience for me. I met many friends from around the world. Perhaps the highlight of the conference was the association with two of my former APNTS students who are now presidents of Nazarene theological institutions in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, something happened to me while I was there. My purpose was to assist other educators. Instead I found myself asking some hard questions about my leadership at MVNC, and the degree of partnership and collaboration we actually experience at this institution.


Let me summarize what I said to the group, and then I want to ask you some questions about us at MVNC.



I suggested that every organization needs a “champion” for the collaborative process, if partnering or collaborating is to become a way of life for an institution, and not just an intellectual game. I emphasized the point that “leadership springs up at the intersection of personal passion and public need.”

Also, I presented some lessons learned at MVNC about collaboration after one year of the three-year Teagle-funded collaboration project.

**Lessons Learned About Collaboration at MVNC**



- **Using collaboration to manage change is challenging.**
- **A vision and need are required for success.**
- **Regular communications is the glue of collaboration.**

**Lessons Learned About Collaboration at MVNC (cont.)**

- **Active, committed leadership and steering committee are required.**
- **The greater the trust and communication, the faster and more profound is the benefit.**
- **Institutional collaboration must become institutional strategy.**

Using the model of our spring collaboration consultant, Mike Winer, I asked the participants to evaluate their institution’s organizational match with his factors of successful collaboratives. Do you remember his factors? (I will ask you to participate in evaluating MVNC regarding these “factors of successful collaboratives.”)

**Institutional**  
 Does our organization match with the factors of successful collaboratives?  
 Rate: High, Medium, Low

- 1. Environment**  
 History & Leadership?  
 Favorable climate?
- 2. Membership**  
 Trust?  
 Able to compromise?

Factors of Successful Collaboratives...

- 3. Structure**  
 Flexible?  
 Clear roles & guidelines?
- 4. Communication**  
 Open and frequent?  
 Established links?

Factors of Successful Collaboratives...

- 5. Purpose**  
 Attainable goals?  
 Shared vision?
- 6. Resources**  
 Sufficient funds?  
 Sufficient time?  
 Skilled facilitator?

Before I completed the presentation, I made some remarks using quotes I had included in a booklet prepared for them. But as I was speaking to THEM, as conference participants, I found myself speaking to me as president of MVNC.

Between sessions and during the discussion opportunities, I listened to these Nazarene educators, primarily from countries in the two-thirds world, talk about the institutions where they served. Over and over the quote by Warren Bennis came to my mind.

*“None of us is as smart as all of us.”*  
 (Bennis)

Imagine the top problem they discussed in relation to institutional collaboration. You guessed it! The problem of communication and trust between administration and faculty. Sound familiar? I reflected long and hard on my (long and hard) return trip to MVNC on how I—we—can better address on our campus some of the same concerns expressed by Nazarene educators in South Africa.

Two passages of scripture reminded me throughout the summer of the profound human resources available to us at MVNC.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up... though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

*Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body...for we each have a different work to do...each needs all the others.*

(Romans 12:4-5 TLB)

I returned to campus with a renewed desire and intensity to increase the level of involvement and trust between the administration and the campus community of employees.

I renewed a commitment to streamline the MVNC administrative and decision-making processes to such a degree that in several years MVNC will be recognized as a leader among colleges and universities in institutional collaboration—within our school and between like minded institutions in Ohio and beyond, including Church of the Nazarene institutions worldwide and other Christian colleges and universities in the CCCU.

Institutional collaboration must become institutional strategy at MVNC. But it will not happen by the institutional president making pronouncements. It will happen if we together we believe with Helen Keller that...

“Alone we can do so little,  
together we can do so much.”

(Helen Keller)

And it will happen as leaders throughout this campus – faculty and staff alike - rise up with personal passion to embrace administrative or instructional needs in areas of specific responsibility.

Let me be more specific. I begin this new school year with the following commitments to you:

#### **Commitments...**

- Affirm your calling to MVNC.
- Renew emphasis on training and development.
- Increase professional travel allocation for faculty.
- Streamline administrative/decision making structure to facilitate work.
- Revise the values document.

#### **Commitments... (cont.)**

- Revise MVNC vision statement.
- Revise MVNC master campus plan.
- Study university status for MVNC.
- Increase communication regarding budget building.
- Participate in performance review of the MVNC president.

#1 I want to affirm each of you as brothers and sisters in Christ whom I choose to believe are called to work at MVNC just as much as I believe I am called to this institution.

#2 With this affirmation will come a renewed emphasis on continued training and development. The staff development committee is being restructured and will provide ongoing staff development throughout the year.

#3 I want to increase the travel allocation for faculty to attend professional meetings and discipline specific workshops and seminars.

#4 Over the next eighteen months, I will work closely with a task force specifically and with the campus community to streamline the administrative and decision making structure to facilitate, not inhibit the work each of you sincerely desire to do in your assignment at MVNC. The senior administrative team and I resolve to work more closely with you as we seek to be responsive to the Board of Trustees and to the

faculty and staff at MVNC. Believing that “none of us is as smart as all of us,” I will ask each of you during the month of September to rate MVNC according to Winer’s “factors of successful collaboratives.” Don’t sign your name to the questionnaire. I promise to read every response, and to do my best to act on the results.

#5 I need you to assist me in revising the document, **FOR THIS WE STAND: Values Underlying the MVNC Faith Community**. I wrote this document in 1993 when I realized that MVNC was enrolling an increasing number of students with no previous tie to MVNC and to the sponsoring denomination of the institution. I asked you for feedback on the document when it was in draft form, and the final product reflected your counsel to me. I again need your assistance. This fall I will ask as many of you who desire to work with me in revising the important document.

#6 I shared with the MVNC Board of Trustees at the spring meeting that I felt a need to revise the MVNC vision statement. Subsequently I asked Chaplain Gary Sivewright and his team to lead the way in providing a draft revision statement on our collective MVNC vision for a new decade. The cabinet has reviewed the statement, and I want each of you this fall to review and comment on the statement if you wish before a final revision is prepared for the Board of Trustees to approve.

#7 A task force has been working throughout the summer to revise the MVNC master campus development plan in light of enrollment growth projections for the next twenty years and the recent acquisition of the 128 acre Pinecrest farm across Martinsburg Road. You will have another opportunity on September 7 to review the several scenarios developed by the task force and our consultants before recommendations are forwarded to the Board of Trustees for consideration.

#8 A commission appointed by the Board of Trustees has been studying the issue of university status for MVNC. This group with a

consultant has been working throughout the summer on this issue. The MVNC faculty will have an opportunity this week to discuss the information already forwarded to them in the mail. A similar opportunity will be given to staff to comment on tentative recommendations.

#9 I told the Budget Planning Committee (the five MVNC vice presidents with divisional leadership and budget responsibility) that I want to find ways to periodically update the campus community regarding our progress in developing an operating budget proposal for the Board of Trustees. I want to believe you trust us, but I think we can do a more effective job in communicating with you the process, progress, problems, and potential regarding the budget building experience. We have nothing to hide, and everything to gain by opening up the process. We are already preparing a budget forum during the fall semester.

#10 Prior to my Fall 2001 renewal vote by the MVNC Board of Trustees, I plan to involve the entire campus community in a performance review of the MVNC president.

I shared an African proverb with the participants in the Johannesburg 2000 Consultation. It states, “When the elephant fights, it is the grass that suffers.”

“WHEN ELEPHANTS  
FIGHT, IT IS THE GRASS  
THAT SUFFERS.”

(Proverb of the Kikuyu people of Africa)

When I asked Dr. Leah Marangu, president of Africa Nazarene University if indeed the statement was an African proverb, she gave an emphatic “yes,” stating that it was a proverb from her tribe. She continued, it means that when the people in power fight (she referenced the World Bank, United Nations, and national leadership), it is the “grass-roots” people (the poor, weak, the disenfranchised) who get hurt.

I wondered if, in trying to do our work as an administrative cabinet at MVNC, we “hurt” the “grass roots” of our institution—the support staff, the mid-level managers who are responsible for so much of the day-to-day nuts-and-bolts administrative work of the college. I thought of how much I really want to empower and support the faculty. Yet I wondered if the structure we presently have in place facilitates or inhibits the “grass roots” of this institution from doing what they are capable of doing and really want to do.

In a new and profound way, to a degree I don’t think has characterized me in the past, I stand before you wanting to understand, embrace, and lead from the perspective of these two quotes:

“Christian leaders who embrace and value collaborative approaches to ministry discover the power of involving others. The sum is so much greater than the parts.”

“Being collaborative taps into the gifts of many people, fosters creativity, and achieves greater results.”

Enjoy the booklet, *Servants of God*, placed on your table. There is a booklet for everyone. Notice the plural—SERVANTS—of God. If MVNC reaches its phenomenal potential during this decade, it will require all of us, in the spirit of Ecclesiastes 4:12, to work together in a way that brings out the best, and the strengths, of us working together to accomplish for the institution what no one of us could accomplish on our own.

And it begins with me. Last week, during three days of cabinet planning, I asked a cabinet member to work on a project being discussed by the group. Uncharacteristically, he asked to be excused from the assignment, given his heavy schedule. And in uncharacteristic manner, I responded, “Never mind! I’ll do it myself.” Throughout the evening and early the following morning, I was really bothered, not so much by his response, but by mine. I felt I left him “hanging” in the interaction. I knew some



things about this person's schedule that the other cabinet members did not know. He was really under pressure from numerous assignments, with staff shortages in his office.

The next day, I apologized to him and to the cabinet members for my snappy response the day before. I felt I had left him "out to dry" and I failed to model to the Cabinet "the power of three" in the spirit of Ecclesiastes 4:12. I did not try to help a friend and colleague who really needed some assistance and understanding.

I ask you to join me this year in talking, dreaming, changing, and enjoying our work together as "servants of God," and experiencing anew "the power of three (or more!!!)" at MVNC. May it be so, Lord.