

Good morning,

Thank you all for being here on this exciting day!

When I was growing up, watching March Madness on TV and dreaming about being an athlete, I remember telling my parents I'd one day be on a basketball court in front of hundreds of people.

My mom and dad are here today, and despite my lack of athletic ability... I guess I still made it to the court in front of hundreds of people.... This is just not exactly what I had in mind...

Today marks a significant moment in the life of Gardner-Webb University... and in its ongoing story.

Since its founding in 1905, this institution has been shaped by faith, strengthened by generations of leadership, and sustained by a shared commitment to purpose.

I would be remiss if I did not pause to acknowledge my deep gratitude.

First, I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ... not only for this opportunity, but for each of you... and for this institution, this mission field we call Gardner-Webb.

I also want to thank my wife... your support and your belief have made this journey possible.

And to my family and friends who are here today... thank you. I am deeply grateful.

I am grateful as well to our Board of Trustees, and to our Chair, Lamont Littlejohn Jr., for your trust and your leadership.

And to our faculty and staff...

You are the ones who give life to this institution each and every day. Through your work, your service, and your care for our students, you are living out the mission of Gardner-Webb in meaningful ways.

Thank you.

And to our students...

You are the reason we are here. You are the heart of this institution, and it is a privilege to walk alongside you as you discover your purpose and prepare for what comes next.

Thank you...

As I've quickly learned, as President, you carry responsibility for everything that happens on this campus...

which means I may have gotten off on the wrong foot... because I had no idea what today was going to look like. I was simply told to show up, wear this robe, speak for ten minutes, and not go over on my time.

With that in mind, I also want to thank Stephanie Stearns and the entire planning committee for the incredible work that has gone into today.

The planning committee has done an incredible job showcasing the very best of Gardner-Webb.

So thank you for making today what it is.

And as you can imagine, I have been given a great deal of advice since stepping into this role as an interim last February.... and some of that advice has come from other senior leaders, from mentors and from friends...

As I prepared for today, I found myself reflecting on what needed to be said. And if I am vulnerable for a second, I wasn't quite sure what to say....

One common thread of advice from those mentors and friends was when you don't know what to do, trust your senior leadership....

We have a terrific cabinet and so, heeding the free advice... I consulted the Cabinet... and here's what they said....

Our Athletic Director said... keep it spirited.

Our CFO reminded me... don't waste time.

Our Provost told me... absolutely no jokes.

Our University Counsel advised... don't say too much.

Our VP of Marketing said... work in "Become More."

Our VP for Enrollment said... make it compelling.

Our Dean of Students said... make it meaningful to students.

Our VP for Christian Life reminded me... keep it Christ-centered.

And our VP for Advancement suggested... I say something worth investing in.

So I believe what follows is a well-spirited, appropriately brief, legally sound, compelling, meaningful, Christ-centered opportunity to say something worth investing in... as we talk about how we will become more.

We have a fantastic leadership team here at Gardner-Webb and I am grateful for all they do.

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Today is not about a ceremony... or speeches... or any one person.

It is about a chapter in a much larger and enduring story... built on the faith, the sacrifice, and the shoulders of those who came before us.

And today, we are entrusted with carrying it forward.

At Gardner-Webb, we are committed to preparing students not just for careers, but for their calling... equipping them with the knowledge, the skills, and the character to lead, to serve, and to make a meaningful impact in the world.

At the heart of that commitment is a simple but powerful belief...

That every student who walks onto this campus is uniquely and wonderfully made... created with purpose, gifted with ability, and called to something greater than themselves.

That belief shapes who we are.

Gardner-Webb is, and will remain, a Christ-centered university.

We believe education is not simply about information, but about formation... developing the whole person and preparing students to live lives of meaning and impact.

At Gardner-Webb, we often use the phrase "Become More."

And for us, that is not just a phrase... it is a reflection of our mission.

It means becoming more in Christ.

Becoming more in knowledge.

Becoming more in purpose.

And ultimately, becoming more prepared to lead and to serve.

We are living in a time of significant change in higher education.

But even in the midst of that, I believe this...

Institutions that are clear in their mission, disciplined in their focus, and committed to their students will not only endure... they will lead.

Gardner-Webb is uniquely positioned to do exactly that.

By being exactly who we are... with clarity and conviction.

In the years ahead, our path forward will be guided by that clarity.

We will strengthen our commitment to faith.

We will invest in academic excellence.

We will elevate the student experience.

We will tell our story with greater clarity and conviction.

We will steward our resources with discipline and purpose.

We will be focused in our priorities, disciplined in our decisions, and bold in our ambition.

But this work does not belong to one person.

It belongs to all of us.

Faculty... you define the academic heart of this institution.

Staff... you shape the daily experience of our students.

Students... you are the reason we are here.

And to our alumni, friends, and community... your belief in this institution continues to expand our impact.

This is what it means to be One Webb.

At the end of the day, people need people.

They need mentors.

They need community.

They need someone who believes in them.

And that is what we have at Gardner-Webb.

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So if you are looking for something to believe in...  
something to invest your time, your talent, and your trust in...

Bet on us.

Bet on Gardner-Webb.

This is our chapter to write.

And I am honored to be with you as we write it...  
grounded in our mission...  
confident in our future...  
and committed to the work we are called to do together.

The future of Gardner-Webb is bright...

And I look forward to all that we will accomplish... together.

Thank you.