

The following is the address by alumni president Marcy Thiesen at the 2006 annual BDH/BC Alumni Association Board Meeting:

WITHOUT THE PAST THERE CAN BE NO FUTURE

For four years I've played a role in planning and implementing an annual celebration unique to those of us gathered here. I've learned that this annual gathering possesses a myriad of meanings for us. For some, this represents a calendar event that occurs on the Friday night of Bethel Fall Festival weekend. To students, it's been a mandatory function, with attendance required. Others have distanced themselves from membership entirely, preferring to consider this an organization of the "old school."

But then there are the faithful gatherers. Those who diligently mark their calendars, await the announcements, communicate with coordinators and each other and anticipate this event. They volunteer their service, the monetary fruits of their labor and offer encouragement and ideas. To them this date represents a union of individuals whose common ground surpasses age, gender or race.

They are a body of believers who have gathered to celebrate a common purpose. They have dedicated their hands and hearts in Christian service. They have dedicated their strength and minds to a noble profession. They have dedicated their allegiance to a vocational training with its foundation carved from the Scriptures. We are Bethel Nurses. Whether the class of 1916 or 2006, our bond is strong and it's steeped in history and a tradition of excellence.

In my two years as president of the alumni association, I've been interested in building participation. I've found that a kind of disconnect exists between graduates of the Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing and the Bethel College Department of Nursing graduates. I myself am a graduate of 1997. In my nursing education, I learned the history of Bethel Nursing in my Nursing Foundations class. The history of Bethel Nursing occupies the first pages of the student handbook today. I remember the old Bethel Deaconess Hospital, I know many nursing graduates of the Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing. However, it always appeared to me that my nursing education differed dramatically from that of my predecessors. Now, nearly 10 years later, I seek to understand the difference and the "old school" sentiment that prevails among younger nursing graduates.

I re-read the book "Our Lamps were lit" by Katie Funk Wiebe again, for the first time. Maybe this time with different eyes, looking for similarities and I wasn't disappointed, the similarities were there.

Let's start with intentions. What were the motivating factors to encourage young women to leave families and pursue a vocation in nursing? Wiebe writes that "the stated purpose was to meet the increasing physical needs of the people in this new country...and to provide young women with a new avenue of church service...(Wiebe, p. 2)." So "The appeal to "Come, taste and see" what blessing lay in store for an evangelical deaconess

went out to the congregations (Wiebe, p. 3).” With the need and intention identified, the process of educating nurses began.

Admission requirements were set and appeared as follows “Women should not apply if they were interested in nursing only to make money, if they had a self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking nature, or if they were needed at home to support aged parents or to help educate younger brothers and sisters...The appeal was clearly a spiritual one to service in the kingdom of God (Wiebe, p. 4).”

Curriculum was established and guided by these early founders. Reverend David Goerz, Sister Frieda Kaufman, Sister Catherine Voth and Sister Ida Epp authored a curriculum of hands-on hospital training emphasizing dedication to Christian service, delivery of care that met a patient’s physical and spiritual needs and classroom lecture on nursing theory and fundamentals of bedside care. Clinical experience was obtained during hospital training, with care given to providing the young students with the best cases possible. Healthcare needs beyond the hospital setting were recognized and clinical experiences in Public Health Service and School Nursing in the city of Newton were available as early as 1916 (Wiebe, p. 15).

Uniform codes were established and strictly enforced. New students were eager to don a stiffly starched uniform, achieve the sturdy white cap with the rich black band and dutifully accepted the pin of Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing distinction.

Academic requirements for admission and progression were outlined and a tradition of outstanding excellence in nursing training and education was off and running. Wiebe records an “obstetrics case in the hospital, the patient became feverish after delivery (Wiebe, p. 10).” The student “followed Sister Catherine’s instructions for diagnosing possible diphtheria of the birth canal. Her diagnosis was confirmed by the doctor. After many long weeks of nursing care, the woman regained her health. Later Sister Catherine learned from medical authorities in Washington that fifty cases of this aspect of diphtheria had been reported that year. Only one patient had survived-the woman at Bethel (Wiebe, p. 10).”

Bethel Hospital students were sent to Children’s Mercy in Kansas City for three-month clinical rotations where their tradition of excellence in nursing care was quickly established. Student’s performance on State board examinations was above the state average and many Bethel nursing graduates ranked in the top tiers of all state nursing students.

Word of Bethel’s reputation and academic excellence in the preparation of nurses spread, attracting inquiries and prospective students. The circle widened, the bonds formed by common experience strengthened. Nursing students found themselves creating families consisting of those previously unfamiliar in face and background yet so familiar in purpose and goals. They lived together, ate together, worked together, socialized and studied together, worshipped, celebrated and mourned as a community. And they supported one another towards a common goal that the deepest chasm couldn’t separate.

Many fondly recall their lives in training and “Serepta the house of refining”, the home for student nurses whose walls absorbed the stories, activity, emotions and memories of all its occupants. Whether considered a place of refuge or confinement, most graduates agree Bethel Deaconess Hospital played a significant role in their personal and professional growth. Personal accounts of self-awareness, development of discipline, integrity, punctuality, patience, tolerance, friendship and servanthood dot the pages of Katie Funk Wiebe’s book.

Though a strong institution with a firm foundation, Bethel Deaconess Hospital recognized the need to keep its finger on the pulse of a growing country with a changing economy. Signs of a changing paradigm in nursing education were noted as early as 1940. Wiebe writes “the pressure to change from apprenticeship nursing to nursing education was coming from many directions. Nurses were no longer being trained they were being educated (Wiebe, p. 34).”

Sister Hilda Mueller Shaum noted “The nursing school of today is highly educational with much more of the student’s time devoted to study, classroom work, lectures, and professional duties...(Wiebe, p. 34).”

Practice standards were coming of age, definitions were being developed. Nurses were seeking recognition in their own domain outside of a medical model or roles dependent upon physicians.

Wiebe notes, “In the past the nurse had been the handmaiden of the doctor, taught to follow his orders regardless of the needs and, sometime, the requests of the patients. Nursing care had been primarily the physical care of the patient with the nurse expected to know little about the concepts of modern behavioral sciences. Performance had been procedure-oriented, but now a well-qualified professional nurse was expected to be knowledgeable in the basic biological, physical, and social sciences. She was expected to plan each patient’s care to meet his or her social, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. In addition, she was expected to assume responsibility for the actions, developments, and progress of her profession. Non-nursing functions were being delegated to non-nurses- cleaning to housekeeping, desk work to ward clerks, and cleaning and preparation of supplies to the central service department. The professional nurse was free to develop an individualized plan of nursing care for her patient (Wiebe, p. 49).”

This was the tone of debate over the role of nurses in the middle of the last century.

The Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing met the challenges presented in economy, politics, population, healthcare needs and role development for 66 years. On June 28, 1974 the last class of Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing graduated. Wiebe writes “Though the Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing has closed its doors, the lamps of its graduates will shine. They were lit at Bethel they say (Wiebe, p. viii).”

So now what, where did we go and what about those similarities that I noted? I like to think the lamps that were lit at Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing were torches that were passed on and entrusted to the care of Bethel College. I believe those lamps serve a vital function today. The flames flickered and provided the light and inspiration needed to turn the page and start a new, yet continued chapter in excellence in nursing education.

Let's consider the similarities. Bethel College Department of Nursing proudly carries forth the intentions of the founders. Nursing education is based upon a mission to serve within a Christian context. Nursing education is focused on serving diverse populations with diverse needs. Bethel College attempts to answer the call for nurses by increasing class sizes and opening enrollment. The integration of Christian faith and learning is emphasized through Biblical studies, which serve as prerequisites for graduation from the department of nursing.

Admission guidelines require that applicants achieve standards of excellence in academics, ethics and moral integrity. Nursing curriculum includes Nursing theory, foundation, studies in the arts and sciences, interdisciplinary studies and Bible and Religion.

Nursing faculty carefully adhere to the leading of the sisters in teaching the delivery of holistic healthcare, evaluating students for their ability to provide for biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual needs of patients.

Tradition has been carried forward by providing clinical experience in OB, Pediatrics, Surgery, General Medical, Gerontology and Community Health. Bethel students continue to be recognized as self-directed, independent workers and motivated learners at clinical sites.

Students develop questions for research, implement research and report findings to professional organizations.

Though it's changed, the Bethel College uniform remains among the most distinguished and recognized in the clinical setting.

Bethel College Nursing students comprise a host of diversity between ages and ethnicities. Clusters of students gather to study in Mantz Library, Bubberts, or dorm rooms. Many students retain the same study group members for 2 1/2 years, fostering relationships and developing into those families with common goals. By graduation time, the old Memorial Hall basement has become a "home away from home." There's rarely a corner or closet that isn't familiar to a Bethel Nursing Student...I liken it to Serepta. Memorial Hall Basement, **our house of refining.**

While Bethel College has successfully adapted to a 20th century paradigm for Nursing as a profession, it continues to face the need to bend, mold, re-shape and re-invent itself, just as the BDH program did. Today the issues are inspiring excellence and servant hood in a

new generation of learners desiring monetary rewards and instant gratification. Or meeting the need for Nursing Educators when the demand is high and the supply of those qualified is low. There are challenges to meet and issues to face, but the Bethel College Department of Nursing continues to conduct business, meet the challenges and face the issues in the spirit of tradition. Tradition built on Bethel Deaconess Hospital soil.

If you've been one that considered this gathering an obligation, a function of the old school, or simply struggled to understand where you fit in, consider the lamps. They remain lit, they flickered strong enough to start a new flame. The flame was lit in 1903 and has remained a continuum of light, held by each member of this association.

This next year, we get an opportunity to celebrate the continuum of light. Bethel Deaconess Hospital nears its 100th anniversary of its dedication and the ordination of Sisters Frieda Kaufman, Catherine Voth and Ida Epp. Bethel College Department of nursing commemorates the 25th year of Department of Nursing Graduates.

Our nursing history and tradition has been previously established and made solid for each of us here. We are the current stewards of the lamps. The Bethel Nursing tradition is calling on us to continue writing our history. Each of us is presented with the opportunity to continue writing on the pages. I hope our time of celebration this year renews bonds, recalls memories and restores commitments that fan the fire of our lamps and encourage our continued growth.

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