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Scholar Week

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Faculty, Students, and Guests:

During Scholar Week we take inspiration from 18th century preacher-scholar John Wesley. As "a denominational university in the Wesleyan tradition," scholarship and piety are thoroughly compatible here.

Wesley is most known for evangelism, church planting, compassionate activism, and piety. But this founder of Methodism was also a methodological thinker, calling himself an "empiricist," analyzing theological claims with formal syllogisms, compiling his own five-volume science book of natural philosophy, and leisure reading, at age 83, Francis Bacon's "Ten Centuries of Experiments." While piety was his great, clamoring gong throughout history, rigorous analysis is his echo.

His theological method is also pliable to academic work. There was for Wesley a dynamic relationship between Scripture and other God-given tools and resources to discern His will and way: the "a priori" gift of reason to test evidence, sustainable patterns set by the early Church, and the great value of common spiritual experience over private and internal "spiritual enthusiasms." William Abraham says about Wesley, Scripture is law, but these other thinking tools are jury. They too are means of grace, mediating life in God and fostering sanctity.

By the early 20th century, founders of the Church of the Nazarene expressed Wesley's Methodism through schools, a dozen of them in its first decade. Dr. J.P. Widney—the man who named the Nazarenes—was president of the University of Southern California. And Phineas Bresee—the denomination's first General Superintendent, president of a college for nine years, and organizer of the Chicago Central District—counseled his pastors to be in touch with the great thought of the world. Get books, he said, get them at any sacrifice, for they equip us to teach and win souls. Today, more than 50 dot the globe, serving 30,000 students. A Harvard panel in 2000 said the denomination's churches are inconceivable apart from its schools.

So, in Scholar Week we tune our ear to the gong and echo of Wesley. It is not just history, but his story, even to this day. In our own scholarship projects we join a great cloud of Christians not educated out of their faith, but fashioning an educated faith, where the love of the Lord by heart, soul, strength, and mind is our great and worthy cause.

Dr. Gregg Chenoweth
Vice President for Academic Affairs