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In your hands is a reminder of another year passed, one filled with triumphs and failures, joys and regrets. It takes belief in yourself and in your ideas to find what you are looking for. It is not drive alone, but a desire and a passion for something greater than just pulling through.
Here we remember the friends we made and the ways we furthered our understanding in the 2014-2015 academic year. For some, it is the first year of college; for others it is the last. For all, it is a step closer to a life as more than a student.
"He has a gentle heart; a character based on wisdom."

"He’s an outstanding professor and has a brilliant mind."
Ask anyone about Dr. Paul Koch and the word “brilliant” quickly comes up. “He is an outstanding professor, and has a brilliant mind,” said Dr. Glen Rewerts, head of Olivet’s Department of Business where Dr. Koch works. “He’s very well-rounded; he’s brilliant too,” said his colleague Dr. Lynda Allen. “He’s always learning,” said Dr. Koch’s wife, Debra, “He reads constantly. He reads newspaper in print and online... and he’ll have five books going at a time! Constantly learning, searching for more. He has a memory that is amazing.”

Dr. Koch has used his brilliant memory both to teach and to connect with people. “[Dr. Rewerts] really appreciates his memory,” Mrs. Koch said. “He will go to Paul and say, ‘When did this happen?’ and Paul can tell him.” Dr. Allen commented on Dr. Koch’s ability to create relationship swith students: “He knows everyone’s name...I am amazed by how often we’ll be walking down a hallway together to classes, and how many names Paul can call out personally. It could be a student he had in Principles of Economics three years ago. I think that says something about his investment in students.”

Dr. Koch is an only child and grew up in the San Diego area of California before moving to McMinnville, Oregon when he was eleven. Church was and continues to greatly influence him. His early view of the world was greatly impacted by his Sunday School teachers. He graduated from high school at the early age of sixteen. “He was going to be a pastor,” Mrs. Koch said. He spent a year at Liberty Baptist University, and it was there that he realized he was called not to pastor, but to teach. He ended up enrolling in George Fox University, where he took economics. His studies eventually led him to the American Studies program in Washington DC, where according to Mrs. Koch, “He took a liking to pursuing economics as a career.”

Though a West Coast native, Dr. Koch has spent more of his life in Illinois than out West. He moved to Illinois to receive his masters in Economics, and eventually earned a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. “If he had not been accepted into the master’s program at Illinois State, we never would have met,” Mrs. Koch said. She described their meeting at a young adult gathering at their church in Bloomingdale. “Paul is very tall,” she said. “It was a big group...and a very small apartment. The only place for him to be was in the hallway. I had to go from one room to another and step over his feet and legs—that made a huge impression—for someone’s legs to be stretched out that long!” As of June 1st, 2015, the two will have been married for 30 years. They have two sons, both college graduates, one of which is an Olivet alumnus.

Although Dr. Koch has been teaching at Olivet since 1992, his experience extends beyond the walls of ONU. Every year he teaches Comparative Systems in Eastern Europe at the International Business Institute, traveling between different countries with students from the program. In addition, Mrs. Koch is the coordinator of 4H youth development, and Mr. Koch volunteers regularly and acts as a judge for the fair. He’s also been involved with theatre. Through it all, he shows a commitment to knowledge and to the people around him. Dr. Rewerts observed of Dr. Koch, “He has a gentle heart; a character based on wisdom.” “He bothers to get to know students and still remembers them, even years later,” said Dr. Allen. Dr. Koch may be a teacher, but he certainly has a pastor’s heart.
Earlier this year I was copied in on an email from one professor to another. The subject of the note was a routine matter, and I was copied into the message just to keep me in the loop. There was nothing memorable about the email exchange other than a quotation appearing in the signature line of one of the professors. It caught my attention. I wrote it down and have thought about it often. It was a statement about education often attributed to William Butler Yeats: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

Those words express, in part, our educational philosophy at Olivet. We do not ask students to "sit still while we instill." Rather, we seek to gather kindling and encourage students to play with matches. Our desire is for students to learn how to learn, to foster creativity and to become lifelong learners. We also believe that higher education ought to have a higher purpose, so we seek to help students learn how to live, as well as how to make a living.

In her book, The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter--And How to Make the Most of Them Now, Meg Jay builds a compelling case for how important these college years are. She says that "... as we leave home and become more independent there is a burst of self-creation, a time when what we do determines who we will become."

University students are in the beginning years of that "defining decade" as they make the journey from late adolescence toward maturity. What happens during this time sets a trajectory for the rest of a student’s life.

The theme for this year’s edition of the Aurora is a challenging one for those living in "the defining decade." The call to ask, seek, and knock implies a sense of personal responsibility. We are to actively pursue life’s opportunities and objectives by taking the initiative to seek. This theme flows from Matthew 7:7 – “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. “

The years one spends in university life are filled with many doorways of opportunity, promise and invitation. These are doorways to learn, to travel, to serve, to build new relationships, and to develop one’s personality and character. Through such doors one’s future unfolds.

Seeking is an active pursuit. Not much of value comes to those who sit and wait. To be at our best we must seek the best. Jesus strikes at the heart of this in his words from the Sermon on the Mount where he says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

One of life’s great lessons is that if we put God in His proper place in our life, everything else has a way of finding its proper place as well. However, if we fail to seek first his kingdom, nothing else will reach its full potential. The Aurora reminds us that we are all seekers and cautions us to seek first things first!
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