authentic: (adj)

true to one's own personality, spirit, or character

"you show that you are a letter from Christ
delivered by us,
written not with ink
but with the Spirit of the living God,
not on tablets of stone
but on tablets of human hearts."
—2 Corinthians 3:3
There was something about the people here. Something real. Something beautiful.

Something seen in the moments of complete authenticity. When what we thought, what we said, and what we did aligned.

When we could love with divine love, serve with selfless hearts, and sacrifice with willing spirits, because we were rooted.

In deep belief. In word. In truth.

And no one was perfect. We were all trying to figure it out. And we messed up. A lot. But somehow we were met in those imperfections.


Turning points.

From the foot of the altar to the crowded coffee shops, we experienced moments that left us changed people.


We shared our weaknesses and found strength. We weren’t afraid to face the hard things, to cry in our pain and be filled with the power of the gospel.

We had purpose. Mission. Hope.

Because we had the Spirit. And in the Spirit we were given the desire and the power to live for something so much bigger than ourselves.

It was this Spirit who made us true to who we were. Who fueled us to reflect a love that was

DEDICATED TO
SPENCER AND ASHLEY COOK

AUTHENTIC
LEADERS • DISCIPLES • SERVANTS
Someone who was truly authentic. As our staff discussed potential nominees for the dedication of the Aurora, we decided to honor someone who really embodied authenticity and sincerity. So many incredibly genuine people work for Olivet, and as we considered them all, it became nearly impossible to choose. However, at the mention of the Cook family, the room was brought to an immediate consensus. Although our staff consisted of students from a variety of backgrounds, their powerful reaction made evident the true impact that Spencer and Ashley have had on their lives and on the lives of so many others. After sharing our stories and speaking to the incredible influence the couple has had on Olivet’s campus, we made the unanimous decision to dedicate our hard work and efforts to them, in gratitude for the hard work and efforts they have dedicated to the students of this university.

For us, the Cook’s exemplify true authenticity and we desired that everyone would see their genuine spirits. I sat down with Spencer and Ashley to learn more about their time at Olivet and their hearts for the students on campus. Their Grand apartment is cozy and inviting, and as we are talking several residents stop in to say hello. Bright string lights decorate the ceilings, and the vibrantly painted walls speak to the fun and open personalities of the couple in front of me. As I sit down on the couch I know that this is a place where many have come to seek the wisdom and counsel of these two, myself included. Pulling out my notebook, I start by asking them to share why they were here at Olivet and what the school had meant to them throughout their lives.

“We’re just here for the food,” Spencer joked, and we shared a laugh before Ashley answered more seriously. “This is what I would say, Olivet is our home,” she began as Spencer enthusiastically agreed. “We basically grew up here.” Both Cooks lived in Bourbonnais, started dating in high school, and attended Olivet together. They joked that they were truly an “Olivet” couple, as Chaplain Mark Holcomb officiated their wedding in Kelly Prayer Chapel, and Joey Ramirez provided the music. As they shared the foundation and support system Olivet has been throughout their lives it became more evident to me how invested they both truly re in this place and in the people here.

“The relationships we’ve made here are everything,” Spencer said. “They are the most important thing. They’ve been a source of joy and we wouldn’t trade them for anything.” As I ask about their favorite memories, they launch into stories about inflatable hot tubs in the Chapman hallways and snowball fights in the Parrot bathroom.

“One of our favorite memories has to be Spring Break of Ashley’s freshman year,” Spencer said. “She had just been through the RA application process and was too excited to wait for the letter. We came onto the empty campus somehow got into the building, and saw that there was in fact a letter. She ripped it open to read that she was going to be an RA in Parrott Hall. That for us was the start of a huge adventure.” They shared that Ashley went on to RA for three years, and Spencer went on to RA for two years. After that, they loved the ministry so much they devoted themselves to it professionally. Spencer became an RD for three years and this past year was Ashley’s third year.

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“It’s remarkable to think about the amount of students that we’ve interacted with collectively through Res Life,” Spencer said. Ashley agreed that it was a huge number of students, but that Christ had continually worked in their ministry.

“The Lord has showed us through everything that he is real, present and active,” Ashley said. “In the midst of his reality and presence, he is faithful—whether we see it or not.” We began to talk about the authenticity of Christ, and the way in which he calls us to be authentic with others.

“I think authenticity is incredibly important,” Ashley said. “That’s where hurts are shared, that’s where joys are shared.”

“If you’re not being authentic, what’s the point?” Spencer added. “Anything that you gain, anything that you do, it’s all worthless. When I came to Christ I was 15, and it was the single biggest change in my life because I began to figure out that my identity was in Him.” The couple shared the struggles they’ve had with authenticity and the ways they have overcome and seen others overcome the desire to be approved of, rather than genuinely themselves.

“I think it brings freedom,” Ashley said. “Sometimes you feel trapped trying to be something you’re not. When you are authentic with someone you sometimes see that you’re not the only one going through something. You might as well be real.” Spencer agreed. “It’s the first gift you can give anyone else—to be genuinely, authentically yourself with them.”

This is a gift that the Cooks have given me, and so many other students on campus. “We’ve had the incredible opportunity to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and mourn with those who are mourning,” Ashley said. “We’ve walked with people in the midst of powerful, super happy moments and in the midst of pain, vulnerability, doubts and fears.”

Both Spencer and Ashley become emotional as they reflect on the spiritual weight of caring so deeply for hundreds of souls. Committing themselves to the ministry together, they have devoted themselves to knowing and praying for each and every one of their residents, sharing their joys and also their burdens. The room falls silent for a minute and in the silence I can feel the tangible heartbreak and passion they have for the broken and the hurting people who have been brought into their lives. The couple tears up as they share the ways in which the Lord has furthered the kingdom at Olivet through incredibly deep and real moments almost too profound for words. I tear up too, thinking of the influence they have had on so many lives and in my own life. Their passion has pushed me to more passionate, their compassion and servitude challenged me in ways I cannot begin to comprehend. As I closed my notebook, it became overwhelmingly evident to me that the Holy Spirit has continually done an amazing work through Spencer and Ashley on this campus. As I left their apartment that night, I could not have been more affirmed of our choice to dedicate the book to these two incredible servants of Christ, who have dedicated their lives in service to Him and His mission to love others with a radical, passionate, and completely authentic love.
DR. JOHN BOWLING

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT
ESSE QUAM VIDERI

No, this is not an eye-test. Although this may seem like a random selection of letters, it is actually a Latin phrase which first appeared in Cicero’s essay “On Friendship,” written in 44 B.C. Translating Latin phrases has become a bit of a social phenomenon that shows up in such random places as casual conversation, carpe diem – “seize the day,” in advertising, caveat emptor – “buyer beware,” on coffee cups, vox populi -- “the voice of the people;” in works of literature, amor vincit omnia – “love conquers all;” or inked on flesh as a tattoo semper fidelis – “always faithful” or errare humanum est – “to err is human.”

Of course, not all Latin phases are profound. For example, there is the bumper sticker, sona si Latine loqueris – “honk if you speak Latin.” When I honked, the fellow flashed a hand gesture in my direction! It must have been a borrowed car.

The phrase that came to mind when I learned that the theme for this year’s Aurora was “Authentic” was esse quam videri, which means “to be rather than to seem.” This call is embedded in the Olivet educational process, which calls for authenticity in every aspect of life: academically, socially, and spiritually.

At ONU, we are convinced that “being” precedes doing. Our mission statement underscores this thought by stating that the first of three core pillars of our work is “personal development.” The aim of an Olivet education is for each student to be the best person he or she can be.

The broader culture has a tendency to invert this idea of esse quam videri. In fact, those who are particularly observant, may have noticed that when television personality, Stephen Colbert, was doing his faux news show, “The Colbert Report,” he was seated in front of a fireplace that bore the inscription Videri quam esse – “to seem, rather than to be.” That was exactly what he was doing, he seemed to be a genuine serious reporter, when in reality he was not.

How like our society at large; we are obsessed with appearance rather than substance. The lives of many are like the Main Street of the old western movies. As the main character walked down those streets the camera would pan to reveal shops, saloons, businesses, hotels and offices bustling with activity. But if one was to visit those sets and walk behind the façade, he or she would see that the appearance was an empty promise. It was all for show.

A high quality Christian education re-centers the focus on being, rather than simply seeming to be. This is expressed in the university’s value proposition: “We believe higher education ought to have a higher purpose.”

At Olivet, students do more than take courses and accumulate credits – they get an education! They learn and learn how to learn. They are challenged to be wise as well as knowledgeable.

Although we don’t teach Latin at Olivet, we do teach and foster the development of men and women who will “be” all that God has created them to be. This kind of learning happens in classrooms, chapel services, service projects, internships, athletic competition, residential life and a hundred other venues. At every corner of the campus, students are challenged and encouraged esse quam videri, to be, rather than seem to be.

Soli Deo gloria

Dr. B.
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Vice President for Institutional Advancement

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