

DAVIDSON COLLEGE DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA 28036 704/892-8021

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

April 26, 1977

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Attached herewith, as a matter of information, is a statement I made at the Alumni Luncheon on April 23. I have proposed to Dean Johnston, Dr. Kelton and Thom Young a forum in which the kind of discussion referred to in the statement can be carried on. All of them agree that this is a good idea, and that it would be beneficial to have such a discussion at the time the Trustees are here.

Consequently, we will have an open meeting on the tenure policy in the Gallery from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 5. Members of the Executive Committee of the Trustees, which worked out and proposed the current By-Laws statement, are being asked to be present and answer questions on behalf of the Trustees.

SRS:ld


Samuel R. Spencer, Jr.

Attachment
Alumni Luncheon Statement

STATEMENT MADE AT THE ALUMNI LUNCHEON, April 23, 1977

I would like to comment on the issue which has caused much discussion on the campus this weekend, and about which an article appeared in the press this morning, the incident involving our offer to a candidate in Political Science and the broader issue of college policy having to do with appointments and tenure.

First, it is important to understand exactly what the By-Laws of the Trustees say with respect to faculty appointments and tenure. The pertinent section reads as follows:

It is natural and desirable that the educational service of a church-related College should be carried forward from one generation to another by persons committed to the faith of its founders. The Christian commitment of a church-related College is reflected not only in its corporate policies, programs, and stewardship of resources, but especially in the lives of the individuals who make up its community, particularly its officers and tenured Faculty members. For that reason, the President is directed to seek out and secure as officers and Faculty members Christian men and women who are not only highly competent but who understand and respond to the implications of their commitment as Christians. In view of the fact that the Christian community has always had a place for the reverent seeker, the Trustees may in special circumstances grant tenure to a person who respects the Christian tradition without commitment to all its tenets. Within the general policy stated above, such cases will necessarily be rare. The President shall be responsible to the Trustees for being certain that each person employed as a member of the Faculty and staff, at the time of his or her appointment, is fully aware of and supports the purpose of the College as set forth in the Davidson College Constitution, and is prepared conscientiously to uphold and seek to increase its effectiveness as a church-related college.

During the candidate's interview at Davidson, this provision of the By-Laws and the Christian commitment of the college were discussed thoroughly with him, and a copy of this provision and the Statement of Purpose were sent to him. We offered him by letter an appointment in the full knowledge that he was non-Christian. This was in complete accord with the By-Laws as quoted above. The letter pointed out to him again the college's Statement of Purpose and stated further, "You should accept this appointment only if you genuinely want to join such a community and are,

as the By-Laws state, prepared conscientiously to uphold and seek to increase the college's effectiveness as a church-related college."

The letter ended by saying that a letter from him accepting its terms would constitute a contract. His reply, written six weeks later, raised a serious question as to whether he had accepted the terms of the appointment as offered. Counsel advised me that he had not, and that consequently there was no contract. Counsel further advised me that my responsibility as President under the college's governance documents did not permit me to treat the reply as an acceptance, and the candidate was so informed.

What is at issue, with respect to the college's policy, is first, whether the college has a right to take religion into account in the appointment of faculty members, and second, whether it is wise and proper to do so. About the right there is no question. The law specifically grants that right to church colleges like Davidson.

Whether it is wise and proper is a matter for judgment. For centuries there have been groups of Christian scholars and teachers who have banded together to offer education to the young. Since its founding, Davidson has been such an educational institution. Its Statement of Purpose and its whole history and tradition make clear that those responsible for college policy have believed that a group of persons who share a common commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord can together form an academic community distinctive in its approach to higher education -- distinctive in combining a concern for intellectual competence with a concern for Christian values. They have further believed that society is well served by the existence of some institutions like this which consciously attempt to give their students not only intellectual skills but the love of truth, respect for human dignity, and unselfish desire to serve which naturally flow from Christian commitment. They have offered it not as a model for all of

higher education, but as an option for those who choose it, for it is consciously different from the purely secular college or university.

A common Christian commitment does not and must not for a moment imply denial of freedom of speech. On the contrary, there are few more important objectives in a society plagued by distortion and riddled by distrust than to maintain the college and university campus as a forum where ideas of all kinds, unpopular or inaccurate as they may be, can be freely expressed. We have, and will continue to have on this campus, expression of the most widely varying points of view, and I will personally continue to protect the right of that kind of expression as fundamental to our educational objectives.

For those who define the term "educational institution" in monolithic terms, an option such as the one Davidson has represented over the years is something less than the best. Central to this position is the conviction that an institution which seeks, in its permanent faculty, commitment to any particular faith cannot attract the "best" teachers. This of course depends upon the definition of "best." Davidson's answer has always been that the "best" is that person who combines to the highest degree academic competence with Christian commitment. It logically follows that in some cases, the choice of faculty members might be different from that of a college which chooses on the basis of intellect alone. The policy has been an honest one, openly and clearly stated for all to see. There is no denying, as is the case in this instance, that it is subject to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Obviously there are those who feel that it should be changed.

The entire matter is an important and basic one. It is a matter for legitimate and rational discussion, and the college campus is the kind of place which should encourage that exchange. Because there are strong and conscientious feelings about the issue, I have no doubt that the discussion will continue.