While I was teaching at Willamette University, President Bruce Richard Baxter often gave me special assignments. I did not know it then but he was actually giving me some administrative experience. Frequently, he would say to me, "Frank, if you had this kind of problem, how would you solve it?" It was fun for me and I would reply that I would do this and this and this. Quite often, he would then say, "Don't you see the political implications and the business implications if you do that? What are the alternatives?" And we would discuss them, and I learned a great deal from him regarding administrative management.

At the same time, Mrs. Baxter often invited Lucille to the President's home to help entertain visitors--trustees, executives from the East, lecturers, and other unusual and interesting people. Both of us learned a very great deal about administration without being aware of it.

When I was offered the position at the College of Puget Sound, I went up to Portland to see Dr. Baxter, who by then was Bishop of the Portland Area, and I always remembered what he told me: "Frank, you will have many unusual experiences if you accept, and you will have sore temptations to leave for some other place after a certain length of time. I think there is something to be said for a president who gives his entire, active life to one institution's development. He achieves something that cannot be derived if he only stays at one place for two or three years and then departs for somewhere else."
Lucille and I talked it over and decided that we would follow Bishop Baxter's advice and go to a school like the College of Puget Sound and give our lives to its development and to the young people with whom we would be associated.

Methodist Episcopacy

We were getting along very nicely at the College of Puget Sound and making good progress when Mr. Robbins approached me about an opening in the episcopacy of the Methodist Church. He asked if the Pacific Northwest Conference could submit my name as a candidate. He believed there would be support from the Oregon Conference and the California Conference as well, and felt if I allowed my name as a candidate there was certainly a very great promise of election.

Lucile and I discussed this at great length—whether or not we wanted to be in the itinerary of the Methodist episcopacy. It would mean that we would have to move our family every few years; we would not have any roots and we would not be able to send our girls to a school like Annie Wright. So we decided that we would not allow my name to be submitted and I told Charles Robbins that we appreciated being considered but we would stay at the College of Puget Sound.

DePauw Offer

Not long after that, in 1951, I was asked to visit DePauw University at Greencastle, Indiana, where I was being considered for the presidency. Dr. Wilder
was not well and had reached the age of retirement and they were looking for his successor. Lucille and I stopped on our way East and Lucille spent the time with the wives of the Board of Trustees and I spent the day with the Bishop and the Trustees. It was a most interesting time. However, we were not particularly impressed, although DePauw had more endowment than the College of Puget Sound, but we knew what we had CPS and it was our decision that we would stay where we were.

I was exceedingly surprised when I received a telegram from Bishop Raines telling me that I was unanimously elected president of DePauw the evening before and asking me how soon I would be able to assume responsibility there. It came as a shock to both of us because we did not think we were being seriously considered and certainly we had not looked with too great favor upon the possibility of the move.

Again, after careful, prayerful thought, we sent a telegram back saying that we were honored that I had been elected but because we had not finished our work at the College of Puget Sound we felt we should remain here. So we turned the offer down.

Drew Visit

Shortly after that, I was called from Madison, New Jersey, by Mr. Leon Baldwin, one of the Baldwin Brothers who owned the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Trenton and who built Brothers College at Drew University. He asked if we would visit the campus with the idea that we might be considered for the presi-
dency of Drew. We visited the campus and I shall never forget the three hours I spent with Mr. Baldwin and the committee. Finally, he said, "Don't worry about making decisions. We'll make them for you. All you need to be is a figurehead!" His wife also told Lucille, "Don't worry about selecting the drapes or the furnishings for the President's house. I will select them for you and have them installed." It appeared that a great deal of the administrative work was actually being done by one or two trustees and that they were looking for a "front".

Finally, we returned to the Lackawanna Railroad Station for our trip to New York, and the first thing Lucille said to me, as she looked at me with a very weary expression, "Let's go home. Let's go home."

A number of years later, when there was another change in the presidency at Drew, I was called again and asked if we had changed our minds and would be interested in coming to Drew as a candidate for the position. I mentioned the fact that we knew what we had here; we were in the midst of a very strong developmental program, and though we appreciated their kindness in inviting us, we would stay in Tacoma.

Nebraska Wesleyan Opportunities

On two different occasions, when there were changes in the presidency at Nebraska Wesleyan, I was called long-distance to inquire as to whether I had any interest in it, if I would be an active candidate, and if I would be, they were sure I would be elected. Naturally, Lucille and I both had great love for Nebraska Wesleyan because it was our alma mater, the place where we
had met and spent many wonderful days and where we established many precious
friendships. However, Nebraska Wesleyan was about one-third the size of the
College of Puget Sound, both in student body and in assets, and it has had a
precarious and difficult time because of the overpopulation of colleges and
universities in the area. Consequently, I said I did not wish to be a candidate
for the presidency at Nebraska Wesleyan.

Claremont Colleges

Some years later, Bishop Gerald Kennedy, whom I had helped to elect
to the episcopacy, called and asked me to fly down and talk to one of the men
in the area. We flew down and discovered that he had arranged an appoint­
ment for me with Mr. Mudd who was chairman of the Board of Trustees of the
Claremont Colleges complex. There were two brothers and both of them
were very much interested in the Claremont College complex, and, of course,
the Harvey Mudd College is one of the four colleges in the complex.

Mr. Mudd was a very interesting person. His father had made an
enormous fortune in mining and engineering and both of the sons had very
strong philanthropic interests in higher education.

Mr. Mudd showed me around the Claremont Colleges complex and talked
with me for three hours about the fact that he would like to have us head up
the complex. He said, "Don't worry about money. We have all the money we
need and we will see that the entire program is underwritten. We have studied
you very carefully; we have seen the way you have developed the College of
Puget Sound; we have watched the careful planning which you have structured, the long-range planning both from the standpoint of the development of the academic curriculum and the development of the plant, and we would like to have you do that for Claremont Colleges."

He was a very persuasive salesman. Again, Lucille and I conferred at some length and came to the decision that we knew what we had; our family was very well situated and enjoying their schooling; we were in a city large enough for us to know every leader and, yet, small enough to lead our own lives, and we decided that the philosophy that Dr. Baxter had suggested—to give our lives to one institution, develop it and make it outstandingly strong—would be the better part of valor.

With genuine wonderment in my heart, I sent a telegram to Mr. Mudd thanking him for his kindness but telling him that our work was not finished and for that reason we would stay at the College of Puget Sound.

Garrett Theological Seminary

One other time, I was asked to head Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Dr. Harvey Smith had been president and I had known him for many years on the Council on Finance of the Methodist Church and also through the General Conference committees. He was a very outstanding leader and a man who was in the great tradition of old and powerful presidents.

I was seriously interested in this opening, although my heart was with the College of Puget Sound. I flew back to Chicago to meet with the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. I was able to talk individually with some
of the members, and I asked the attorney how many assets Garrett had. He quoted me a figure of about $3 million in endowment. I asked the treasurer how much endowment there was, and he said $4.5 million. I asked another man and he quoted $5.5 million. I determined then that the Board of Trustees did not know exactly what was happening and did not know how many assets Garrett actually had. I also discovered that Dr. Smith had held the budget and the finances of Garrett very close to his chest and very, very few, if anyone, really, honestly knew the financial situation. I also knew that their campus was limited in size because it was surrounded completely by Northwestern University and that Northwestern was contemplating filling in Lake Michigan, using the sand dunes of Gary, Indiana, area, so that the campus, with its beautiful beach, would be cut off and hemmed in by Northwestern buildings, which actually happened later on.

Again, Lucille and I gave this careful, prayerful thought and decided that we would like to stay at the College of Puget Sound because it was an interesting place, it was dynamic, it had potential and we knew what we were doing and we were enjoying it very, very much.

University of Denver

One day, Bishop Baxter called me and said, "Frank, did the committee from Denver approach you yet?" I told him no and he said, "There is a committee from the University of Denver that will be coming to Tacoma to talk with you and Lucille about whether you would be interested in becoming Chancellor at the
University of Denver." The University of Denver did not have a president but had a chancellor. He said, "Take a long look at it but I don't think you'll be interested in it because the University of Denver has had a very rocky situation. It is dominated by city politics. It is also dominated by some of the political and business interests so that its relationship is very difficult with the Methodist Church and the Methodist tradition. As a matter of fact, it is completely away from the Methodist tradition and it is really a municipal university at the present time. Their financial situation is so precarious that intercollegiate football has been eliminated and they are cutting back on their offerings because of budgetary problems. I think it is nice to be asked but I seriously question whether you and Lucille should move to Denver when you know what you have at the College of Puget Sound." The committee did come and talk to us but we decided to stay in Tacoma.

In retrospect

As I look back now on the wonderful life which Lucille and I and Martha and Mary have enjoyed here at the University of Puget Sound, I have no regrets about our decisions. It has been a wonderful, complete, and full life. Naturally, there were times of tension; there were times of great responsibility; there was great difficulty in raising the $33 million which I raised over the years; but I have never regretted the fact that we stayed in Tacoma at the University of Puget Sound rather than leaving for one of the other opportunities.

At the time of student tensions when all 2600 universities were in difficulty because of student attitudes, and some faculty attitudes, naturally a person thought long thoughts concerning the episcopacy of the Methodist Church,
about whether it would have been better at Nebraska Wesleyan or at Drew or at Garrett or at Claremont, or any of the other places where we might have gone. But it is most interesting to walk over the campus of the University of Puget Sound and realize that, as the needs arose, we built the 37 different buildings, and at the same time, we took the active endowment from a million dollars up to $8.5 million and built a great foundation for the future of the University of Puget Sound.

R. Franklin Thompson
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