

# Presidential Inaugural Address: A Journey and a Quest

*Rosedale Bible College inaugurated Daniel Ziegler as its seventh president on November 19 at a ceremony held in the chapel on the Rosedale campus. The text from his inaugural address follows:*

Board members, students, faculty, staff, alumni, pastors, colleagues in higher education, church agency representatives, family and friends:

It's a sincere privilege to stand before you today and willingly accept this mantle of leadership as the seventh president of Rosedale Bible College. My heart is full as I consider the impact this institution has had through its 53-year history on the spiritual and intellectual lives of literally thousands, most of whom are actively and faithfully serving the Lord today across the globe.

And the more I get to know RBC and its people, the more excited I am about what it currently represents and what it can achieve. I have found the faculty and staff to be gifted brothers and sisters in Christ who are fully engaged in the calling of challenging young adults to spiritual and intellectual maturity. Getting to know the students has been a special joy, as I am captivated by their youthful exuberance, their unguarded openness, their thirst for knowledge and experience and their sincere love of God. Building upon this solid foundation, I believe in the potential found in this institution and am driven by a deep conviction that this college has much to offer to the future of the Conservative Mennonite Conference, the broader Anabaptist faith community, and the cause of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Throughout my life there have been many passions – faith, family, leadership, teaching. And as a former camp director, one of my greatest loves has been enjoying the wonder of God's creation. I have studied and taught astronomy, have learned to know the flora and fauna of the Pennsylvania forest, have explored caves, canoed rivers, hiked mountains and to date have seen over 350 species of birds in the wild. In fact, this love of nature has led to a unique pastime.

Since I was a young man I have been on a journey and a quest to reach the highest point of all fifty states, and I currently have stood on the summit of the highest ground of 45 states. OK...so the high point of Delaware is on a street corner near Wilmington, and the high point of Florida is in a park by the side of the road, and the high point of

Iowa is in a feed lot, and, yes, the high point of Ohio is near a park bench on the grounds of a vo-tech school near Bellefontaine. Nonetheless, this quest has gotten me into some of the most beautiful places in the United States.

One of the first high points I ever hiked still ranks among the most beautiful: Mount Katahdin, the highest point of the great state of Maine. This rugged mountain rises from the north woods to a height of over 5,000 feet, with the top 2,000 feet above tree line. My friend Martin and I set out late one summer afternoon to “bag this peak,” choosing to climb directly up the shortest route to the



Members of the RBC community gathered around Dan and his wife Wendy in a time of prayer and commissioning at the inauguration.

summit...the dreaded Abol Slide. The “trail” consisted mostly of steep scrambling up the boulder-strewn face of this 180-year-old rock slide, gaining 4000 feet in just over three miles. I still recall the thrill as we, in total exhaustion, hoisted ourselves up over the last of the boulders and beheld, stretched out before us, the grandeur of a large alpine meadow named the Tableland.

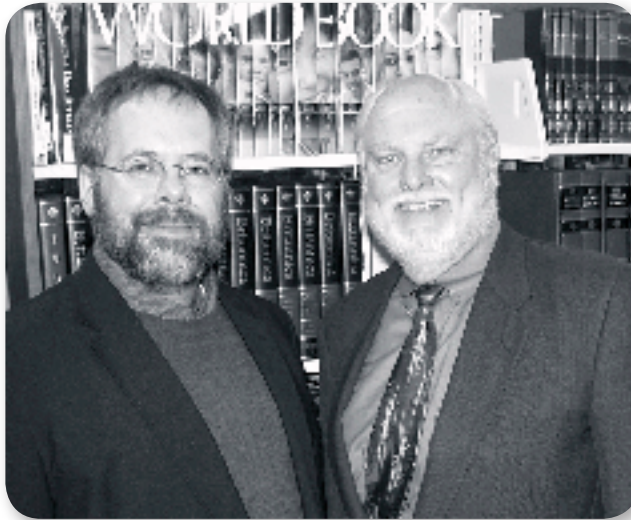
Victorious, we stood there for a while in awe, taking in the holy splendor of this place. And, as if a gift was given to reward us for our efforts, we turned to the west and from this spot almost a mile above sea level, watched the sun set

over the northern forest. I remember at that moment thinking of the hymn lyrics: "I want to scale the utmost height, and catch a glimpse of glory bright....Lord, lift me up and help me stand, by faith on heaven's tableland, a higher plane than I have found, Lord plant my feet on higher ground."

That moment seemed to linger, and forever will remain etched in my memory, yet it was broken as Martin and I, glancing at each other, were both suddenly hit by the same wave of dread: there we were, novice hikers, on the top of a 5,000-foot peak watching the sun set, with nothing between us but 6 ounces of water, a windbreaker, a half-dead penlight and a small bag of corn nuts. You see, our journey was only half over, and if we thought climbing up the rock slide was difficult, we had not even begun to comprehend the difficulty of descending that vertical boulder field in the dark by the glow of a dying penlight.

You see, Martin and I had violated a principle that seasoned mountaineers and Boy Scouts have known for age: always be prepared. Specifically, when hiking a real mountain you need to make sure you have covered the three basic needs: food, water and shelter. In this case, our combined wisdom had accounted for... none of these needs. Needless to say, we emerged from the trail at 2 AM, hungry, dehydrated, bruised, disoriented and thoroughly done-in. And to make matters worse, we were greeted by a not-so-friendly park ranger, who spent the next 30 minutes lecturing us on the finer points of STUPIDITY!

Metaphorically speaking, as Christian parents and uncles and aunts and pastors and youth leaders and teachers, our hope for our young people is that the journey and



Dr. Gil Peterson (right), former president of Lancaster Bible College, gave the keynote address, "Higher Ground." Using Nehemiah as his text, Dr. Peterson urged President Ziegler to follow Nehemiah's example by keeping his eyes on God, his hand to the work, and his mind on the purpose behind the work.

without having their basic needs covered. Are they prepared to confront the world's philosophies and enticements when their knowledge of Scripture amounts to the biblical literacy equivalent of a small bag of corn nuts? Will



Dr. Ziegler received symbolic gifts at his inauguration from various groups. These included, from left, a gift from parents of students, dry markers from the faculty, a trumpet from the staff, a lamp from the Mennonite Education Agency, a Bible from the outgoing president, a compass from the students, a trowel from Conservative Mennonite Conference, a 1959 school yearbook, and a globe from Rosedale Mennonite Missions.

quest of their life would take them to "higher ground"; that the experiences they undertake and achievements that define them would bring healing and hope to a lost and dying world, for the glory of God. In an age when truth is under attack, when wealth and comfort and complacency threaten to mute the witness of the church, when fear and violence reign, we need a generation to rise up to the heights and in new ways declare the goodness of the Lord and the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

But they must go on this journey and this quest prepared! Too many of our young people venture forth

without having their basic needs covered. Are they prepared to confront the world's philosophies and enticements when their knowledge of Scripture amounts to the biblical literacy equivalent of a small bag of corn nuts? Will they reach the "higher plane" while in a dehydrated state, not having developed the spiritual disciplines needed to keep their soul quenched? When the winds of adversity blow hard upon them above tree line, will they have developed a faith deep enough to offer a shelter in the time of storm?

Our calling at Rosedale Bible College, then, is clear. We want to prepare this next generation for their journey and quest for higher ground:

- by helping them to feast on the manna of the Word of God, providing for them a foundation that will continue to nourish their souls during the climb and prepare their minds and hearts to discern their way.
- by providing a place and atmosphere where they can drink deeply of the Spirit of God, and where

they can learn to imbibe the communion of prayer and partake of the refreshment of worship, so that throughout life their souls might never have to thirst, but would be filled with the life-giving water of the Spirit.

- and by nurturing them to a sheltering faith, a faith that is well grounded and provides an immovable, protective shield against the gales that are sure to come as they press onward and upward in the name of Jesus.

If we do our job well, with God's help this next generation will embark upon their journey and quest fully prepared, and we will cheer them on as they reach new heights as the vanguard of the Kingdom of God. "Lord lift *them* up and let *them* stand, by faith, on heaven's tableland. A higher plane than *they* have found, Lord plant *their* feet on higher ground." **BB**



PHOTO BY PRESTON YODER

President Dan enjoys getting to know the students at RBC. Here he chats with Travis Yoder, a first-year student from Sarasota, Florida.

# Probing

WITH SHELDON SWARTZ

## The Downside of Certainty

*"The Bible said it. I believe it. That settles it."*

It simply hasn't been true for me. I've *wanted* it to be true. *How* I have wanted my heart-felt belief to be a direct line of response to the truth of God's Word as stated in the Bible. But it hasn't worked that way for me.

This little bumper sticker, while attempting to give a "solid place to stand," may accomplish exactly the opposite. It may actually undermine genuine faith. For one thing, what is one to say in response to this statement? Amen? So be it? Ok? There is no invitation in it to face the honest questions that real on-the-way-to-faith people have.

The fact that the Bible says something does not settle much for me. It may seem to settle a lot for those whose god is the Bible. But for those who believe the Scriptures are meant to *reveal* some-



Sheldon Swartz

thing of God, something of the past, present, and future, something of ourselves, and something of the mystery of grace, then the Bible provides a great reference point to relate to, to question, to embrace, to fight with, in our journey for an authentic spiritual life, out of which

the fruit of the Spirit comes naturally. And it's not something one can take credit for.

The bumper sticker appears to remove the mystery and struggle that is necessarily associated with what it means to live by faith. I only have to think briefly about what it is like to relate to people who believe in God and the Bible and seem not to struggle with their faith and with what it means to love God, self, and others, to realize how repelled I am. (Yes, and many times I am repelled by myself!) If I saw a car with a bumper sticker that said, "God said it, but many times I have a hard time believing it. Can we talk?" I think I would follow that car.

My father was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer. In the midst of the uncertainty of whether or not it had spread, he admitted that promises of God that had previously reassured him provided no real comfort or relief from his anxiety. His faith wasn't "working." He doesn't know what a gift that sort of honesty is to me. I believe his faith *is* working.