

**Remarks at the memorial service for Henry King Stanford  
President Emeritus, University of Georgia  
Saturday, January 24, 2009  
Americus, Georgia**

I am honored to have been asked by the family to say a few words in memory of my dear friend and predecessor, Henry King Stanford. When there are this many college and university officials on a program, there are legitimate concerns about the length of the ceremony. I will do my best to honor the request of the organizers and stay close to my five minutes.

But if we were to stay here all day to talk, Dr. Stanford would have loved that.

I will leave the details of Henry King Stanford's life and, indeed, his walk of faith, to others, particularly the presiding ministers. But I will not apologize for a Scriptural reference or two in the process.

Every great institution presents its leaders with history and context, and the one I have been privileged to lead for 12 years is no exception. We all read history to try to understand the nuances, and yet our proximity to the center of the institution makes our perspective subject to question.

It has been more than 20 years since Dr. Stanford left the University of Georgia, and history has been justifiably kind to him. In one of his many letters to me, he wrote that Athens was "a place where I never felt as needed or appreciated as I did in that one year." He was indeed needed and he was deeply appreciated.

He also noted that UGA was his fifth presidency, and it is uplifting to those of us who are serving in that capacity today that five presidencies will not kill you until you are well north of 90.

In retrospect, there are three things about his time at UGA that impress me greatly. First, he stilled the waters. He came at a time when the institution had made many mistakes in the relationship between its football program and the core mission of academic quality. The faculty were upset; the political leadership of the state was upset; the alumni were upset; the press was having its usual field day; and there were serious issues to be addressed in court.

Into that climate came a person of genuine ebullience, sound strength and wisdom and good will. He made changes in the academic leadership structure; some have questioned whether those moves were symbolic. But symbols are important in times of crisis, and in fairly short order he had calmed the turmoil.

Second, he encouraged the UGA community to "keep the faith." I know from his own life and his service to the faith-related institutions he served that Dr. Stanford was a person of real faith who was likely familiar with Galatians 3:11: "through faith the righteous shall live."

But the faith he exuded as president was broader than a Christian faith; it was a faith in the basic enterprise of the flagship institution of the University System of Georgia. He helped redirect the university community's attention to the basics and pointed to the strengths of a fractured institution.

We were still teaching classes. We were still conducting world-class research. We were still serving the people of Georgia at a very high level. We were still educating and maturing the next leadership class for the state.

He reminded us that the core strengths were still in place and that we could still do what we were supposed to be doing. Once the campus began to hear his faith in the future – to hear that there was a future at all – the way was prepared for the transition to the permanent leadership of my friend and colleague, Chuck Knapp. I do not believe the community would have been as receptive to the positive and progressive leadership of President Knapp had it not been for the broadly expressed faith message of Dr. Stanford.

Finally, in a time when the press was becoming obsessed with focusing on the bad and the negative, Dr. Stanford led this community by focusing on the good. He did what St. Paul suggested to the church at Phillipi: focus on the true and the honorable and the just and the lovely and the gracious and the excellent.

By putting his focus on the good, he began to melt away the challenges of the prior year and position the university to acknowledge that, while imperfect, it could still be a place engaged in honorable work, focused on the good with a long-term commitment to approving what is excellent.

In a nutshell, UGA is a better institution, more prepared for the future and more grounded in an understanding of its core mission because of the work of Henry King Stanford.

I had the pleasure of many interactions with him in my 12 years at UGA, and while he would never say it this way, I'm convinced that one of the reasons he remained so committed to this place is that because deep in his soul he knew the tremendous impact he had had on it.

For those who think that institutions of this size and complexity don't return the ardor and appreciation I would simply hold up Dr. Stanford as an example.

I would like to close with the statement I made when I learned of his death.

Henry King Stanford is a real hero of Georgia history. Though his decades of public service and leadership included only a short time at the University of Georgia, his impact on the institution was substantial. He steered UGA through tumultuous waters, refocused the institution on its core mission, and prepared it for much of the progress made in the years since he was president.

On behalf of the students, faculty, staff, administration and alumni of the University of Georgia, I extend deep sympathy to the family and friends with full appreciation for the legacy of Dr. Stanford at the University of Georgia and the many contributions he made at the four other institutions he led.