



Dr. Clyde Lynch, president of Lebanon Valley College from 1932 to 1950, at a cornerstone dedication on campus in 1950. A 1918 alumnus of LVC, Lynch died in office the same year this photo was taken. The Lynch Memorial Gymnasium, named in his honor, was renovated in 2003, converting the gym into several new, technology-enabled classrooms.

Lebanon Valley College: From Dependent Child to Distant Cousin

Rev. Dr. J. Dennis Williams (2011)

Editor's Note: Rev. J. Dennis Williams is a retired clergy member, and former District Superintendent, of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. This article is adapted from an article of the same name he published in Methodist History 42:2 (January 2004), 98-109; and from the book he is writing, Of High Grade, which will be published for the Lebanon Valley College Sesquicentennial in 2016. The editor also wishes to thank Mr. Tom Hanrahan, Director of Marketing and Communications of Lebanon Valley College, for supplying the illustrations.

The spire of Miller Chapel, that dominates the sky as you approach the college from the north, gives tangible witness that the church is part of the story of Lebanon Valley College. College catalogs have stated that the school's "mission arises directly from its historic traditions and a relationship with The United Methodist Church."¹ It is the story of that relationship, between church and college, which now will be examined. This association has required the college to interact with three different church bodies: the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (1866-1946), the Evangelical United Brethren Church (1946-1968), and The United Methodist Church (1968-present).

I

The year was 1866. The sounds of war between the Union and the Confederacy were silenced. It was a Monday morning, May 7th, when the door of a three-story brick edifice on Annville's Main Street

¹Lebanon Valley College Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog (2010-2011), 3.

was flung open to students. A new creation called Lebanon Valley College, that would have a lot of growing up to do,² was being launched as a school of the United Brethren in Christ.

It was a beginning without much promise. Twelve United Brethren colleges had been founded earlier. Only one, Otterbein University (now Otterbein College), had survived. *The United Brethren Almanac For The Year 1867* listed seven colleges and seminaries, plus Lebanon Valley College. By 1891, four of the seven institutions had already disappeared. The death rate for United Brethren colleges was horrific. Consequently, when Lebanon Valley College welcomed its first students in 1866, the odds of it surviving were not good. Much of this was due to the United Brethren Church not being of one mind concerning collegiate institutions.

Higher education had its outspoken adversaries amongst the United Brethren. This opposition was driven, in part, by the fear that launching a college would incur unpayable debts. This fear was combated by a *Confidential Circular* that was distributed among members of the church's East Pennsylvania Conference, the sponsoring conference, a few months after the school opened. It read:

As the college belongs to the Conference, and as we have leased it in such a way that each additional boarding pupil will bring a revenue to the Conference of from \$9 to \$17 per annum, we trust you will put forth every effort, and diligently use your personal influence, to secure students for the school.³

By huckstering the college as a “cash cow” that would provide income to the conference, the fear of irredeemable debts was exorcized and support increased.

The opposition was also based on the fear that schooling beyond “the three R’s” would draw young people away from the Bible and promote worldliness. Anti-intellectualism was part of the landscape of the United Brethren movement in its early years.⁴ Though Philip

²Lebanon Valley College was more an academy than a college in 1866. The overwhelming majority of students were in its Model School, which offered grammar school classes, or preparatory classes for a collegiate program. By 1891, the Model School was gone. Lebanon Valley College was growing into its name.

³A copy of the *Confidential Circular* is found in the college archives.

⁴Richard Hofstadter indicates that the anti-intellectualism of the period was part of the religious awakening that began in the mid-eighteenth century in America and

Otterbein was classically trained, most preachers in the movement were not. They relied not upon aid from books, but upon, in their words, “the Holy Spirit.” In contrast, many educated clergy of the day seemed dull promoters of correct faith. Their learned preaching lacked power and a sense of connection with the sacred. This fostered an anti-intellectualism, in which being educated came to mean being deficient in piety.

Such fears were counterbalanced by the church’s need for an educated leadership, and the realization that the church could not expect to retain its youth if “it [failed] to offer them as good opportunities for growth as [could] be found elsewhere.”⁵ Driven by these counter-balancing factors, the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ overcame its fears and established Lebanon Valley College.

The relationship between this offspring college and its founding church grew to display a signature that was recognizable to both parties. One recognizable characteristic of the partnership was that both the school and the church understood that Lebanon Valley College was an institution of the United Brethren in Christ. The *Confidential Circular* clearly stated that “the College belongs to the Conference.” This meant that the church would have a pivotal influence upon the college. As an institution of the United Brethren, the college reflected the values of the church when it came to the Bible, church teachings, and evangelism. In 1900, President Roop reported to the East Pennsylvania Conference:

The religious condition of the college last year was gratifying. More than ninety per cent of all the students were professing Christians. All the resident students were, or became Christians during the year... No college is better fulfilling its purpose, namely, that of promoting sound learning and deep piety in its students.⁶

A second characteristic of the relationship between the church and the college in the United Brethren era was the dependency of the college upon the church. The college relied upon the church for students. The *Confidential Circular* of 1866 asked the members of the East Pennsyl-

embraced a much larger constituency than the United Brethren. See Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1964).

⁵East Pennsylvania Conference Minutes (1880), 17.

⁶East Pennsylvania Conference Minutes (1900), 20.



The faculty of Lebanon Valley College, 1902-1903.

vania Conference to “use your personal influence to secure students for the school.” The same refrain was repeated year after year. In 1946, the end of the United Brethren era, President Clyde Lynch reported that 30.7 per cent of the school’s total enrollment was from the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

The college also relied on the church for funding. In difficult financial times the college would cry to the church for help. During the Second World War such a financial emergency existed. The college president reported to the college trustees in 1943: “our cooperating conferences and the denomination should stand in readiness... to provide emergency financial aid... Unless such aid should come, Lebanon Valley College will likely become a deplorable casualty of the war.”⁷ A financial campaign to raise \$550,000 was launched. In 1948, President Lynch reported that the East Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Conferences alone had pledged \$424,855, more than 75 per cent of what was required.

A third characteristic of the relationship was that the church saw itself as a college-related church. At the annual meetings of the cooperating conferences, the President of Lebanon Valley College would

⁷Paul A. W. Wallace, *Lebanon Valley College: A Centennial History* (Published by the College, 1966), 201.

deliver a report on the state of the college to the delegates. Invariably there would be comments concerning the college in the reports of the superintendents, and in the reports of the committees charged with the educational interests of the respective conferences. There were often resolutions concerning the college and its welfare which became items of discussion. Congregations in the cooperating conferences celebrated an annual college day, and representatives of the college were welcomed and often spoke in local churches.⁸

There is a story that is told, perhaps more legend than actual, which personifies the nature of the partnership between Lebanon Valley College and the church during the United Brethren era. On Christmas Eve, 1904, the administrative building of the college, ablaze with flames, lit the sky like a burning torch. "It burned like a brush pile," said one spectator. At the end, all that remained was a "blackened skeleton" of a building.⁹ Rumor had it that the fire spread upwards through the elevator shaft. When the plans for the new building were proposed, there was a place for an elevator. This was opposed by a Bishop. Legend says that the Bishop opposed having an elevator, because he believed that, since elevators are not in the Bible, they are not proper for a church college. The new building was constructed with no elevator.¹⁰ From this story a picture emerges of the relationship between the college and the church during the United Brethren era. It was a relationship between a dependent child (the college) and a controlling parent (the church).

II

On Saturday morning, November 16, 1946, in the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church were conjoined. Lebanon Valley College was now an Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) institution.

The partnership between the new church and the college continued to display the same three characteristics as were evident in the United Brethren in Christ years. The college was still seen as

⁸President Keister reported having been welcomed and spoken in nineteen churches in a thirteen week period. This information is from the handwritten minutes for April 7, 1908 of the Lebanon Valley College Executive Committee.

⁹A description of the fire can be found in the *Annville Journal*, Saturday, December 31, 1904.

¹⁰This story was told to me by Dr. Howard Applegate, an emeritus professor of Lebanon Valley College.

belonging to the church, only now it was the Evangelical United Brethren Church.¹¹ The church continued to be a pivotal influence in the life of the college and saw itself as college related.¹² A dependency on the church for students and funding was no less real. In 1947, 262 students of the total enrollment of 831 students were from Evangelical United Brethren churches. In 1954, the college was advised that a capital campaign of \$900,000 to \$1,000,000 seemed possible, but only if \$500,000 [would] be authorized by the denomination.¹³

Though the partnership between the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the college was much the same as it had been in the United Brethren years, change was taking place. The changing relationship was evident in the matter of finances. Thirteen percent of the college's income for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1947 came from the church. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 1966, the amount of funding from the church had grown to \$137,370, but the percentage of the total income of the college that came from church sources had decreased to 6.7 percent.¹⁴ The college was becoming less dependent on the church for its economic viability.

The growing independence of the college from the church extended beyond the area of finances. At the 1958 General Conference of the EUB Church, the understanding of the church as being like a controlling parent, and its colleges as dependent children, surfaced. The issue over which this attitude surfaced had to do with activities that should or should not be a part of the social program of the colleges. There were some who wanted the General Conference, as a controlling parent, to ban certain activities on the campuses of its colleges, while approving other activities. In response, a resolution was approved by the conference that entrusted to the trustees of each of the colleges, includ-

¹¹The General Conference of the EUB Church spoke of "a responsibility on the part of the Church for *her* colleges." *Official Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Session (Third since Union) of the General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Harrisburg: The Evangelical Press, 1954), 265.

¹²The influence of the church was seen in the composition of the Board of Trustees and in the selection of the college president. Except for alumni trustees, all trustees were EUB ministers. Though the college president during much of the EUB era, Dr. Frederic Miller, was not an ordained minister, he was a respected leader in the church, and the son of a prominent clergyman.

¹³*Fund Raising Report of Lebanon Valley College*. This report that advised the college concerning a capital campaign is to be found in the college archives.

¹⁴The financial figures come from reports of the college treasurer that are found in the college archives.



An early image of Lebanon Valley College's Carnegie Library, built in 1904 with monies from the Carnegie Foundation. Today it is the home of the college admissions office.

ing Lebanon Valley, the responsibility of determining what activities should be a part of their social program. The General Conference would have nothing to do with micro-managing its schools. The colleges were being treated as emerging adults who would make wise decisions, though the church did expect to receive reports of the social, moral, and religious aspects of life on its college campuses. The church was becoming a hovering parent that was involved with its colleges, while understanding that it was impractical to run them.¹⁵

¹⁵The General Conference discussion of the social program of the colleges is from *Official Proceeding of the Thirty-Ninth Session (Fourth since Union) of the General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1958), 454, 455.

III

On April 23, 1968, in Dallas, Texas, Evangelical United Brethren Bishop Reuben Miller and Methodist Bishop Lloyd Wicke clasped hands and declared their two peoples to be one in The United Methodist Church. Lebanon Valley College was now related to a new church. Where once the college had been connected to a denomination with eight colleges, now it was part of a church with eighty-four baccalaureate level colleges.

In the early years of the United Methodist partnership, much seemed the same as in the EUB era. The three characteristics of the partnership that had been present since the United Brethren in Christ days were evident. That gradually changed. The financial support of the college is illustrative of the change. At the time of union, the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference had promised no less than \$150,000 annually to support the college.¹⁶ The amount that was actually given diminished over the years. In the mid-1980s, the conference's treasurer and council director visited the college's president, John Synodinos. The purpose of the visit was to inform the college that the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, because of financial difficulties, would be unable to provide financial support to the college, beyond a token amount of \$5,000, in its future budgets. To the surprise of the conference representatives, the president of the college, upon receiving this news, expressed no resentment. His response was, "Our relationship is not based on money." He asked the conference representatives, "How can the college help the church?"¹⁷ The partnership had changed. The college was no longer a dependent child or an emerging adult. The church was no longer a controlling or a hovering parent. The partnership was now between two full-fledged adults.

Neither adult, upon the arrival of the 21st century, seemed to be talking very much to the other. By the year 2000, Lebanon Valley College no longer had a conference-elected trustee; therefore, the need for conversation between parties on this important matter ceased.¹⁸ The

¹⁶*The Plan and Basis of Union for the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference*, 31.

¹⁷This account is based on conversations with President John Synodinos, Rev. Dale Owens, who was the conference treasurer, and Dr. Howard Applegate, all of whom were present at the meeting.

¹⁸In 1989, the college moved from conference elected trustees, who represented the church, to all trustees being elected by the college's board of trustees as trustees-at-large.

conferences no longer had the college president make a report on the state of the college at their annual meetings. The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference no longer held its annual meeting at one of its colleges.

At the formation of the United Methodist Church, the Central and Eastern Pennsylvania Conferences had talked of a Regional Commission on Higher Education. A coordinating committee of five educational institutions (including Lebanon Valley College) and three conferences was initiated, but this group ceased to exist well before the year 2000, as did occasional meetings of the College of Bishops with the college presidents. With the restructuring of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, the Commission on Higher Education was eliminated. With its elimination, there was no group within the conference to which the college could relate. The church and the college had become like distant cousins who seldom talked and rarely thought of one another.

There are reasons for this distancing. An erosion of interest on the part of the church toward the college is a factor. Through much of the United Brethren era, the college was the only college of the church in Pennsylvania. Once Lebanon Valley had been the primary center for the training of ministers and church leaders. This has changed. More and more of the church's youth attend public institutions. With fewer United Methodist youth attending Lebanon Valley, interest on the part of the church toward the college has lessened. There had been a time when the church had the energy and resources to sustain the college's development, but this is no longer the case. The church is dealing with issues such as an aging membership, a slow decline in numbers, and financial limitations. These matters, and not the college, constitute the focus of church attention.

The maturation of Lebanon Valley College is another factor in this distancing. As the college matured, it required resources and leadership beyond that which the church was able to provide. This led the college to become more independent of the church. With independence the college began defining itself, choosing its own presidents, and cultivating a constituency of support beyond the church. It became immersed in the collegiate universe, and a professional distancing took place. Both the college and the church developed their own quasi-professional networks of expertise.¹⁹ All of this has resulted,

¹⁹For a more detailed exploration of the effects of professionalism on the church and college see Russell R. Richey, "Connectionalism and College," *Quarterly Review* (Winter 1998), 346-350.



The chapel of Lebanon Valley College.

in the United Methodist era, with the college and church becoming distant to each other.

This distancing has not meant that the imprint of the church is absent from the college. The United Brethren parents, who in the late 1860s sent the first student to Lebanon Valley College, did not have in most cases the benefit of a college education themselves, but they wanted their children to be included at the table of learning. The anticipation was that those who sat at this table would do so in an atmosphere in which there was a vibrant religious life and training for service to the world.

Today, a significant portion of each entering class at Lebanon Valley comes from households where parents have attended college, but who want their children to have a place at the table of higher education. Students discover, upon their arrival, that a vibrant religious life is very much alive on campus. Twenty-two percent of all students participate in some aspect of the campus religious program.²⁰ There are worship opportunities each week in which the Christian story is central.

²⁰The information about campus religious life comes from a 2011 interview of the college chaplain, Dr. Paul Fullmer. There are five foci to the religious program: worship, study groups, performance groups, service, and fun.

Numerous Bible study groups meet regularly. Service opportunities abound. Students are involved in Habitat for Humanity. They tutor elementary age students in various subject areas, and serve as mentors to students in the eighth and higher grades in a local urban school district who are at risk of failure or dropping out of school. They shovel sidewalks for senior citizens, provide music in area churches, organize parties and lead worship services in local nursing homes.



The story of relationship between the church and Lebanon Valley College is a story of change. The college is no longer a dependent child, and the church is no longer a controlling parent. The relationship is between two full-fledged adults. Unfortunately, these adults, like distant cousins, seldom talk and so rarely think of one another, that the reasons for their having a conversation are not as clear as they once were. Can this difficulty, as past difficulties, be overcome? For it to be overcome requires someone to begin the conversation. Will it be a Bishop, the college president, a general church board, or something not yet created that will be the joint work of the college and church leadership?²¹ Such questions deserve to be pondered, and must be answered, if there is to be a new and ever more inspiring future for the church and college relationship.

²¹Richey, *Quarterly Review*, 350.