My child, learn what I teach you and never forget what I tell you to do. Listen to what is wise and try to understand it. Yes, beg for knowledge; plead for insight. Look for it as hard as you would for silver or some hidden treasure. If you do, you will know what it means to fear the Lord and you will succeed in learning about God. It is the Lord who gives wisdom; from Him comes knowledge and understanding. He provides help and protection for the righteous. He protects those who treat others fairly, and guards those who are devoted to Him.

If you listen to me, you will know what is right, just, and fair. You will know what you should do. You will become wise, and your knowledge will give you pleasure.

—Proverbs 2: 1-10, Today’s English Version

On May 29, 2008, an intriguing announcement was made by Steven Siceloff, of NASA's John F. Kennedy Space Center:

Seven astronauts who will fly into orbit aboard space shuttle Discovery will have comfortable seats for the climb into space. An eighth space ranger won't have a seat at all. In fact, he will be packed tight inside a box and won't even get to enjoy the ride up. Buzz Lightyear is flying as part of a partnership between NASA and Disney Parks to encourage students to pursue studies in science, technology and mathematics, one of NASA’s main educational goals.

Buzz Lightyear, one of the central characters of the film Toy Story, made his debut, with great fanfare, in 1995. His name was inspired by Apollo astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second person to set foot on the Moon, after Apollo 11 Mission Commander Neil Armstrong.

In the film, as well as the sequel that followed, Buzz is a space ranger from the Intergalactic Alliance, stationed in the Gamma Quadrant. As a birthday gift for Andy, Buzz does not realize that he is a toy. The other toys in Andy's room are attracted by Buzz's gung-ho attitude, but Woody, Andy’s favorite toy, becomes increasingly jealous and plots to cause Buzz to fall behind Andy's desk. Instead, Buzz Lightyear falls out of the window and is thought to be lost.

In the events that follow, Buzz manages to survive due to the fact that he still believes that he is a space ranger. Using both stealth and agility, he manages to get through each

1  www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/shuttle/behindscenes/whatsgoingup124.html
precarious challenge, though eventually learning that he is, in fact, a toy. He teams up
with Woody to defeat the horrible toy-destroying child Sid Phillips, and with his
declaration, “To Infinity . . . and Beyond!” Buzz and Woody are able to overcome the
most dire of situations and re-unite with Andy and the other toys.

About nine years ago I rescued Buzz when my son grew tired of him—and since that
moment Buzz has sat on my bookshelf. I always smile when I see him standing in that
confident pose, though now a bit scruffy from being banged about in galactic wars and
savage battles, and missing one of his rockets. The twinkle in his eyes, the memory of
his exploits, it’s all there in his gaze as he declares: “I can do anything I set my heart to.
“To Infinity . . . and Beyond!”

In this present moment—gathered here in our university’s church, new students and
returning students, faculty and staff—I can think of few phrases that capture my hopes
for this new year as does this well-known declaration of Buzz Lightyear.

“To Infinity . . . and Beyond!” resonates with a startling sense of imagination and wonder.
Its core message suggests that there are few boundaries we cannot get over if we put our
minds and hearts to the task. It is a call that reminds us that we are to be passionate about
life—and about our place in the world and even in God’s universe, a place whose
boundaries are indeed marked by infinity.

Here at La Sierra University, the centerpiece of our mission statement is a commitment to seek, to know, and to serve. Recently a group has been meeting and discussing ways in
which this statement can more faithfully reflect our deepest commitments. Over the
coming weeks we are going to keep talking about our mission—with the hope, and the
belief, that all of us will be more effective if we are absolutely clear about the
commitments that hold us together—whether we be students or teachers, staff or alumni.

The first of these three commitments—to seek truth, enlarging human understanding
through scholarship—is powerfully lived out in the activities of this university each and
every day.

I will never forget the profound sense of awe I felt as I wandered through the
undergraduate research fair this past spring here on campus. As I visited with students—and very proud professors—I was deeply encouraged by the research activity that our
campus is engaged in. I listened as students spoke of their discoveries with excitement
and tremendous freedom. This commitment is lived out as faculty and students in
Chemistry will make new discoveries with the NMR Spectrometer, brain research in the
School of Education and the sequencing of DNA in Biology, the joy of theoretical
mathematics and the discovery of new species, the work of faculty and students at the
School of Business contributing to global economic solutions through the TransResearch
Consortium, and the excitement of dating an archeological treasure from Jordan in the
School of Religion bolstering our understanding of the Near East—all of these activities,
and so many more, reinforce my belief that our campus commitment to seek after truth is
something we are truly passionate about.
As our musical organizations take shape and our students and faculty soon begin an invigorating concert series, as the cast of “The Crucible” come together and begin the exciting journey that will conclude, later this fall, with the performance of one of the theater’s greatest plays, as the faculty of the Art Department embark on one of the Brandstater Gallery’s most ambitious series of gallery shows—the arts are alive at La Sierra—and we are all fundamentally better as a result of these remarkable gifts that affirm the spirit of truth.

One of the main reasons we so like Buzz is that he believes he can accomplish anything he sets his heart on. Each of us would do well to follow his lead.

As we focus on the second of these three commitments, we ask ourselves an important question: What is it that we want to know? Think through the work that we are engaged in here at La Sierra. You may conclude, like I have, that what we are most interested in knowing is God, ourselves, and the world.

Like the author of Proverbs, in the scripture that was earlier read, we are committed, as a campus, to know God. We long to follow the commitments of this passage as we are encouraged to “. . . beg for knowledge; plead for insight. Look for it as hard as you would for silver or some hidden treasure. If you do, you will know what it means to fear the Lord and you will succeed in learning about God. It is the Lord who gives wisdom; from Him comes knowledge and understanding.”

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and whose writings have been particularly significant to the Adventist faith community, wrote a great deal about reaching beyond ourselves and our human understanding to ever greater faith in God.

In her book Education, she challenges us to also dream about infinity, to reach farther, higher than we might otherwise believe possible as she exclaims: “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children.”

It is imperative that we never forget this calling, to reach beyond ourselves to ever greater faith in God, for every day we learn of some new calamity: Storms that bring destruction and leave thousands homeless; a staggering array of wars that are being fought—and tensions near boiling over; a financial meltdown and crisis here in our country that has brought ruin to families and to corporations—and continues to spread its ugly and devastating results around the globe; a presidential campaign that never tires of negativity and insinuation.

At times we are overwhelmed with how little we seemingly can do for a world that is falling apart. Yet there are things that we can all do. We can pause. We can reflect on God’s ideal for each of us as His children. And, we can act.

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2 Proverbs 2:3-1, Today’s English Version
3 Ellen G. White, Education, 18.
Here at La Sierra University we embrace the opportunity to serve others. This is the third of our mission commitments. The dedicated people who clean our buildings and care for the beautiful grounds. Those who prepare our meals and help us do our research in the library. Roommates who wake us up when we sleep through our alarm, and a medical staff who still make house calls. Students and faculty who arrange study groups so that all might succeed, RAs who sit with you when you’re homesick. People who send care packages, emails and photographs to students who are serving overseas. Students, faculty and staff who spend weekends focused on solving problems that impact individuals and communities on the other side of the world. Students who volunteer in nearby schools, teaching children to read, and others who travel home on the weekend so they can teach Sabbath School at their church.

As Desmond Tutu has said: “If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up in one another’s, that we can be free only together, that we can survive only together, that we can be human only together, then a glorious world would come into being where all of us lived harmoniously together as members of one family, the human family.”

True wisdom is, indeed, found in loving people. As the final words of the musical Les Miserables declare, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” Building a bridge between yourself and other human beings should be a fundamental part of your commitment to serve.

And let us never forget: When our alums talk about what they love about La Sierra, it is the people they remember. A favorite professor who helped them succeed. Singing in the choir. Late night conversations with roomates. These are the memories that continue to bring joy and meaning.

To Seek. To Know. To Serve.

In beginning this new academic year, let us all be mindful of the past, intrigued by the future, and absolutely certain our path is directed by God. We live in a world that is ever changing—it is abundantly clear that we do not know the future—we cannot even fully imagine it. But we do know the One who will accompany us on this journey.

Several summers ago I had the privilege of traveling to Peru with my family. For ten days we explored this beautiful country, and enjoyed the warm hospitality—but the centerpiece of the adventure came in trekking the ancient stones of the Inca Trail on our way to Machu Picchu. For four long days we hiked—up, up, up. Many of us had never been at such high altitudes before—we were stretching far beyond our comfort zone. On the morning of the third day we started the climb that would prove to be the most daunting: we were to hike over the Pass of the Dead Woman at an elevation of 13,700 feet above sea level. For most of us the night had not been all that restful—nearly half of the group had been sick due to the elevation, and the buffeting winds and snow kept

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many awake. Yet early that morning we broke camp, and started up the mountain. We were a weary group, but by mid-morning all 14 travelers made it to the top. Some were fast, some slow. Some depended upon the strength of others to pull them through the most strenuous moments.

And something happened during these four days: we became a family. As we walked we shared our stories, we laughed—there were even a few tears as the terrain became more and more challenging. Yet the moment of success finally came as we made one last push to the top of the final mountain range and arrived at the entrance to the Sun Gate. Machu Picchu, in all its glory, was far below—we were there! And we knew we were successful.

As we journey together here at La Sierra University this year, we will serve with all our hearts. We will live with passion and intentionality. We will respect ourselves and each other. And we will never forget that God has a plan for each and every one of us.

“To Infinity . . . and Beyond!”

Randal Wisbey
President
La Sierra University