

A TRIBUTE TO DEAN WILLIS P. WHICHARD

I remember my excitement when I found Dean Whichard's letter submitting his application for the deanship at Campbell. As a member of the Dean Search Committee, I had spent a long evening reading through dozens of resumes before I reached the last entry in the notebook. When I finally reached then-Justice Whichard's resume, I excitedly told my husband, "We've got the best candidate—now we just need to convince him to come."

I first met Dean Whichard in the early 1980s when I was speaking to a legislative committee on behalf of my legal services clients. Several of my clients testified before his committee. He was the first committee member to understand the proposed bill, and he was the most gracious of all the senators in his kindness to my elderly clients. When I saw his application for Dean, I knew we had a candidate with a brilliant legal mind and a caring heart.

Seven years later, I look back and realize how blessed we have been to have had Bill Whichard as our Dean.

One of my early memories of his deanship is a University faculty dinner at Marshbanks Dining Hall shortly after the announcement that he was the new Dean. He asked me to sit with him so that I could introduce him to members of his new University community. The reality was that we almost didn't make it to our seats because he stopped to greet dozens of people he knew as we entered the dining room. He seemed to know everyone! I soon learned that our new Dean brought a broad knowledge of North Carolina and its people to his new job.

He also brought a willingness to listen. Early in his deanship he held the first of many "Conversations with the Dean." He invited students to come to an open meeting to share their concerns about the Law School. I remember the excitement among the students when they realized their Dean truly wanted to hear from them. He took notes and reported back to them on how he was able to implement their suggestions. Throughout his tenure as Dean, Dean Whichard has continued to seek input from the student community.

In addition, he understood that not every student feels comfortable speaking out in a public forum. He established the "Committee on the Community" to provide a way for any member of the Law School community to bring a concern before this small committee whose members could listen and help to solve the problems presented.

One former Campbell University Student Bar Association President shared with me her experience with Dean Whichard's interest in listening to the concerns of students. She said she was working in a large law firm for the summer with students from several other law schools when she received a telephone call from Dean Whichard soliciting our Student Bar Association's opinion on a matter. The other law students were astounded that a law school dean actually called a student and asked for input. They had had very different experiences with their own deans.

Throughout his deanship, Dean Whichard has maintained an open-door policy allowing any student or faculty or staff member to meet with him without a formal appointment. His humility and his much-deserved reputation for keeping confidences have guaranteed a steady stream of visitors. He has a way of communicating his concern not only for how the information will affect the Law School, but also how it will affect the person who is sharing the information.

Dean Whichard has been a supportive colleague to the faculty. He has encouraged us to write and has raised money to reward faculty members who publish significant articles in their fields of expertise. While working long hours as Dean, he has also found time to write a book and teach a course at the Law School each semester.

Dean Whichard's grace under pressure has been a model for all of us. We first saw it when he was meeting with the faculty during the interview process. Halfway through the interviews, he received word that his ninety-six-year-old mother had passed away. Although he certainly grieved her passing, he decided to go forward with the interviews, commenting that his mother would have encouraged him to continue. We had another opportunity to see his grace under pressure during his inauguration as Dean. Hurricane Floyd roared through the Carolinas during the luncheon following Dean Whichard's induction as Dean. He did not allow the weather to distract him during his speech. However, at the end of the speech, he announced that classes were cancelled for the rest of the day and encouraged everyone to get home as quickly as possible. His calm during the storm served as a model for all of us.

Dean Whichard has a keen ability for the use of language in both the spoken and written form. I remember a faculty-staff dinner early in his deanship when he said grace before the meal was served. My husband was so struck by the eloquence of the blessing that he asked Dean Whichard for a copy of the prayer. Dean Whichard had no written copy to share because the prayer had been from his heart.

We as a law school community have been blessed with Dean Whichard's willingness to share his heart for the last seven years. We will truly miss him.

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