Dear Alumni and Friends of Erskine College and Seminary,

Greetings! In our roles as Chair of the Board, Moderator of the General Synod, and President of the Alumni Association, we feel privileged to serve our alma mater on Erskine's Board of Trustees. Prior to our recent meeting, August 18-19, a number of alumni appropriately channeled their concerns to our Alumni President, Nan Campbell. We would like to share the Board's view on the most frequently mentioned concerns.

1. By far, the most frequent concern we heard related to the future direction of Erskine.

During the Board's meeting, there were extensive conversations regarding Erskine's mission. Here is a refresher of our mission statements:

The mission of Erskine College is to equip students to flourish by providing an excellent liberal arts education in a Christ-centered environment where learning and biblical truth are integrated to develop the whole person.

Erskine Theological Seminary is an educational institution of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Seminary has been called by God and commissioned by its host to serve not only that denomination, but also the entire Church of Jesus Christ. The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church.

Much of the concern related to the fear that Erskine might lean towards becoming a Bible college. Bible colleges have a different mission than Erskine. Bible colleges seek to enlarge students' biblical and theological knowledge and train them for a vocation of Christian service. Erskine's mission is to equip students to flourish as whole persons. Erskine exists to provide an excellent liberal arts education in a Christ-centered environment.

We are writing to emphasize to you the Board is committed to providing both an excellent liberal arts education and a Christ-centered environment.

2. Some of the alumni concern we heard related to Synod's suggested change to Erskine's charter to gain authority to remove members of the Board for cause.

During the Board of Trustees meeting, Nan Campbell, Alumni Association President, voiced this concern clearly, with support for the existing bylaws’ mechanism regarding for-cause-removal, and alumni trust in the Board's ability to monitor our members.

We intend for the Board to respond to Synod's requests with serious and thorough consideration.

Joe Patrick, Chair of the Board, has appointed an ad-hoc committee for this purpose. David Connor (ARP) is chairing this committee, and it includes Bill Cain (ARP, current Sem student), Ray Cameron (ARP, Sem '85), Andy Lewis ('97), Andy Putnam (ARP Moderator, Sem '91), Steve Suits (ARP Moderator-elect), and Ann Marie Tribble (ARP, '85).

The ad hoc committee has issued the following statement:
"The Erskine College and Seminary Board of Trustees has appointed an ad hoc committee to review and make recommendations to the entire Board in response to the General Synod requests regarding a bylaw revision on board member removal and a charter amendment on various aspects of the Institution’s relationship with the General Synod. The ad hoc committee held its first meeting on Friday, August 19, 2011, at which it: (1) prayed; (2) discussed the opportunities presented for continued healing and relationship rebuilding; and (3) began a review of various historical documents and references. As the committee conducts its assigned tasks throughout this academic year, we intend to continue to seek God’s guidance as we pursue a thorough review of the General Synod documents and gather input from constituency groups and accrediting agencies before making recommendations to the Board of Trustees for their consideration. The ad hoc committee covets your prayers for this work and for the Institution."

3. Other concerns we heard related to the recent Erskine bylaw revisions not being given a chance.

To the contrary, the work of the Board is moving forward in accordance with the revised bylaws.

One important example is the membership of the Committee on Trustees. In the past, the Chair has appointed this committee. This year, each standing committee elected a representative. Max Bolin (Academic) will serve as Chair of the Committee on Trustees. Other members are Judy Boyd (Finance), Eddie Spencer (Student Services), Joe Donahue (Seminary), and Nan Campbell (Development). This committee has much infrastructure work to do in cooperation with the Committee on Nominations to place gifted alumni and friends as future Board members.

4. Finally, we heard concerns related to Erskine’s financial position.

The Board shares this concern. During our meeting, Dr. Norman shared that the college has capacity for 100 additional resident students. Operating at capacity, Erskine’s financial picture would be much improved. Recruiting, retention, and attracting transfers for spring are part of the strategy to increase overall enrollment.

Another part of the financial position relates to giving from alumni and friends. Over the past four years, the number of Annual Fund donors has decreased significantly.

The Alumni Board is taking steps to conduct a statistical survey to better understand this undesirable pattern. When this information becomes available, the Board of Trustees can study the results and use it in making future decisions. For efficiency purposes, the survey will be distributed to a random sample of alumni. If you receive a survey, please respond promptly.

During the Board meeting, several members, including the Chair of the Finance Committee, encouraged Board members to give and to use their personal influence with others to encourage giving to Erskine.

We are asking alumni, members of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and other friends to follow the Board's example.
Thank you for being concerned about Erskine's future. Communicating accurately is one of the best things we can do for Erskine right now.

Now, the concern that the Board of Trustees desires alumni and friends to hear is that Erskine needs you to stay engaged.

Erskine needs you ... to build relationships with those willing to invest their time, finances, and other resources for the sake of future Erskine students, including your children and grandchildren. Erskine needs you ... in order to accomplish her mission of equipping students to flourish as whole persons. Erskine needs you ... in order to continue providing an excellent liberal arts education in a Christ-centered environment.

Thank you for your prayers and for all you do and mean for Erskine.

Sincerely,

Joe Patrick
Chair
Erskine College and Seminary
Board of Trustees

Andy Putnam
Moderator
General Synod of the ARP Church

Nan Campbell
President
Erskine College and Seminary
Alumni Association