December 13, 2012

Dear Erskine Faculty, Staff, Students, Parents, Alumni, and Friends:

While the purpose of this letter is to communicate important information, I want to start by wishing you a blessed and joyful season of celebrating the birth of Christ.

Earlier this week, we received some news regarding the decennial reaffirmation of our accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Since many members of our community are away from campus, and because of the considerable potential for misunderstanding, I thought it best to provide context and share a few important details.

We anticipated that our reaffirmation from SACS would include continued monitoring in the areas of strategic planning and assessment. However, at the SACS annual meeting this week, the Commission on Colleges determined that our needs in this area required additional attention before our accreditation could be reaffirmed for another ten years. While we address the areas of concern, Erskine will be on what SACS terms warning status for one year.

I want to make two things very clear up front, then provide some additional information below.

First, Erskine’s institutional accreditation is not in jeopardy. Our accreditation for both college and seminary remains in force and uninterrupted. While addressing these concerns requires our careful and immediate attention, we have until September to demonstrate progress in order to receive our ten-year reaffirmation.

Second, this warning status is not related in any way to any previous warnings. The concerns raised in the 2010 SACS warning were addressed and Erskine was removed from warning in July of 2011. Progress continues on defining and clarifying the character of the relationship between the ARP Church and the Erskine board in a civil and orderly manner.

The reaffirmation of accreditation is a complex multi-year process that involves dozens of people across the institution. As we engaged in this process, we became aware of some deficiencies in one core SACS requirement. This requirement (CR 2.5, Institutional Effectiveness) reads as follows:

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

In order to address these deficiencies, we expedited our strategic planning process last year. The previous strategic plan was designed to go through 2013, but was written prior to significant changes in the national economy as well as substantial internal challenges. This past summer, representatives of the faculty, staff, administration and board of trustees drafted a new strategic plan that will guide Erskine’s efforts over the next five years.

While we believe our new strategic plan provides a solid yet broad framework for our efforts to meet this requirement, it is clear that SACS would like to see more details and more demonstrated progress in implementing these strategies before they reaffirm accreditation for ten years.

Our plan calls for ongoing effort to refine and improve our planning, assessment, and effectiveness. So while this development will cause some adjustment in how we address these areas, it does not alter our commitment to our mission and to improving the overall quality of an Erskine education.

I look forward to seeing many of you on your return to campus, and I wish you all blessings in the coming new year.

All for Christ!

David Norman
President
Erskine College & Theological Seminary