

October 1, 2026

Dear Sewanee Community,

With the arrival of autumn, our campus community is entering one of its most dynamic and eventful seasons of the academic year. In this letter, I want to provide several important updates across the University, including our preparations for Family Weekend, recent organizational realignments designed to strengthen student support, and record-setting milestones in University Relations. I also share a few personal reflections on the college journey from both an educator's and a parent's vantage point. Thank you for all you do to support our students and enrich life across the Domain.

Family Weekend

This week we will celebrate Family Weekend, so Sewanee will welcome approximately 2,000 family members and friends of our students to campus. For some families, the weekend offers the first opportunity for them to see their students since the start of classes. For all families it is a chance to meet with faculty and advisors, learn about study abroad and civic engagement programs, meet other families, and enjoy a variety of sporting events and other activities. For faculty members and administrators, meeting students' families is an opportunity to establish connections and understand students' and families' expectations of faculty and the University. This year, the University will return to a former practice, an address by Vice-Chancellor Pearigen to students and families at 5 p.m. on Friday afternoon in All Saints' Chapel. Family Weekend will be followed quickly by the St. Luke's Lectures and School of Theology Homecoming and meetings of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Regents—four major campus events in a short time frame. These types of events require extra effort from a number of offices on campus including the Office of Alumni and Family Engagement, Sewanee Dining, Facilities Management, the Division of Student Life, the Department of Athletics, University Relations, and the Executive Offices. Additionally, the academic units—the School of Theology and the College of Arts and Sciences—engage with returning alumni, friends, and families during these events. Thanks, in advance, to all of the offices (and I surely forgot some) who help to make these events successful.

Community Building and Connections

In the last year, the Office of Community Building and Connections has experienced a number of changes in personnel and organization. With the announcement of the creation of the new Center for Engaged Learning, we now have greater clarity about organization of programs and staff that were formerly a part of the Office of Community Building and Connection.

The student support services and staff that were a part of the Office of Community Building and Connections are now within the Division of Student Life under the direction of Vice President and Dean of Students Nicky Campbell. POSSE+ and a revitalized 213-A program, named for the office of the University's first tenured Black faculty member, Houston Roberson, and originally co-developed by Nicky, will be managed by Associate Director of Community Building and Connections Tarneka Ezell and an associate dean of community building and connections. The University is currently in the process of hiring for the associate dean position. The Roberson

Project and the Indigenous Engagement Initiative will report to the provost. Personnel working on Title IX, Equity and Equal Opportunity, and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) will report to Director of Human Resources Brian Evans. Employee affinity groups will be supported by the provost and the Office of Human Resources.

University Relations

Fiscal Year 2025-26 (FY26) was a particularly active and successful one for the Office of University Relations. The University relations team, led at that time by Jay Fisher, enjoyed a record-setting fundraising year and completed a search for a new vice president. In July, Burns Jones, C'95, P'28, moved into the vice president for University relations role, just in time to announce the record-setting cash gifts and pledges that the University received in FY26, totaling more than \$48 million. The \$48 million in gifts and pledges from last year combined with \$69 million in gifts and pledges from the prior two fiscal years for a total of \$117 million toward our comprehensive fundraising campaign. Due to the hard work raising funds by the vice-chancellor and the University relations team, we are making substantial progress toward our fundraising goal for the upcoming campaign.

The campaign will provide a mixture of support for the University endowment, programs, and facilities. In other words, the campaign will provide financial support for the University's strategic and master plans. As part of his work to understand and shape the goals of the campaign, Burns Jones joined the steering committee of the ad hoc Master Planning Committee and chairs a Fundraising Priorities Committee. An important goal of the campaign is to raise funds for the endowment, and to date, the campaign has raised \$38 million in support of the University's endowment. Endowed funds support student scholarship and programming, both of which help us to provide excellent programs and attract exceptional students. The funds raised during the comprehensive campaign will position the University to continue to excel during the coming decades. Many thanks to Vice-Chancellor Pearigen and the University relations staff for their hard work laying the foundation for the comprehensive campaign.

The Other Side of College Experiences

Having helped to raise two daughters who have completed their college education and are now facing the excitement and challenges of early adulthood, I have new opportunities to reflect on the college experience and "next steps." Although many people at liberal arts colleges appropriately focus on the joy of learning from a wide variety of subjects and integrating knowledge and methods across disciplines in the classroom, I have developed a greater appreciation for how my daughters' liberal arts colleges prepared them for life after college. The friendships they formed, the internships they completed, and values they developed prepared them for who they have become. Those experiences outside of the classroom, including studying abroad, were important to their personal growth and education because they learned how to navigate unexpected situations in real time.

I am not so far removed from being the parent of college students to have forgotten the joy of meeting my daughters' friends and taking a few of them to dinner over Chinese hot pot or Indian food at their family weekends. Those moments were snapshots of their transformation and what

they would become as adults. Now, having completed the college experience with my daughters, when I meet with parents of current students at the start of the semester and at events such as Family Weekend, I can empathize with them as they sort through the range of emotions that they experience watching their students take shape. Such conversations always evoke feelings of nostalgia for a not-so-distant past as a parent and a more remote memory of being a student. Conversations with families also offer me a chance to see Sewanee through their eyes and learn about how we are successful and can improve as an institution.

Sincerely,

Scott Wilson
Provost