



JOHN MONGERSON '76

“ONU Development work is perfect for you.” With those words spoken to him at a key point in his life and with God’s guidance, John Mongerson accepted that job in 1999.

Transitioning to that assignment from 16 years as ONU’s director of admissions, with four years serving alongside then-University President John Bowling, brought changes but proved to be an ideal role for John. Through his decades of service for the University, his background and calling in ministry have proven to be valuable.

“I grew up in a Nazarene parsonage in Moline, Illinois,” John says. “My dad pastored a church there for 29 years. That was unusual in those times. When my parents and I decided I would attend ONU, it was the right decision. Several other students in our church chose ONU, too. I’ve always recruited for Olivet, no matter where I was employed.”

One of John’s favorite moments as an ONU student came during chapel in Chalfant Hall. “Dr. Ovid Young was playing the organ,” he says. “When I heard ‘And Can It Be’ as if it were for the first time, I felt it was my testimony.” After graduating from ONU, John served as

associate pastor and youth pastor at First Church of the Nazarene in Hoopeston, Illinois. As the only youth pastor in town, he enjoyed his close connections with other churches, as well as with the police department, the local high school and the hospital. That assignment prepared him for where God was sending him next.

John began working full time in ONU’s Office of Admissions in January 1979. In 1983, he was appointed Director of Admissions. “I assumed it was a temporary assignment to organize and refine the admissions systems,” he says. “But the more I got into the work, the more I saw that it was all the things I had in my heart: preaching, church relations, constituent relations, management, education, research.

I realized I was in the right place, especially when my father casually mentioned that maybe this work at Olivet is where I was supposed to spend my life.”

One of John's favorite stories from his years in Admissions concerns two students, a boy and a girl, from the same small town. He recalls how the boy struggled with even the most basic social skills. The girl had been abandoned by her parents, and a local pastor's family had taken her in.

"When we looked at the numbers and the details, enrolling at ONU was impossible for both of them," he says. "I remember telling each of them, 'OK, we can make it happen for this year. I have no guarantee of funds for a second year, I don't know if you'll make it academically, and I'm not sure how you can pay for your books. But I think this is the right place for you for this year. I only ask you to throw yourselves fully into all that Olivet has to offer, even if it's only for one year. The loans will be minimal, so you can pay those off with any type of work. Just take this offer, do your best in classes, make friends, try out for sports, get involved. Focus on learning, growing, having a great year. That's it.' Our team put enough together so each of them could enroll for their freshman year. We didn't know what would happen later, but God did. Both of them graduated from ONU."

John is proud about the sizable number of staff members he hired who later became successful, long-term Olivet employees all across campus. His proudest accomplishment in Admissions was his creation and implementation of a master plan for a "technology revolution" that would launch the sustained growth of the late 1990s as precursor to the explosive growth that came along after his Admissions tenure.

One of ONU's former VPs, Doug Perry, decided in the early 1990s to invest in technology ahead of the coming wave. At that time, no one could even purchase a flight or reserve a hotel room online. Almost no university, even the University of Illinois, offered an online application for admission. The internet and technology explosion had not arrived in business or education. But Olivet was going to jump in early.

So in 1994, John wrote a plan for drastic, rapid implementation of new technologies. With

help from Dennis Seymour and Tony Grimm, the Admissions team began work on an online application for admission. There were no models from other colleges to copy, but the vision became a success. ONU's booth at the 1995 Nazarene Youth Congress was a large digital display featuring an online application for admission and online interest cards.

When the opportunity arose to join the ONU Development team in 1999, John discovered, to his surprise, that it was an ideal fit for his experience, interests and personality. Currently, John is the longest-tenured ONU employee. An especially enjoyable assignment was taking on the leadership of the ONU Foundation in 2013. He also enjoyed his role as executive director of Development. But the sweet spot for John is his direct work with donors.

John believes that an unusual hallmark of Olivet value is the ability to serve a diverse and wide range of students. Excellent students are well-served and become some of the University's best supporters. But Olivet also meet the needs of average students and even those who have struggled academically.

"ONU is doing what Harvard could never do," he says. "We see average students become good students, and then become successful in life. Harvard can't do that, but Olivet does every year.

Students I didn't expect to even graduate are making a difference in our world. That's what I continue to share with our donors. The strongest essence of ONU is students' personal and spiritual development. That's why we do what we do."

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