



TONY FIGHTMASTER '80

Sometimes our dreams come true in our children's lives. Tony Fightmaster and his three brothers attended Olivet Nazarene University, although their dad never got the opportunity to live that dream in his lifetime.

During a revival service in Dayton, Ohio, in the 1940s, Tony's dad had a life-changing salvation experience. Stepping out in his new faith, he quit his job at National Cash Register and moved his family to Bourbonnais, Illinois, to prepare for ministry at Olivet. The day he was to register for classes, he received his draft notice and was sent to Europe just before World War II ended. Later, he did become a pastor and served churches in southern Ohio.

When Tony entered Olivet as a freshman, he was still dealing with the grief of losing his dad just four months earlier. He credits Dr. George Dunbar, Coach Larry Watson and Professor Joe Noble for their Godly examples and close mentorship during such a significant time in his life. An athlete majoring in music, Tony sang in Orpheus Choir, competed in baseball and wrestling, and learned how to walk in humility with deep purpose from his mentors.

"All three of these men lived Godly holiness and excellence in their own unique ways," Tony says. "At Olivet, academic excellence, social development and spiritual growth all merge together. Olivet is strong in all three areas, and that is the strength of Olivet."

Tony met his future wife, Janine, while they were students at Olivet. After his graduation, Tony devoted six years to serving in youth and music ministry in Ohio and Michigan. He also served as a song evangelist for the Church of the Nazarene, singing in revivals and concerts across the country. "When Dr. Ted Lee called me in 1986 with a job offer in the Office of Admissions at Olivet, I knew it was God's direction for me," Tony says. "Through the years, I've traveled hundreds of thousands of miles and talked with thousands of people about the transformation of students' lives at Olivet."

OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

In 2008, Tony accepted the invitation to serve specifically in the area of Church Relations at Olivet. He knew the relationship between the Church and the “Academy” has always been vital for a Christian university to stay true to its original mission. Tony says, “We have many examples across our nation of former Christian colleges drifting into being just another private school.”

With the help of Dr. Brian Allen and Craig Manes, Tony began the Preaching Ambassador and Music Ambassador program. Along with gaining valuable experience preaching, these students receive additional equipping and mentorship from District Superintendents and current ministers, beyond their academic education. Although the purpose of the program is to prepare for preaching and worship ministry, these students became additional spokespersons for the University, extending Olivet’s reach to hundreds of churches.

The Preaching Ambassador program began with two freshmen who were praying about ministry as their calling in 2009. That number grew to four in the spring of 2010 who preached in 13 churches; 13 students in the fall of 2010 who preached in 64 churches that academic year; and then to 20 in the fall of 2011 who preached in 131 churches that academic year. Years later, 65 students either preached or led worship in over 250 worship services in one year.

“What we needed the most was funding to support this program,” Tony says. “We prayed, and God answered. One generous donor in 2011 turned into more than 100 individuals and churches giving to support our students and make this program possible. From that time to today, the funding is always there to award scholarships, pay for travel, give stipends to students, and cover other expenses. That experience with stewarding donors ultimately laid the foundation for me to serve on the Development team.”

Today, Tony works with nearly 200 Olivet alumni and friends, helping them to find the best way to steward the resources God has given them. Each day, he appreciates the opportunities he has to help build the Kingdom of God by fueling Olivet’s

mission financially. His goal is to make sure Olivet has all the revenue needed to continue to serve students with excellence. In that process, he connects needs and challenges with people who want to be part of this great work.

He also appreciates seeing how God is now using students he has mentored. “LaMorris Crawford served as the chaplain for the Cincinnati Bengals and is now on staff of a large church serving with his wife, Megan, as marriage pastors,” Tony says. “Jordan Fish is the director of planned giving for another private university. At Olivet, these students and so many others found a place to excel and change their life story.”

Tony’s four sons are also Olivet graduates. In fact, John, Ben and Janine, their mother, received their degrees on the same day in 2015. “When my sons graduated, they were obviously at a different level spiritually, academically, professionally and in the way they handled themselves,” he says.

“I see in them how the whole person matures. Holistic education is where Olivet shines. Students are challenged to grow and to develop values that will last.”

Living for the Lord is and always has been more than a 9-to-5 job for Tony. He views his time, talents and energy as gifts that he stewards for God’s work. He remains committed to trusting God and living in obedience to God’s direction.

“None of this is something I planned,” Tony says. “As an Olivet student, I began to realize in a much deeper way how the Spirit of God lives in us and through us to accomplish His will. He has truly called us to a holistic abundant life as we ‘live into’ what God is doing in this world. We can always trust Him completely.”

Tony Fightmaster
Senior Development Officer
(815) 928-5638
fightmas@olivet.edu