

## Reasons for the season: blessings, purpose and aspiration

I love the holiday season! This year is extra special with our return to Hays, providing the opportunity to revisit the familiar traditions and experience new traditions. I love the church services, the outdoor lights, and the Christmas trees – I have four in the president’s residence, one in my office, one in the outer office, and so many more throughout the building, campus and city. Bill and I drive around at night and look at all of the beautiful outdoor lights.

I especially love the holiday season because it creates so many special moments for us to gather with our friends and family and to think a bit about our blessings, purpose, and aspirations. I always think of the holiday season as inclusive of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. The three events seem to transition both thematically and rapidly – signaling, paradoxically, both a time of heightened activity as well as a meaningful time for personal reflection.

Thanksgiving is such a great time for communities and families to come together to give thanks for their many blessings. Returning to Hays America has reminded me about the strong relationships and good people who call this area home. Clearly, a hallmark of this university is a strong town and gown relationship. Fort Hays State is blessed by a long legacy of strong leaders, extremely talented faculty, staff who care deeply about our students, and a community that rallies its support around the university in a myriad of ways.

My Thanksgiving blessings list may have been longer than Santa’s list. The Reader’s Digest version of my list included our generous donors, our students who choose FHSU, legislators who believe in higher education, and the quality of the innovative education our faculty deliver. A few blessings witnessed this fall include an 18th consecutive year of record enrollment growth, partial restoration of higher education base funding, top passing rates on national exams, and a \$100 million Journey Campaign – which was supposed to be a stretch goal – outpacing the timeline.

And then, Christmas!

Christmas – a time to enjoy more beautiful decorations, holiday music, and even the snow. A time to again express our gratitude for the people in our lives as we exchange cards, gifts, and encouraging words. I also appreciate the fact that both the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday facilitate a little extra generosity as we often provide a little extra food, gifts, and other treasures to those in need. I am so happy to be part of a community who actively engages in philanthropy and service to others all year round.

I really appreciate the person responsible for coining the phrase: *the reason for the season*. For me, Christmas is such a great opportunity to think deeply about my purpose – do I live my life as I have been called to do? What changes do I need to make? As I ponder about the life I lead, I realize a new year is quickly approaching.

A new year always brings new hopes, dreams, and aspirations. I once read that at the most basic level, our dreams, hopes, and wishes determine how we live our lives. Our aspirations are rooted in a strong desire to achieve something noble. Authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner share that if

we live each day as if we matter, we offer up our unique legacy. By offering up our own unique legacy, we make the world we inhabit a better place than we found it.

This is precisely why the holiday season is the perfect time to say “thank you” not only to our donors, who have changed the lives of generations of students, but also to everyone whose aspirations lead to a better world. In Hays America I experience a community brimming with people who live their lives generously and with kindness, who change lives, offer hope and live with integrity, and who inspire me every day to live more generously.