

# Courage, Gratitude, and Integrity

## A New Year's Message



Oliver Jennings Davis, Jr.  
1927 - 2016



Charles B. Runnels  
1925 - 2016



W. Timothy Pownall  
1948 - 2016

In his book *A Pretty Good Person*, author Lewis Smedes recounts how he asked his brother what he planned to do with the remaining short time of his life when he learned he had a terminal disease. His brother responded that he thought he would spend his final few months trying to "be a better person." Needless to say, it was not the response Smedes was anticipating.

At this time of year, many of us spend time looking forward to determine what

changes we should make in the year ahead. Those changes may be many or few, and may vary wildly in degree of seriousness or difficulty. Several of us also at this time reflect on the past year and take inventory of our lives to date. Somewhat related, it is not uncommon for us to think of those among us who have passed this life within the last year.

While there are several we have lost in our Pepperdine community in 2016, three that impacted the lives of many of us were Jennings Davis, Charles Runnels, and Tim Pownall. Each of these individuals in his own way enriched our community immeasurably through his speech and actions. Professor Emeritus and former Dean of Students Jennings Davis reminds us of the power of one individual who stands courageously against racial injustice and for equality and concern for all. Chancellor Emeritus Charles Runnels manifested that concern for all through his willingness to consider everyone first and foremost a "friend," living in such a manner that countless people considered him their best friend. Professor Tim Pownall, through his teaching and tireless work in dispute resolution, strove daily to bring peaceful resolve and reconciliation locally and globally. Each of these men inspired those who knew them to become better people.

During this coming year, in a world that seems increasingly bent on generating mistrust, tension, and conflict, may we resolve like the Apostle Paul to "seek...and set our minds on the things above" (Colossians 3:1-2) so that, like those who are no longer with us, we will be ambassadors of equality, friendship, and reconciliation. As children of God, may we lean into that goodness and strive like the brother of Lewis Smedes to "become better people." Not insignificantly, the subtitle of the book *A Pretty Good Person* is "What it takes to Live with Courage, Gratitude and Integrity." As a new year begins, my hope is that we all endeavor to learn what it takes.

RICK R. MARRS

Provost