

Fairbanks' legacy: Dream big, and trust in the Lord

By Carrie A. Crouch, Director of Communications



Who could have imagined that a boy from a broken home, with an alcoholic father for a role model, would someday become a college president? Dr. E. LeBron Fairbanks, Mount Vernon Nazarene University's president for the past 18 years, would say it was only through God's grace, a special tenacity and the help of "guidepost" individuals along the road. Here, he reflects over his 18 years as MVNU's leader, what brought him to this point and what the future may hold.

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Born in Chattanooga, Tenn., in 1942, LeBron is the eldest of three children. His childhood was not as easy or as pleasant as it should have been. "My mom was a saint and my dad was an alcoholic, so it did not make for the happiest of homes," he explained. But life improved when he, his mother and siblings moved to Florida to live with an aunt.

Responsibility came at an early age. After high school each day, Fairbanks could be found working at a local A&P grocery in order to help put food in the family's cupboards and to pay for schooling and other expenses. He willingly accepted this as a part of his duties.



In the summer of 1959, Fairbanks attended a summer church camp meeting. During a Saturday morning service, he responded to an invitation from the pastor and prayed, surrounded by friends. For him, this was a defining and clarifying moment that had obvious implications for the rest of his life. He commented, "I remember going back to my high school and telling my best friend at the

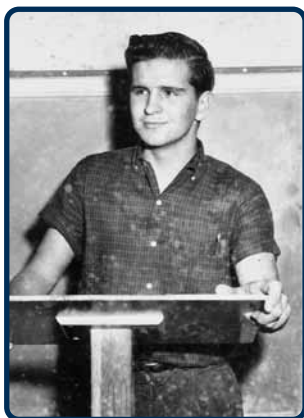
appointments, doctors informed Fairbanks that there was no evidence of illness whatsoever. "Because of this, there began a deep sense of stewardship on my life," he said. "I've tried to be a good steward of my days ever since."

THE PATHWAY TO LEADERSHIP

After graduating from Hialeah High School in northwest Miami, Fla., Fairbanks enrolled at Trevecca Nazarene University (then College) in the fall of 1960. It was here that he found his life deepening in many ways—spiritually, psychologically, emotionally and academically. "It wasn't in high school, but in college—a Christian college where people believed in me—that I became a good student. I didn't believe in myself, but they brought out the best in me," he said. "Spiritually, I became more focused, more committed, and that had a ripple effect on me academically. Of course, a certain education major named Anne had a positive influence on my studies as well..."



"I remember going back to my high school and telling my best friend at the time that something significant had just happened to me and I would not be doing the things and going to the places we used to. I really wanted to be a Christian."



time that something significant had just happened to me and I would not be doing the things and going to the places we used to. I really wanted to be a Christian."

Later that same year as a high school senior, Fairbanks became so ill, he was not expected to live. The diagnosis was leukemia. Though he's able to chuckle looking back, he reflected, "One night in the hospital, I remember receiving a call from an out-of-state friend who said, 'I heard you were very ill, and I wanted to talk to you before you died.' That was the worst night." However, after four years of regular



Anne and LeBron, who had met during their freshman year at Trevecca, were married in 1962. Following graduation, Fairbanks joined the staff of Nashville's Grace Church of the Nazarene. Simultaneously, he enrolled in Scarritt College, a Methodist graduate school, to complete a Master of Arts in Christian Education.

MVNU AND WORLD TIMELINE

E. LeBron Fairbanks elected as MVNU's fifth president.

1989

Berlin wall falls, uniting East and West Germany.
Exxon Valdez dumps more than 20 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound.

President Fairbanks' inauguration ceremony.
MVNU dedicates the Free Enterprise Business Center.

1990

Public debut of the World Wide Web.
Nelson Mandela freed from prison.



Gymnasium/MPB, Lakeholm Administration Building, and Founders Hall renovated.

1991

Collapse of the Soviet Union.

Alumni say a fond farewell

The following stories, memories and wishes are excerpted from alumni letters to Dr. and Mrs. Fairbanks. A complete scrapbook of these letters, pictures and other mementos from MVNU alumni was presented to the Fairbanks at MVNU's Farewell Celebration on Saturday, Dec. 2.

You have both demonstrated the knack of individually caring about the hearts and needs of each one of the thousands of students who have passed through MVNU's halls so that we all have felt uniquely and individually loved.

James McCament ('95)



You have been an amazing president to this institution. I really enjoyed my four years at MVNU and it is because of your leadership and vision to make it what it is today. I remember thinking you wouldn't know who I was, but every time I'd say hi to you on campus, you would know my name and talk to me a little. You may not have thought that it was a big deal, but it was to me. I recall that you loved "Redeemed" and always wanted to sing with us every time you had the chance. I hope that we made you proud. You are a great man of God and an inspiration to many.

Adam Etris ('03)

A move in 1967 brought Fairbanks to Kansas City, Mo., where he became a member of the editorial staff of the Department of Church Schools at the International Headquarters of the Church of the Nazarene. There he worked closely with the late Dr. A.F. Harper and Dr. Kenneth Rice. It was also in Kansas City where he completed a Master of Divinity at Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS). "As a teaching assistant to Dr. Chet Galloway, NTS's first professor of Christian education, I taught my first class—Christian Education of Children. I had a personal and professional interest in the subject and came close to pursuing a doctoral degree in it before moving to Kansas City," Fairbanks explained.

He enrolled and graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary with a Master of Theology, where he served as teaching assistant to Dr. D. Campbell Wyckoff, the premier Christian education theorist in the United States during the '60s to '80s. Fairbanks' passion for education began to grow as he looked toward a doctoral degree. He was admitted to Princeton's first Doctor of Ministry program and completed his coursework in pastoral theology with Dr. Wyckoff and Dr. Seward Hiltner.

However, upon taking a pastorate in Norristown, Pa., Fairbanks became quickly engrossed in pastoral ministry. Correspondingly, he became discouraged with the doctoral program at Princeton and eventually withdrew, despite receiving the Fellow in Pastoral Leadership Education. "In 1975, I attended the Continental Congress in St. Louis on the Family. At that meeting, I talked about my experiences at Princeton with Dr. James Hamilton, professor of pastoral care and counseling at NTS. He encouraged me to enroll in NTS's first Doctor of Ministry class and I heeded his advice," said Fairbanks. "It was one of the best decisions I've made in life." Another life-changing event came that same year: Anne and LeBron adopted their son, Stephen, from Korea.



EDUCATION WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

LeBron Fairbanks has had the unique and valuable opportunity to teach and serve at Nazarene institutions around the world. In 1978, he joined the faculty at European Nazarene Bible College (EuNC) in Büsingen, Germany, of which he later became academic dean. Here, he worked to implement a special relationship with MidAmerica Nazarene University both to share faculty and to allow selected EuNC students to graduate with baccalaureate degrees accredited through the U.S.'s North Central Association. "A number of today's Church of the Nazarene leaders throughout Europe were students there at time," Fairbanks commented. "In fact, EuNC's current rector, Klaus Arnold, was one of my students."



The Fairbanks returned to the U.S. in 1982, where LeBron served as professor of education and lay ministry development at Southern Nazarene University (then Bethany Nazarene College) shaping and coordinating this new program. Less than two years later, however, the Fairbanks were off to a new international destination. This time, to be president of Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in Manila, The Philippines. "What a great and fulfilling experience those five years were," Fairbanks recalled. On July 27, 1989, which also happens to be LeBron's

Art Studio, Central Complex, and Maintenance Complex renovated.

1992

William Clinton elected 42nd U.S. president.
Jay Leno debuts as host of The Tonight Show.

MVNU launches Adult and Graduate Studies programs (formerly EXCELL).



Cougar softball wins NCCAA national invitational title.

1993

Waco, Texas, cult compound stormed by FBI.

Visual Arts Center completed.
Women's basketball and men's golf win NCCAA national invitational titles.

1994

O.J. Simpson arrested for alleged murder of wife, friend.
Long-running sitcom Friends premieres on NBC.

birthday, he received the call from MVNU's Board Chair Dr. Harold Graves, informing him of his election as the University's fifth president. Fairbanks recalled, "It was quite a surprise." Ready or not, he was about to begin the assignment of a lifetime.

AN ANCHOR THROUGH CHANGE

"My inauguration at MVNU was one of the first events to be held in the newly constructed R.R. Hodges Chapel," said Fairbanks. "I remember the subject I spoke on—'Education for a Lifestyle of Service'—where I asked faculty and staff to consider expanding the sphere of influence and impact of the MVNU education." Already, Fairbanks had a dream to provide working adults with the opportunity to attend MVNU.

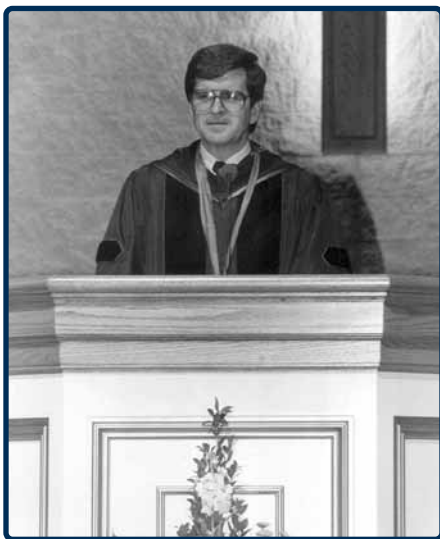
With the excitement of a new task also came apprehensions. "I was a 'Southern' boy," said Fairbanks, "and I didn't know how I would fit into this region or the campus. On a personal note, we were also concerned about Stephen. Because he is Korean, we knew he would definitely be a minority in Mount Vernon's community." But they pressed on, remaining at MVNU out of a deep sense of a great calling in their lives.



I am so thankful that I went to a college that had an approachable and loving president. When I look back and think about how available and caring you and Anne were, I recognize that we were spoiled. We share memories of you sitting with us in the cafeteria, stopping us on the sidewalks for a brief chat, giving us a hug in the chapel foyer, inviting us over to your home and cheering with us at basketball games, not to mention countless more.

James Smith ('99)

In his first article in The Communicator, MVNU's alumni and friends publication, Fairbanks laid out the four goals he brought to the school: enabling the campus community to think more globally, live more simply, love more deeply and to give more generously.



Throughout his entire administration, these have always been a priority and have been accomplished in numerous ways. Fairbanks has served as the model for each of these and through his strategic initiatives has changed the face of MVNU.

Five more specific goals included:

- Developing a strategic plan for the decade of the 1990s.
- Expanding and improving the library facility.
- Creating a nontraditional program for working adults.
- Surpassing the 1,100-student enrollment barrier for traditional undergraduates.
- Implementing a Division of Campus Ministries.

You were extremely influential in our lives as we spent our years at MVNU. We will never forget your asking, "How are you doing?" (We knew you truly meant this.) "Is there anything we can do for you?" You have had and continue to have an enormous impact on the lives of so many students, their families, and the community of MVNU. It's amazing how God will put wonderful people like you into the lives of others.

Dwayne ('97), Bethany (Reams '96), Ethan, and Evan Mills



First, thank you for your spiritual leadership and the example that both of you have set for all of the students, past and present, at MVNU! Second, thank you for allowing me to be a part of not only MVNU as a whole, but for allowing me to be a part of WNZR! My time at WNZR is filled with so many memories, many of which include both of you!

David "Emerson" Leist ('06)



Cougar baseball wins NCCAA national title.
Adult and Graduate Studies opens Polaris campus.

1995

Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building (Oklahoma City) bombed.

Thorne Library/Learning Resource Center dedicated.
Hyson Campus Center is refurbished.

1996

Summer Olympic games held in Atlanta.

Multicultural Affairs begins;
Eric Ely serves as first director.

1997

Princess Diana and Mother Teresa die.
DVD players available in the U.S.

Anne made my experience at Mount Vernon so special. My father was ill with cancer and passed away while I was in school. Not only did she spend time on the phone with me, she also made a special trip during calling hours. I can't tell you how much that has meant to me. At any other college, I would have gone unnoticed, but she made my family's situation her own.

Lori (Kincaid '01) Denney



One of the greatest memories I have of Dr. Fairbanks was at graduation. He spoke about Christian contentment and said, "If you're not content with what you have, you'll never be content with what you want." Dr. Fairbanks always spoke from his heart and was genuinely concerned for the spiritual growth of those he encountered.

Ryan ('05) and Renee (Blake '04) Avery



I will miss the Fairbanks! LeBron has taught me to always dream big and seek God's will in all that I do. Some of

my fondest memories will be the phone calls he made to WNZR. He would call to say hi, ask for a song title, or encourage a new DJ. It has been so encouraging to know that our president and his wife were listening to us and supporting us with their prayers.

Marcy (Street '91) Rinehart

Each one of these goals has been fully completed over the course of these 18 years—not without many risks and much rejoicing though. Fairbanks remembers one risk he's glad he took: "In the mid 1990s, I began to realize that a building expansion plan was necessary to accommodate the continuing growth of MVNU. As a campus community and as a board, we had determined the best site for the new library; however, on this site was the 'Ed Shed,' the art annex and our Counseling and Career Center," he explained. "I challenged our traditionally debt-averse board to assume financial debt on an expansion of the dining commons with a second floor, a new visual arts center and three student residence facilities. It was a risk for them to take and for me to recommend it. Fortunately, they embraced the vision and the rest is history."



The Thorne Library/Learning Resource Center was a part of Fairbanks' academic vision for MVNU.

Holding firm in both vision and values, Fairbanks is most proud of staying with his God-given assignment for an impressive 17 years amidst massive growth and change. "Just not giving up—the tenacity—has been the thing. The temptations to move along the way were there, but the release was not," he commented. "I've tried to be an anchor for the School as we've experienced profound change together. I wanted to be a steadying influence. That's my leadership style—to turn the ship slowly. I just wish I could start all over again with the knowledge I've gained since."

STRUGGLES AND SURPRISES

Fairbanks' tenure at MVNU has been filled with personal and professional growth. When he was elected president, one board member mentioned a fellow board member's concern: "He's detail-oriented," Fairbanks remembered. "This is usually a good thing, but as the institution has grown, I've increasingly recognized that I must infuse the attention to details into my senior administrators. I know I cannot be involved in as many of the details as I would like to be."



Fairbanks presenting at a conference in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Communication skills have been a tremendous area of growth for Fairbanks. The naturally introverted LeBron explained, "I knew I was following a 'prince' among communicators [Dr. William Prince], so I knew I had to work hard at improving my communications to the various constituency groups." With over 1,000 speaking engagements, chapel services, classroom presentations, church and district gatherings and more under his belt, he's had plenty of practice.



MVNU enrollment pushes past 2,000.

Jennie K. Moore Family and Consumer Science Center dedicated.

Emphasis on missions and international studies: Dr. Fairbanks, other administrators and faculty participate in International Studies Romania Semester Abroad; Dr. Fairbanks visits a Romanian orphanage.

1998

John Glenn becomes oldest astronaut.
Google is first established.

4041st MVNU diploma awarded by Dr. Fairbanks on May 22, 1999.
Hyson Campus Center receives addition/renovation.

1999

Student gunmen open fire at Columbine High School.

2000

George W. Bush elected 43rd U.S. president.
Scientists successfully clone a sheep.

"I've had to increase my financial analysis skills and understanding of legal and compliance issues as they related to higher education," he continued. In 1989, MVNU did not have legal counsel. Of course, this is one area of education that has changed greatly. "I discovered shortly after arriving at MVNU that we were engaged in a small lawsuit. This was enough to remind me that I needed to stay close to legal counsel."

Surprises, both positive and negative, have been a way of life through 18 years at MVNU. "I've been surprised from the beginning by the warm embrace of the Mount Vernon/Knox County community to this institution," said Fairbanks. "At first I was offended by the phrase 'The Naz,' but I quickly learned that this truly was a term of great endearment."

He added, "I should not have been surprised, though I was, by the intense commitment of the board to this institution. The board has been a strong part of MVNU from its beginning and through my administration ... and will be for the next president as well." Fairbanks is also appreciative of the positive overall response of faculty, staff and the greater constituency to his leadership of MVNU.



Fairbanks with Dr. Jim Couchenour, former Board of Trustees chair.

Anyone associated with MVNU during Dr. Fairbanks' presidency has been amazed at the fruit of his leadership. His political skills are truly a gift to the church. However, the thing that has most impressed me is his continual path of learning. When he arrived at MVNU, he had large shoes to fill in replacing Dr. William Prince. One of Dr. Prince's strengths is preaching. One of Dr. Fairbanks' admitted weaknesses, at the time, was preaching. I know that because he showed up in a few of my preaching classes and shared this with the class. One day after class, Dr. Fairbanks asked me what a few of the most recent books on preaching I had read were. That impressed me. And his preaching began to change dramatically.

His humble pursuit of learning and service has been a pristine example of the old motto, "To Seek To Learn Is To Seek To Serve." His service to MVNU has been a blessing in every sense of the word and his wife Anne, a treasured gift.

Rev. Larry Dunlap ('92)

What a blessing you have been to the community of MVNU. I was a student when you came to us. I'm sure your vision for the young school was met with opposition and lack of faith. Thank you for believing in what the Lord was showing you, and for not giving in. Thank you for exercising faith—believing in what was not visible to the naked eye. Look at what the Lord has done!

Kevin Angel ('91)

REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

When asked what it means to truly be a leader, Fairbanks replied, "I've given the last 27 years of my life to exploring this question." In truth, his quest for leadership probably began even earlier than that. "I once wrote a definition of Christian leadership that has guided me fundamentally to this very day:

"Christian leadership is humble service to others in a community of faith for the purpose of enabling them through visioning, collaboration, and teaching to live their lives on the lordship of Christ, and to understand, accept, and fulfill—both individually and corporately—their ministry to each other, to their vocational choices, and to the world."

Adult and Graduate Studies opens Lima and Newark campuses.
Women's basketball wins NCCAA national title.

2001

More than 3,000 die in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.
Apple introduces the iPod.



MOUNT VERNON
NAZARENE UNIVERSITY
Life Changing

MVNC transitions to university status.
Men's basketball wins NCCAA national title.

2002

U.S. government establishes Department of Homeland Security.

Adult and Graduate Studies opens Gahanna campus.
Women's soccer wins NCCAA national title.

2003

U.S. invades Iraq.
Space shuttle Columbia explodes; seven astronauts killed.

I learned more about leadership watching the way you led our University than from the many books I've read on the subject. Thanks for your years of dedication to MVNU and the Church of the Nazarene! You've made a difference that will last for generations! God Bless you and your wife as you retire!

Rob Paugh ('90)



Dr. Fairbanks, you have been a wise and dedicated leader and you have helped to make MVNU more than just a place to get a degree—a place where people like me grow into a relationship with God that I didn't know was possible before college. Mrs. Fairbanks, you were the very first person I met on my first day at MVNU. You were so kind to me and my parents. I've never forgotten that.

Angela Tanner ('97)



I have really appreciated the leadership and, even more important, the friendship and support of Dr. and Mrs. Fairbanks. Dr. Fairbanks has always gone out of his way to chat with me when our paths crossed on campus or through e-mail, and Anne is one of the most precious and caring ladies whom I have ever met. As they prepare to finish their time at MVNU, they can walk away knowing they have left a tremendous legacy on our campus and around the world. They were the right people at the right time and with the Lord's help, they took MVNU to new heights.



Dave Parsons ('94)

Fairbanks also concurs with Dr. John Stott's summary of Christian leadership. Stott breaks the definition into five ingredients: clear vision, hard work, dogged perseverance, humble service and iron discipline.

Have students and education changed in the past two decades? "Yes and no. Anne and I love students and, fundamentally, I don't see big changes. Though some of their characteristics may change from generation to generation, we embrace them for who they are and what they bring to this campus, both strengths and limitations," Fairbanks added. "We try to nurture them and push them as far as we can in the time we have with them."

Some things don't and shouldn't change, however, such as the liberal arts core at MVNU. A Christian liberal arts education provides a foundation—a biblical, theological foundation—for the exploration and development of ways of thinking and ways of doing, in graduate school, in an occupation, at home, in the church and in the community. "That integration of faith and learning is not brought to completion in an undergraduate education," said Fairbanks, "but hopefully a way of thinking has emerged that will stay with the student and inform and guide him as he grows and matures for the rest of his life."



LOOKING BACK GRATEFULLY, LOOKING AHEAD EXPECTANTLY

It's next to impossible to sum up nearly two decades of a university presidential experience neatly, but LeBron made the attempt in just three words:

REWARDING:

- Development of academic programs for both traditional and adult/graduate students.
- Establishment of multiple satellite campus locations.
- Expansion of campus property with the 121-acre Pinecrest Farm and 5-acre Kinney property.
- Creation of the Campus Ministries Division.

GROWING:

- Experiencing a phenomenal journey of faith, both for Fairbanks and for MVNU.
- Pushing beyond what most people thought was possible.
- Accomplishing God's word and will collectively, as a campus community.

VISIONING:

- Creation of two strategic planning documents.
- Journeying through the year-long process of revising the MVNU vision statement.
- Sustaining the dream for the next steps of MVNU's impact and influence.

Prince Student Union dedicated.
Adult and Graduate Studies opens
Cincinnati campus.

2004

Tsunami hits Indonesia and Thailand;
228,000 missing and dead.

Christopher Reeve dies.



Second floor added to Jennie K.
Moore Family and Consumer
Sciences Center.

Couchenour House
(former president's home) dedicated.

2005

Hurricane Katrina hits Gulf Coast;
1,000 dead, millions homeless.

Crash awarded Best Motion Picture.



MVNU surpasses 2,600 in enrollment.

Dr. Daniel J. Martin announced as
MVNU's sixth president.

2006

Winter Olympics held
in Turin, Italy.



The years ahead will have its share of challenges as well. Fairbanks expressed that some of these may include:

- **Access for students.** MVNU is a tuition-driven institution, so as salaries increase, as new programs are needed, new technology and equipment are required, new facilities are necessary—financial demands increase and student charges increase. “I don’t want to see an MVNU education that is unattainable, especially for Nazarene students,” he said.
- **Diversity.** Because Mount Vernon is a fairly rural community, there is a lack of diversity, and multicultural students are not initially drawn to MVNU. Yet we need to provide opportunities for our students to appreciate and experience cultural diversity in order to realize the whole world is the arena of God’s concern.
- **The relationship with the Church of the Nazarene:** “There is an intensely strong relationship presently,” said Fairbanks, “but it is a challenge to keep that relationship dynamic, vibrant and before us as a campus community, while seeking to invite faculty and students from a broad array of denominations.”

“My biggest hope and dream for MVNU is that it will be an institution that continues to embrace and fulfill the vision of shaping Christ-like leaders for lifelong service and global impact. I also want to see the University continue to increase in its academic standing and quality.”

“My love and desire to serve emerging Christian leaders is still strong, particularly in the two-thirds world. And I believe in some way I will give more attention to that in the days to come,” said Fairbanks.

To Dr. Fairbanks and Anne—may God watch over your future days and continue to bless you with the desires of your hearts as you carry out your purpose for Christ. MVNU is greatly indebted to you both, and we will never forget the great love, leadership, compassion and grace that you have poured out for this campus. MVNU will never be the same.

I did not know Dr. Fairbanks on a real personal level, and my one-on-one encounters with him over the course of four years at MVNU were few. I can remember one time when he prayed with me at the altar after a Wednesday evening service concerning my future after college. He told me that sometimes you have to use your “sanctified common sense” when it comes to taking the next step. That has stuck with me. Dr. Fairbanks exuded love. I believe that he truly loves MVNU and each and every student there.

Liz Young ('03)



Although I didn’t have many opportunities to interact with Dr. and Mrs. Fairbanks, I fondly recall that Mrs. Fairbanks saved clippings from my volleyball games and sent them to me at my apartment. The fact that she would care enough to take notice of these events and remind me that she and Dr. Fairbanks were supporting me was a huge boost. They are a couple who cares deeply about each and every student at the school.

Courtney (Testa '97) Aljancic

