Gerhard Spiegler Memorial Service
Remarks by Carl Strikwerda, President, Elizabethtown College
August 29, 2015

Gerhard Ernst Spiegler served Elizabethtown College as president from 1985 to 1996. I am privileged today to serve as one of his successors and to see every day the fruits of his labor as president of the College.

On behalf of the entire Elizabethtown College community, I wish to express our sincere condolences to his widow Ethel, his children Karin, Eric, and Mark, his grandchildren Sarah and Emma, and his sister Hanna.

Gerhard Spiegler served as an intellectual and innovative leader for Elizabethtown College at a critical time in its history. Given his own high intellectual standards and his experience at institutions such as the University of Chicago, Haverford College, and Temple University, he envisioned Elizabethtown College as a vigorous community of scholars and students supported by a beautiful campus. Inspired by his vision, the College reformed its core curriculum, established the First-Year Seminar program, and created its Student Directed Learning Communities. While his intellectual gifts remained his most well-known talents, Dr. Spiegler had superb taste in architecture and buildings. The buildings that were constructed at the College during his tenure are some of the finest on our campus, or on any college campus for that matter—the High Library, the Leffler Chapel, and the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. He also had the President’s House renovated, a wise decision that benefitted his successor, Dr. Ted Long and his wife Betty, my wife Gail and me, and countless visitors to the House over the last two decades.

In addition to his oversight of architecture and construction, President Spiegler’s practicality and common sense manifested itself in the improvement of the College’s finances. He raised a considerable amount of money to support construction and our educational program, and tripled the College’s endowment while president.

One of President Spiegler’s most noteworthy achievements remains the re-alignment of the College’s relationship with the Church of the Brethren, a denomination of which I am a member. As the College’s first non-Brethren president, he was in a sensitive position that could have made the re-alignment with the denomination a much more controversial transformation than it proved to be. Thanks to his tact, patience, and diplomacy, the College and the Church officially separated but maintained very close ties which remain until this day. The creation of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies is not only one of President Spiegler’s great achievements but a
testimony to his conviction that, in separating from the Church, the College would remain committed to the intellectual, historical, and philosophical heritage of its Brethren origins.

While I have served as president of the College, President Spiegler expressed pleasure in knowing that the donations given in his honor at his retirement went to support a fund for our new Prestigious Scholarships Program at Elizabethtown College. I know that he was extremely pleased to hear that the College’s graduating seniors won two Fulbright Fellowships each of the first two years of the program, then three Fellowships last May, and a record fourth this summer. The prestigious scholarships won by our students are a testament to the high intellectual standards that he held dear.

In addition, he and Ethel established a Distinguished Achievement Fund. President Spiegler also cared deeply about global citizenship, drawn in part from his own life experiences of leaving Europe and re-settling in a new country. Appropriately, the Distinguished Achievement Fund’s 2015 award went to Alyssa Zerbe, who used it for an international internship in Bogota, Colombia with the Foundation for the Support of Abandoned Children. President Spiegler would have been proud.

A scholar and a relentlessly hard worker, Gerhard Spiegler leaves a great legacy as one of the leaders who shaped Elizabethtown College’s history.

Carl J. Strikwerda
August 29, 2015