

## **THIS IS ONEIDA BEING AND LOOKING PRESIDENTIAL**

After arriving at Oneida to serve as the school's president, I spent quite a bit of time with Dr. Bud Underwood. He shared a lot of helpful and insightful information with me regarding his experience in leading this ministry. Since that time, I have also sought counsel and advice from other gentlemen who lead other Christian institutions. Each person I have talked with has shared helpful information with me.

Not long after becoming the new president of OBI, I had someone ask me if I was now going to grow my hair out. I told that person that if I had any hair, I would gladly grow it out for the world to see. I later reflected upon that question and thought perhaps that person was implying I should seek a more presidential look. Some years ago after watching a presidential debate, I made a comment about one of the candidates not really appearing very presidential during the debate. Recollection of those conversations made me think perhaps I should soften my look a bit. I have had a goatee for nearly 12 years now. As a matter of fact, I can hardly remember not having some chin whiskers. You may notice my picture that flanks this article includes a clean-shaven face. During our fall break back in late September, I decided to shave my goatee and took a new picture for the Western Recorder. When our students and staff returned from the break, many of them made comments about my cleanly shaven look. The overwhelming majority of the comments suggested I bring the goatee back. All of those comments didn't convince me to do so, but when my wife suggested I grow my beard back, I decided to do so.

As a former coach and athletic director in Florida, I routinely wore shorts and a polo shirt. Whenever I did dress up for an event, many of my peers gave me a hard time about it. I now wear a tie to work every day, but typically don't wear a suit coat on campus unless we are having a special event. When representing the school off of our campus, I typically wear a suit coat. On our last choir trip of the year, we stopped at a state park on the way home for some fun. When I changed from my suit to shorts and a t-shirt for the hot bus ride home and the park festivities, many of our students gave me funny looks or commented that they had never seen me dressed that way before.

I recently visited Dr. Jim Taylor at the University of the Cumberland. He was very helpful to me and graciously took the time to share some of his knowledge with me as I seek to lead Oneida in the way the Lord wants. Perhaps the thing I picked up the most quickly from Dr. Taylor without him having to say it was to simply be myself. As I watched him interact with people, it was clear that he was comfortable being himself.

The way we are dressed does not make us who we are. Trying to look presidential doesn't make me any more presidential, just as trying to act Christian does not make me a Christian. We are striving at Oneida to teach our kids to be themselves, but more importantly to be who they are in Christ.



**Larry A. Gritton, Jr.**  
**OBI President**

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