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President's Welcome

Richard F. Wilson
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Commencement Welcome

May 6, 2007

Good afternoon! And what a beautiful afternoon it is! I can't tell you how much time and energy has been devoted to canvassing the weather Web site over the last five days, and it's so delightful to me to be here on a sunny and warm day for Commencement on the Quad. This is a great omen for the Class of 2007.

I have to tell you that I've waited three years to have a day like this. The first Commencement, we froze to death, the last Commencement, we had to move indoors because of thunderstorms, but today, the sun is shining.

One of the distinctive pleasures I have as president is the frequent opportunity to listen while wonderful musicians perform. Today is one of those occasions. I would like to thank the members of the Wind ensemble for sharing their talents with us this afternoon.

There is also one change in the Commencement program that I would like to call to your attention. We planned to award an honorary degree today to Marjorie Agosin, Professor of Latin American Studies at Wellesley College. Unfortunately, Professor Agosin is ill and unable to be with us. We will find another appropriate occasion to bestow this honor on a very distinguished scholar and human rights activist.

As many of you may have noticed by now, we have an empty chair on the platform draped with the colors of Virginia Tech. Each of us has been profoundly affected by the tragedy on that campus, and we search for ways to convey our sorrow and to share the burden of grief. I ask you to join me in a few minutes of silent reflection on behalf of those who lost children, friends, and colleagues...Thank you very much.

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the faculty and staff of Illinois Wesleyan.

For our 518 graduates and their families this is a much-anticipated day. For the University, this Commencement Ceremony concludes our 157th year of service.

Four years ago, the class of 2007 arrived in Bloomington with a sense of exhilaration, anticipation, and no small amount of anxiety. I know those feelings well, because one year later I arrived as the University's 18th president.

And despite all of the growth and successes that you've experienced over the last four years, chances are that the graduates are feeling some of those same emotions creep back into their minds and perhaps into the pit of their stomachs.

And, this time you aren't wondering "Will I like my roommate or have I selected the right major?" Instead, you are thinking about such things as, "Have I selected the right graduate program or made the right career choice?" A few of you may even be pondering how you'll get by without Saga Dave's Sunday Brunch or Tobin's Pizza!

The emotional roller coaster that comes with graduation is nothing new. In fact, Illinois Wesleyan's very first graduate, James Hugh Barger, Class of 1853, was the sole graduate in his class at that first Commencement and, if that wasn't enough pressure, he was the son of one of our founders of the University. Now there's a helicopter parent.

Commencement marks the beginning not the end. Today, we honor you and wish you well, wherever your journey takes you. We know what you have accomplished here and what you are capable of accomplishing once you leave.

While this day and this ceremony properly focuses on you as graduates, we must not lose sight of the fact that you did not make this journey alone. You had help, and it is very appropriate that we take a moment to thank those who helped you along the way.

I would invite the graduates to please stand, and face the faculty who are seated immediately behind you and give this group of dedicated people a round of applause. While you're standing, I'd like each of you to turn in the direction of where you think your friends, relatives and siblings might be seated, and give them a round of applause. Thank you.

This is justifiably a shared occasion. I hope, and I trust, that you and your loved ones are proud of what you have accomplished and the person you have become.

I can assure you that we share this pride and the opportunity that we have had to get to know you over the past four years. I sincerely hope that we can continue to be part of your life in the years that lie ahead as you join the more than 16,000 Illinois Wesleyan alumni who can be found doing great things across our nation and around the world.

It is now my honor to present to you another member of our community, the President of our Board of Trustees, and a distinguished Illinois Wesleyan graduate himself, GEORGE VINYARD.

COMMENCEMENT CLOSING REMARKS
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In a moment, we will rise and sing together the *Alma Mater*, which you first sang at your Opening Convocation in 2003. With four years of practice our expectations are high but, then again, we have printed the words in your program just to be safe.

Following the alma mater, Pastor Weir will give the benediction and then we will adjourn to the graduation tradition of strawberries and scones.

Before this ceremony is complete, however, I want you to know what a privilege it has been for me to be part of your lives over the past three years. In that short time, I have come to appreciate the many special talents and skills represented in this class.

You should also know that we will miss you. We will miss your intellect and your passion; we will miss your creativity; and we will miss your spirit and determination.

You may leave the campus today, but a part of your life story will remain here. We sincerely hope you will return often to reconnect with that story and share the succeeding chapters with us.

I told a group of seniors a few weeks ago that I know they have spent much time preparing themselves intellectually and we know that effort is important. We also hope you are leaving with greater sensitivity to several important values of the university, ones that transcend any particular major or area of concentration: social justice, global literacy, ethical decision making, environmental sustainability; civic leadership; and community engagement.

I lift my hat to the Class of 2007. Go forth from this campus **filled with wisdom, focused on goodness, and fired with enthusiasm.**

Congratulations and Godspeed.