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Welcome by Provost Janet McNew

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Welcome to the Inauguration
Janet McNew, Provost

Surely there is no sweeter place in springtime than a residential college campus, where the first warmth of the season brings forth budding flowers, nascent leaves, and sleepy students in shorts and flip-flops, emerging from their dorm rooms like groggy bears after winter's hibernation. April itself seems just the right metaphor for the time of life of our undergraduates, and it is likewise an especially apt time to celebrate the new beginning in the life of a university that a new president represents.

To “inaugurate” means to “introduce into public use by some formal ceremony.” We don't inaugurate corporate CEOs, and, really, besides the President of the U.S., it seems that presidents of universities are the only sorts of leaders for whom we feel the need for such ceremonial beginning. Institutions of higher learning, especially residential, undergraduate ones like Illinois Wesleyan, think of ourselves as communities, planted in particular places, and sharing a common set of academic values. For us, a new president symbolizes a new era in the life of our community, and as such, requires a ceremony to honor our new leader who represents the hope we share for a bright future for this venerable university.

As a community solely dedicated to undergraduate education and to lifelong learning engendered by the liberal arts, we draw our mission not only from a commitment to the advancement of knowledge but also from the cultivation of values, such as those explicitly mentioned in our mission statement - diversity, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Today, you will hear speakers offer variations on Wesleyan's motto, *Scientia et Sapientia*, Knowledge and Wisdom. My version turns for inspiration to the English Renaissance and to a man who is remembered today for the great range of his writing - in ethics, literature, philosophy, several of the sciences, history, politics, and law. It is the opening of the first of Francis Bacon's famous Essays, the one “On Truth” which I quote: “What is truth? Said Jestling Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.” One need not be Christian or even religious to recognize that Pilate was a great idiot not to stay long enough to hear Jesus out. This urbane ruler has become the ultimate symbol of a kind of failed intellectual, of shallow, callous cynicism. Yes, Pilate was learned and witty, but he was drastically unwise.

By seeking wisdom as well as knowledge, this university community aims not just to sharpen our intellects but also to deepen our understanding, to increase knowledge and also to cultivate character. Francis Bacon was one of the founders of the scientific movement in Europe, but he fully embraced the Renaissance concept of the *vita activa*, a life of service, and he intended his literary works to advance moral and civil knowledge. For him, as for us at Illinois Wesleyan, when we ask, “What is truth?” we are not making fun of a stranger among us, we seek revelations from each other, and we do stay to listen to all the variations of true answers that we hear from one another.

We thank you for joining this celebration of Illinois Wesleyan University and of the new beginning offered to us by President Richard Wilson. I extend to all of you a most hearty welcome from our community of scholars on this auspicious and joyous day.