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Greetings and Call to Leadership

Greetings from the Illinois Wesleyan Faculty

Paul E. Bushnell, Professor of History, Illinois Wesleyan University

Richard Wilson, on behalf of the faculty, I welcome you to the office of president of Illinois Wesleyan University. We welcome you not only to tranquil moments of delight in ideas or the arts, but also to the arduous task of re-shaping this part of academe to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. The presidency of American colleges and universities, as I am sure you are aware, is not what it used to be. Contrary to the custom of colleges in the early 19th century, you may be relieved to learn that you will not be called upon to teach moral philosophy to the senior class. In 1850, Illinois Wesleyan was founded by leading citizens who saw the need for higher education in this young prairie city with a tide of immigration on its way, but did not give in to their doubts or their limited resources. As Bloomington-Normal grew with the railroads and the bounty of the prairie soil, this community and a wider circle of Methodists and their friends enabled this University to survive economic shocks and by the 20th century aspire to a wide recognition for excellence.

Now that we have reached the 21st century, we are again called upon to define ourselves against new challenges. The world we grew comfortable with was changed by forces of globalization, changed by realization of the damage we have done to our environment and vital resources, and changed by threats of violence which despite our military power we have limited means to deal with, in part because we Americans have failed to invest adequately in study of the cultures and languages of the world's people who generally do not speak English. All of these changes pose unanticipated problems for our curriculum and our resources. Pressed by the urgency of 'internet' information and messages and the intrusive ringing of cell phones, it is hard to believe we are only in the early stage of a technological revolution. Already we are appalled at the speed with which misinformation or an ill-considered opinion is communicated. But this is the world in which we live and plan for the future. Taking our cue from the very serious attention you have given to strategic planning, this faculty is anxious to play its full part in determining what we will become.

Preoccupied by our work and sometimes impatient, we nevertheless pledge that we will muster our wits and our energies to share in the proper governance of this University, to find creative and effective solutions to the problems that challenge us, and at the same time properly educate, stimulate and provoke our students. In the background remain the threats of international confrontations, the urgent question of how we turn war into peace, profound problems of how to solve the growing gap between rich and poor, or how justly to use the powers of the state. Our assignment in this generation is to deal with these daunting problems. But we will not neglect the great common task we share - to build this University, knowing, (as we have come to know you in the last few months) that you will work to the utmost to launch a vital new era of high achievement in the life of Illinois Wesleyan University.