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## New Student Convocation Remarks

Richard F. Wilson

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## New Student Convocation

August 21, 2007

Good afternoon. On behalf of the faculty and staff, I am delighted to extend the first official welcome to the Class of 2011. We are pleased that you are here!

This is a special day for you and a special day for us. The air is filled with excitement and anticipation as you begin your collegiate journey with 575 other new students. You are a talented and interesting group that comes to us from 22 states across the nation and 17 countries around the world.

The diversity of your backgrounds, outlooks, interests, talents and ideas add to the vitality of our campus community and will enrich the broader community in which you will live for the next four years.

The reasons that you have selected Illinois Wesleyan are also many and varied. However, I would venture to say that for most of you, one important reason was the way you felt when you visited campus or talked with faculty and students that you met—a feeling of belonging that said this is a special place, I feel at home here. We will do our best to make that feeling last for you.

For those of you who have attended one of our campus Open Houses, you may recall hearing me say that you should resist the pressures to define your undergraduate experience as preparation for a job when the more compelling reason is preparing yourself for a fulfilling life. We hope that you will indeed approach your years here with this thought in mind.

Your life at Illinois Wesleyan can be as rich and as varied as you want it to be. I urge you to explore and expand your interests while you are here. Learn not only inside the classroom, but outside of it as well. Participate in the many activities, events, organizations and groups that are available to you. If at all possible, spend some time in another culture, either through a semester-long study abroad program or through a travel course during May Term. Finally, find a way to become involved as a volunteer in the life of the Bloomington-Normal community. If you do these things, you will find your life transformed in meaningful and unexpected ways.

One of those transforming experiences will take place later this week through the discussions that are held around the Summer Reading Program selection *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder.

In reading this book, I found myself pondering the following ideas:

- A worthy goal of one's life is to provide a preferential option for the poor.
- Clean water and health care and school and food and tin roofs and cement floors, all of these things should constitute a set of basics that people must have as birthrights.

- The answers to many important questions aren't always black and white, but there are areas of moral clarity.
- Resources are always limited but does it always follow that the objective must be to do the greatest good for the greatest number?
- The goal in life is not personal efficacy; it is to improve the lives of others.
- Finally, never underestimate the ability of a small group of committed individuals to change the world.

This book was not selected simply because it was a great book; it was selected because it emphasized social justice, a value that is important to the University. You will begin your exploration of social justice on this campus with the discussions that will be held later this week, but you will find recurring attention to this value and others (like sustainability, diversity, and ethical decision making) throughout your educational experience here. We hope these experiences will help you realize that, although we live in an increasingly complex world, anyone who truly cares can have a meaningful impact on the lives of others.

In a few weeks we'll continue the discussion on *Mountains Beyond Mountains* when author Tracy Kidder comes to campus to deliver the keynote address at the President's Convocation. I am very excited about this program and know you too will enjoy the opportunity to hear first-hand from the author.

Now, in order to become an official student at Illinois Wesleyan, I would like to ask the members of the Class of 2011 to please stand.

“Congratulations to you all. You are from this point forward matriculated students at Illinois Wesleyan University and, as such, part of our community of scholars.

In this capacity, bear forth the University's norms, bear forth its hopes,

And make the most of your own gifts for yourself and for others.”

You may be seated.

Thank you for your attention this morning. My best to you this week as you learn more about Turning Titan. And, I look forward to getting to know each of you in the year ahead.