



2010

Founder's Day Convocation Remarks

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Recommended Citation

Wilson, Richard F., "Founder's Day Convocation Remarks" (2010). *Remarks and Messages*. Paper 41.
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Founders' Day Convocation

February 17, 2010

I am delighted to welcome you to Founders' Day, 2010, a celebration of the 160-year history of Illinois Wesleyan University.

Endowed Professorship Announcement

Founders' Day, as you know, commemorates a very important event in the life of the University. At this time of year, we pause to remember the enduring values that have guided the development of Illinois Wesleyan and to pay tribute to those who embraced those values in serving this institution.

One of our overarching goals is to provide students with an undergraduate experience of the highest quality, a goal facilitated by our success in attracting and retaining a faculty of distinction. As I travel around the country and talk with alumni, I am frequently reminded of the impact that faculty members have on the lives and careers of students who attend Illinois Wesleyan. A desire to recognize such contributions led us to be quite intentional about increasing the number of endowed chairs and professorships as part of the *Transforming Lives* Campaign.

We are fortunate that one of our local alums, Byron Tucci from the Class of 1966, shares our desire to recruit, retain, and recognize faculty members who have distinguished themselves as teachers and scholars. I am pleased to announce this morning that Mr. Tucci has made a major gift to the University that will allow us to establish the Byron Tucci Professorship. Byron wants this professorship to be awarded without restriction, thus open to faculty members from any department or school on this campus. Byron views this gift as a way to acknowledge the caring faculty members who make students the center of their attention and whose accomplishments over an extended period are key to the stature of the university.

Mr. Tucci is here with us this morning. I would ask that he stand so we might show our appreciation.

Provost Cunningham and I will be asking the faculty for nominations for the Byron Tucci Professorship in the coming weeks.

Thank you, Byron.

General Remarks

Although the past two years have presented many challenges, we only have to look back on the history of Illinois Wesleyan for perspective and confidence. One cannot ignore the fact that the times leading up to our founding in 1850 were, much like today, ones of great promise and yet significant challenge for the leaders of our community and the nation. This period was one in which the issues of equality and social justice would soon drive a wedge between the North and

the South; new technologies and modes of transportation would emerge; and, of importance to us, a new college was being planned for Bloomington. While the country and its national leaders looked ahead, at times with uncertainty, so did those in Bloomington.

Listed in your program today are the names of the group of people who came together to found Illinois Wesleyan. This was a diverse group in terms of their backgrounds, religious beliefs and walks of life.

The historical record gives Reverend John Barger much of the credit for enlisting the support of the community for the University and eventually the sponsorship of the Methodist church.

Barger was a real dynamo who believed that building an institution of “collegiate grade” in the recently established city of Bloomington would bring new opportunities, just as surely as the coming of the railroad. However, just as trains are often delayed en route, so too was the establishment of Illinois University, the name that had been chosen at that time.

From May of 1849 until July of 1850, it was a roller coaster ride for Barger, Peter Cartwright, Kersey Fell and the other founders.

Finally, when no other sponsor would step forward, Barger and Cartwright convinced the Illinois Methodist Conference to embrace the idea of a new college in Bloomington. With their endorsement, the University was founded and Wesleyan was added to our name. As an aside, if you go over to the Library today and look at our founding charter, which is on display, you will see the hand-written word “Wesleyan” inserted above the line where Illinois University was typed. As much as we find it difficult to eliminate the confusion surrounding all of the colleges and universities in the United States that have “Wesleyan” in their names, it might have been even more challenging if this state had ended up with a University of Illinois, an Illinois College, and an Illinois University!

Although we gather here today to celebrate the vision and fortitude of those who founded this university, we also must keep in mind their admonition which appears on the Founders' Gate: “We stand in a position of incalculable responsibility....” That instruction requires us to be vigilant about our work as teachers and scholars.

Over the past six years, it seems that we have devoted inordinate time to financial matters and have made adjustments that were difficult and, in some cases, quite painful. Some challenges remain, but I believe we are better positioned to address whatever contingencies might arise in the future.

As we move forward, I am heartened by the interest and early commitment being made to a thorough review of key elements of our curriculum. I believe it is an opportune time to shift the focus of our collective efforts from the financial to the curricular. I will save more extended remarks on this topic for another time but do wish to convey that I look forward to revisiting those values embedded in our vision for this university, revising and reaffirming our commitments, and developing plans that will allow us to demonstrate to future generations that we embraced our “incalculable responsibility” with confidence and creativity.

Thank you.