



2011

Founder's Day Convocation Remarks

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Founders' Day Convocation

February 23, 2011

Good morning and welcome to Founders' Day, 2011.

Our honored guest today, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Jorie Graham is the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University, the first woman to be named to this distinguished professorship. In a few minutes she will be introduced formally by Interim Provost Boyd, but I want to offer my personal thanks to Professor Graham not only for coming to campus to deliver the Founders Day address but also for extending her stay so she could spend time in classes with our students. We all look forward to your address and readings.

I also would like to take a few minutes to recognize those who have joined me on the stage for this Convocation:

- Joerg Tiede: Council on University Programs and Policy
- Joe Williams: Promotion and Tenure Committee

Also on stage are seven members of the faculty who currently hold endowed professorships:

- Marina Balina: Funk Professorship
- Robert Bray: Colwell Chair of English
- Given Harper, Lewis Chair of Biology
- Ram Mohan: Beling Professorship of Natural Sciences
- Carole Myscowski, McFee Professorship of Religion
- Carolyn Nadeau, Tucci Professorship and Chair of Curriculum Council
- Michael Seeborg: Eckley Professorship of Economics

Professors Harper, Nadeau, and Myscowski will be formally invested at the Commencement ceremony on May 1. I certainly look forward to presenting the medallions which signify the honor they have received. Please join me in congratulating all of the faculty members who hold endowed professorships.

We gather here today to celebrate the vision and fortitude of those who founded this university. In doing so, I will remind you once again of the inscription on the Founders Gate that marks the west side campus entry. That inscription reads in part: "We stand in a position of incalculable responsibility ... "

No group takes that message to heart more than the faculty. Throughout its history, Illinois Wesleyan has been blessed to have faculty members of great intellect, creativity, and passion. As I travel across the country and talk with our graduates, I am reminded frequently by alumni of the impact that Wesleyan faculty members have had on their lives.

This point was driven home most pointedly during this calendar year when we paid tribute to two former faculty members and one current member of the faculty who passed away. I am referring,

of course, to Dwight Drexler, Melba Kirkpatrick, and Jim Dougan. The statements made about them by current and former students were inspiring and reinforce what we know to be true about the transforming nature of their work on this campus. On this Founders' Day, we wish to honor their legacy and the legacy of all those who have served this University over its 161 years.

At the time of our founding in 1850, there were many challenges facing the leaders of this nation. As I read our history, the roadblocks were especially formidable for those who sought to establish an institution of higher learning in Bloomington.

Listed in your program are the names of those who came together to establish Illinois Wesleyan. This was a diverse group in terms of background, religious beliefs and walks of life.

While each of our 30 founders played an important role, two in particular--John Barger and Peter Cartwright--are credited with securing our future when they gained the sponsorship of the Methodist Conference for what was initially to be called "Illinois University". When that sponsorship was finalized, our founding charter was amended by inserting the word "Wesleyan" in our name. You will see that handwritten notation in the charter that is on display in the Ames Library.

Subsequent generations have faced their own set of challenges in sustaining the health and vitality of the University. We are no different. The economic challenges of the past two years have been all-consuming, almost overwhelming. Yet, we found ways to respond that I believe not only allowed us to survive but also positioned us to thrive. I am not so naive as to believe that our problems have now all been solved. A casual review of current state and federal budget debates reminds us daily that we must be careful and ever vigilant. At the same time, I have allowed myself to dream a little, to think about positive steps we might take to extend and enhance the legacy of our founders. I hope you will do the same, because it is through those dreams that we bring life to our "incalculable responsibility".

Thank you very much.