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President's Convocation Remarks

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Welcome Remarks at the President's Convocation
by Richard F. Wilson

September 6, 2006

Good morning and welcome to the 2006 President's Convocation!

It is my great pleasure today to welcome students, faculty and staff to what I am sure will be a very stimulating presentation by author and social commentator Barbara Ehrenreich.

I could not think of a better choice for our summer reading program than Nickel and Dimed, Dr. Ehrenreich's best-selling account of the working poor in our nation. Today's presentation and the campus discussions that preceded it and will follow in the weeks ahead will bring this important subject to life for all of us.

This is the first time that we have had the author of our summer reading selection come to campus, and I am delighted that we have been able to tie that effort together with today's Convocation and the campus sessions.

These discussions have been led by faculty and staff volunteers across campus who have met with our students and colleagues to discuss the issues that were so vividly portrayed by Dr. Ehrenreich. I would like for those discussion leaders to now stand so that we can publicly acknowledge their involvement and thank them for giving of their time.

In a few minutes our provost and dean of the faculty, Dr. Beth Cunningham, will formally introduce our speaker to you.

But first, as you know, this Convocation marks the official beginning of a new academic year. We welcome 8 new tenure-track and 16 visiting scholars to our faculty. These additions to our ranks come from some of the finest institutions in the nation. Each is an active scholar and is dedicated to undergraduate education. They bring our full-time faculty number to 189—an increase over last year.

But more than filling faculty-lines and classrooms, we look to these new colleagues

- To add to the intellectual vitality of our campus,
- To stimulate the curiosity and creativity of our students,
- To continue their scholarly activities contributing to the body of knowledge, and
- To engage themselves and their students in meaningful ways with the broader community.

I would like to ask these new colleagues to please stand and be recognized.

This celebration also marks the beginning of what promises to be a very stimulating and productive year in terms of implementing our newly adopted strategic plan. Over the next five years, you can expect to see significant effort devoted to enhancing the Gateway Colloquia, May Term, and other elements of our curriculum as well as improvements in such areas as advising, student support services, endowment growth, and facilities.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to pay tribute to a colleague who has touched all of our lives in one way or another over the past 10 years. I am speaking of Denny Groh, University Chaplain and professor of Humanities & Archaeology.

As most of you know, several months ago Denny announced his retirement from the University, effective in December.

Over the years, Chaplain Groh has been a source of great comfort and encouragement to the Illinois Wesleyan community during difficult moments. He has also helped us to come together as a community and in the celebration of significant milestones.

I always marvel at how his blessings and benedictions capture each occasion so eloquently.

In addition to his time at the pulpit, Professor Groh has also brought a unique blend of scholarship, abiding faith and inclusiveness to the spiritual and intellectual life of the University.

Denny, I invite you to stand and be recognized by your colleagues, friends and students.