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President's Welcome

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WELCOME

I am honored to welcome you to these Commencement Exercises, concluding the 156th year of instruction at Illinois Wesleyan University. I have enjoyed sharing in your experiences over the past two years and am honored to preside at this very special ceremony.

Four years ago, the Class of 2006 arrived in Bloomington with, I am quite certain, a mixture of anticipation and anxiety. Each of you expected to grow academically and personally and knew that your future would be determined, at least in part, by what happened on this campus. What you could not predict was the impact of events external to the campus such as:

- The Tsunamis in the Indian Ocean
- The War in Iraq
- Corporate Corruption at Enron, Arthur Andersen, and World Com.
- Hurricane Katrina

And despite all that has happened between then and now, chances are that you are experiencing that very same mixture of anticipation and anxiety today. This time you aren't wondering "Will I like my roommate or have I selected the right major?" as you were when you arrived. Instead, many of you are asking yourselves: "Have I selected the right graduate program or made the right career choice?" A few of you may even be wondering how you will get by without Saga Dave coming over to fix Sunday brunch.

The anxiety that comes with graduation is nothing new. You might be interested to know that Illinois Wesleyan's very first graduate was James Hugh Barger who received his bachelor's degree on July 7, 1853. According to Elmo Scott Watson's history of the University, Mr. Barger comprised the entire graduating class that day.

Watson goes on to write this about Mr. Barger: "...as the 'first graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University' it was hoped that 'his future career will be as bright and useful as his friends have a right to expect.'" It is hard to tell if Elmo Watson had any anxiety about his future but his friends certainly did!

Today, we honor 486 graduates and we do expect big things from you, and with good reason. We know what you have accomplished here and what you are capable of accomplishing once you leave.

While this day and this ceremony properly focus on you as graduates, we must not lose sight of the fact that you didn't do this all alone. You had help: from your family and your friends; from faculty and staff; and from each other. I would like to provide an opportunity for you to thank two of these groups specifically.

- The faculty and staff are seated behind you. I would ask that you stand, turn around and offer this group of dedicated people a round of applause.
- Now, I would invite you to turn in the direction of your parents and friends and extend a round of applause to them as well for their help and assistance.

There is justifiably a shared pride on this occasion. We are proud, as a community, to have been a part of your four years and to have participated in the process that has led to your walking across this stage in a few moments.

I hope and I trust that you are proud, too. Proud of what you have accomplished and of the person you have become. But proud, too, to join more than 16,000 Illinois Wesleyan alumni who are scattered across the globe.

It is now my honor to present to you another member of our community, the President of our Board of Trustees, a distinguished Illinois Wesleyan graduate, George Vinyard.