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Trustee Greetings

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May 2, 2010, Commencement

**Trustee/Alumni Welcome
George A. Vinyard '71**

Graduates, parents, family members ...faculty, staff, and friends of Illinois Wesleyan —

On behalf of the Trustees and alumni of the University, it is my great privilege to say to the Graduates of 2010 and to all of you – Congratulations and welcome.

We congratulate and honor each graduate for your individual achievements and contributions to the University community. And we welcome you to the fellowship of Illinois Wesleyan alumni.

To the parents, family, friends, faculty and staff who are gathered here, we share your pride in the accomplishments of these young men and women, and we join them in thanking you for all the support, guidance and instruction you provided to help them arrive at this auspicious day.

As many have observed, Commencement not only denotes a new beginning; it is also an occasion for looking back. More than that, it is an occasion on which graduates are traditionally subjected to plenty of unsolicited, platitudinous advice. Some of it may be relatively concise -- “Plastics”, “Wear sunscreen”, and so on – and some of it will fill considerable chunks of this afternoon. Such advice is traditionally delivered by people who are not your parents – people like me. Here we go.

Time will tell whether it has been our blessing or our curse to live in “interesting times”, but I dare say you, the Class of 2010, have been witnesses to some very interesting times, indeed. Not unlike my own generation’s experience in the late 1960s and early ‘70s, during your entire time here at the University you have been inundated with words and images of war and conflict, and you have witnessed the accelerating awareness of the fragility of our global environment and of the social fabric that makes civilization possible.

In many ways, the world you are about to step into is a rather grim place. But great challenges can represent great opportunities. As you begin to grapple with these challenges and seek these opportunities, I would offer for your consideration, a motto written in the aftermath of the Civil War and a quote from a remarkable historian, author and activist who died this past January.

The motto is the one inscribed as part of the Illinois Wesleyan University Seal which you see about you. Its authorship has been attributed to the great John Wesley Powell and one of his contemporaries in the early years of this institution. Our motto -- *Scientia et Sapientia* -- is generally translated as “Knowledge and Wisdom”. In my humble opinion, these words precisely express what higher education should be about and what we need more of today.

“Knowledge” suggests the ability to acquire true information and understanding – to discover the facts, discern which are relevant and meaningful and draw correct inferences and conclusions about the world. “Wisdom”, however, suggests something that goes far beyond knowledge and the search for objective truth and reaches into the realm of what it means to be human. Wisdom

has been defined as the capacity to exercise sound judgment and act rightly in matters of life and conduct, choosing proper means to achieve good ends.

Discovering the truth and distinguishing actual knowledge from false premises or speculative beliefs has never been more important. We live in a time when great numbers of people regularly fail to grasp or choose to ignore actual facts when these conflict with their treasured beliefs or self interests. But merely knowing and understanding the truth is not enough. We also need, individually and collectively, to behave wisely given the information available to us.

In sum, our motto evokes our need to strike a proper balance between Learning, the ongoing acquisition of knowledge grounded in objective observation, logical reasoning and open-minded inquiry, and acting wisely -- employing proper means to achieve good ends -- using what we come to know in a manner that is informed by an understanding of humanity in all its historical, social, esthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions. Our future is literally dependent on our doing this. It is my fervent hope and confident expectation that you are leaving our University well prepared both intellectually and morally to live up to the aspirations reflected in our motto.

Which brings me to the quote, which addresses both the need and the basis for hope in difficult times. The late Howard Zinn -- author of *A People's History of the United States* (among many other works), an instrumental figure in the Civil Rights Movement as a professor at Spelman College, and a peace activist during all of our longest wars (Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq) whose views were informed by his personal experiences and scholarly study of military actions in World War II -- said these words that may be relevant today:

"To be hopeful in bad times is not . . . foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places . . . where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this . . . world in a different direction. . . . The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

Let me conclude by saying that as you pursue your life's goals, we ask you to remember and honor your University and your fellow alumni. We trust that each of you, as a graduate, will continue to think of this community as your extended family and as your home.

And so, we bid you farewell as students and welcome you home as alumni. We invite you to return to your University often, whether in person or in spirit. You will always be welcome here on this campus and anyplace where Titans gather.