



Remarks and Messages

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Founders' Day, 2021

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Georgia Nugent
Founders' Day Remarks
January 20, 2021

Hello and welcome to Founders' Day. The founding of Illinois Wesleyan University in 1850 was part of a larger cultural movement in America in the mid-19th century, fueled by religious piety, civic pride, and a deep respect for education. All across America, but particularly in the upper Midwest, it seemed that every community and religious denomination wanted to found a seat of higher learning. Illinois has more than 50 small, private colleges, and you will find that the majority of them came into being around this time.

I mentioned three motives for this burgeoning of colleges and universities. First, Religious piety: America's original, colonial colleges had a primary objective of training ministers. Educating *men* (of course) for a religious calling remained a central motive for college-founding in the 19th century. IWU's story is interesting, because it was founded as a Methodist institution—but the founding fathers were not all Methodists. Twelve were Methodist ministers, but 18 were not. In fact, in our founding document the institution's title is "Illinois University." "Wesleyan" is inserted above the line, as an edit in the handwritten text.

Second, civic pride: early records about the university's founding show an enormous pride and confidence in the anticipated importance of central Illinois: "Destiny seems to point out this valley as the depository of the great heart of the Nation." On a somewhat less grand scale, the founders clearly wanted to elevate Bloomington, by the founding of a college. As one wrote, "We cannot begin too soon."

Third, respect for education. On the one hand, America has always had a strong tradition of anti-intellectualism. On the other hand, from its earliest days, there has been a belief in the power—and the necessity—of education. The founders of the Massachusetts Bay colony established Harvard within 9 years of arriving in America. They saw it as one of the most important institutions to create in their new country.

The founders of Illinois Wesleyan stand in that same tradition. There were fits and starts in our founding; it was not a smooth road. Hopes would rise and then be dashed. But the founders persevered, because they felt that “a seat of advanced learning” was so important to the destiny of this region.

I emphasize these three motives that contributed to the founding of Illinois Wesleyan, because it is important not to lose sight of them, in our contemporary environment, when all three may seem to be in short supply. But faith, care for the community and belief in the power of education stand at our core, and in recognizing Founders Day, we celebrate those values.

The Founders Day we observe today was established by the Board of Trustees in 1913. In recent years, we have linked Founders Day to our annual intellectual theme, which draws together guest speakers and courses to address an overarching issue of importance. This year’s annual theme is: Health, Healing, and Humanity. While this theme was chosen before 2020, it obviously could not be more relevant today, as we see these three inextricably intertwined in the context of the Corona virus pandemic.

And I want to turn now to introduce our speaker for today’s Founder’s Day, Dr. Stephanie Whyte, whose experience and expertise are

uniquely suited to bring us insights on that theme. We regret very much not being able to hold this event in person, and I want to especially note that Dr. Whyte has generously agreed, not only to deliver this address, but she will also be participating in Professor Greg Shaw's American Healthcare Policy class and delivering a presentation on the intersection of Blackness and U.S. Healthcare. That's really going above and beyond for the Titan community. Thank you so much for giving us so much of your time, Dr. Whyte!

I hope that many of you have taken the opportunity to read Dr. Whyte's impressive biography. Dr. Stephanie Whyte is a 1991 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan., with a degree in biology. She received her MD from the Chicago Medical School (now Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science) and completed a pediatric residency at Louisiana State University Medical Center in New Orleans.

Dr. Whyte also holds an MBA in Public and Nonprofit Management from St. Xavier University. She has been honored with "Distinguished Alumni Awards" from both the Chicago Medical School and Illinois Wesleyan.

Currently, she is a Senior Clinical Solutions Medical Director for Aetna Medicaid, with particular responsibility for Florida, Kentucky, and Louisiana. Prior to joining Aetna, she served as the first ever Chief Health Officer for Chicago Public Schools. She also spent a decade serving as Medical Director of Mobile Care Chicago, caring for children with asthma in Chicago's most underserved neighborhoods.

Dr. Whyte—Your experience and commitments could not be more relevant to our campus theme and to what we are seeing in our country today, as we wrestle with the COVID pandemic. I look forward very much to hearing your remarks.