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Introduction of the President

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Chair, Board of Trustees, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Introduction of Eric R. Jensen
19th President of Illinois Wesleyan University

On the Occasion of his Inauguration
April 2, 2016

George A. Vinyard '71
Chair, Board of Trustees

Good Afternoon. Let me end the suspense. I am here to introduce Dr. Eric R. Jensen as the 19th President of this University.

It seems strange to be introducing someone who has been in office for 4 months, traveling thousands of miles across the country meeting Alumni and Friends of the University, especially after a wonderful series of celebratory events and programs focused on Collaborative Engagement. Once again I extend our profound gratitude to the Inauguration Steering Committee for their great work in making this all happen.

But today is about ceremony and the associated rituals. We draw inspiration and comfort from what we already know and believe by repeating traditional expressions and actions of celebration and significance.

The inauguration of a University President is a rite of passage, both for the institution and the individual charged with leading it into the future. It is not something that happens often in the life of a strong University – in the recent history of Illinois Wesleyan (by which I mean the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a

century since 1940), we have done this less frequently than once a decade. For the new President it is most likely a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Private universities and colleges are unusual among modern secular institutions. They are organized and governed according to principles and forms of authority and rank that often date back to antiquity, while at the same time they are dedicated to ideals of extraordinary intellectual and artistic freedom in the search for what is true and good. The leadership of such an institution requires a person of extraordinary capacity and quality. Thus, when we find such a person and entrust him or her with the guidance and stewardship of such an institution, it is altogether fitting that we should mark the significance of the occasion with music, words and tangible symbols, some of which harken back to medieval times. We don our regalia and ritually bestow upon our selected leaders medallions and even archaic weapons – witness the University Mace.

So we have now come to the ceremonial culmination of a process that began over a year ago with the announcement of President Emeritus Wilson's planned retirement. A Presidential Search Committee made up of Trustees, Faculty, Students and Staff, under the able leadership of Trustee Jean Baird, undertook an exercise in collaborative engagement that ultimately led to the selection of President Jensen last September.

He took office in November and we have already experienced a smooth transition. This is thanks in no small part to the outstanding tenure and accomplishments of Dick and Pat Wilson, whose willingness to stay on the job a bit longer allowed for the successful completion of the

search and provided Eric and Elizabeth just a little time to breathe before stepping into their new roles.

I will not attempt to repeat all of the impressive details of President Jensen's biography, but I will note a few aspects of his experience and personality that impressed the Search Committee and the Board at the time of his selection, and have been clearly demonstrated in the initial months of his tenure.

President Jensen has a real passion for the liberal arts. His dedication to teaching and scholarly work is evidenced by his many years of experience as a professor of economics at the College of William and Mary, and by his leadership and work, on important national and international issues of public policy and higher education. More particularly, he comes to Illinois Wesleyan well prepared for the role of President by virtue of his prior tenure as Provost with a broad portfolio of responsibilities at Hamline University.

But perhaps the clearest indication of President Jensen's superior qualifications comes in the person of his spouse, Elizabeth. Her manifest intelligence, charm, strength, grace and sense of humor provide ample evidence that this choice was a good one.

Finally and not least important, President Jensen is a genuine "people person" – he is at once approachable, engaging, interesting and interested in those around him. He clearly understands the importance of service as a significant aspect of leadership. Thinking about

how best to express this quality caused me to recall from my student days Chaucer's description of the Oxford Scholar – "and gladly would he learn, and gladly teach." – perhaps a 14th Century poetic precursor of "Collaborative Engagement."

If there were a handbook of rituals for academic presidential inaugurations, I imagine it would mandate that the introduction of the new president include a recitation of the extraordinary challenges of the job and the uncertainties confronting academia. I will simply say that, as with so much in our world today, extraordinary challenges seem to be the norm and meaningful change always seems either to be happening much too fast or to be woefully slow in coming. This is why having the right kind of leadership is always critical. I am happy to say with confidence that we have found in President Jensen the right kind of leader for these times and have every reason to be optimistic that his service will inure to the sustained betterment of our University.

It is therefore my great honor and privilege to ask Dr. Eric R. Jensen to come forward and accept the Presidential Medallion and other symbols of his office -- asking only that he wield the University Mace as judiciously and as little as possible. I give you President Eric R. Jensen!