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Trustee Greetings

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Scientia et Sapientia + Stephen Hawking

*Graduates, Parents, Family Members. . . Faculty, Staff,
and Friends of Illinois Wesleyan --*

Greetings from the Trustees and Alumni. On whose behalf, I say to each Graduate -- **Congratulations, Welcome and Thank You.**

Congratulations on your individual achievements. **Welcome** to the fellowship of Illinois Wesleyan Alumni. And **Thank You** for your contributions to the University community.

To Parents, Family, Friends, Faculty and Staff -- we share your pride in the accomplishments of these young people, and we join **these graduates** in **Thanking You** for all you have done to help them on their way to this important occasion.

At Illinois Wesleyan, we strive to help our students develop the intellectual and moral capacity to think deeply about the important things in life and to live in a manner that is consistent with the values reflected in our University motto -- **Scientia et**

Sapientia – which is generally translated as “**Knowledge and Wisdom**”.

Knowledge implies the acquisition of true information and understanding, grounded in objective observation and logical reasoning. ***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**. This requires personal engagement that goes far beyond the search for objective truth and reaches deeper into the realm of what it means to be part of humanity in all its historical, social, esthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions.

Those who have heard my remarks at prior Commencements know that I always cite the University Motto as I have just done and then seek to underscore the point with quotes from recently deceased authors and cultural icons. Today we are honoring an outstanding Alumnus in Physics. And it happens that I began my association with Illinois Wesleyan a little over fifty years ago as a physics major; though I ultimately decided to get my degree in English Literature. So I think it is fitting to consider the words of both a physicist and a poet.

On March 14, coincidentally the anniversary of Albert Einstein’s birth, the great theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking,

died at the age of 76. It was thirty years ago that Hawking's "Brief History of Time", an improbable international best seller on the subject of cosmology, was published. Much earlier, he was diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease that typically ends in death within 5 years. It left him completely paralyzed and ultimately speaking only with the help of computers. About this he said:

“My expectations were reduced to zero when I was 21. Everything since then has been a bonus.”

Hawking not only survived for another **55** years, he made tremendous contributions both to science and the public's understanding of it, becoming an inspiring world celebrity in the process. It may have had something to do with his sense of humor, as he said:

“Life would be tragic if it weren't so funny.”

Hawking's wisdom and indomitable will are evident in another quote:

“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is

always something that you can do, and succeed at. It matters that you just don't give up."

And this Hawking statement strikes me as especially relevant to our University Motto:

"Science is not only a disciple of reason, but also, one of romance and passion."

Which brings me to the Pulitzer prize-winning poet and literary translator, Richard Wilbur, who died last October. He was a Veteran of World War II whose career as a published writer spanned 7 decades, and he was the second person to be named Poet Laureate of the United States. Wilbur was a formal poet in the tradition of Robert Frost, who once described his world view in this way:

"I feel that the universe is full of glorious energy, . . . that the energy tends to take pattern and shape, and that the ultimate character of things is comely and good."

On creativity, Wilbur once remarked:

**“Step off assuredly into the blank of your mind.
Something will come to you.”**

Finally, here are some words by Wilbur that seem to me to resonate both with Stephen Hawking’s work life and also with what we are about here today:

**“Teach me, like you, to drink creation whole
And casting out myself, become a soul.**

In your time here on campus we trust that you not only developed your intellects but also cultivated the essential curiosity, perceptiveness and values to set a pattern that will serve you well as you strive to live fulfilling lives of reason, romance, passion, integrity, good humor and joy.

In closing, may you always warmly Remember and Honor your University and fellow Alumni; and think of us as your family and this campus as your home. Please return often. You will always be welcome here and wherever Titans gather.

Thank you.