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Trustee Greetings

George A. Vinyard, '71

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[IWU Commencement 2019 -- George Vinyard '71 – Trustee Welcome Remarks]

Scientia et Sapientia + Robert Persig

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

Greetings from the Board of Trustees. On their behalf, I say to each Graduate --
Congratulations, Welcome and Thank You.

Congratulations on your individual achievements. **Welcome** to this important milestone and threshold in your lives. 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 **them** in **Thanking You** for all you have done to help them on their way to this important occasion.

The great physicist, Richard Feynman, said, “when you get older you find nearly everything is really interesting if you go into it deeply enough.” 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.

I have had the privilege of preparing remarks on behalf of the Board for 13 prior commencements. For most of these years I have cited the University Motto, as I just did, and sought to underscore the point with quotes from recently deceased authors. In 2017 a sudden illness prevented me from actually delivering my prepared remarks, so this year I have decided to reach back and feature an author who died in April of that year.

The late Robert M. Pirsig, wrote a philosophical inquiry into values and metaphysics in the form of a fictional autobiographical story entitled Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. Published in 1974 after being rejected well over 100 times the book improbably became a best seller with millions of copies in print.

As a philosophical thinker, Pirsig was particularly concerned with the conflicts between rationalism and romanticism in Western thought, the relationship between humans and machines and how we perceive and create Quality.

With regard to machines and technology, Pirsig now seems prophetic. He wrote:
“The Buddha resides as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a [motor]cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain.”

Put another way, he suggested that the supposed conflict between human values and technological needs can be resolved by understanding that technology is really:

. . . a fusion of nature and the human spirit into a new kind of creation that transcends both.”

Perhaps more ominously, he also said:

“If you run from Technology, it will chase you.”

Among Pirsig’s many statements about Quality, I think the following is especially resonant with the mission and purpose of our University:

“Care and Quality are internal and external aspects of the same thing. A person who sees Quality and feels it as [s]he works is a person who cares. A person who

cares about what [s]he sees and does is a person who's bound to have some characteristic of quality."

Finally, Pirsig offered this observation about life:

"You look at where you're going and where you are and it never makes sense, but then you look back at where you've been and a pattern seems to emerge."

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 with Care and create a future of greater knowledge, wisdom, Quality and personal fulfillment.

Whenever you have occasion to look back at where you have been, may you warmly Remember and Honor your University and think of it as your family and of this campus as your home. Please return often. You will always be welcome here and wherever Titans gather.

Thank you.