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## WGLT Q&A with President Richard Wilson

Willis Kern

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The Richard Wilson era at Illinois Wesleyan University is underway. The 57 year old former development chief at the University of Illinois in Urbana was named 18th president of IWU in April and succeeds Minor Myers, who died last summer.

Wilson spent part of his first hours on campus sitting at a table in his stark office talking with GLT's Willis Kern...

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You can hear the complete GLT interview with new Wesleyan President-designate Richard Wilson at WGLT-dot-ORG.

Willis Kern: The president's office in Holmes Hall on the Illinois Wesleyan campus has no photos on the walls. The main desktop contains only one manila folder stuffed with papers and a telephone. The adjoining computer desk has a server connection wire sticking out from the bottom and that's it. President Wilson and I sit down at a small, round conference table in what amounts to his first formal meeting as Wesleyan President. When we're finished, he'll meet with the university chairmen of the board.

Richard Wilson: I was saying to some folks this morning, I have to keep reminding myself that this is a marathon not a sprint and we're going to—In terms of meeting people, I walked around campus this morning and I had this desire to walk on every floor of every building and see who was around but I knew I couldn't get that done. The IT people that were in here early and they're going to have me wired probably by the end of the day so I think some things will happen on a very fast schedule.

Willis Kern: Besides become acclimated to campus, what's your first priority here at Illinois Wesleyan?

Richard Wilson: I've thought about that, as to how I might want to spend let me say the first 30 or 45 days and, you know, I know it's expected at one level but, you know, one of the most important things I can do is to meet people and so I'm making a lot of effort to meet people here at the university and, frankly, in the community. I think that there are some processes in place and some planning that's been done here at the university that I need to move forward and I want to spend July thinking about how we take those steps,

particularly in terms of the strategic planning process that was initiated a little over a year ago.

Willis Kern: With your extensive background in development I know you have tapped a lot of funding resources out there. What's out there for Illinois Wesleyan that maybe hasn't been tapped at this point?

Richard Wilson: Illinois Wesleyan has received gifts from all of the sources that one might expect and it—they've got a major gift program underway, they've solicited funds from foundations. I'd like to push that one a little more in terms of the availability of funds from private foundations around the country. There is corporate support here. I think corporate support is tied in large measure to the value those companies feel they receive from the institution in terms of the graduates they're hiring. I want to build those connections and as I talk with companies what I want to determine is, what are their interests relative to Illinois Wesleyan and what could we be doing to help them accomplish their mission and at the same time accomplish our mission as well? So I'm going to push on all three of those categories of funding for the university.

Willis Kern: You've said that your approach to governing has collaborative elements to it, who or what group is going to be watched closely by you and who are you going to be paying the most attention to as you begin your term here at Wesleyan?

Richard Wilson: Well, the heart of the university is the faculty and I want to have a very strong connection to the faculty and I want the faculty involved in a serious and significant way as we go about establishing these priorities in the plan that's produced. I also want to—the entire community to be part of that process and so as I think about this, what we'll probably end up having is a series of let me call them task groups that will wrestle with things like: How do we recruit and retain the best faculty? How do we recruit and retain the best students? What facilities should be priorities for the institution? And then what curricular enhancements need to occur? I'm also interested in things like: What is the relationship between this campus and Bloomington-Normal and the surround communities? And we're going to look carefully at those and try to identify, what are the areas that Illinois Wesleyan is uniquely qualified to connect in what I would call a mutually beneficial way? And it's in those areas that I really want the best advice I can get from faculty and other staff of the university.

Willis Kern: Besides sticking to the university's strategic plan which you've mentioned, what vision do you have for Illinois Wesleyan? What's out there for the university to attain that maybe hasn't been broached up to now?

Richard Wilson: I think that this one of the national leaders in liberal arts universities in the United States and I think we—there are opportunities for us to move even higher in that group of very selective institutions and I think it's a—there are ways for us to do that and my aspiration is to continue the trajectory that this institution has been on.

Willis Kern: Richard Wilson says, looking into the future, he hopes his legacy during his term as Illinois Wesleyan President reflects fairness, honesty, and engagement. Wilson

will commute from his home in the Champaign-Urbana area before moving into the President's House at IWU sometime later this summer. I'm Willis Kern, WGLT News.