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Trustee Greetings

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

On behalf of the Trustees and the Alumni of the University, it is my great privilege to stand here and greet you, and in particular, to speak to the Graduates of 2007, to whom I say Congratulations and Welcome.

We **Congratulate** and **Honor** each of you for your individual achievements and contributions to the University Community. And we **Welcome** you to the fellowship of Illinois Wesleyan Alumni.

To the Parents, Family, Friends, Faculty and Staff who are gathered here, we certainly share your pride in the accomplishments of these young people, and we join **them** in thanking **you** for all the support, guidance and instruction you provided to help them get to this auspicious day.

Commencement is an occasion for looking back as well as forward. And my job here is basically just to say greetings and get out of the way of the real speakers, but as a graduate who came of age in the 1960s, I can't help but note the passing of great American author and humorist very recently, Kurt

Vonnegut Jr. He was widely misreported as having said at a commencement speech to the graduates, “wear sunscreen.” I think he wished he has said that, but it turned out not to be true. But I think he had some words of wisdom for us. The bad news is, I'm going to say a few words about Kurt Vonnegut and a fictional religion that he invented in his novel *Cat's Cradle*. The good news is that only Kurt Vonnegut could invent a fictional religion that could be addressed in less than three minutes. He created this religion called Bokononism and in that context he developed key concepts, which fictional though they may be, can perhaps have relevance for us here today. And this is not meant to be a commentary on what any of the other speakers say.

But one of the concepts, which I hope is relevant only in the negative, is the *granfalloon* – that's defined as a proud and meaningless association of human beings, who claim to have a shared identity or purpose based on common characteristics or experiences that are actually insignificant in the larger scheme of things. Vonnegut was a Hoosier and he used that as an example of a *granfalloon*, but one could imagine that he might

easily have referred to the alumni association at some very large, impersonal state institution.

Another concept he created was the *karass* – that's a group of people who, unbeknownst to them, are a team that is organized around some pivotal object and are collectively doing “god’s” will. And finally, there is a concept that is at the core of this religion. This is *foma* – which he defines as harmless lies that make one happy.

So what does all this have to do with Illinois Wesleyan and the Class of 2007 you may wonder. I believe there is a tie-in between the teachings of Bokonon and our University motto – those Latin words handed down from John Wesley Powell who designed the University seal that we proudly display here today. And we generally translate those words as “Knowledge and Wisdom”.

That motto suggests, with all due respect to Harvard’s “Veritas,” that knowledge in the sense of empirical truth is not enough. Vonnegut quoted the teachings of Bokonon to the same effect when he said “*Beware the man who works hard to learn something, learns it and finds himself no wiser than before.*”

So Bokonon is also quoted as saying “Live *by the foma that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy.*” Good advice, but not as practical as “wear sunscreen,” unless one has the wisdom – the intellectual capacity, the values, the human insight and understanding – to separate the *foma* – the truly harmless lies that make us happy – from the vast waves of insidiously false and misleading words and beliefs that seem to wash over us on a day-to-day basis.

So looking to the future, we hope and trust that you will follow the best examples of thousands of Illinois Wesleyan graduates who have gone before you. May you use and build upon what you have learned and whatever you have gained in the way of wisdom during your years here to lead productive and fulfilling lives that make a positive difference in the lives of others. And may you always be wise in distinguishing the truth, and yes, even the *foma*, from the lies that are hurtful to yourself and others.

Finally, as you pursue your life’s goals, we ask you to Remember and Honor your University and your fellow alumni. If Illinois Wesleyan has faithfully discharged its obligations to you as students, we trust that each of you, as a graduate, will

continue to think of this community as your extended family and as your home. From your perspective it may only be a *granfalloon*, and that's not necessarily a bad thing, if it makes you happy. But it might just turn out to be a grand *karass*, which would be very good indeed. Time and God will tell.

So, in closing, it is my honor to represent the Board and the Alumni Association in bidding you farewell as students and welcoming you home as alumni. We invite you to return to your University often, whether in person or in spirit. You will always be welcome here and any place where Titans gather.