

Berea Stories
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President's Welcome and Introductions
Opening Convocation
August 30, 2018

Welcome all of you to the Opening Convocation of the 2018-19 year at Berea College. And welcome as well to all the others watching this event via live-stream!

May I begin by reminding you to silence your phones and tablets and any other raucous technology you may have brought into the arena.

Thank you, Anne Lawson, for providing the invocation. We so appreciate the River of Life church, where so many Bereans are blessed to participate.

Our great relationship with the community in which we are situated goes back to the very origin of the College and the City, so we welcome distinguished guests from the City of Berea and nearby. Our town is still small enough to be warm and friendly, but has grown large enough to be interesting. We are proud to be part of what makes the City of Berea special and are so honored that folks from the town and the area have joined us today.

This Opening Celebration kicks off a series of superb convocations this Fall. The Convo Program is a *real highlight* of Berea College, providing rich community occasions, and offering great artistic performances, intellectual presentations and

spiritual explorations, truly enlarging and enhancing the experience of all Bereans.

I am very excited that we are able to begin this year by joining all together. It says, "Our Berea," on your program cover; that conveys how we all, regardless of our position in the community, enjoy it, are blessed by it, take responsibility for it, and, so, we own it. We are celebrating today the start of this new academic year. That really is something to celebrate, but it is also fitting to acknowledge the sadnesses and challenges we have to face, too. Many of you know that we lost a member of our student body this summer. Ian Klenk, rising senior CS major, passed away and is no longer with us; he is greatly missed. And, we were all deeply saddened to lose our beloved colleague, Dr. Katherine Christensen of the History department, just two weeks ago. And we know of many other challenges for our families, for the places we are from, for our country and the world. We all need to do our part, whatever we can do, to fix what is broken and there is a LOT to do. Today, we focus on our school and the start of a new year.

Because of its compelling mission, Berea College is a special and unique institution, and over the years and continuing into the present, that mission has attracted many wonderful people, some as students and some to work here, and many who have done both. Each of those wonderful people is also a great story, and so we also like to say that Berea College consists of the combination, really the synergy, of those many stories, 1600 student stories at any time, the stories of

about 600 employees, the continuing stories of more than 19,000 alumni, as well as the stories of many Bereans who are no longer with us, but whose stories also contributed importantly.

Our convocation today will be a celebration of those many stories and so our theme is *Berea Stories*. The *Book of Berea*: it's a long and fascinating book! We could organize it into chapters, one for each category of story tellers.

In this convo, we will have a speaker from each of those chapters. So, sit back and listen to some excerpts of *The Book of Berea*. Sharing them will be:

- Lakshya Bharadwaj, “Luck-sh-yeah” “Baa-rudh-waj”, hailing from India, a member of the senior class and President of the SGA.
- Dr. Michael Berheide, Professor of Political Science, will speak from the faculty chapter. Mike is a much-appreciated teacher and faculty leader, and is the drummer in the Jeff Richey experience, the faculty band that will be playing after convo!
- Representing the staff chapter will be Dr. Channell Barbour, who in her work in the area of Student Life is immersed in the many Berea stories being written every day, some great, some not so good! She is also a Berea grad and so has a compelling Berea story of her own.
- Speaking as one of so many retirees who have served the College capably and faithfully will be Dr. Libby Jones, who retired from the English department last year, having served the College for 29 years!

- Sharing a story on behalf of the incoming Berea student class of 2022 will be Olivia Mbugua “Boog wah”, who hails from the state of Arizona.
- Telling her story as one of our many accomplished Alumni will be Mr. Vance Blade, who graduated from Berea in 1982 and went on to a very successful executive career at Kroger Foods. Now in retirement, he has started his own business and seems to be working even harder than before. Vance first joined the Berea College Board of Trustees in 2000, and has been part of the leadership of nearly every facet of the College in that time.
- And then I will wrap up.

They will address you in that order, and although each is (or will be in the case of the students) a highly accomplished individual, meriting much lengthier introductions, that would slow us down too much and anyway, they’ll be telling you their story themselves! So, we will proceed now, and they will succeed one another without further ado.

Lakshya, you go first!