

**Berea Stories**  
Lyle D. Roelofs  
President's Welcome and Introductions  
Opening Convocation  
August 29, 2019

Welcome all of you to the Opening Convocation of the 2019-20 academic 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 any other raucous technology you may have brought into the arena.**

Thank you, Pastor Nate, for bringing the invocation. We so appreciate the long and close partnership between Berea College and Union Church and are glad you are serving there for the next couple of months.

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 is part of 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, as, 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 and retirees, 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:

- Ishara Nanayakkara, hailing from both Sri Lanka and the US, a member of the senior class, double majoring in Political Science and Communications, and President of the SGA. .
- Dr. Eileen McKiernan Gonzalez, Associate Professor of Art History, will speak from the faculty chapter. Eileen is a much-appreciated teacher and faculty leader.
- Representing the staff chapter will be Luke Hodson, Director of Admissions, who therefore played an important role in getting all of you students into Berea. Luke is also a Berea grad, class of 2002, and so has a compelling Berea story of his own to share.
- Speaking as one of so many retirees who have served the College capably and faithfully will be Mr. Carl J. Thomas, who retired from the Admissions department last year, having recruited over the years many, many wonderful students from cities in the urban South.
- Sharing a story on behalf of the incoming Berea student class of 2023 will be Je-Dynn Fogle **[Jay'-den Foe'-gul]**, who hails from Lexington, right up the road.

- Telling her story as one of our many accomplished Alumni will be Mrs. Ashley Seals, who graduated from Berea in 2008 and now lives near her home in the far western reaches of Virginia.
- 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.

**Ishara, you go first!**