

## **Berea Stories in a time of National Crises**

Lyle D. Roelofs

President's Welcome and Introductions

Re-Opening Convocation

August 27, 2019

I want to offer a warm virtual welcome to everyone tuned in for this Re-Opening Convocation, celebrating the beginning of the 20-21 academic year at Berea College.

Thank you, Noe, for bringing the invocation. We know you had to deal with COVID-19 over the summer and are very glad you are recovered and have been able to return to campus.

This Opening Celebration is the first in a condensed convocation program for this fall, reflecting the fact that we are not able to do mass gatherings. Even though the format will be different and students are not required to attend, I still urge you to attend virtually as many as you are able. They will be incredible!

We are celebrating today the start of this new academic year, celebrating that even in the face of urgent national crises, we can continue the work of learning that is our main objective, whether it is being done on line or in person.

Because of its compelling mission, Berea College is a special and unique institution, and that mission has attracted many wonderful people, some as students and some to work here, and many who have done both. Each of those Bereans has a great story, and so we 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 who contributed importantly.

Opening Convocation is always a celebration of those many stories with the theme *Berea Stories*. This year these stories will have an asterisk, because they are the personal stories of Bereans sharing also how the current national crises have impacted us.

Our speakers will be:

- Brady Willis, a junior hailing from California and president of the SGA.
- Dr. Dawn Anderson, Professor of Biology, will speak for the faculty. Dawn is a much-appreciated teacher and faculty leader and our resident expert on microbes.
- Representing the staff will be Teena Riddell of Facilities Management, one of our key front-line workers in keeping our spaces clean and sanitized when necessary.
- Speaking as one of so many retirees who have served the College capably and faithfully will be the beloved Dr. Kathy Bullock who retired last year from the Music Department where she had been the inspirational leader of the Black Music Ensemble for many years.

- Telling her story as one of our many accomplished Alumni will be the Rev. Dr. Sonja Williams who graduated from Berea in 2002 and now serves as professor and dean of students at the Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis.
- Representing Berea's Board of Trustees will be Dr. John Fleming of the class of 1966. John has served on Berea's board since 2007. He is a nationally known expert on museums and the Director of the National Museum of African American Music.
- And then I will wrap up.

Interleaved amongst these remarks will be the presentations of the various awards that would have been given at our May 2020 commencement, an event that we could not hold this year.

Finally, we are dedicating this Re-opening Convocation to a great friend of Berea, who passed away just a month ago, Congressman John Lewis, a courageous leader in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's who went on to become a key national leader and the conscience of the Congress, as he served in the House of Representatives, representing Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> district for 33 years.

**Brady, you go first!**