

**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 2021-22 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, Rev. LeSette, for bringing the invocation. We so appreciate all the Campus Christian Center does to support the spiritual growth and well-being of the whole community.

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. This year, in light of COVID, we have adjusted the requirement aspect of attending convocations, but students can still earn that convo A grade for attending five of them this semester; that's half, by the way.

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. We are also celebrating our re-opening as an in-person community, so this year's opening convo is really special. It's a *re-opening* convo!

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 these 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 continue to inspire us.

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, with contributions from all the different categories of Bereans.

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

- Obinna Ilochonwu, who also goes by Bobby, a member of the senior class, majoring in Nursing, and President of the SGA this year.

- Dr. Ed McCormack, Professor of Business, will represent the faculty. Ed is a much-appreciated teacher and faculty leader.
- Representing the staff will be Beverly Cook, College Postmaster, who we all know for her cheerful and helpful presence in the College Post Office.
- Speaking as one of so many retirees who have served the College capably and faithfully will be Mr. Andrew Baskin, who retired from the Africa and African American Studies department in 2019, after having been an important faculty leader and much beloved teacher for many years.
- Sharing his story on behalf of the incoming Berea student class of 2025 will be Julian Gober, who hails from Clarksville, Georgia and participated in summer bridge this year. He is interested in the Theatre program.
- Telling her story as one of our many accomplished Alumni will be Mrs. Sherry McCulley-Hall, who graduated from Berea in 1981 and is the current President of the Berea College Alumni Executive Council. She now lives in Asheville, North Carolina. Sherry, we thank you for undertaking a rather lengthy trip to come and be part of our celebration.
- And then I will wrap up.

Those speakers 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.

**Obinna, you go first!**