Good Evening! Let me add my heartfelt welcome to that of President Roelofs. Also, for those of you who have been here a while, let me state the obvious: I am not Chad Berry. If you are expecting poetic and literary comments tonight, you will be sadly disappointed. However, I hope to make up for my oratory deficiencies with brevity—especially valuable given the three amazing retiree sendoffs and 27 new colleague introductions still to come.

I am profoundly humbled to have been nominated by you, my peers, and selected by President Roelofs, to be Dean of Faculty. When I first joined the faculty in 1999, becoming Dean never occurred to me. My focus simply was to help prepare Berea students be successful, something Berea had done for me as a student. Over the years, I grew into helping not only students, but also colleagues, departments, and the institution as Chair of Chemistry, Chair of Division 1, and Building Shepherd for the Margaret A. Cargill Natural Sciences and Health Building. The most important things I learned through these administrative experiences were the value of communication and working collaboratively towards a common goal. Last fall the MAC Building opened and I was ready for something different. I thought that different thing was a sabbatical studying a penicillin-binding protein at the Medical University of South Carolina. However, when Chad stepped down and Lyle split the Provost and Dean positions last March, I wondered if the skills I had learned through my service work were the right ones to step into a bigger administrative role here. While they certainly helped, I have learned a great deal in these first seven weeks, along with making plenty of mistakes. I’ve said frequently that I just hope I figure out what I am doing before your goodwill runs out. I’m thankfully surrounded by amazing and supportive colleagues with the experience and motivation to help me continue helping us transform the College motto and Great Commitments from pretty words into tangible outcomes.

I have had many people ask me about my “agenda”. I must say, I feel good about where Berea is now and our trajectory moving forward and I think I can sum it up with three statements:

1. Let’s keep up our good work.
2. We work best when we work together.
3. I like structure.

What does this really mean? Well, I believe Chad did an excellent job of leading us through the uncertainty of restructuring and continuing to build a
diverse and inclusive campus. He also sustained our academic excellence by navigating us through SACS accreditation. I want to keep up his good work by supporting you as you do yours. Beyond that, I want the work of the Dean’s Office to be what we collectively as a faculty agree to work on together. I’ll be reaching out to Division Chairs, Department Chairs, and Faculty this year to get a sense of what you all feel we need to focus on to make our experience as teachers, scholars, mentors, and campus servants more effective and positive. And finally, by structure I mean the boring details of administration. I hope, with your blessing and input, to make our practices and administrative structures even clearer and more transparent.

But enough about me. My 20 years as a chemistry professor pale compared to the time invested by our three faculty retirees, Kathy Bullock, Susan Henthorn, and Al White. I want to spend the rest of my time celebrating them. First, if I could ask Kathy and her husband Keith to stand:

Kathy and Keith came to Berea College in 1991, as I understand, a bit skeptical that this small school in the middle of Kentucky would be a good fit. Aren’t we all grateful that they were convinced otherwise? Now, 29 years later, Kathy is leaving behind a legacy of an internationally renowned Black Music Ensemble and countless, grateful students and colleagues. Who among us is surprised that “retirement” for Kathy means shifting from fulltime teaching to conducting workshops and residencies throughout the US, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa? When I asked Kathy what she wanted to be acknowledged for, she shared, “for helping make a difference in students’ lives, for being one who inspires, encourages, supports others and who brings joy and light to those with whom I have interacted.” It is almost eerie how well she accomplished that. A former student shared:

“Dr. Kathy Bullock for me was and is the ‘angel of light’ that allowed my being and becoming at Berea College to be an experience and blessing that my life has exceedingly benefited [from]… I had never seen or met a Black person or professional [who] so proudly expressed who she was and the history of where she came from so freely and unapologetically via the clothes she wore, the lessons she taught, and the battles she has won. Coming from Birmingham, AL, as a black male student, I struggled trying to find my validation and my own confidence in exploring my identity at Berea College. Dr. Bullock solved that problem with Aces.”

Another added:
“During my time at Berea, she made me feel a great amount of self-worth, not only as a soloist and student, but as a woman...The great Rap artist Nipsey Hussle was quoted to say, ‘The highest human act is to inspire,’ and Dr. Bullock is a living embodiment of those immortal words.”

Colleagues were no less adoring in their praise, one sharing:

“Kathy Bullock is a woman of many talents—theoretician, ethnomusicologist, performer—but perhaps the talent I will most remember is the way she brings light into an often-dark world. That talent is rare in this world, and her light at Berea will be missed.”

And:

“Traveling with Kathy, I have stood in awe at not just her musical prowess, or her rigorous intellect, but also something more immutable—Kathy exudes love and kindness and care in a way that is rare—it is not an act—it is who she is in the depths of her soul.”

I’ll end with one last quote:

“She has the greatest people skills of anyone that I know, being both wise and perceptive. If I ever need advice on how to relate to someone ..., I go to her first to make use of her wisdom and grace. She is observant, and has a generous, warm, welcoming, and gracious spirit...She and her husband Keith have continually upheld and promoted Berea’s values of impartial love and celebrating the beauty and potential of all people, and they have served as role models in this regard...To students, Kathy is “Mama B.” Many students have told me over the years that they would not have made it successfully through Berea, would not have persevered to graduation without her.”

It is clear that words alone will never capture Kathy’s transformation of Berea College, so I think it is only fitting that we thank Kathy and Keith with more than words. Please join me in thanking them!

Our next retiree, Susan Henthorn, has worked at Berea College for even longer than Kathy, starting in 1990. Susan has been a pillar of support for Hutchins Library, filling whatever role was needed, including Reference and Instruction Librarian, Berea Digital Coordinator, Electronic Resources Librarian, Library Systems Administrator, and
even Library Webmaster. When I asked her what she’d like to be acknowledged for, she shared:

“I have tried to be a true team player… always looking for ways to enrich and expand Berea students’ abilities to locate and interact with information that will support their course work. However, beyond that, we also endeavor to help them develop skills and a thirst for knowledge that will foster their ability to make a difference wherever they find themselves throughout their lives.”

Comments from former students show she succeeded:

“As an undergraduate...at Berea College; I remember Susan being introduced as the subject librarian...Susan was always happy to answer research questions related to music or any other discipline. Susan was the first subject specialist academic librarian that I had encountered, and I was so amazed that a professional librarian could also be an accomplished musician! So, naturally, when I decided to switch careers from being a musician to becoming a librarian, the first person I contacted for advice was Susan.”

Another wrote:

“After 1.5 years of working at the library, I decided to pursue my Master of Library and Information Science...I saw the impact our librarians were having on individual students and wanted to be able to do the same. [Susan] wrote numerous letters of recommendations for me and … I was accepted into all 8 programs I had applied to.”

Her colleagues were no less effusive with their praise, writing things like:

“[As] a [professor] at Berea for 35 years … and before we got the internet and such, I consulted Susan a number of times on various arcane questions in my research. Obscure as the information was, she never let me down. I thought about making this a game and seeing if I could come up with some question she couldn’t answer but knew she couldn’t be stumped.”

And:

“Susan's biggest gift to me ... has been the framework she's provided me for understanding my relationships with our labor students. Before arriving at Berea, I supervised work-study students at my previous institution ... There the culture was such that the supervision of student workers was seen as something to be endured ... It was understood
that they were largely unreliable and frequently apathetic about our mission; … [and] a waste of time to invest too much time in training them. When I arrived at Berea and unexpectedly found myself the supervisor of more than a dozen students, I worried about how to reconcile my past experiences with the high expectations of the labor program. One day, while discussing our labor students with Susan, she referred to them as our "junior colleagues". In her naming them as such, Susan opened up my eyes to the potential and possibility inherent in labor supervision."

I’ll end with one last quote:

“From my earliest days on campus I have considered [Susan] to be a quintessential Berea faculty member—super smart and unfailingly friendly, to be sure, but also a moral exemplar. Her intelligence and affability are satellites orbiting an unshakeable ethical center. Her vast interests and voracious, wide-ranging curiosity mean she finds everyone she encounters intriguing, and she relishes the chance to engage them in conversation and exploration. These qualities, which have made her a truly great librarian, also make her a cherished colleague and a model of the kind of liberal education we aspire to offer at Berea.”

I have no doubt that Susan will find plenty of things to fill her time after she eventually relocates to North Carolina with her husband Steve. She might even be up for a reference challenge during retirement if anyone would dare try to stump her. Please join me in thanking Susan Henthorn for her 30 years of service to Berea College and its students!

And finally, I will ask Al and Alice White to stand. Al and Alice, like my wife and I, are both alumni, so while Al has only been working at Berea College for about 20 years, his affiliation with the college goes back much further (you can ask him how long). I actually got to know Al not as a musician, but as a father—his youngest daughter Emma and my oldest daughter Sofia are the same age and were in the same CDL class as babies. It was only later that I learned of Al's amazing reputation as a musician. First, as a teacher of music lessons on traditional stringed instruments, and then as the director of multiple ensembles, Al has left his mark not only on Berea College and its students, but also on the Berea Community. His colleagues told me:
“If it has strings he can make it sing! Under Al’s direction, the Bluegrass Ensemble has become an internationally acclaimed professional performing ensemble. The group has toured in Europe, Asia, Africa, and all over the United States.”

And:

“Al White is a hard-working, industrious, good-humored, talented, and versatile musician … The mark of a superb ensemble director over time is the achievement of a consistently high standard of performance in spite of the ever-changing student personnel. This is a particular challenge in Al’s case because the ensemble consists of only one player per part, each on a different instrument … No matter the student personnel that Al has worked with…Al has succeeded in developing a well-trained, high-achieving, entertaining, [and] ensemble every year, each with its own color, flavor, and personality.”

And also”

“Al’s relaxed professionalism is the finest example for young performers. His nurturing and kind guidance are also obvious as, once a student is selected to participate in the Blue Grass Ensemble, they stay! I have seen many young Bereans have their dreams realized by getting the opportunity to be a member of Al’s fine class/band.”

His former students share comments like:

“I met Al through the Music Department as I was interested in taking fiddle lessons. Not only did Al teach me countless fiddle tunes, he also weaved music history and personal stories into lessons that continued to grow a love for traditional music in me … Touring around with the band meant being unofficial school ambassadors, and Al always spoke highly of Berea College and its mission. I have no doubt that Al has singlehandedly carried the message and story of Berea College to thousands of people throughout his time there.”

And:

“I was privileged to be in the very first Bluegrass Ensemble. I witnessed the group go from a collective group of folks who could barely get through a song as a unit, to a band that performed arranged material successfully…Al patiently molded the ensemble, capitalizing on the strengths of its members … I say thank you Al for your contributions to Berea College, my life, the lives of many other students that I am sure
appreciate your contributions just as much as myself, and I look forward to your endeavors in the future!"

Those of you who know Al will probably not be surprised to hear that he plans to continue to make music with his multiple local bands and, hopefully, will find a place for himself and Alice on a beach in Mexico during the winters. I hope they welcome visitors. Please join me in thanking Al White for his service to Berea College and its students!

So now is the time we shift from honoring our great retiring colleagues to getting to know our new ones. While each of our 27 new faculty is definitely worthy of praise and celebration, I ask you to hold your applause to transitions between introducers. The saved time will be much better spent talking to them in person at the President’s reception right afterwards. Thank you.