

**Remarks to the Board of Trustees on the occasion of the election of  
Ambassador (ret.) Reuben E. Brigety II as  
Vice-Chancellor and President  
The University of the South  
Sewanee, Tennessee  
February 28, 2020**

Chancellor Skirving, Vice-Chancellor McCardell, Regents, Trustees, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with a heart full of gratitude and humility that I stand before you as the vice-chancellor-elect of the University of the South.

As this is the first time that I am meeting all of you, it seems appropriate that I should offer a few words of introduction. I am a son of the New South. Born in 1973 in Jacksonville, Florida, I am a member of the first generation of African Americans that was born fully free and equal under the law to all of my fellow citizens. Growing up in the deepest part of the Old Confederacy, I was raised with the rhythms and rituals of Southern culture with all of its beauty and complexities. As the son of a Morehouse graduate who integrated the University of Florida School of Medicine in 1970, I was also imbued with the history of the struggle to free all the people of the South—both black and white—from the darkest parts of their shared heritage. Finally, as a man who was raised as a Southern Baptist but is now an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church, USA, I have centered my life on the foundational principle of respecting equally the human dignity inherent in all people as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. From my time in uniform as a junior naval officer to my service abroad as a United States ambassador, and from my work in conflict zones as a human rights advocate to my tenure in the academy as a professor and academic leader, advancing the dignity of the individual has been the unifying theme in my professional life. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in my commitment to preparing the next generation of young people to become global citizens, ready to “fight the world’s fight.”

It is this set of values and passionate commitment that has brought me before you today here at the University of the South. I must say that my wife Leelie, our boys Roebel and Redda, and I have been overwhelmed by the love and warmth with which the Sewanee community has greeted us here on the Mountain.

Mountains have a particular symbolic importance in the Christian faith. It was on Mount Sinai that Moses received the Ten Commandments from the Lord and on the Mount of the Beatitudes that Jesus preached his first sermon. It was the image of a mountain that C.S. Lewis conjured to create a sense of place and belonging in his novel *Till We Have Faces* and it was the memory of the mountaintop that Martin Luther King Jr. summoned to inspire a people on the eve of his martyrdom.

So it should not be surprising at all that over 150 years ago, our founders set upon this Mountain to establish a new university rooted in this sense of place and built on the bedrock of their Christian faith.

The Mountain is where you go for insight and inspiration. The Mountain is where you return for respite and reconnection.

Over the last century and a half, men and women have come to Sewanee to prepare themselves for lives of character and consequence. They have taken the best of what they have learned here on the Mountain to make a difference in the world. And they have brought the wealth and wisdom they have gained in the world back to the Mountain to contribute anew to the promise of Sewanee for future generations.

Ours is a rich heritage that we must all continue to work to preserve and extend in the years to come. Following the example of our early benefactors from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, we will continue to pursue elite excellence in intellectual endeavors, committing ourselves to follow the truth wherever it may lead us.

Taking inspiration from the Episcopal tradition of our founders, we will continue to embrace both faith and reason as the cornerstones for the shaping of character and the strengthening of community.

Embracing the glory of the Domain, we will continue to stand as stewards of the natural world, exploring with confidence and care how it may strengthen our bodies and uplift our spirits.

Even as we embrace the inheritance that has been bequeathed to us over the generations, we will spare no effort to ensure that there is ample space and a warm welcome on this Mountain for anyone who seeks its insights and hungers for its inspiration. As a community, we will muster

the courage to be honest about who we have been so that we may have the wisdom to become what we aspire to be. Building on the vital and difficult work led by Vice-Chancellor McCardell, we will persevere in wrestling with the facts of our past in full as an essential element for building a bridge to our future.

As in generations past, we look forward to that future with confidence and with conviction. We are rooted here, in a particular and providential place—a place that is the gift of the “never-failing succession of benefactors” whose toil and treasure have touched, and are touching still, the souls who’ve lived and learned and loved under the protection of the angels of Sewanee. With gratitude for the best of the past, we engage anew the work of the present in the enduring hope that, by God’s grace, the future shall prove us worth the while.

In honor of the spirit of our founders, our mission is nothing less than to establish ourselves firmly as one of the elite liberal arts colleges and Episcopal seminaries in America. Here on this Mountain, we aspire to bring the world to Sewanee and Sewanee to the world.

For all who dwell on this Mountain, and to all whom we invite to join us here, on this penultimate day of Black History Month in the year of our Lord 2020, let us continue to labor together in the spirit of the 133rd Psalm: *ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*—“Behold how good and pleasing it is for kindred (yes, brothers AND SISTERS) to live together in unity.”

YEA, SEWANEE’S RIGHT, and may God bless you all.