

Don P. Moon, President Emeritus
Remarks at the Final Waukegan Commencement
Shimer College
May 20, 2006

EXPLORATION

*We shall not cease from **exploration**
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the **first time**.*

From the final stanza of the final quartet of T.S. Eliot's, *Four Quartets*

The exploration which you have experienced these years at this place called Shimer College started with a vision that one woman, Frances Wood, communicated to those nearest to her and to the residents of a small Illinois town not far from that “strong brown god”, the Mississippi River, a memory of which begins the third of Eliot's Four Quartets. The beauty of that river is in its flow, in its branching, in the many tributaries that feed its ceaseless energy.

You who are graduating today are part and parcel of the “strong flowing river” that is Shimer College. You have fed it with your own visions, with your energy, with your love, and now you are branching forth into other places – places that need the water you are prepared to give them.

The drops of water in the river have only a dim perception of, a tenuous connection to, neighboring drops. In contrast, you will go forth from this place with deep and abiding ties to those with whom you have shared this part of your journey.

The connections that hold together the journey that is Shimer go well beyond your classmates, your teachers, the staff that provides your food, your housing, your financial aid and the sundry other benefits that make a community work.

An important - a primary connection: the city of Waukegan.

For these past twenty-seven and a half years the city of Waukegan has provided the setting, the channel, for the flowing life of Shimer College. It has provided a kind of security at minimum cost as Shimer recovered from the stress of the 1970's, explored and expanded its mission in successive small leaps, and started to look beyond its own survival toward a wider vision of its place in the world.

Another important - not secondary - connection that merits recognition: the strong presence of the Trustees of the College. In time of great need they have provided the wisdom and the wherewithal to keep the life of Shimer flowing. In their present incarnation they are seated here behind you supporting you as you push forward – as you explore new channels for your life. Without their support we would not be here today.

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Will be to arrive where we started
And **know the place for the first time.***

To know Shimer College we need to journey back to our beginnings in Waukegan, to the channel that has been her place, our place, for almost a fifth of her life - our life. Let us explore then the lives of three men and their connection with the ongoing life of Shimer College. These three were all born in the years between 1900 and 1911. One died in 1985, one in 1992, one is still going strong today at age 95. All were deeply

connected with the University of Chicago and with Robert M. Hutchins. To understand them will be to know this place that is Shimer College in a new way.

Their names:

Richard McKeon

Gaylord Donnelley

Sidney L. Port.

Richard McKeon was a renowned classics scholar and, for a number of years, the Dean of the Humanities Division at the University of Chicago. He was also a trustee of Shimer College during the first six years of Shimer's sojourn in Waukegan. He was an important presence in the three visitations by the College's accrediting agency during those initial years of struggle in Waukegan; and his faith in the vision of education that is Shimer's never wavered. And, most importantly, it was through Richard's friendship with Gaylord Donnelley that Gaylord became connected to Shimer.

Gaylord Donnelley was Chairman of the Board of the R. R. Donnelley publishing company, a one-time chairman of the Board of the University of Chicago, and a resident of Libertyville in Lake County. His estate was a short ten miles from this campus. Gaylord was a fervent supporter of the environment and of education. In the twelve years that Shimer was in Waukegan prior to his death, Gaylord became a personal friend of the College. He and his wife even had a meal with us in the Koko "cafeteria." His foundation granted a constant \$20,000 a year to the College at a time when those dollars were the difference between making payroll and not. His securing of a loan to the College of \$200,000 in the early 1980's is a primary reason I am standing here before you and you are graduating today.

And then there is Sid Port – a man who knew Robert M. Hutchins first hand – who took classes with him and fell in love with the Great Books approach to education – a man who proudly displays the honorary degree he received from Shimer – and a man

who over the years that Shimer has been in Waukegan has granted the College in excess of \$750,000. Without Sid's presence in our lives, we would not be here today.

These men all shared the vision that Shimer could outgrow its infancy, its "muddy-creek" appearance, and become a vital force in the educational world – a model to be emulated.

As you, our graduates, are branching forth from Shimer and flowing into new channels, so is Shimer returning to where she started and knowing that place for the first time.

What place? The place of pioneering, as Frances Wood was a pioneer on the frontier near that "strong brown god."

What place? Chicago – just twenty blocks north of the place where Robert M. Hutchins started the educational journey that surges within us even now.

What place? The multitude of places that you, Shimer's graduates, Shimer's water bearers, will take that **exploration** that has become part and parcel of your journeys – of your lives.

Thank you.