

Remarks by  
**President Kyle W. Farmbry**  
**Celebration of Community**

March 18, 2023

*On March 18, 2023, Guilford College held a Celebration of Community for faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents and friends in the wider community.*

*Included in the day's activities was the installation of Kyle W. Farmbry as the 10th President of the College, a student and community showcase, a memorial tree planting and a looking-forward reception.*

*Here is the text of Kyle's remarks at the installation.*



**The Tenth President  
of Guilford College,  
Kyle W. Farmbry**



## **A Celebration of Community**

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us for this Celebration of Community. I'm excited to be here with trustees, students, staff, faculty and friends of Guilford College. I would like to start my remarks with a bit of background on how today came about, and specifically why we are celebrating in this way.

As you know, I started as Guilford's 10th president about 15 months ago, on January 1, 2022. The campus at the time was very quiet as we were still navigating the omicron phase of COVID-19. Students were studying remotely, and there was a sense of concern about when we would be able to gather again in person.

Guilford had just gone through a period that led alumni and friends to launch an initiative known as Save Guilford College. With the care and concern of a protective family, many of you rallied to stand up for this institution you hold so dear.

Little did you know that in the summer of 2021 that effort, viewed from afar by a Rutgers-Newark professor and administrator, was pivotal in his decision to pursue the presidency of Guilford College.

And that crisis provided an opportunity for Guilfordians to consider who we are as a community and what type of institution, ultimately, we want to be.

Not long after I arrived on campus, questions began to arise about when we would have an inauguration.

People would say, "Kyle, congrats on the job, when is the inauguration?" ... "This is great, when is the inauguration?"

I avoided the question when I could, and ignored it whenever possible.



The stage party of the Installation of the Tenth President of Guilford College, Kyle W. Farmbry

My concerns rested in the fact that I have seen many presidential inaugurations over the years that were celebrations of a person and not the community. And, given all that was done for Guilford through a pandemic and financial crisis, it seemed that time and energy would be best spent celebrating everyone who supported and continued to believe deeply in the College.

Today really should not be about the President of Guilford but about its alumni, faculty, staff and most importantly, its students.

Our College faces many critical questions, and it's a perfect time to focus our energy as a community on our vision for where we are headed.

So, with the Board's blessing, today we have a celebration of community with the one caveat that the formalities of an installation ceremony are included.

And, with this celebration of community in mind, I have been reflecting a lot on Guilford and the stories that I've heard about this place and what I've witnessed that have reinforced who we are as an

institution and my expectations of who we will continue to be.

Stories of what we do for one another are much of what has defined Guilford over the years. Last April, I watched our community come together in mourning the loss of Ahmad Brewington, a student who died tragically. A relatively impromptu memorial gathering drew nearly 200 members of our community onto the ground floor of Founders Hall, where in a very Quakerly way, students sat in reflective silence and spoke when called from within to do so. The outpouring of love and support I witnessed that day, and that week, for all of Ahmad's family and friends, spoke to me of the support this Guilford community provides for its members.

Quakers have a term that has become important to me during my time here, "holding one in the Light." And in that very difficult week, I saw our students, our faculty, staff, alumni, and friends hold Ahmad's family in the Light. And I remember saying to myself, "this is Guilford College."

In my time here, I have received countless emails and pages of handwritten notes from alumni and friends who have written about what Guilford means to them, and why they are so committed to the success of this institution. Paul Zopf, who started teaching at Guilford in 1959 and now is in his early 90s, lives on the edge of campus, shared several letters. Each one of Paul's letters has had the wisdom of someone who has put nearly 70 years of his life into this institution. In October, over 150 people gathered for the dedication of the Paul and Evelyn Zopf Gazebo. I sat next to Paul and looked at the sea of people who gathered to celebrate him and celebrate the memory of Evelyn. Former students, family, former colleagues, and LOTS of friends were there. I realized at that moment that there is something about the lifelong bonds created here that allowed for such a heartfelt tribute to Paul and Evelyn, and I remember saying to myself, "this is Guilford College."

I've joined community gatherings celebrating initiatives such as Every Campus a Refuge, which was launched on this campus to provide housing for refugees fleeing war and persecution. This organization, which started after Guilford English Professor Diya Abdo heard the Pope challenge parishes around the world in 2015. "Every parish should host a refugee family, and help that family become integrated into their new community," argued the Pope. In response to the Pope's challenge, Diya and a group of volunteers said, "if every parish can host a refugee, why not every campus?" In the eight years since that initial vision, Guilford has hosted over 80 refugees on or near this campus. Friends ... this is Guilford College.

David J. Hopkins '91,  
Vice Chair,  
Board of Trustees



Several weeks ago, I had the pleasure of joining in the festivities celebrating the 50th anniversary of our 1973 men's basketball national championship. It was at a brunch for the team that Guilford alum and basketball legend M.L. Carr told me, "now is the time for Guilford to dream big and be bold" ... and that, Friends, is exactly what we want to do. For this is Guilford College.

In a few weeks we will be launching our new strategic plan, *Envisioning Guilford 2027*. The planning process was started in the spring of 2022. Here are some highlights.

We expect to launch a new Center for Campus and Community Engagement to frame many of our local service activities. We have a long history of service in Greensboro, and it is important that we think about our mission as being deeply intertwined with the wellbeing of our city.

That is why it is so important to me that the City Manager is here with us today, sharing his thoughts about community and Guilford as a partner. We want to work with this great city of ours and with other stakeholders to tackle Greensboro's challenges and celebrate Greensboro's successes.

This past week, we held our second Guilford Dialogues. This gathering brought over one hundred participants together to explore how to address issues of educational inequity in our communities. Coupled with our first Guilford Dialogues last June, which focused on issues of economic inequity, I have realized that Guilford College is a place where people can gather to creatively and collaboratively explore means to address two of our most pressing local and global issues: economic inequality and educational inequality.

Voices of Victory perform  
"Walk in the Light Medley"



It may sound a little unQuakerly, but let me suggest that Guilford has bragging rights. We are a place that changes lives, or as one of our trustees recently put it, “Guilford will change your life and give you the tools to change the world.” Here we celebrate a culture of radical inclusion and radical care for members of our community.

Our Guilford 2027 plan takes pride in the role of the humanities and the liberal arts. We are imagining all that STEM fields, and areas such as business studies, sport management and criminal justice can do. We are looking to support the creative ideas of many of our faculty and staff around academic opportunities for our students and we are so excited about the intellectual contributions of our full academic team.

We will be doubling down on raising support for scholarships and creating opportunities for our students. Building our scholarship pool is an important part of our strategy for helping students afford the cost of a Guilford education, and it will require leveraging external support especially for endowed scholarships. We also want to ensure that our students seize opportunities for amazing internships, study-abroad experiences, and what I like to refer to as “Only at Guilford moments.”

New partnerships are being established with the City of Greensboro, the Volunteer Center of Greensboro and the Nussbaum Center for Entrepreneurship, among other organizations. We want to do our part to make this community, and corners of this world, a better place for all.

We realize that we cannot make all of the improvements that we would like to see for humankind, alone. That is why Guilford must work closely with its partners, and its collaborators. On this note of partnership, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge several guests from South Africa, who were part of a much larger delegation that visited us this week. Last month, I signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Pretoria. This agreement will provide a number of exchange opportunities for our students, faculty, and staff to travel to places like Cape Town, Pretoria,

Johannesburg, Soweto, and Mamelodi.

Of course, these are in addition to all of the other study-abroad experiences our students have in France, Spain, Ecuador, and as some of our students experienced two weeks ago, of walking slightly over 47 miles of the Camino de Santiago.

Guilford’s challenges a few years ago, and the path that we’ve taken to move our institution forward, reinforced for many of us the value of doubling down on our identity as a Quaker institution. The impact of discernment and critical discourse, or knowing that if you make a point of occasionally sitting in reflective silence, that often a great wisdom will make itself known. In our case, we are excited as Guilford College to bring forward much of what we’ve learned through our own discernment into this new vision of who we are.

All of these points of exploration have led me to think about notions of community, and all of the ways that community can enhance the well-being of so many people. What is the role of a small liberal arts college, like Guilford, in leveraging community for so many? How can we, as Guilford, continue to play a role in the advancement of this college and those who embrace it?

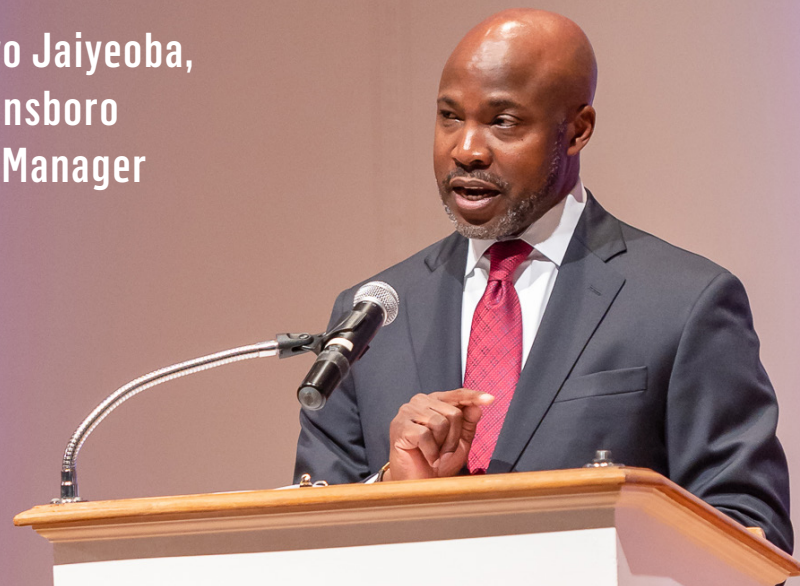
One day, while thinking about these questions, I rediscovered an essay that the late Congressman John Lewis wrote shortly before his death in July of 2020. In the essay, Congressman Lewis reflected on civic change and the roles and responsibilities we have in the 21st Century. He wrote of a time when he was searching for a way to get into the activities of what later became known as the American Civil Rights Movement.

He noted that he turned on the radio and heard Rev. Martin Luther King talk about philosophies of nonviolence and ultimately what King referred to as a Beloved community. As Lewis noted in his essay:

“... each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community,” which he defined as being reflective of “a nation and world society at peace with itself.”



Taiwo Jaiyeoba,  
Greensboro  
City Manager



Tinyah Ervin'23,  
Guilford Student Body  
Association President



Lewis spent much of his life thinking about and ultimately trying to realize this Beloved Community. I suggest that we each have a role in building this type of community.

You see, in this little corner of Greensboro, North Carolina:

- A community of Quakers set up a boarding school in 1837 that became Guilford College
- Local abolitionists like Levi Coffin played a critical role in shepherding escaping enslaved people to freedom through the Underground Railroad
- Lavina Curry, a free Black washerwoman working here used her deceased husband's free papers to help escaping enslaved people achieve their freedom
- And today, faculty, and students think about and act in creating the vehicles for embedding notions of political, economic, and social justice wherever they possibly can.

This is a place where we are building our own notion of a beloved community, a community that is founded on a set of ethical and responsible norms, a community that aims to solve some of the broader challenges in the world.

It is this community that I invite you to join me in celebrating, and it is this community that I ask you to join me in continuing to build. It is this community, our beloved Guilford community, where I say welcome, walk with us, and join us in celebrating our history as an institution, and more importantly join us in celebrating the institution that we are committed to becoming.

Friends ... this is Guilford College. And I so thank you for being here with us today.

Hope Williams,  
President, North Carolina  
Independent Colleges  
& Universities



Photography by  
Michael V. Crouch '10 & '12  
and Hardy Event Photos

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