REMARKS AT LINCOLN ACADEMY LAUREATES AWARDS

Governor Quinn, trustees, regents and rectors of the Academy, and my distinguished fellow Laureates. Thank you most sincerely for this wonderful and unexpected honor you have bestowed on me.

There is a story in the gospels told by Jesus about a king who threw a wedding feast and sent out invitations far and wide. When the host came into the banquet hall, he spied a guest who was there who did not have on his wedding garment and had the man thrown out. Ever since getting up on this stage in the company of my resplendent fellow awardees I have been waiting for an attendant to come and show me and my plain back suit to the door!

I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Rev. Stan Davis for his kind remarks. His presence prompts me to say very briefly something about a phenomenon of Illinois and Chicago that many may be unaware of—a phenomenon that I think reflects the spirit of Lincoln.

Perhaps more than any major city in the United States and perhaps, we have been told, more than in any other city of the world, Chicago is a center of religious harmony, respect and understanding. We hear every day about our city and our state’s tensions and challenges, but it is also good to know our strengths. One strength can be found in the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, a unique organization in which Stan and myself have been involved in for
a long time. The chief executives and leaders of some 40 different religious traditions—Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Mormon, Sikh, Zoroastrian—you name it—they are represented here. Each of these leaders come together several times a year in friendship and mutual trust, not so much to discuss religious matters but to muster our common values to work together with our city and state officials to address issues of common concern.

And there is another little known fact about Chicago that I think I should note. Strange as it may seem, Chicago and the Chicago area has a greater concentration of divinity schools and seminaries than any other city in the world with the possible exception of Rome. Most of them are gathered under an umbrella organization entitled the Association of Chicago Theological Schools. Some 11 theology schools, together preparing some 3,200 students for lives of service, schools with a combined library strength of 2.1 million volumes, and a combined faculty of 260 members, teaching 700 courses a year! And again each of these schools, representing the whole theological spectrum of Christianity—and with strong relations with Spertus Institute of Judaica and the American Islamic College—enjoy open cross registration, common programming, common library services and a host of other ongoing collaborative projects. It is, I suspect, a little known fact about our city and our region. What would Paddy Bauler, the former alderman of “Chicago ain’t ready for reform” fame have thought about that! We
have our tragedies of division and violence but we also have a multitude of people of good will.

This is a great city, a great state, and we honor in this ceremony the memory of perhaps our greatest citizen and most extraordinary president, Abraham Lincoln. May his legacy of courage and integrity, of wisdom and compassion for those in need continue to nourish the best of the human spirit. Thank you to the Academy for helping that Lincoln legacy remain vibrant and thank you for this great honor you have bestowed on me and my fellow Laureates today.

Donald Senior, C.P.

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