

**Remarks Greeting New Students in the College of Arts and Sciences
August 22, 2008**

President Patricia McGuire

“This is Our Generation, and We Must!”

Good morning, Trinity Women! I am so pleased to greet you at the conclusion of your first week as members of the Trinity family.

This morning you have received your Trinity Medals, symbols of your membership in this new community that will mold and shape your lives for years to come.

You have signed your Honor Pledge, that most important contract you have made with each other to live honestly and with integrity, to guard and protect the values of our community.

You are now officially part of the grand Trinity tradition, a long line of remarkable women stretching all the way back to the first students who inhabited this campus in 1900. And you share something very special with those early pioneers. Those 19 young women who arrived on this campus as the first Trinity students on November 6, 1900, established many of our great traditions. And perhaps the most durable tradition they established is the class color --- and those first Trinity students chose as their own class color --- guess what? --- the color red. You, the new Trinity Class of 2012, you share this Red Class tradition with that very first class, those who graduated in 1904, the first great Red Class. Wear your color well!

Some of you are coming in as transfer students into other classes --- sophomores, juniors, seniors. Golds, blues, greens. And if you don't know your class or the color, you are always safe with purple and gold, Trinity's school colors.

But who are you, our new Trinity sisters? You have been here all week, getting to know us, revealing some of yourselves, but my task this morning is to reveal more of what we know about you, and through this revelation to invite you to tell us even more about your history, your talent, your hopes and dreams for your Trinity days.

You come from 20 states, with 44% from DC and 40% from Maryland. You are also from Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and Washington State.

You were born in more than 20 different countries in addition to the US: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Liberia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Russia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, St. Kitts.

You are Baptist and Catholic and Methodist and Muslim and Orthodox and Christian and many other religions and beliefs, and even Wiccan and agnostic.

You have had a remarkable array of sports and activities beyond your classes, from ROTC to Gospel Choir to Bowling and Karate to basketball and volleyball and soccer and track and swimming and ballet and gymnastics and Girl Scouts and student government and many volunteer activities in your Church groups and communities.

Some of you are young mothers, and you are here because you want to be great role models and exceptional parents for your children. Some of you are caring for your siblings or even sick parents and grandparents. Many of you have had to bear responsibilities far beyond what society should expect at your ages, but you have done so with courage and grace.

Many of you answered the essay question about what you hoped you'd be recognized for 15 years from now. You wrote great speeches for me --- or some future president --- to give about you, extolling your virtues, hailing your accomplishments.

Guess what?

You don't have to wait 15 years for me to recognize your gifts and talents. In your own words you have already revealed yourselves to me in ways that are delightful, heroic, profound, funny, sometimes troubling, sometimes superficial, often evoking mixed emotions of joy to know you and challenge at the thought of advancing your education here at Trinity.

Each year during orientation, I greet the new class with a talk about who you are, and what you can expect here at Trinity. I have pursued a tradition of reading all of your application folders and essays, and in your own words I find my own speech is almost written, but for the threads necessary to weave it all together. Like generations of Trinity students before you, you have presented remarkable stories of courage, ambition, hope and vision. Today I will quote from some of your essays. Since I have not asked your permission to do this by name, your quotes are anonymous. Taken together, they reveal the quality and character of this class at entrance, and they show habits of mind and heart that will sustain you in all of the Trinity years that are to come for you.

Your essays reveal a sense of humor and whimsy that will serve you quite well during your college days. (All student essay quotes are in italics below.)

One of you wrote about your "addiction" to the supernatural:

- *"I love books, movies and costumes that deal with otherworldly things... I even sometimes call myself this creature... One of the creatures is the werewolf... a beast of legend that only comes out during the full moon. .My second name would have to be the vampire... Just as a vampire would drain its victim dry, I drain every ounce I can out of the books I read..."*

Another confesses an infatuation with dinosaurs....

- *“In middle school, I all of a sudden struck up an interest in dinosaurs....No one in the school understood why I liked dinosaurs.. but my peers would come up to me and ask questions about dinosaurs and.... I ended up making lots of friends through my interest...”*

Another one among you has a bright and creative idea for what the president of the college should become in a truly modern university...

- *“It is the year 2018. The president of the college is a robotic device structured to look human. The device is congratulating me with accolades...”*

And this one learned some important lessons through gymnastics:

- *“I started competing more and getting better and better at what I did...Stunts, flips, runs, dance routines, jumps, everything takes time to learn especially how to fall. In gymnastics you fall on your face, your side, your butt, and even your soul. When you are learning something in gymnastics, you will fall eventually, but then you get back up...”*

This one is transported through dancing:

- *“Dancing takes me back to that wonderfully warm place where I was born --- that place where dance became a part of my blood. When I hear Cuban folk music, my feel involuntarily move. Soon my body is swaying and moving with the rhythm. I am carried back to my roots. I remember my culture, my past, and my friends still living in Cuba.”*

Many of you express interest in various aspects of medicine, nursing, and science --- nearly 40% of you indicate that you want to study either biology/biochemistry, nursing/medicine, forensic science or psychology.

This is a very scientific class!

- *“My ultimate goal is to become a research pharmacist...I became interested in Pharmacy as I pursued my studies as a Medical Assistant. The courses of studies aroused my enthusiasm and strong interest in the medical field. I enjoyed discovering the systems of the human body...”*
- *“Science has been the main interest throughout my school career and life. During my childhood I found an interest in nature and how the world works. I found small creatures the most compelling. In elementary school I was always the one answering questions... I moved to the Virgin Islands when I was six years old. My new environment had an even greater impact on me. Going hiking, fishing, boating and swimming gave me another*

avenue to fulfill my passion of exploring the earth. I have also taken horseback riding lessons which fostered a greater love of animals. Not only was I riding but I was also taking care of the horses there. All of my science experiences led me to my career decision which is to become a veterinarian..."

- *"My goal of seeking an undergraduate degree in biology and later attending medical school is a mirror image of the career path laid before me by my parents who are physicians. My mother a physician expired during my primary years of school. Her death and unfinished pieces of research has over the years sparked my curiosity for medicine. My father who has an untiring commitment to medicine has served as a role model for me."*

A number of you expressed a desire to become the next generation CSIs:

- *"[I am fascinated] ...with forensic science.... I dream about solving crimes and catching the bad guy. That's all I want to do in life. Since I was in elementary school I was in love with science. I will proudly admit that I am a science nerd. It's hard to explain, I was just drawn to it. I loved how science told the truth about so many things.. When I found out that science could be used to solve crimes I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. ... There are very few women in the field of forensic science and I'm hoping that one day will change."*

You all have a very strong sense of self, and an appreciation for your individuality:

- *"An individual is a person who stands out in a crowd and isn't afraid to be themselves. I am all these things and more. All throughout my life I have never been afraid to be different. It's my unique qualities that draw people to me and make me the person I am."*

Your vision for your future work takes on some of the toughest issues of your own young lives:

- *"At my 10 year college reunion I will be accepting a Humanity Award for my work with educating teenagers about safe sex, pregnancy and teen parenthood. I started this clinic and plan to open many more. This program means a lot to be because while I was growing up teen pregnancy seemed to be very common among younger children... but they had no idea of how to care for the baby after giving birth... My clinic helps them along with their pregnancy and after."*

You have remarkable creative energies and a strong impulse for entrepreneurship; more than 15% of you want to study business:

- *"By seventh grade I had developed an eye for several different ventures. Some, which included documentary photography, web design, photojournalism.... Tenth grade I'm able to start my own photography agency. ... The summer of eleventh grade.... I decided to pull my political and music industry supports together to help sponsor and support a magazine for teens created and published by me."*

- *“If I were being recognized at my 10 year Trinity reunion... the award would be for accomplishing my dream of creating my own magazine company. All my life I liked to write. I never was the outspoken one, but I always spoke my mind in writing. I wrote poetry, short stories, and songs. Writing is a way for me to express my feelings and really show who I am.”*

Many of you expressed a great affection for writing:

- *“15 years from now... “I have become a New York Times best-selling author and I am known for my authentic, gritty portrayals of inner-city life.”*
- *“A talent that sets me apart from my peers is my passion for poetry. I've always enjoyed writing poems. I felt it was one of the best ways of expressing the way you felt about anything or yourself....”*
- *“Rapping not only allows me to release stress, but it also gives me the opportunity to speak in front of people and showcase my work. I am part of the poetry club at my school and this club has helped me progress as a writer and performer. for the past three years in the poetry club, I have developed from a shy quiet girl to an open and confident speaker..... I plan to study journalism because I feel I am a great writer....”*
- *“Have you ever felt misunderstood or unheard? Well, poetry is the voice to the unheard and misunderstood. It sends the messages with each line, which moves like a song, to the ears of listeners. Poetry is also a good way to express one's deepest feeling, and a good way to release stress... To this day I still write for the youth. To me they are the most important, but the most unheard, and that's why writing for them is so essential. I will forever be a voice for them. I believe that my poetry can save lives maybe even the world.”*

Quite a few of you expressed a sentiment similar to this one:

- *“I will be the first member in my family to attend a four-year university. I would be breaking a barrier and setting an example for my younger siblings. It would be an honor for my family members to see me end a cycle which has become too familiar among us.”*

Some of you know that your decision to be here today is a radical one:

- *“My unusual interest that sets me apart from my peers is I want to go to college and make something of myself. To many people this might not be unusual or strange at all but to many of my peers it is. They set their dreams upon unrealistic things that many can't achieve. Such as: being a rapper, basketball player and maybe even a singer.... I want to be a child therapist...”*

You have already chosen to devote your talents and time to helping others in great need:

- *“I have worked with "at risk" and mentally/behaviorally challenged teens for the past three years. This was a job that I happened to fall into. Being a young woman trying to be an independent adult, I was willing to take any job that paid well. Working at this facility I met young girls who had been thrown into a locked facility just because their parents were unable to care for them. some of the girls were there because they had mental illnesses that they could not control. I came to love my job and love the young ladies that I cared for even more. At that moment I decided that this was what I wanted to do. I made a commitment to help as many troubled youth as I could. To my peers this was something they could not understand... why would a young woman my age rather work evenings with "bad kids than go out and party on a Saturday night? This is where my talent comes in. By taking the jobs that I've had.... I got to display my talent everyday.”*
- *“By joining a youth group, I was able to assist in beautifying polluted streets and abandoned lots... children could not have festivities and play on the now-restored lot. Most of my peers who were in this program were from low income families like myself, however, my mother and I did not let our low income get in the way of helping these kids. With the stipend that was given to me I used it to help buy supplies such as paper, book bags, pens, pencils for my peers....”*

You have struggled with some of the most profound sorrows of human life:

- *“Growing up I have had a lot of obstacles in my life. At the age of 5 my brother that was close to me was shot and killed on the streets of Washington, D.C.”*
- *[Her essay opens with a news story and obit for one of her best friends gunned down in DC gun violence....] “For many residents of many urban communities, violence is a fact of daily life. Innocent children die almost every day in crossfire, drive-by and retaliatory shootings, yet there is little public outrage or sadness expressed outside these communities... Why we are not outraged?... I believe that the spread in violence is mainly sparked by the idea that our young people have no one to show them affection and let them know that they have a promising future ahead of them... I believe that our community leaders should come together and try to resolve this issue not thinking like police but as concerned parents...”*
- *[She describes the murder of her cousin Yusef].... "Now grieving has a permanent place in my heart. Murder leaves your mind in a state of shock, not wanting to know what actually happened. You want revenge, and you need justice, it is a never ending battle.”*
- *[She went to work after high school and had a series of very unsatisfying jobs.. Now she's returning to college 4 years after high school graduation...] “The drastic changes in my life have made me the strong person that I am today. Life experiences are one of the best experiences one can have. I found out I was expecting my precious baby boy, who is now 2 years old! While working my cousin went to war and my uncle was brutally murdered.*

The following year my mother was diagnosed with cancer, my aunt had just died from cancer...Then in 2007 the absolute unthinkable happened to my sister.... My sister, my best friend, my pride and joy was shot dead in a teen club! She was gone forever my sister was 17, in the 12th grade and was so certain of her future she was ready for the world. I was devastated. I wanted to die. I literally wanted to go to sleep and never wake up I lived in a constant nightmare, my reality was unreal. My mother helped me realize I have to fight and be strong like never before. Tilly would have wanted me to be strong for her and fulfill our dream of going to college. So I will do that for my baby sister."

You are very serious about wanting an end to war, a permanent peace:

- *"Since the death of my father, who was a proud Vietnam veteran, I have visited his grave at least four times each year, one for each new season. Each time that I visit my father's grave, I reflect on his service to the country, his desire to provide a peaceful future for the children of America..."*

You are still in recovery from Hurricane Katrina:

- *[She writes about being in a play in 2006 at her summer camp and the play dealt with the effects of Katrina on children]... "...drama was a way to deal with loss and anger from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. ...In the play, children danced, sang and acted out events during the hurricane. Post and during Katrina, children were exposed to rape, murder and the loss of everything familiar and positive. I noticed the children in the camp dealt with the suffering through violence. Children were silenced because of the hurricane, violence and negative images seen on television. Crimes were being committed within the community and children who witnessed these crimes were forced to turn their heads... the images destroyed a part of us and any positive images we had of ourselves. The play helped me deal with my own feeling of loss and anger.. I realized that I had a voice and an ability to help children discuss their problems and the feeling they were experiencing. Drama gives me a voice in order to work with children and help them with their struggle in society."*

You have a definite point of view about the struggles of women, and you want to be the ones who break the molds:

- *"Women all over the world have not been recognized for the challenging and creative accomplishments As an African American woman living in the District of Columbia, one has to be so dedicated and self-sufficient if one wants to succeed. I have lived in DC my whole life and I have seen many women that have just given up.. They have let illegal drugs, unhealthy relationships, and frustration in school construct the way they are going to live there life. I'm tired of seeing women like this hold their heads down. They should be proud to be a woman and to be here in this city. I am going to be the one to make a difference in my community.... I dream of being a successful business woman....Education is my number one priority in life and I am going to succeed in whatever I do..."*

- *“It was not too long ago when women did not have the opportunity to be educated and receive professional preparation. However, I feel that women are succeeding more in society today and becoming an increasingly strong presence in the workforce. I appreciate that Trinity's core values and characteristics emphasize this. This commitment to the education of women is something of interest to me because I want to represent women that receive a higher education and have younger women look to me as a role model. I also feel that so many women believe that they can't go on past high school because of other pressures in life....”*
- *“Where I come from, based on stereotypes the typical thing for me to do is becomes someone's "baby mama" or housewife. Women all over are subjected to these stereotypes. That's why I firmly believe in this college. I want to get educated so that in return I can educate others. We are living in times where women all over the country are taking charge. We have stopped letting the men run America. Women of all ages and colors are top CEO's , managers and things of that nature. Women today are also starting more businesses and always remain great writers.”*

You pay homage to your mothers' struggles and dreams for you:

- *“Like everyone with a dream, I had a driving force inside of me; something that kept me going even though at times I felt like giving up. That force was, and still is, my mother. She is the hardest working woman I know. She carries three jobs. ... Raised by such a strong, selfless confident woman inspired me to take the first step in making the world a better place...”*

You also express much admiration for heroic fathers:

- *“My father has walked with Martin Luther King. He has helped give African Americans civil rights. My father walked, marched, protested and was arrested because he was defending African Americans. He wanted equal rights for all. Because of my father, people of color have opportunities. Schools, bathroom, restaurants, buses, drinking fountains, swimming pools, playgrounds and neighborhoods are integrated....”*

You come from countries that are struggling with poverty and disease:

- *“Growing up in Ethiopia, I always wondered what had happened to the parents of so many young children. I asked different people but nobody was willing to give me an answer. The adults around me felt as though discussing what had really happened was very shameful. As I got a little older I discovered many young children lost their parents to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.” (This led to her strong commitment to working as a volunteer in an HIV/AIDS project)*

You want to go back to your countries to be agents of social change:

- *“My professional goal is to become a diplomat and help eradicate many of the global issues. I would like to contribute to accomplishing the eight millennium goals established*

by the United Nations... One of the millennium goals is education for all. In response to this I thought about where I come from: El Salvador, a third world country where education is not available to everyone. In El Salvador, a poor family would prefer that the boy attends school rather than the girl. According to most families, the male child is more important. What happens to the girls? They stay with the mind set of inferiority and would probably continue to influence their female children not to attend school and in doing so contribute to an increase in illiteracy. Research has also shown that educated women are most likely to encourage their children to attend school and better understand how to manage domestic finances. In addition, if education is provided to women in third world countries, the birth rate would also decrease. This is relevant to decreasing poverty because there would be more food to feed a rational amount of people."

- *"In some countries around the world like some parts of Africa they believe that education is not for girls or women because some primitive African parents believe that women should be at home taking care of the domestic duties in the house and community as a whole while men go to school for education, in this our new generation the idea of education in Africa has changed every girl child has to be educated by any means of provision. I am the first in my family to get a university education so I am determined to press forward..."*

You are the embodiment of the American Dream for your families:

- *"My parents first came to the US because they could not earn enough money in Mexico. They came to California when my mother was three months pregnant. After my birth my father finally earned enough money to return to Mexico with the family. What a gift they gave me --- my citizenship. I was raised in Mexico, the oldest of four sisters. memories of my childhood in Mexico are happy ones.... My sisters and I are the first generation to have the opportunity to go to college... Five months before my high school graduation, my family returned to Mexico. I had to make a choice. I could go back to Mexico or finish high school and follow my dream of becoming lawyer. I chose to stay. Having been around immigrant people, including my own family, who struggle throughout their lives and who survive countless unbelievable circumstances has taught me numerous lessons. The greatest of these lessons is my strength. The reason I endure without my family and continue to achieve my goals is because of those before me who have persisted and continued, despite unthinkable tragedies. I use their example to continue to search for my own dream."*

You are champions of the women warriors of the world:

- *"I could never have prepared myself for what I would experience in the Dominican Republic or how it would change my life forever... For five weeks we did everything from construction on houses to creating and running children's activities as well as bringing resources to other villages where conditions were horrible. I worked in the poorest area of the Caribbean where the majority of the people in our village were HIV positive and many of them starving... I fell completely in love with the women of our village; I got to*

know mothers and children on a personal basis... These women, most of them widowed or abandoned by their husbands, were warriors. Warriors that went hungry for days if it meant that their children would eat. Warriors that would walk for miles, barefoot and with a child on their back, if it meant they could receive medical attention... The courage and strength of these incredible women who fought for survival every day was contagiously uplifting... I made a vow to myself that I would never forget that there are women in this world who struggle for survival but yet smile and live every day to the fullest. these women taught me the meaning of happiness..."

- *"Some of my friends call me a "feminist" or a "raging liberal" because of my belief in equality regardless of race, orientation, religion or sex. I do not think of myself as an extremist, but rather a young woman seeking to make a difference..."*
- *"My goal is to go back to my homeland and provide education to little children who do not have access to education, as well as education women who had no access to education in their lives as growing up in a country that is torn apart by a civil war for the last two decades...the least I can do is teach others what I have learned in the past 20 years growing up in five different countries -- Somalia, Kenya, Egypt, Canada and here in the USA."*

You are grateful for the guidance and love of your parents:

- *"I am truly grateful to have a wonderful mother and father who have always stressed the importance of getting an education and doing the right thing to succeed in life, and because of this, I have set great expectations for myself in achieving and accomplishing my short-term and long-term educational and career goals."*

Sadly, too many of you have known discouragement:

- *"When looking out into the real world there's not really much for Black African American Women to do or get the support we need. As a woman in history I truly believe that men and women should all be equal and not separated. ... Trinity is a place..where the students and staff will treat you like family.... coming to trinity will make me proud of myself because I made it when my family kept me down, I still kept my head lifted high when I was told I couldn't make it in life, and I will never be successful in live..."*
- *"Losing both of my parents at a young age was one of the most depressing times in my life. ... I can remember a time when my grandfather told me that I would never be or amount to anything because I didn't grow up with a mother or a father. To hear that comment, one would shrivel up into a ball and weep. but not me, when my grandfather, my own flesh and blood, told me that I would never be anything in life, I was motivated to get the highest level of education I could get so that I could prove him wrong.. I took that negative and made it a positive..."*
- *"I want to go to college to prove wrong all the people who looked down on me all my life, the people who said that I would be nothing, the people who said that I would let my*

surroundings and personal life get in the way of my education. I want to go to college for those people! I want to graduate from college, but if I do not, I at least want to attend to show that I made it to college level with all odds against me. I want to go to college to be a role model. I want to go to college to show myself that I am intelligent and that I can make it through life and be successful because I made it that way, for myself!... I want to go to college to escape the life of poverty, so that whatever house I walk into I can buy without hesitation because I have a career that pays well that I love! ... I want to go to college to find that everywhere is not going to be like the place you grew up."

You have definite opinions about what's going on politically in this country:

- *"I am an 18 year old high school graduate with massive political views... It seems as I am the only girl my age running around asking my peers whether or not they watched the debate last night, in which they reply, "No, I was watching American Idol." ... In the 2008 campaign it amazes me to be a young woman of African American descent and an African American man is running to become president. It also intrigues me that a woman has the courage to step up in which is believed to be a man's field..."*

This is a world that needs your passion, your engagement, your fresh new ideas so deeply. 110 years ago, a few brave women who were Sisters of Notre Dame looked around and said, "Why is there no great college for women in the nation's capital?" Then, they said, "Why not?" They created Trinity to be a place where women could learn and grow into powerful leaders for our society and their families, agents of change, beacons of hope, advocates for justice and peace, bearers of truth and honor.

The great women who have come before you on this campus have lived up to that vision and mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame each day, famous women like Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi '62 and Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius '70 and thousands more women whose names you do not yet know but who have educated countless children across generations, built great families, led corporations, contributed to the advancement of knowledge in science, created works of art and poetry and literature for the ages, shaped law and policy for states and the nation, built schools and changed lives for the better around the globe.

You are now part of this grand tradition.

And if your own words are any prophecy, you are already a great class, women of compassion, conviction and courage, women who have already heard the call to change the world.

Let's conclude this morning with the words of one of your classmates, a student who was so moved by her research into the tragedy of Darfur that she organized an entire program at her school to raise the consciousness of all of her sister students and her community about genocide. She wrote a poem about that experience, part of which I quote here, and this quotation is also a call to action for all Trinity Women today:

Taking Our Stand

Kyla Roberts, September 17, 2006

*If you look back on your life now could you say you made your mark?
Could you disappear forever into the dark,
and have faith you made a difference?*

*Well, now I ask you to understand
this is our generation and we must take a stand
Many say that our generation has turned out wrong
But I have waited so long
For my voice to be heard
That I will not be stirred
I will make my mark
And as you embark on this journey with me
You will see
Immediately, that in our hands
Lies the life of a man's
So if you dare to be different
If you want to stand out
Take my hand, leave no one out*

*And shout
"I will make a stand against
all that I know is unjust
because this is our generation and we must."*

*You ask me why I took this pledge
If you look over America's safe hedge
Just beyond the sea
The poverty
That clings to the Sudanese
I strong enough to bring a woman to her knees.
In my mind I can understand a lot
But genocide I can not
To rap my mind around 400,000 plus killed
Is like seeing the cup only half filled
People are dying
Children are crying
And yet we stand idly by*

*Why?
We have the power to change it all
And yet we stall*

What are we waiting for?

*Now is our chance
To take our stance
To show the world we will not be cast aside*

*That freedom should never be denied
We should never judge someone on their race, religion or creed
That is not what we need
We need to take a chance
We need to make our stance*

Powerful words, a call to action for the Class of 2012! This is your generation... and you must, take a stand! I am pleased and proud to be able to walk with you on the Trinity portion of your life's journey.

Welcome!