

**Remarks for Phi Beta Kappa
May 7, 2009**

President Patricia McGuire

Congratulations to the 2009 Phi Beta Kappa initiates! Many thanks to the resident members of Phi Beta Kappa for choosing yet another stellar group of new members. Special thanks to Sister Margaret Claydon for her vision and commitment to establishing the Epsilon Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at Trinity in 1971. Thanks to Dean Andrew Steigman of Georgetown, the current D.C. Phi Beta Kappa president, for joining us tonight. And very special thanks and congratulations to Marguerite Kirst Colston, Class of 1989, for tremendously inspiring remarks.

Each new class of Phi Beta Kappa members sets a high standard of excellence for all other members of the campus community to follow. I find myself wishing that all of our students could be in this room tonight to see your high achievements and to find in you the inspiration to persist in pursuing academic excellence. Perhaps we can have some of our new members of the Epsilon Chapter return in August to greet our new students!

You will wear your PBK keys with pride, you will note this distinction on your resumes, and perhaps you will even see to it that this moment is mentioned in your wedding announcements. You can count on obituary writers to do the same.

But between tonight and those occasional moments of recognition, what does this achievement really mean? What will you really do with your Phi Beta Kappa keys?

You hold the keys to high intellectual attainment. We live in an age that begs you to use that intellect to figure out solutions to the challenges of human society.

For nearly a decade, our nation and world have suffered through the antithesis of intellectual leadership. We have allowed the naked exercise of brute force to displace reason and persuasion in our approach to security and advancement of our national interests. These anti-intellectual abuses of power have ultimately revealed themselves for what they really are: the impotent rages of small minds hell bent on destruction rather than effective peaceful solutions. The challenges to civilization remain: terrorism, poverty, stunning domestic murder rates, shameful illiteracy among the children of our cities. Brute force did not trump intellectual firepower.

Thankfully, the people have spoken, and today we see the ascendancy of more literate and intellectual public leadership. More than enshrining the politics of left or right, the new administration embraces the ideal of reason enlarged through higher learning and thoughtful intellectual engagement with the complexities of contemporary global issues. This is an opportune moment for the best and the brightest, the rising stars of the new generation of young leaders like you, the best brains that Trinity can offer to the world that years for your brilliance.

The world also yearns for your honor and integrity.

We have come to the end of the era of dishonesty and deception, the bitter denouement of a decade of self-serving greed supported by fraudulent schemes. Not one life is unscathed by the consequences of the destruction of our economy resulting from the appalling lack of integrity of those who ran the games, played their foolish hands, redefined Ponzi for the era of unsustainable greed.

Trinity Women bring much different values to the marketplace. Our tradition of honor and integrity takes on even greater significance in an era when such concepts take on desperate new significance amid the wreckage of economic security. As Phi Beta Kappa graduates, you stand at the front of a long line of Trinity alumnae through the decades, women who stand firmly for the values of *alma mater* that often go against the popular tide.

We live in the end of an age of ultra narcissism, a time when the pursuit of personal fame, wealth, “American Idol” status, You Tube moments, seems to outstrip all other human concerns. “The Me Decade” has gone on for too long.

Trinity values are the antithesis of this preoccupation with personal celebrity and acquisition. Trinity exalts the imperative of service to others over the impulse to self-glory.

Your membership in Phi Beta Kappa calls you to be exemplars of these Trinity values for generations to come: high intellectual attainment supported by rigorous honor and integrity, all used in service to your communities and places of work, families, nation and global village.

We will look to you for your leadership in service to others. Someday, your banners will hang down through the Well in the same way we have recognized alumnae from other eras. You will be the role models for rising generations of Trinity students.

You have received that special grace that Marguerite Colston spoke of so eloquently; take your grace with you from this day and share it generously with the world.