**2012 Trinity Commencement**

*President’s Remarks Introducing*

*Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi ‘62*

*Former Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly ‘58*

President Patricia McGuire

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For 115 years, Trinity has been a force for the education of women who exert courageous leadership in private and public arenas around the globe. As leaders in schools, corporations, hospitals, media outlets, public interest organizations, social agencies, and communities around the world, Trinity graduates, now men as well as women, have exercised their talents for creative change and human advancement. No where is the evidence of such leadership more powerful than in the public square where Trinity graduates have served our nation as citizen activists, staff on the back stages and leaders on the front pages, judges on state and federal benches, members of Congress and Cabinet officers, elected and appointed officials at all levels of government.

Today we have the great honor of welcoming “home” to Trinity two of the most distinguished daughters of *alma mater*, exemplars of this university’s commitment to the value of public service, pioneers who blazed trails across some of the most challenging terrain in American public life: the halls of the United States Congress: Nancy Pelosi, Class of 1962, who celebrates her 50th reunion this year and 25th anniversary as a member of Congress, former Speaker of the House and now Democratic Leader; and Barbara Kennelly, Class of 1958, former member of Congress whom some of our students have now have the privilege of knowing as Distinguished Professor Kennelly.

Trinity is the only university in the United States to have had two of its female graduates serve at the same time in Congress; for twelve years the Congressional terms of these two amazing public leaders overlapped as they joined forces to advance the causes of justice, equity, prosperity and human rights for all inhabitants of our global village.

In 1982, at the time she made Trinity history as our first member of Congress, from Connecticut’s First District, Barbara Bailey Kennelly was one of only 21 women then serving in the U.S. House of Representatives; there were only two women in the Senate. She joined an illustrious group of women pioneers including such legends as Lindy Boggs, Shirley Chisolm, Pat Schroeder, Barbara Mikulsi and Geraldine Ferraro. No women were chairing major committees at that time, and only several chaired minor subcommittees. Barbara Kennelly soon made women’s history when she became the first woman ever to serve on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and she was the sole woman in the powerful Ways and Means Committee for several years. She earned the confidence of her peers, so much so that she became the first woman ever to earn the office of chief deputy minority whip, and then vice chair of the Democratic Caucus, the highest political position held by a woman at that time. Her achievements in these positions blazed the trail that her alumna sister Nancy Pelosi would follow to even higher office.

In 1987, when Nancy Pelosi won her first election to represent California’s 8th District, there were only 24 women then serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, still only two women senators, and still no women chairing major committees. Congresswoman Pelosi soon followed Congresswoman Kennelly onto the Intelligence Committee, and her achievements over time led her fellow Democrats to elect her as the first woman ever to be the minority whip, and later on, she made even greater women’s history as the first woman to be elected party leader in Congress, and ultimately, the first and still only woman in history to become Speaker of the House of the United States, second in line to the presidency, the highest ranking elected woman ever in this nation.

Today, the 112th Congress includes 76 women in the House of Representatives, more than three times the number that served when Barbara and Nancy started their illustrious careers. 17 women are now U.S. Senators. While we still have a long way to go to achieve real gender parity in Congress --- only 93 of 525 total members are female, just 17% in a nation where women are half of the poulation --- women’s rights and women’s horizons are so much stronger today thanks to the leadership and trail-blazing work of Barbara Kennelly and Nancy Pelosi. They are renowned role models for precisely the kind of bold, courageous leadership we expect all of our graduates to exercise in the public square.

On the occasion of the 50th year since she walked across the graduation stage at Trinity, and her 25th year in Congress, and in reflection on a record of achievements that sets the bar so high for all Trinity graduates still to come, we are so very pleased and honored to welcome our sister alumna, former Speaker of the House and now Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi to this commencement today. And, Leader Pelosi, on behalf of our graduates, thank you for the beautiful gift of your book “Know Your Power” to every member of this graduating class.

To introduce her friend, her protege, her sister alumna and co-conspirator in the never-ending drama of improving conditions and opportunities for women in the highest levels of government of the United States, I am so pleased and honored to introduce my esteemed colleague, sister alumna and dear friend, former Congresswoman and now the most honorable Distinguished Professor Barbara Bailey Kennelly.

**Remarks for the 109th Commencement**

**May 20, 2012**

President Patricia McGuire

Trinity Washington University

When the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded Trinity in 1897 as one of the nation’s first Catholic colleges for women, they did so with an unyielding belief in women’s right to a higher education. They incurred scorn and opposition, even charges of heresy from some conservative quarters. But, ultimately, through their courage and fortitude, the sisters prevailed, and we sit here today, 115 years later, in this glorious manifestation of their vision for Trinity, now a great university.

From the Sisters of Notre Dame we learned how to use the power of this education in service to society, to express our Catholic faith commitment in the active pursuit of social justice in all corners of the earth. Trinity aims to instill in her students of all faiths a passionate commitment to use the intellectual gifts of this education in ministry to the vast needs of God’s creation. In so doing we exalt the Gospel teachings on social justice, which are rooted in the sacred dignity of human life, and articulated in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the globe through advocacy and action to relieve poverty, to improve the health of families, to protect the rights of workers, to care for the environment, and to participate effectively in civic life.

Trinity graduates live these values across the spectrum of human endeavor. In that broad and free pursuit of the ends of education in service to humankind, our graduates develop perspectives and political positions rooted in their own consciences, articulated to the world according to their understanding of their duties in the cultures they inhabit. The intellectual, political and spiritual lives of our graduates reflect the myriad dimensions of God’s creation; this is not an opaque cloth of one color, but a tapestry of infinite richness and complexity.

For our graduates who pursue the most urgent and difficult causes of society in the public square, as advocates and elected representatives of various constituencies, their sworn duties require them to create secular civil laws and public policies that reflect the will of the people for whom the government exists in this democracy. Consequently, the civil policy choices of public officials often align, but sometimes diverge from those that religious authorities prefer as a matter of faith teaching. Differences between political and religious imperatives, sometimes profound and irreconcilable, are inevitable in a democracy where the wishes of citizen constituents establish the obligations of politicians in shaping secular law and public policy, while the right of religious liberty empowers the Church to proclaim its moral teachings robustly. Hence, the duties and responsibilities of public officials and religious authorities are quite different, and this democracy enshrines that difference in the constitutional separation of church and state.

The religious and political arguments of our time are not cavalier differences of opinion, but profoundly conscientious debates about whether and how civil law and religious beliefs can or should ever converge in shaping public policy for society’s most fundamental issues: the right to life, the care for the poor and the obligation of the wealthy, waging war, imposing capital punishment, the definition of marriage, universal access to health care, protection for all of our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, among which are freedom of thought, speech, assembly and belief. Religious liberty draws its nourishment from the same wellspring of those freedoms protected in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, and those freedoms are not divisible.

A Catholic university lives at the intersection of religious imperatives and cultural realities. Our faith calls us to evangelize the culture according to Catholic teachings; our culture calls us to uphold the fundamental principles of academic and intellectual freedom without which the university withers. A Catholic university cannot live its mission in a cocoon of only like-minded congregants, sheltered from engagement with those who have different perspectives, beliefs and obligations. A university’s necessarily broad hospitality toward many different opinions does not signify broad agreement, but rather, the risk of disagreement and debate. Argumentation is as old as Plato, and the dialogue of faith and reason may be humankind’s longest and most contentious intellectual debate. Engaging the debate does not jeopardize our faith; we should only fear for our faith when all we hear is silence.

As a matter of faith, Trinity proclaims Catholic teachings and the essential importance of religious liberty. As a true university, Trinity affirms the robust exercise of academic and intellectual freedom. For the health of our democracy, Trinity promotes the obligation of public service, respecting the commitments of public officials sworn to discharge their civic duties according to the will of the citizens.

To achieve a society where justice can flourish and peace will prevail, we who have the gifts of a great education must work together to reconcile our differences where we can; to accept the reality of disagreement where we must, without recrimination; and to remember that, in the brief time we have on this earth, the ultimate commandment compels us to love one another, and to share God’s love through our humble service to the vast needs of his creation.

Trinity is immensely proud of all of our alumnae in public life. They are exemplars of the expectations we have for all of our graduates to use the privilege of our Trinity education in service to our neighbors, our nation and the world. These women deserve our utmost respect and reverence for daring to engage this contentious society for the sake of improving the human condition.

May they be an example to you, members of the Class of 2012, and know this, from this day forward: throughout your lives, through all of the lovely and strange and difficult terrains you will cross, this *alma mater,* this loving mother*,* will alway cherish her daughters and sons, and she will always welcome you home. In the same way, honor and cherish your *alma mater*, because she needs you and your achievements to witness the worth of her own life in the mission of Trinity writ large to the world.

May the strength, the wisdom, the light and the love of the Trinity will go with you, the Class of 2012, always.