



**Remarks for Commencement 2013  
May 18, 2013**

**President Patricia McGuire**

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Each year at commencement it is customary for the president to address the state of the university and the state of the academy. I am pleased to say that the state of Trinity is quite well. The achievements of this great Blue Class of 2013 are the latest witness to the vitality and durability of Trinity's mission to our city, nation and world. This is a class that has heard the call to action for justice and responded with great passion.

You have walked in the footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights activists in Selma, Alabama.

You have awakened the conscience of our campus to environmental sustainability, worked for the candidates of your choice in election seasons, reached out to help the people of Haiti still recovering from the terrible earthquake.

You have held up and held out "half the sky," seeking ways to improve the conditions of life for millions of women who suffer the terrible afflictions of poverty and oppression each day.

You have learned how to administer medicines, teach children to read, interpret balance sheets and decipher the codes of life in microbes and chemical reactions.

You are already using your Trinity knowledge, skills and values in pursuit of the most important causes of the human community: to ensure human freedom, to confront injustice, to work for peace.

Your achievements are possible thanks to your own hard work and determination, the amazing support of your family and friends, and the wise and persistent teaching and guidance of the faculty and staff of Trinity who have devoted themselves to your success.

Trinity's success, which is really the success of our entire community, has received important recognition this year from benefactors who see this mission as so worthy of their support.

I am pleased to say that the Second Century Campaign for Trinity is winning great support among our alumnae and friends, with about one-third of our total goal of \$30 million now pledged. We have received the largest pledge ever made by a Trinity Alumna, a \$3 million pledge from a member of the Class of 1953, to support our new academic center; and several other pledges in seven figures from alumnae have also followed. We will soon hire the architects who will begin work on the specific design of our new academic center, a project that will still take several years to complete --- but complete it we will with the support of many great benefactors.

Today I am particularly pleased to announce a magnificent gift to Trinity, one of the largest in our history. Joanne and William Conway, through their foundation, have pledged a gift of \$2.8 million to Trinity for scholarships for high achieving low income students who intend to be nurses. The first class of Conway Scholars will enter Trinity in Fall 2013. We are so grateful to the Conways for their magnificent generosity.

I would also like to recognize our D.C. Achievers Scholars who are graduating today. Thanks to the generosity of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the College Success Foundation has been a remarkable partner with Trinity to ensure educational success for students from Wards 7 and 8 in our city. I salute our D.C. Achievers who are graduating, and also recognize and thank Mr. Herb Tillery and Ms. Monica Gray for the amazing support you have given these great women.

While Trinity is thriving today, on the larger stage of our city and nation, education at all levels confronts enormous challenges. Reform of K-12 education is mired in controversy. Standardized test cheating scandals involving teachers and administrators are a blot on the profession. The achievement gap between low income students and all others is widening, with ramifications through college and on into the workforce. Traditional schools are closing, experimental new schools are growing in number, and yet, at least as measured by readiness for college and work, student learning outcomes are languishing.

Meanwhile, at the collegiate level, the academy is besieged by criticism over high tuition prices and mediocre learning outcomes, scandalous misconduct in athletics departments and nasty public fights about governance. Even as student debt burdens increase, state after state disinvests in higher education, jeopardizing access to college degrees for millions of students who can no longer afford the state universities that once were the reliable gateways to economic and social advancement. Private colleges like Trinity try to pick up some of the slack with our own large financial aid programs, but we do not have the financial foundation that public education was supposed to have to invest broadly in citizen education.

To solve the financial challenges, some politicians, pundits and philanthropists propose to displace the liberal arts with job training, to replace faculty with software. Something called a MOOC --- a massive open online course enrolling tens of thousands of students --- is hailed as a cheaper way to educate the masses with no evidence that such a methodology is effective.

Curiously, at the same time, another “massive” event is occurring --- the tsunami of significant new populations of Hispanic and African American students are coming into the academy just

as the political world suggests that this great nation now cannot afford to extend the same kind of robust campus-based academic experience to rising generations that the rest of us enjoyed.

We must not betray the future because of the bad decisions of the past and worse policy choices of the present. Future generations of students should not have to bear so much of the ongoing consequences of the economic crisis caused by bankers' greed and political myopia. And let's not forget that this great nation also found it possible to spend more than \$2 trillion on a decade of wars whose outcomes remain vague. The money for education should not be so hard to find.

In the last few weeks, we have seen more than ample evidence of the reasons why education is essential to sustain our democracy. The abuse of power by government agents is not an isolated fluke --- the problem is as old as the question of Socrates, "Who will govern the people in power?" Absent the robust voices of educated citizens, absent a free press exposing bureaucratic misconduct, a free nation can easily devolve into a state where security always trumps liberty. Sustaining our democracy demands that "We, the People" achieve the highest educational levels possible, because democracy is government by brain, not brute force.

We citizens, we academics, we teachers and educators must redouble our resolve to ensure excellence in education at all levels for the health and vitality of our nation --- not only in the cause of economic productivity, which is important, but even more urgently, in the cause of freedom and liberty.

Among our graduates today, we salute the many teachers and principals, counselors and educators at all levels who will be on the front lines of school reform for decades to come. My challenge to you today: be relentless in your pursuit of excellence for the sake of the children whose lives and careers will be inextricably linked to the power of your good work. Do this for the sake of this democracy, to ensure that today's liberties will be durable for future generations.

We salute the nurses and health care professionals who will be partners with students, parents and educators to ensure that children can succeed in school because they are healthy and truly able to learn without the hunger, pain or emotional distress that afflicts too many schoolchildren in our city. We challenge all future professionals gathered here today --- whether you become private corporate leaders or nonprofit executives or public officials --- to join forces and fortunes in the cause of alleviating poverty in this wealthy city and nation, because poverty is not an "excuse" for poor education, but rather, an impenetrable wall against which children and families feel battered, broken and abandoned. Teachers cannot bear the brunt of remediating the consequences of poverty alone; teachers must join with like-minded citizen leaders hell-bent on tearing down the walls of poverty so that children can thrive.

As citizen leaders, insist that investment in educational opportunity regain its rightful place as a top priority in public policy. Expanding educational opportunity through college completion for more citizens will ensure prosperity for all, and guarantee that America has the elasticity of knowledge, perspective, tolerance, competence and respect for human advancement to

embrace the mid-century demographic changes that will morph the face of this nation to a dramatic new majority.

Members of the Class of 2013: you have worked so hard to achieve this great day in your lives. You are the latest witnesses to the wisdom of our Founders, those brave religious women, Sisters of Notre Dame, who understood the value of a great education to change lives. We have every confidence that you will use these degrees well and wisely in service to our city and the cause of freedom in our nation and world. You will carry the mission of Trinity forward from this day to the far corners of the earth, extending your charity, illuminating hope, revealing your faith, working for justice and peace all the days of your lives.

Congratulations, Blues of 2013!