



Remarks for the Reopening of Notre Dame Chapel Tribute to Sister Margaret Claydon and the Sisters of Notre Dame

Alumnae Reunion Mass, June 1, 2013

President Patricia McGuire

We gather in this beautiful sacred space this afternoon, our beloved Notre Dame Chapel, celebrating its reopening after two years of extensive repairs on the drainage system. Such a mundane issue for such a grand space, but as we all know, age takes its toll on the plumbing and bones of even the best of us.

Thanks to the magnificent generosity of Mary Field Goubeau, Class of 1927, whom we remember with great fondness and gratitude today, the work on the roofs and gutters and drains and downspouts and underpinning of the foundation is complete; the project cost just about a million dollars, supported in large part through the Goubeau Trust. We have more work to do on the interior restoration, the sound system, the future air handling system, and we are so grateful to the Goubeau Trustees for continuing their great stewardship of Mary's trust for the renewal of this Chapel. In a few minutes we will have a blessing of this space as part of our formal reopening.

Let's take a minute to shout out a great thanks to Mary Goubeau!

Salute to the Sisters of Notre Dame

We gather today to celebrate, as well, the Sisters of Notre Dame, whose heritage is our inspiration and great mission in and through Trinity.

Little could Julie Billiart know, when she first gathered her sisters in France to educate the girls orphaned in the French Revolution, that she was launching another revolution in women's advancement that would still be durable and quite necessary 200 years later throughout the global village. Julie's pragmatic direction --- "teach them what they need to know" --- and unyielding sense of mission --- when the bishop of Amiens told her to slow down, she simply moved the work to Belgium --- remain among the most useful characteristics of the SNDs and their heritage at Trinity today. Trinity is a deeply pragmatic institution; we are unyielding in our commitment to this mission. We live this mission in the light of the faith she expressed so

simply, “How good is the good God!” --- not a complicated theological treatise but the animating force for our work in the diverse communities we serve.

Sister Columba’s detailed history of the first seven decades of the life of our *alma mater* reveals that the founding of this college was no easy task. Possessing little more than their firm belief that women had a right to a higher education equal to that of men in those days --- and concerned that Catholic women who were turned away from the young Catholic University would lose their faith if they went to the new secular women’s colleges like Vassar and Bryn Mawr --- Sisters Julia McGroarty and Mary Euphrasia Taylor simply would not take “no” for an answer. Not from local monsignori who harumphed about the possibility of heresy; nor from disdainful male writers who dismissed women’s education as a dangerous frivolity likely to harm women’s reproductive systems and their willingness to be submissive; nor Mere Amiee in Namur who fretted about the appearance of controversy; nor even the pope whose curial cardinals rumbled with displeasure at the thought that the nuns might be up to something of which they might disapprove. (Some things never change!)

But with their smart blend of Sr. Julia’s astute insight into how to achieve results in building institutions, and Sr. Euphrasia’s somewhat reckless enthusiasm for making Trinity a reality, bound together by their powerful faith and amazing fortitude, they persisted, insisted, and persuaded, eventually succeeding in establishing this great institution.

All of us gathered in Notre Dame Chapel this afternoon owe a huge debt of gratitude to those visionary and courageous women who would not take “no” for an answer in their quest to create Trinity. We must thank them not only because their legacy has meant so much for each of us in some way linked to our past lives, but even more because Trinity continues to be a powerful presence and voice to us in each time of our lives. If Julia and Euphrasia were here today, they would marvel not so much at how much has changed, but even more at how much remains the same not only at Trinity but in the world beyond Michigan Avenue. The very same conditions that drove their ardor to create this college still animate our very being more than a century later. The condition and status of women; the imperative to work for Gospel justice; the essential nature of the dialogue of faith and reason in our lives.

I was thinking of how much remains the same just yesterday as I was reading excerpts from the “Foundations” manuscript quoted in Sister Columba’s book concerning the virulent opposition to the founding of Trinity, the fierce assault on the very idea of educated women in 1897. And as I read that material I was multi-tasking, as usual, listening to an online broadcast of a discussion of the virulent reaction in some quarters to the news that 40% of American households now have women as their primary financial pillars --- the “breadwinners” --- and this has stirred up much the same kind of fiercely negative comments about working women as the idea of women’s education provoked 116 years ago. “Social catastrophe” are almost the exact words used in 1897 and 2013 to oppose women’s advancement.

Thank goodness for the courage of the Sisters of Notre Dame who did not let some fulminating monsignori frighten them away from the great causes of all of our lives. Thanks to the Sisters of Notre Dame, thousands of women across twelve decades of Trinity’s life have had the confidence, strength, intellectual breadth and spiritual depth to be full participants throughout

the journeys of our lives. With this strength and confidence, we are able to be of service to others --- our families, our communities, our places of work and throughout the corners of the world we influence. The mission of Trinity, the spirit of Notre Dame, touches and transforms lives far beyond those we can see and comprehend each day. We live the call to action for social justice, the Gospel imperative that we have learned from the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Across the arc of Trinity's 12 decades, we have known and are indebted to so many great Sisters of Notre Dame, too many to name but all of whom have shaped our lives in remarkable ways. They contributed all that they had to found, build and sustain our *alma mater*. Their influence remains strong as our spiritual mothers, the moral authority calling us to remain restless and relentless in our quest to be of service to others, to be beacons of hope and leaders for peace and justice.

Please join me in giving a grateful shout out to the SNDs who are with us today and all who influenced our lives!

Tribute to Sister Margaret Claydon, SND

Among all of the Sisters of Notre Dame, our guiding star, greatest exemplar of Trinity's ideals and role model beyond compare is the greatest of all Trinity presidents, Sister Margaret Claydon, Class of 1945.

Beginning her remarkable journey from New Rochelle to Trinity as a freshman in the Fall of 1941, Margaret Claydon from the start embodied the wit, charm and sophistication of the ideal Trinity Woman, a large intellect with a penetrating sense of purpose, an inquiring mind dissatisfied with the rote, the superficial, the easy way out. She was the English major whose command of language and literature was always a thing of beauty for others to read, to hear, to listen to her cadence. For many of us, hers was the first voice we heard giving life to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Her choice to enter the Sisters of Notre Dame in the year after her graduation revealed the true power of the dialogue of faith and reason in her life.

Her leadership ability was so clear and compelling that not too many years elapsed before she received the call to high office at age 36, becoming one of the youngest college presidents in history in 1959. She led Trinity's great era of modernization in the 1960's and early 1970's through times of great change and frequent unrest in the Church, in Washington, on college campuses everywhere.

Sister Columba writes of Sister Margaret's tenure, "Her long administration spanned years of expansion, of significant change in the city, in the country, in the church, in higher education, and problem years of worldwide unrest reflected in college life by student unrest, of constant financial needs, of radically changing trends in enrollment and in curricular development, and in administrative and faculty organization." (*Trinity College: The First Eighty Years*, p. 99)

Sister Margaret built the library, led the conversion of governance to the lay board, revamped the curriculum, earned the distinction of securing a Phi Beta Kappa Chapter for Trinity, and

became a national spokesperson for women's colleges, women's education and advancement. She served on the great boards in higher education, and was the only woman on a significant delegation of Catholic college leaders in Rome in the late 1960's when Catholic colleges and universities were undergoing a period of dramatic transformation in governance.

We have received many messages of tribute for Sister Margaret, and we will deliver those to her after this liturgy today. I did want to share these words from Bryn Mawr College President Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Trinity Class of 1968, who could not be here today for her own reunion because she is presiding over Bryn Mawr's alumnae reunion:

A message from Bryn Mawr President Jane McAuliffe:

“Sister Margaret was president during my years at Trinity, her influence on my own understanding of effective academic leadership cannot be overestimated. I vividly remember a speech that she made to students in the mid sixties that spoke about leadership as service. I don't recall if Sister Margaret used the phrase "servant leader" but that was the thrust of her remarks. For the first time, I heard about leadership as a collaborative, consensus-building and empathetic exercise. It was about building capacity in others rather than asserting one's own dominance. While her exact words are lost to memory, her ideas have remained with me for decades.

“As I continue to reflect on them and on how they were embodied in her extraordinarily productive presidency at Trinity, I realize that they were a natural extension of the vocational dedication of the Sisters of Notre Dame. What a privilege it was to witness the lives and to be blessed by the generosity of these wonderful women! In the rush and preoccupations of our college years, my classmates and I probably did not think about this much but at some level of consciousness we knew that many of our teachers had given their lives for us. They were devoting themselves to our intellectual and spiritual formation in the hope that we would carry on their tradition of leading by example in our own adult lives, both professional and personal. Their legacy is one that nourished us all and from which, as Trinity graduates, we draw enduring benefit.”

I can only add, personally, to my sister President Jane's words, a great AMEN.

To honor Sister Margaret Claydon on this occasion, I am pleased to announce that Trinity is establishing the Sister Margaret Claydon Scholarship Program for talented students in our women's college who excel in writing, leadership and the liberal arts. I am pleased to announce as well that on this occasion, the Sisters of Notre Dame of the Ohio Province have made a special gift in honor of Sister Margaret Claydon and this gift will help to launch the Claydon Scholars Program.

We can all also agree that we want to be sure that the words and wisdom of Sister Margaret continue to hold a place of honor at Trinity for future generations. I was struck by the phrase in Jane McAuliffe's message that Sister Margaret's ideas remain with her, but the exact words may be lost to memory. We want to fix that for all succeeding generations. To ensure that

Sister Margaret's legacy of leadership and service is known to all those who will inhabit this campus in the future not only through remembrances of others but in her own voice, I am pleased to announce Trinity will undertake a project to organize and publish Sister Margaret's speeches and writings, and along with that to commission an oral history and biographical project that will make her story, her words, her philosophy and achievements accessible to Trinity's future students, faculty and staff as well as to the world of Catholic higher education and educators around the globe.

Sister Margaret: you have been the voice, the face, the spirit and soul of Trinity across more than a half century of Trinity Women. Today we stand together to honor all that you have meant to each of us, and to the Trinity we all love and cherish. And with you, we pray, that the power, wisdom and love of the Trinity will be your constant companions, now and forever.

Thank you, Sister Margaret Claydon!