



## **Remarks for May 2015 Commencement May 16, 2015**

### **President Patricia McGuire**

Each year at commencement it is customary for the president to reflect on the state of the university and the state of the world into which our graduates are marching with great boldness and courage. I am pleased to offer this briefest of summaries of both.

For Trinity, the state of the university is excellent. Our latest graduates in this marvelous Class of 2015 exemplify our highest ideals and reflect the hard work of our faculty and staff.

Among the many achievements in the Class of 2015, we hail many successful science majors who have achieved acceptances to graduate schools and research programs at major universities including Ohio State School of Medicine, Baylor University, the University of Chicago and American University. Social Science majors have received acceptances to the Western Kentucky University Summer Research Experience, the New York University School of Social Work, and the University of Montana . A Nursing graduate in this class joins four other Trinity nurses in the Nurse Residency Program of the Washington Hospital Center Intermediate Care Cardiac Unit.

Trinity is also pleased to announce candidacy approval for our new Master's in Occupational Therapy Program, and we are also starting the Master's in Nursing Program this fall. This expansion of our Health Professions Programs at the graduate level signifies Trinity's strong partnership with the regional health provider community.

The success of Trinity's faculty and students in the sciences and healthcare underscore the need for and excitement we feel about the new science and nursing laboratories being built in the new academic center that we watch grow and develop each day. This time last year we were just anticipating breaking ground for the new academic center, which we did on May 31, 2014; today we see that great building's bones ready to take on the facade, starting very soon; and this time next year, at Commencement 2016, we will be ready to move in!

We also celebrate the success of our faculty. We congratulate three faculty who have achieved tenure this spring: Clare Boothe Luce Professor of Biology Dr. Cynthia DeBoy; Clare Boothe Luce Professor of Mathematics Dr. Kerry Luse; and Associate Professor of Psychology Christopher Bishop. We also congratulate Dr. Deborah Haskins of the School of Education Counseling Program for receiving the Unsung Hero Award for Outstanding Service from the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

We are also so pleased to celebrate the achievements of Trinity alumnae and alumni. We shout out special congratulations to M.B.A. graduate Brandon Todd, Class of 2007, newly elected member of the D.C. Council from Ward 4. Another M.B.A. graduate, Nkenge Harmon Johnson, also Class of 2007, was recently appointed president and CEO of the Urban League

in Portland, Oregon. In Philadelphia, D'Arcy Rudnay of the Class of 1977 was named executive vice president at Comcast, the highest ranking woman in that global communications company. In Boston, Maggie Williams, also Class of 1977, was named director of the Institute of Politics at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. Maggie served in the Clinton Administration as assistant to the president and chief of staff to then-First Lady Hillary Clinton. Earlier this year we were also pleased to welcome to campus the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico Liana Fiol Matta of the Class of 1967.

These and so many other successes enliven our days and demonstrate the great reach and worth of a Trinity education.

The great success stories of Trinity students, faculty and alumnae stand in sharp contrast to the negative rhetoric that afflicts so much of higher education in media and public policy circles today. At a time when every citizen needs even greater educational opportunity to participate even more effectively in the Knowledge Economy --- at a time when millions of previously marginalized students of color are seeking access to higher education --- some dyspeptic voices question whether college is necessary or "worth it," whether we should focus more on specific job training and less on building the large intellectual capacities that foster research and discovery, make innovation possible, and help citizen leaders come together to forge solutions to this small planet's most vexing problems in war and poverty and environmental degradation and terrorism and racism and other forms of human oppression. Dumbing-down the worth of college with an algorithm based on starting salaries suggests that teachers are unimportant, that nurses are not necessary, that counselors and psychologists and nonprofit leaders are not useful, that philosophers and artists should go into hiding, that the future society will truly be a dystopian village dominated by a small wealthy class of technicians who will soon disappear in the absence of nurses to care for them and teachers to educate the next generations.

Seriously, of course everyone needs a good job and a secure paycheck, but the real worth of a higher education is not about money but freedom --- the freedom to know, to search, to explore, to debate, to choose a life's work that is meaningful and fulfilling not merely in economic terms but in intellectual and spiritual terms. A great higher education does not simply lay down rote skills to employ in one line of work --- heaven knows, if most of us relied on the technical skills that we learned when I went to college we'd all be out of jobs --- but instead, a great higher education makes us able to keep learning, provokes the imagination and fuels the engine of curiosity that leads to great discoveries. A great higher education teaches us how to understand and influence human behavior, how to shape and articulate ideas for change, how to root hypotheses in sound research and analysis, how to distinguish among the villains and charlatans and prophets and visionaries of each generation, how to solve problems we never imagined, how to imagine solutions we never thought possible.

For 118 years, Trinity has educated the teachers and civic activists, the caregivers and healers, the community organizers and journalists and writers and public officials and gadflies and goaders and servant leaders who know that the real power of a great education is not in how much personal wealth a graduate can amass for herself, but in how much social value and spiritual richness and public good she can achieve for families and communities. The real

value of a Trinity education is that virtue we learned first from our founders, the Sisters of Notre Dame, for whom social justice is a living, breathing imperative. We measure our effectiveness by the ways in which each and every graduate of this great university works to improve equal opportunity for all, to confront injustice, to advocate for public policies and private practices that protect human life and dignity in all places.

Trinity graduates are not mere bystanders observing the moral crises of our age --- the challenges of poverty and illiteracy, racial and economic injustice, the culture of violence and environmental devastation, issues of grave concern to our Church and to all people of conscience and concern for the future of the human community. Trinity graduates accept their degrees today with a profound awareness of our obligation to use this education in the tireless pursuit of just solutions to the conditions that limit human potential. We reject the idea that the worth of this education or any human pursuit is only measurable in a pay stub; we exalt the idea that what is truly worthy is what we do that makes human life better, more bearable, more peaceful and more secure for all whose lives we touch each day.

Members of this great Gold Class of 2015: you now receive this charge along with your Trinity degrees: to live each day with honor and integrity; to be excellent in your chosen work, and to remain hungry in the quest to keep on learning and pushing the boundaries of your intellectual being; to embrace knowledge as integral to robust faith and spiritual fulfillment; to quest for justice and peace as if the lives of all you touch depend on it, because that's true; and to honor the great women who founded Trinity for you, the Sisters of Notre Dame, through your tireless stewardship of the gift of education as the best hope for future generations.

Congratulations, Class of 2015!