

**From Hashtags to Hope**  
**Remarks for Senior Luncheon**  
*Class of 2018*

May 18, 2018

President Patricia McGuire

Senior luncheon is always such a nostalgic moment for all of us. It seems like we only just met, and now we are saying farewell. But of course, it's not really a final goodbye, because we hope to see each of you as active and enthusiastic alumnae coming back to campus often in the years to come.

This great Green Class of 2018 has so many terrific stories --- stories of courage and persistence, hope and triumph. You have been like the brave Trinity pioneer women of 1900, coming to college often from family and social situations where the idea of college seemed far-fetched, a very long reach, something that once might have seemed inaccessible and even impossible. Now you sit here, about to receive your Trinity degrees, and you are aglow with the joy of success, at the pinnacle of your academic and intellectual lives. You have earned the right to be called something you may never have considered as your title --- you are "scholars," people who have mastered the challenging disciplines in arts and humanities, sciences and social sciences, healthcare and business and education. Along the way you've also played some great soccer, painted houses in Selma, marched for your rights along Pennsylvania Avenue, held down many jobs and raised remarkable children who are inspired by your persistence.

You are also citizens of a larger world, inhabitants of a global village beset by challenges and contradictions of values and purpose, of power and its ultimate corruption in oppression and injustice. Each of you has an identity that is bound inextricably to some of the most difficult and urgent social causes of this historic age. You have lived experience with discrimination and oppression rooted in gender bias, racial and ethnic hatred. You have felt excluded, unwelcome, put down. But you have learned to rise up, speak up, fearlessly make your place at the table, to set your own table to make your statement that you are not waiting on anyone else to give you permission to be who you are, to occupy the space you have a right to be in, to construct lives of meaning and security and achievement and even audacious daring despite the taunts of lesser minds. Your hearts are too big, your ambition too fierce to be constrained by small men.

Hashtags have defined some of the most critical issues of your college days: #BlackLivesMatter, #HeretoStay, #MeToo, #NeverAgain. You know the real stories behind the memes. And you must know, by now, that these issues are not separate and distinct, but all entwined in the ongoing struggle for civil and human rights, the quest for a good society that lives up to the essential values of freedom and justice for all.

#BlackLivesMatter. Ten years ago we might have deluded ourselves into thinking that the election of Barack Obama was leading our country to some kind of "post-racial" nirvana, but the campaign and election of 2016 tore away that fig leaf exposing anew the ever-insidious American sin of racial oppression. Your senior year started last fall with white supremacists

marching across the grounds of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The incidence of racism has continued to rise unabated, seen not only in the ongoing instances of police brutality but in events such as the arrest of black men in Starbucks or random white people calling the police on black people on golf courses, or having barbecues in public parks, or the interrogation of a black student at Yale just last week because she was asleep in the lounge of her own residence hall.

And even with all of this provocation, there are some who say that any expression of outrage about racial injustice, any stance taken in solidarity with the movement Black Lives Matter is somehow complicit in violence, somehow encourages the extreme forces of hatred whose tentacles are wrapped around our political system these days. We must say NO to demands that seek to intimidate protest into silence. I hope your Trinity education has kindled in you a fearless passion for justice, the courage to speak up for what is right, to build collaborative coalitions and to lock arms with allies who may not be like you but who stand in solidarity with you as we work together to overcome this ugly period in American history.

Solidarity is one of the essential principles of social justice, an expression of our care and concern for human life, for human rights and particularly for the poor and vulnerable persons in our society. Our commitment to solidarity at Trinity includes our brothers and sisters who are immigrants, particularly our Dreamers who suffer so much uncertainty and threats to the well-being and cohesion of their families. You are truly #Heretostay and you are a remarkable credit to your families and communities where you are pillars of strength for others. We are in a political era in which our leaders feel free to say the most appalling things about immigrants --- what the president of the United States said just the other day about immigrants should not even be repeated, but it sears the soul and galvanizes our hearts to rise up against such despicable language and the intentions behind it. We hear high ranking government officials speaking casually of draconian, immoral policies that are an affront to human dignity, that deliberately tear undocumented children away from parents and warehouse them on military bases. The wealthiest nation in human history seeks to wall itself off against human misery, and in doing so, makes the suffering a thousand times worse over and over again. We cannot just sit back and accept this moment as any kind of “new normal.” Nothing about it is normal, and resistance is imperative.

The abysmal treatment of immigrants at the hands of our current administration is not separate and apart from the administration’s horrific indulgence of white supremacy and neo-Nazism, twisted threads that run through the political and social ideology of those who claim power through fomenting fear and hatred, through spreading lies about some people --- people of color, people of different cultural and ethnic and religious backgrounds --- in order to secure the votes and support of people who are vulnerable to fearmongering and racist tactics. If you have read history carefully, you will recognize the tactics of fear, the deliberate use of conflict among people to support the rise of authoritarian regimes. As educated scholars you must continue to read history to learn about the present and future; read about Germany in the 1930’s and tremble, and then resolve never to let that happen again in human history.

At the juncture of so many issues we also declare, #MeToo. The #MeToo movement is an interesting phenomenon, something the public might think started among relatively rich and

famous women --- celebrities if you will --- to call out rich and famous men for their sexual harassment and abuse, all power games in the workplace. But actually the movement started well before Taylor Swift and Ashley Judd and other famous actresses and entertainers blew it wide open. In fact, an African American woman, Tarana Burke, created the #MeToo movement in 2006.

I heard Tarana speak the other night as she received the Hubert Humphrey Award for Civil and Human Rights at a dinner for the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights, and she spoke powerfully about the need for solidarity across movements, about the fact that the very same corruption of power that abuses women also fuels the forces of racial and ethnic hatred, encourages and supports the arming of America, mocks the children of the #NeverAgain movement and celebrates each repeal and retreat from once-humane and progressive policies of prior years, policies designed to provide a social safety net for families and children living in poverty, to ensure adequate healthcare for the poor and elderly, to protect children with disabilities in schools and to ensure every citizen's right to vote. Tarana echoed a statement of Vanita Gupta, president of the Leadership Conference, that we are in "a struggle for the soul of America," and they are right. And each one of us must join this struggle with fervor, without fear, and with confidence that we can prevail if we stick together.

So, where do we go from here?

We cannot leave those hashtags standing out there all alone. We cannot just Tweet out our stories and walk away. We need to move from hashtags to hope, the belief that we can make effective, permanent change for the better.

If we say #BlackLivesMatter, we must be committed to working for justice and equity not only in law enforcement, but also in housing, in healthcare, in career opportunities, in support for families and children in poverty, and perhaps most fundamentally in education.

If we express our solidarity with Dreamers who are #HereToStay, we have to lock arms with them, we have to use our powerful voices and influence to insist that our laws and policies enshrine the moral treatment of all human beings to enjoy the lives they have created right here in this vast nation of so much bounty --- we have enough here to share with all, don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise.

If we say we want #MeToo to be the end of the era of wanton sexual harassment and abuse of women, we must not only demand that our campuses and workplaces and churches and other institutions be free of sexual abuse, but also we must be willing to use the economic clout of our purchasing choices to send the message: do not patronize companies that indulge sexual harassment or gender discrimination or racial bias, whether that company is Starbucks or Uber or a major entertainment conglomerate.

To do any of this, we have to get out of our comfort zones, to devote precious time to learning the issues and developing the plans, to immersing ourselves in the hard work of social change not just as a casual hashtag but as a lifelong vocation, to take the risk of being out in front, to take the risk of leadership for the good society.

Who are you to take the risk for leading social change? Trinity alumnae before you have done all of this, and more. Women sat in this very room decades before you, and they probably said, “Who am I to do any of this?” Think of your Trinity sisters who went on to change the world --- Trinity Women like Barbara Kennelly ‘58 our first member of Congress, Nancy Pelosi ‘62 who remains the most powerful woman in Congress, or Maggie Williams ‘77 who was chief of staff to First Lady Hillary Clinton or Peggy Lewis ‘77 who was an advisor to President Clinton or Liana Fiol Matta ‘68 who was chief justice of the Puerto Rico Supreme Court or Susan Burk ‘76 who was ambassador for nuclear non-proliferation or Leah Martin ‘07 and Sydney Cross ‘10 who are diplomats in service to our nation or Philonda Johnson ‘05 who went from being homeless to starting her own charter school or Corinne Cannon ‘99 ‘03 who started the DC Diaper Bank program or Morgan Carillo ‘13 who we heard from at our Sower’s Seed program just this year, a social worker changing lives every day. Take your inspiration from them and countless other Trinity women who took their hard-earned degrees and walked boldly into a world of tremendous need and put their knowledge and skills and values to use in leading social change.

And now, you join that amazing honor roll of great Trinity graduates. You will seize this historic moment, I have no doubt, and you will be forces for good, for change, for justice and peace in a world that needs your fresh thinking and powerful voices so very much. You will be the ones to move us from hashtags to hope. You will lift up the truth, confront the corrupt, and restore confidence in the power of people working in solidarity to make a real difference.

In all of this, you will go forth with the strength, wisdom and love of the Trinity.

Congratulations, Greens of 2018!