

Charge to the Graduating Class

Thank you, Sam, for sharing your story and those inspiring words with our graduates. You make us all proud to be Bantams. And, in just a few minutes, these students will become Trinity alumni creating their own inspiring stories.

As we recognize and celebrate our honorands, another life we honor today is that of our friend and classmate Chase Hyde, who passed away last fall. His death was a profound loss for his family, friends, and our entire community, and his absence today is felt deeply.

In a ceremony yesterday, we paid tribute to Chase by engraving his name on a brick on the Lower Long Walk. Chase's name will endure there, along with the names of his classmates, and his memory will live on.

Before I begin my charge to the graduates, please join me in a moment of silence to honor the life of Chase Hyde.

And now, to the graduates of 2019: You have given me a gift. Gifts aren't always easy to accept, but true gifts are treasured forever.

Do you remember ... it was a hot summer day in early September 2015? We gathered here 'neath the elms for the first time for your Convocation. (There were more elms then, darn that vicious, invasive ash borer!) And that day at Convocation, we gave each of you a brown paper parcel tied with a ribbon. I asked you to unwrap the packages, and inside you found T-shirts signifying your Bantam Network nests, and a new tradition began at Trinity—whether you were in the Book or Brownell nest, the Lemon or Washington nest, the Elms or Olmsted nest, the Cannon or Lockwood nest, or the Minty or Roosevelt nest, YOU will forever be the inaugural members of that nest.

You made history.

Think back to that first day and the days, months, and years that followed ... they went by so, so fast. You made friends for life. You reached out to people completely different from you. You tried new things and visited places that you'd never been, *maybe even downtown Hartford*. You challenged yourselves academically. You protested something and thought seriously about what's right, what's wrong, and what you stand for. You challenged me and pushed Trinity to be its very best.

Along the way, you helped launch initiatives like the Liberal Arts Action Lab, and you advanced environmental sustainability on campus. You achieved academic, artistic, and athletic successes that are simply too numerous to list here. And you have had fun! You made deep, lasting connections with teammates, club mates, and of course with faculty and staff and with me. You have left me with the gift of music—sometimes very, very loud music—living, as I do, across from St. A's and AD.

You know I like it like that.

I love you all, really I do. But there are a few of you who have touched me deeply.

Simran Sheth, you brought an energy and enthusiasm and a love of culture to Trinity. You invited me to every event that you organized with a beautiful invitation. You reminded me of your name for

three years, and you did so with a smile! You filled the Washington Room many times with joyous people and more importantly with your warm, generous spirit. You tried to bring me a cake on my birthday. Today, you have received the Trustee Award for Student Excellence. Simran, you ARE a connector.

Kristina Miele, you helped found Stella, a new sorority, on campus. You expressed yourself beautifully in dance concerts. You were a mathematics major and models and data minor, and of course you were president of the Student Government Association. You learned that leadership isn't always easy, but it's incredibly satisfying. You were always gracious and thoughtful, leading with a strong moral compass. You have emerged from your experiences here wiser and more resilient. Kristina, you ARE a leader.

Michael Zarra, you were the President's Fellow in neuroscience, the highest honor that your department could bestow upon you; your love of neuroscience and Trinity were contagious. You strategized with me about how to create a vibrant intellectual community at the college, one that would outlast your time here. You designed and executed the very successful Creative Brain Series here on campus. I am certain that is only a preview of what you will do in the future. Michael, you ARE a doer.

To all three of you, and so many more who have touched me, *you have left an indelible mark on this place and on my heart. That is a gift.*

In case it's hard for you to see the progress that's been made at Trinity because you're so close to it, let me share a little perspective made possible by some time and distance. As I stand here and look out at this beautiful sea of faces, from around the country and around the world, and from every possible background, I am distinctly aware of how impossible this would have been just 50 years ago. Nearly every aspect of this would've been impossible, including the fact of an African American woman as president of Trinity College.

It was just 50 years ago that Trinity committed to admit women as students. We have been honoring that monumental time in our history with a celebration of 50 years of coeducation—a celebration that will continue next year. Those women in the Class of 1973, the first to graduate after four years at Trinity, were pioneers, and many of them have remained deeply committed to Trinity and to its continued evolution and progress. We are forever grateful for their strength and commitment to propel this historic institution into the future.

And now, that tradition is in your hands. You have been given a great gift: a Trinity education. You have been given teachers, mentors, and coaches who care deeply about you and have pushed you to be your best self. You have learned to be problem *finders*, not just problem solvers. You have been a part of a caring community of staff and administrators who have frequently run interference behind the scenes so that you can thrive. You have been helped by alumni who have provided you internships and jobs and welcomed you to the network of Bantams. You have been supported by family and friends who rooted for you along the way. You have lived in a city that offered some fun and great food, but a city that brings into sharp focus some of the deep divides in our society and how you can make a difference in bridging those divides. You have a real-world context for your liberal arts education.

What will YOU choose to do with this gift of a Trinity education? How will YOU empower others?
How will YOU transform the world?

I will treasure forever the gifts you've given to me. I can't wait to see what you do with yours.
Congratulations, Class of 2019!