

Remarks  
Matthew Rivera, Class of 2020

Good morning, and congratulations to the Class of 2020! I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge all the families, friends, administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, community members, and all others 'neath the elms of our dear old Trinity. This is truly a beautiful moment, and I am grateful we have the opportunity to celebrate with one another.

I think the most beautiful part of celebrating success in whatever form or fashion is the gathering of people through presence and/or memory. It is the idea of a shared community. Through our celebrations of success, we gather with the people we could not have done it without, those who may not have had such opportunities, and those we wanted to make proud. Look around ... what a privilege it is for us to be in community with one another.

And for those who may not have anyone present or who do but are also holding onto people through your memory of them, my heart is with you, too. For those who acknowledge and remember the people who are no longer with us, the ones who could have been here two years ago, but not now, those who did not have the access or resources to get here, those who were influential but unaccepting, and those who are yet to come and we are seeking to pave the way for them. I invite us all to live in this moment of acknowledging community through both presence and memory. As we all think back to these people and the respective stories we share with them, we understand that this success belongs to them as well. Can we give them all a round of applause?

Success also belongs to the Class of 2020 as a collective, and I want to revisit the last time we recognized that. March of 2020 to be exact. We all started receiving the news around COVID-19. And before I go any deeper, what I am about to say probably was not the best idea, but in our defense, we honestly did not know better. It was then that we all began gathering. In the Crescent parking lot and all throughout campus, although sad and confused in the moment, I never felt a stronger sense of community, and I am sure we can all agree. We made our relationships with one another a priority and recognized that the only way to weather the storm that was in front of us was to do it together. And even after COVID-19 disrupted our ability to be in community through proximity, we learned to do so virtually. It was through our unique care for one another that we successfully made it to the end of the semester despite all the many moments of just wanting to give up when we realized our time apart was more than just an "extended spring break." Success belongs to us because when it mattered most, we did it as a community.

And lastly, success belongs to you, and when I say that, I mean each of us individually. We must never forget the very lifeline of success has a pulse because it beats through you. I think sometimes we forget that. We can get so caught up in the pursuit of titles and accolades, all while trying to live up to the standards set before us by society, we forget to applaud our own success. And if we're not

careful, we can so easily go through this entire weekend without being proud of ourselves for such an accomplishment. But I remind *you* that we graduated in a pandemic, and I'm even speaking to myself, that we graduated during a time where the whole world stopped. During a time where most businesses and institutions lost their footing. Some of us pursued further education during one of its most uncertain times. Some of us were forced to enter probably one of the most difficult job markets. And through all of that, here *you* are. We all deserve the right to be proud of ourselves. During these past two years, each of us inevitably had those "me vs. me" moments, where even if so much was done around us and for us, we had to face ourselves, show up, put the work in, and really make it happen to be able to share in this moment right now. Nobody can take that from us. You know your story. So yes, share this moment of success, but do not forget to own it for yourself as well.

The unique part of living through the introduction of the pandemic during such a pivotal transitional period of our lives was that we were able to reinvent and maybe even discover the talents, gifts, and abilities that lie deep within to shine during a moment like this.

And lastly, of course, we are the Class of 2020 because we perfectly executed the vision. To make manifest the mission of this institution by engaging, connecting, and transforming. The beauty of our engagement is that it went far beyond the classroom. I think back to how we used what we learned in classrooms, at club meetings, and on athletic fields to engage the city of Hartford and beyond. And here we are today, engaging one last time by reminiscing the past six years of our lives, and the question becomes, how do we walk from this quad into the greatest versions of ourselves? How do we go out and be all that we have ever dreamed of? How do we go off and live transformed lives?

What is interesting about Trinity's mission statement is that the word "connect" lies between "engage" and "transform." I'd like to argue, if this institution taught us anything, if COVID-19 taught us anything, and if this very moment of shared time teaches us anything, it's that the bridge we need in order to walk into our transforming lives lies within the power of our community. That is what "connect" means at its core: building community. Although your community and my community may look different. Although our communities may have evolved since we last gathered. Even if these past two years have interfered with our ability to be in community with each other. We still all are here together, everyone under the sound of my voice, on a day like today to represent one community as Trinity College Bantams.

So the charge is to live transformed lives and to make this world a much better place for such a time as this, but remember that it is powered by community. Let us enjoy one another's presence. And let us hold true to the ideals of community by accepting one another, accepting who and what we come from, and standing boldly to represent all that this community embodies. However you feel led, share in the community today, for we will never be together like this again. Seize the moment to

build and connect in community so we might leave this place ready to continue to live transformed lives.

Congratulations again to the Class of 2020. Thank you!