

President's Address Pres. Beasley

To our graduates, their guests and loved ones, and all gathered here today, it is my true honor to address you as we celebrate this wonderful milestone. As the first order of business, let us pause and recognize all who made our graduates' journeys possible.

Will the faculty in attendance please stand as you are able so we may salute you and your colleagues? Our faculty have the supreme responsibility of educating, challenging, and mentoring our students, inviting them to join in discovery and learning. Thank you.

Will the Trinity staff members joining us today please rise to receive our appreciation? Our staff members ensure that the educational experience we offer here at Trinity is indeed transformational, both inside and outside the classroom, and we thank you.

Will the representatives of the Board of Trustees please stand and be recognized? Our trustees serve faithfully as the university's fiduciaries, responsible for Trinity's enduring excellence from generation to generation. Thank you.

Will all Trinity alumni now stand and be acknowledged? Our alumni ensure that Trinity is known. They represent our university around the world, demonstrating that a person with a Trinity degree makes a difference, and they do that through what they learn here. Thank you.

Now, will the families and loved ones here today please rise as you are able? You have made many choices, some easy and some more difficult. And you've even made sacrifices in order to bring your graduate to this moment on this day. Therefore, this day is your day, too, and we thank you.

There are so many others here today and also watching from afar who have cheered for their student ever since they began their journey. And they are cheering today. These include family, friends, and in many cases, scholarship donors—people who you don't even know, who believed so much in your potential that they made your education possible. Let's show them our gratitude, too.

I have one more request, perhaps the most important one. Degree candidates, will you please rise and join me in applauding everyone who has made this day possible for you?

You may be seated. Thank you.

As president of Trinity University, I do not have a favorite class. I'm proud of all our students and graduates. However, Class of 2026, we share a special bond: We started our Trinity journey at the same time. Like most of you, this is the culmination of my fourth year at Trinity. That makes me a senior, too, in the best sense possible. After today, I'll be a fifth-year senior.

I remember our first day of class. August 22, 2022. I remember it was hot that day, as hard as that is to believe in August in San Antonio, and I also remember it rained that day, it stormed. Do you remember?

You might have been far from home and loved ones, wondering if you made the right decision. But soon the skies cleared and we found our rhythm, you with your academic work, me with the business of the university. We shared our first Fall Family Day in October. As 2022 ended, our

first semester was behind us, and the years have moved quickly since then. Now look at us. Look how far we've come.

Like you, I've learned a few things in my four years of living and learning on this campus. For this year's commencement speech, I want to share three of those lessons.

1. Learning requires accountability. Before I came to Trinity, I thought I knew what was required for learning: determination, capability, challenge, some degree of failure, resilience, and, of course, teachers. Now, I know there is another requirement: accountability.

Amer Kaissi, professor of health care administration here at Trinity, who studies leadership, talks about accountability in his book *Humbitious*.

Dr. Kaissi's research shows that in an organization, for people to learn new behaviors or methods, leaders must create an environment that is psychologically safe while also requiring high accountability. This is an environment where people feel empowered to participate and also take ownership of their decisions. People know they are supported and also know that the path ahead is theirs to walk. And when they decide to walk that path and take responsibility for their education, formal or informal as those lessons may be, they learn, they grow.

What's also interesting is that when these things—accountability and safety—are not both present, there is likely no learning.

For example, when safety and accountability are both low, there is apathy, inertia. There is no motivation to change because change is terrifying. Better to keep things the way they are, the way they have always been.

And when there is high safety but no accountability, people are too comfortable. They're not having honest conversations or tracking outcomes. They're not achieving goals. It's just good vibes!

If accountability is high but people don't feel safe, that's a recipe for anxiety. They know they will be judged without having any way to defend themselves or an opportunity to try again after they fail.

Whether you go on to teach third grade, organize community events, or run a Fortune 500 company, you will be leaders. You will have to think about how your choices influence those around you. So remember this: Other people will feel confident and empowered when you provide an environment with high psychological safety and high accountability. That's what we all need to learn.

2. Listening does not mean agreeing ... and listening may be even more important than agreeing.

For the past two years, I have taught a class here at Trinity. More accurately, I have co-led a one-credit class with three other faculty members called "Listening."

Contrary to the name, we don't just sit around in a silent classroom listening for noises. We actually talk, and we guide students through learning the wide range of skills required to

listen—to listen with empathy instead of quick judgment, to listen critically to make our own decisions, and to listen to new ideas so our imaginations can grow.

Early last semester, we read an essay by the late author Harriet McBryde Johnson about how to listen to someone who doesn't value you, someone who may not even think you are their equal as a human being. It's a very hard thing to do ... and a hard thing to talk about ... and yet that day, I had one of those moments when teachers learn from their students.

The discussion turned to relationships, and one student who is graduating here today, Seven Aguirre, a computer science major and music minor from San Antonio, said, "Relationships are not about finding people you agree with, but about finding people worth forgiving."

Seven, would you raise your hand, please? Thank you.

Seven's insight that day was so elegantly succinct, and it has stayed with me. What IF everyone is worth forgiving?

I caught up with Seven to find out more about this wisdom.

"It's important to have friends who support you," Seven says. "But if you're in an echo chamber, it's hard to learn."

Indeed. If everyone agrees, is anyone learning? Is anyone growing?

Consider the inverse. Be the friend who listens with care and empathy, and be the friend who knows how to disagree respectfully. We want to be in relationships with people who help us learn and encourage us to grow. Listening does not mean agreeing. It means I care enough about you to listen to you even though I do not agree. That level of caring for each other should be our goal.

Seven has a best friend he's known since elementary school.

They care about one another, but they also challenge each other. "It's nice to have someone who's not always affirming what you say. That's the only way your understanding of the world as something bigger than yourself can evolve," Seven says.

When a disagreement festers into a falling out, make sure the person is worthy of your forgiveness. Forgiving, Seven says, also helps you grow.

May your relationships—work, school, personal, familial—be among people who understand that listening does not mean that you agree with them, or they with you. It does not mean that either person capitulates, sacrifices ideals, gives up, or gives in. It means you care.

3. When you set your personal goals, consider the one I've heard Roan Erwin state about his time at Trinity: "I want to leave this place better than I found it."

Roan is also one of our degree candidates. Roan, would you raise your hand, please? Thank you.

Roan's a finance major, and in his first semester, he learned about commercial real estate in a class called "The History of American Business and Capitalism." The idea of commercial real estate lit an interest in Roan, and he started looking for ways to learn more. There was a real estate club on campus, but it was dormant and about to be deactivated. Roan saw potential for the club to bring Trinity alumni working in commercial real estate together with students who have an interest in it.

Dr. Shage Zhang, a professor of finance and the associate dean of the Michael Neidorff School of Business, heard what Roan was doing and reached out to him. With her leadership and mentoring, the two put together an annual conference that brought alumni to campus. They made site tours to lay eyes on commercial real estate. Dr. Zhang created new courses for the business school curriculum. Roan added officers to the club and gave them agency to create its future. And by engaging our alumni, they created connections for our students with the potential for internships and future employment.

"What's cool," Roan said, and I quote, "is that I'm being molded by Trinity, but at the same time I'm molding what future Trinity students get to experience."

Indeed, Roan.

Roan is leaving the real estate club, the department of finance, the Neidorff School of Business, and Trinity University better than they were when he arrived.

What makes this story really interesting is why Roan feels the need to leave things better than when he found them. As a middle schooler, Roan says he was a troubled kid. He interrupted class and argued with teachers. He was lost, confused.

But a coach saw potential. He spent time with Roan, introduced him to kids from other parts of town, took them hunting and fishing. With time, and proper attention, Roan became the dynamic young man we know today—a star student and also a student-athlete on our football team who has made the Trinity Dean's List for five semesters here—not an easy achievement.

Yet Roan remains humble. "I've been impacted by change," he said, and again I'm quoting: "I try to pass that forward."

You can expect his career in commercial real estate to leave entire communities, even the city, better than when he found them.

Finally, you all leave our campus today, and that can be very emotional for those of us who have accompanied you on this journey. You have learned, and you have learned how to facilitate learning in others with accountability and psychological safety. You have learned how to listen with intent and empathy, and how to process what you hear, what you absorb in the world critically, and that listening does not mean agreeing. And you have left us better than you found us.

Thank you for that. Thank you for entrusting us with four years of your life, for letting us be your partners in intellectual and interpersonal growth. Just as the Trinity University faculty and staff have worked diligently to instruct and support you, you have enriched our lives, just by being you and learning here.

Today, you are commencing into your lives vastly more prepared than you've ever been before, and we are grateful to have played a part in your growth. Thank you.

Now, I'd like to introduce Omar Ratrut, president of the Student Government Association. A native San Antonian, Omar is a senior political science major with minors in sociology and philosophy. In addition to his role as the president of the Student Government Association, Omar worked as an intern in the Admissions Office and served as the judicial chair of his fraternity, the Omega Phi. Omar is applying to law school to pursue his academic goals after graduating today.

Please welcome Omar Ratrut on behalf of the graduating students.

Charge to Graduates Pres. Beasley

Congratulations to you all.

For my closing words, I'd like to continue a tradition by reading an excerpt from President James Laurie's address to students more than 50 years ago. As he told the graduates then:

"Of itself, your degree is no certain mark that you are an educated person. That will be revealed by what you do with what you are—and what you have—and what you know. True education translates knowledge into character and action."

I look forward to seeing your true education—your Trinity education—get translated into the character and action our world needs.

I look forward to seeing what that looks like for you, and I look forward to seeing you as Trinity alumni, making us all proud.

Congratulations!

We will now enjoy the singing of the Alma Mater led by one of our talented student performers and one of our most recent graduates, Jake Cipolla. Please rise, if able, and remain standing through the benediction.