



Charge to the Class of 2025
President Joanne Berger-Sweeney

Good afternoon, Trinity College!

“All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change.”

When I read these profound words from *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler, I knew I had found the theme of my Commencement address to this class—my last time as president and my farewell to this great institution. At this juncture of beginnings and endings, I am struck by how perfectly these words capture our shared journey.

Change is, indeed, the only constant.

It is a joy and an honor to stand before you to celebrate the Class of 2025. Together, we look back on a time of growth, accomplishment, and resilience—a time of change for Trinity and for each of you. What an extraordinary journey this has been!

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to remember Ryan Chisholm, a member of the Class of 2025 who died too young. We honor Ryan with a seat at this ceremony and with a fond remembrance in our program and in our hearts.

Throughout my 11 years as president, my speeches usually have involved books. But I’ve been thinking about how music plays a pivotal role in our lives. So this year, my final year, I thought I would reflect on the iconic soundtrack of my presidency. To me, these songs will forever mark the moments of triumph, challenge, and transformation that we experienced as a community.

In 2013—you perhaps were in middle school—I first visited campus and walked through Williams Memorial Arch, marveling at the Chapel on my left and the Long Walk on the right. I felt at home; I was *happy*! And Pharrell Williams’s “Happy” was everywhere. It was my anthem of joy and optimism, and I believed that together this community could be a place where every student felt empowered, and—yes—happy.

In 2014, we were building momentum. And what better way to capture that than with Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars’s infectious “Uptown Funk”? We strutted around campus, full of confidence and a sense that nothing could stop us.

But the world wasn’t always a dance party. In 2015, Adele’s “Hello” came out. That year was about connecting, about reaching out and saying “hello” to the challenges we faced—not just as a college but as a global community.

In 2016, Rihanna's "Work" became our anthem. We rolled up our sleeves, and Trinity got to work on the Campaign for Community, which engaged students in transforming the campus culture. We expanded our programs and reinvented our admissions practices. We worked hard with a shared sense of purpose.

The next year, 2017, provided a little magic. "A Million Dreams" from *The Greatest Showman* reminded us that our dreams weren't just individual aspirations—they were collective, too. We created Summit, the strategic plan, and imagined a future where the community would be a beacon of excellence, inclusion, and creativity.

In 2018, Ed Sheeran's "Perfect" struck a chord. The world felt complicated, but we knew that we were working together to create something that was, indeed, "perfect" in its own way—unique, flawed, but nevertheless beautiful.

Billie Eilish's "Bad Guy" brought us a bold, unapologetic energy in 2019. We didn't have to conform, we could question the status quo. We encouraged our students to be the quote, unquote "bad guys" but in the best possible sense—to think critically, to disrupt norms, and to fight for a better, more just world.

And then came 2020. COVID-19 and national unrest rocked our world with new dilemmas and uncertainty. The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" became our anthem of resilience. And the lights weren't just blinding—they guided us forward, even in the darkest of times. We adapted. We innovated. And we never lost sight of the future.

In 2021, we saw the rise of Bad Bunny's "Yonaguni," reminding us of our vulnerability as humans and the importance of moving forward to follow our passion to the ends of the earth—or at least to an island in Japan.

As we emerged from the darkest days of the pandemic, in 2022, Harry Styles's "As It Was" became a metaphor for this new era. The world was different, but we grew from lessons of resilience and empathy.

Through all the ups and downs, we've learned what's most important: to change the reflection we find in the mirror. In 2023, Michael Jackson's song "Man in the Mirror" in *MJ the Musical* reminded us that change starts within each one of us.

In 2024, Beyoncé reminded us that the game of life is about risks, strategy, and, yes, a little bit of gambler's luck in the song "Texas Hold 'Em." During our Bicentennial, we reflected on 200 years of risk-taking and strategies to reimagine our future with an entrepreneurial spirit.

And here we are in 2025. "For Good"—from *Wicked*—is the perfect song to close this chapter in our lives together.

"And you'll be with me," my final class of Trinity graduates, "like a handprint on my heart."

"I do believe I have been changed for the better." *For good*, we have grown together and created a community that will continue to flourish well beyond our time here—*we* are the handprints on Trinity's and one another's hearts.

What a special year this has been—your senior year at Trinity. Despite tumult in the world, you have brought joy to this campus. We enjoyed amazing performances such as *Baltimore*; we celebrated The Chapel Singers, which at 200 is the oldest student organization on campus; students excelled in their studies and won Fulbright and Goldwater Fellowships; our athletics teams were simply superb, including bringing home two national championships, so far; we piloted a J-Term Tuck Business Bridge program; and we are opening a new wellness center! And while we had tense moments over divestment and admonitions, even in moments of disagreement, we managed to bridge divides and to emerge stronger.

I will take this opportunity to thank some people who have been so important to me over the last 11 years: my family, Urs, Clara, and Thomas—you have provided me with unwavering stability and love; John Michael, for more than 10 years, we worked out together, and you kept me in balance—how beautiful it has been to jog on the track together with the Chapel on the right and a sunrise on the left; Campus Safety officers, ABM, and Chartwells, you watched over my home (yes, I *do* live on campus!) and kept my entire family safe and cared for, always with a smile; my senior leadership team and the President's Office, you demonstrate your love for the Trinity community every single day, sometimes unnoticed but always constant; all students, you have kept me honest and continually inspire me to change for the better; the faculty and staff—your dedication is what keeps our community connected to one another and to Hartford; and our trustees and other alumni—your passion for Trinity is unrivaled and true; please always remain involved with this place.

Finally, graduates of 2025, I leave you with this:

You are the legacy of all who have come before you, and you are carving the path for those who will follow.

The world is waiting for you—for your passion, for your persistence, and for you to engage it with gusto. Life will not always be easy, and it will not always be perfect. But you must believe that you can make a difference in a world that needs you. Take the lessons of intellectual engagement, persistence, and leadership that you've learned here, and pay it forward with determination and heart.

Be filled with hope for the future, gratitude for the lessons of the past, and joy for the journey we've shared. *You* are the change makers, the dreamers, and the doers.

Like you, I leave Trinity ready for a major life change. I look forward to retiring, ready and excited for my next chapter. So, let's not fear change. Let's face it, embrace it, and shape it.

All that we touch, we change.

Congratulations, Class of 2025. We are so proud of you. And I hope that when you hear our songs, you will recall this moment and Trinity with fondness and love. Always remember—once a Bantam, *always* a Bantam. *For good.*

Thank you, Trinity College. It has been the honor of my life to change and to be changed alongside you. ONWARD!

