

Remarks by Jaidyn Barber

For the School of Education at Trinity's 123rd Commencement, 2026

Thank you, President McGuire, for the introduction.

Good evening, everyone.

President McGuire, professors and staff, friends and families, and most importantly, the graduating class of 2026, thank you.

My name is Jaidyn Barber, and it is an honor to stand here and represent the School of Education.

First, can we give our class of 2026 a round of applause.

Fellow graduates take a moment and look around. Every person sitting beside you has a different story, stories filled with sacrifice, determination, self-doubt, growth, and perseverance. And somehow, through all of it, we made it here together, at this moment.

Before we move on, let us thank the people who helped to get us here.

To our families, friends, mentors, and professors, thank you.

Thank you for the encouragement, the reminders to keep going when things got rough, and yes, the financial support. We share this accomplishment with you.

To be honest, who I was when I first joined Trinity is not who is standing here today. I came to Trinity after taking a gap year during COVID.

At the time, Trinity was just a quick pit stop on the way to where I thought I *really* wanted to be. I started here as a nursing student, convinced I had it all figured out.

But somewhere along the way, I realized I didn't. Something changed. Trinity became a part of me.

What made me stay was the heart of Trinity. It was the professors who didn't just teach, they noticed. They noticed when we were trying, when we were struggling, and when we were growing.

It was the classmates who turned those 6:30 PM evening classes into something we looked forward to.

It was the way the people here genuinely care, not just about our grades and achievements, but about us as humans.

I know I am not the only one with a story like that. Many of us came here uncertain, overwhelmed, or questioning what was next. Yet, here we are, changed. More confident. More prepared for the future than we ever imagined when we first arrived.

Now I know our future is looking a little...*blank page-ish* right now, which is honestly a little scary considering I still checked Moodle on Tuesday even though I know there are no more assignments due.

But in all seriousness, stepping into this next chapter can feel uncertain. The world that we are entering is constantly changing. And as graduates from the School of Education, we know better than anyone how important it is to adapt, lead with compassion, and continue learning even when we think we have all the answers.

So today, I want us all to take a moment.

Close your eyes and remember who you were when you first arrived at Trinity.

Families and staff, think about who you were then as well.

Now take in everything that's happened between then and now: the missteps, the growth, the challenges, the wins.

The moments you thought you couldn't do it and the moments when you knew you could.

Think about the lectures that challenged us. The professors who believed in us. The classmates who became friends. Think about the experiences that shaped who you are, not just as a student, or a professor, or an employee, but as a person.

Because the person who walked onto campus years ago, is not the same person who is sitting here today.

We have evolved.

That is the heart of education. It stretches far beyond grades and credentials. It's transformation.

As future educators, advocates, and leaders, we're stepping into roles where our influence goes far beyond lesson plans. We'll enter classrooms and communities where what truly matters isn't how perfectly we explain something, but the trust we build and the humanity we show.

That is the real legacy of our work.

And while today is a celebration of everything we have accomplished, I also hope we remember not to rush what comes next.

Every chapter of our lives eventually becomes a story we tell. So be present for this one.

Don't spend so much time longing for the past or worrying about the future that you miss the beauty of right now. One day, you'll look back on this moment with nostalgia. So while we're here, let's truly be here.

Class of 2026, we made it.

Wherever life takes us next, I hope we continue to serve others and become people our younger selves would be proud of.

Congratulations, graduates. And thank you.