



Dear Bennies,

You're a year out from college, and now you're figuring out what you've really learned ... about yourself, life and how to thrive in environments that may not have been prepared for a courageous, strong and bold College of Saint Benedict graduate.

As you reflect on who you were and who you've become, I would encourage you to also think about how you've created space for your sisters – not just the ones who graduated with you from CSB, but all the women you encounter throughout your days who are struggling, discovering, thriving, living, succeeding and persisting. They need your support, acknowledgement and encouragement as much as you need theirs. You are perhaps now more aware of how interconnected you can be with others, if you choose to allow their lives and experiences to impact yours. Please honor their truths and lives and allow yourself to be changed. Co-create a sisterhood of opportunity, empowerment, agency and access.

The strength you possess, borne from a life lived and a degree earned from CSB, will provide the foundation you need to continue to venture out and take risks, and then move forward anyway when things don't turn out as planned. And of course, you'll encounter others who are doing the same: trying to figure it out as they take each step. As you are able, lovingly hold them accountable and forgive them as appropriate, and learn together from mistakes made and adventures experienced. Please be sure, though, that as you live your life fully and authentically, you also allow others to do the same.

If there's anything I hope you choose to do as a life-long learner, it's to continue to discover more about yourself and others and improve your skill in synthesizing this ever-new information to form healthy relationships with others. Our world (and perhaps your own lives) needs more people who care, think and act in ways that build up instead of tear down. As we understand more about the folks with whom we share the planet, it's imperative that you develop the confidence, competence and comfort necessary to interact, learn, work, serve and live with people who have vastly different backgrounds and life experiences from your own. Please don't allow yourself to be complacent in building your skills and become a better person who allows others to shine as brightly as they can, while allowing your own light to shine, too.

The choice is now yours whether you'll continue to nurture what you've been taught and encouraged to learn in service to yourself and the world.

I wish you the best as you live an authentic and full life.

Brandyn Woodard
Director, Intercultural and International Student Services

