

**ALANNA MITCHELL PRESENTATION FOR DSL, 8 MAY 2012, TRINITY COLLEGE,
TORONTO**

Chancellor, Acting Provost, Honoured Guests, Faculty of Divinity graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am honoured to present Alanna Mitchell for the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Letters, *honoris causa*.

Tonight Alanna Mitchell returns to her alma mater with a record of excellence going back to a BA *cum laude* in English and Latin Literature from Trinity! Her wide-ranging curiosity, research skills, critical thinking, and writer's talents were fostered here. She subsequently gained a journalism degree at Ryerson University.

Then, as an investigative reporter with the *Globe and Mail* from 1990 to 2004, Alanna became widely known and renowned. Supporting this nomination, Trinity alumna Ruth Grier – who was Ontario's Minister of the Environment in that period – observed that Alanna made a major contribution to the public's understanding of complex issues at a time when environmental battles were often in the forefront of the news. In support also, David Suzuki says that to the environmental movement then, she was a “beacon” who clearly understood the magnitude of the environmental crisis confronting us. Alanna won four major national and international awards for her work, and in 2000 the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Reuters Foundation named her the best environmental reporter in the world.

Her books are remarkable. The 2004 one, *Dancing at the Dead Sea: Tracking the world's environmental hotspots*, was hailed as one of the five best non-fiction books in Canada and was acclaimed internationally. It was followed in 2009 by the absorbing best-seller *Sea Sick: the Global Ocean in Crisis*. Two and a half years of intrepid research on five continents went into it. In the process, Alanna linked the work of a diversity of scientists. Integrating insights and fostering intellectual exchange, she enabled experts to transcend silos and reach conclusions not previously considered.

Until she wrote *Sea Sick*, the critical role of the ocean in giving breath to all creatures through plankton produced oxygen and through carbon absorbing capability was not fully understood. The book is drawing attention to stark realities: the ocean -- the source of life on the planet and home of at least half of the mass of life – contains the *switch of life*, and as it warms and acidifies that switch could be turned off. Experts say Alanna's research is invaluable. Her conclusions about ocean acidification now figure in public debates on climate change and global warming. And as Professor Stephen Scharper, in supporting her nomination, points out, “her gripping prose and simultaneous publication with different publishers around the English-speaking world helped assure the immediate global attention [the book] deserves.”

A compelling public intellectual, Alanna is committed to changing public policy. She generously shares her scientific data and insights in countless forums engaging faith communities and the wider public. She works hard to help people understand the ocean crisis and to prod them into action, galvanizing hope – a much needed strength, as Professor Scharper observes. He identifies her keen environmental passion as dovetailing neatly with Trinity's own ecological concerns,

manifest in its pioneering adoption of the President's climate initiative. Trinity students, whose commitment is equally manifest in the solar panels on the Larkin building, can claim Alanna as a kindred spirit! Her prophetic call to heed the ocean crisis and to act now, in hope, puts the critical challenge to our age.

Chancellor, on behalf of the corporation of Trinity College, I ask you to confer the degree of Doctor of Sacred Letters, *honoris causa*, on Alanna Mitchell.