President Ainlay, trustees, faculty, staff and students … I am proud to welcome you today at the start of another academic year. As a longtime faculty member, new chair of the Faculty Executive Committee and Union parent, I know that you are indeed, fortunate to live and study at one of our nation’s most beautiful and bountiful liberal arts colleges.

I say bountiful, because the sheer breadth and depth of what Union has to offer – the classes and disciplines; the opportunities for real campus, community and global involvement; the relationships with classmates and professors; the lively discussions that crop up in all corners of campus at all hours; the many ways in which you can be a scholar, artist, athlete, poet, historian, economist, scientist, engineer and everything in between – is truly astounding.

I welcome you during an exciting time, the bicentennial celebration of our campus as the first planned campus in America. I realize that this might not mean much to some of you, especially those new to Union, but you’ll see, very soon, how this small institution in the heart of upstate New York presents a landscape that’s ideal for higher learning.

This place, its people, programs and long history of educating accomplished men and women, inspire us every day. Whether you are just beginning your college journey with us, are in the middle or striding toward the completion of your degree, this is your life to lead, so steward it well.

Students: I encourage each and every one of you to challenge yourself. Challenge your perspectives and your views.

Challenge the things you think you believe, have always believed, were taught to believe or brought up to think you were supposed to believe.
Challenge me and my colleagues, the faculty, administrators, deans and staff of Union College. Challenge our views.

At the same time, stay open. Listen. Understand that other people have viable points of view.

Take chances. Don’t get stuck in the proverbial comfort zone. Comfort is good – if you’re a lizard or a house plant, not a student.

Don’t be afraid of the new or unfamiliar. If you’re fearful of something, run toward it, not away from it.

Experiment. Take risks. Imagine. Try new things. Embrace the complications. You might even have fun.

If you’re an art major, take an economics or computer science course. If you’re an engineer, dance. (Trust me, there are more dancing engineers around here than you’d think.) Neuroscientist? Steer your brain toward the study of anthropology or classics or a new language.

In short, rock your world a little. Let us rock your world.

Eliphalet Nott, the man whose presidential portrait graces the walls of this chapel, was an inventor. I can think of no better time or place in America to invent and reinvent yourself, your dreams and goals, than right here, right now, on these historic grounds.

Thank you, good luck and enjoy. I look forward to a great year.