

**VALEDICTORY ADDRESS at The Ursuline School Commencement**  
**May 29, 2015**  
**By Diyu K. Pearce-Fisher**

Mrs. Davidson, Ms. Killebrew, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Lynch, Monsignor Keane, members of the Board of Trustees, beloved faculty, parents, guests, friends, and fellow members of the Ursuline Class of 2015, welcome! I am honored and delighted to speak to you today as we celebrate this bittersweet milestone in our lives: our graduation from high school.

It feels strange to think that today is the last time we can call ourselves high schoolers. After today, we won't be wearing our kilts or displaying our highly esteemed ID cards on lanyards. Today marks the end of an era, the end of a chapter in our lives. It sounds so sad! That's why I always wondered why graduation is called "commencement." "Commencement" means the beginning, the start of something new. So, how did we get "commencement" from graduation, the end? Can the end also be the beginning at the same time? Well, as much as we think of graduation as the end, it really isn't.

Graduation--commencement--whichever you prefer, marks a new start, a new opportunity for us to apply what we've learned at Ursuline. Graduation means that we will go to new places full of new people and new experiences. They say that when one door closes, another door opens. But just because something new starts, doesn't mean something else has to end. The doors to Ursuline aren't closed to us. Our time here does not fade away, a forgotten page in the book of our lives. We will always have the unique mark that Ursuline has left on us. Graduation isn't the end of our journey, and isn't the end of Ursuline for us. We will always be Ursuline girls.

We will remember each other, with our skirts rolled and our hair in a messy pony tail, printing out that essay the morning it's due, and eating our weight in

fries on French fry day. We will always remember the laughs, the jokes, and the friendships that we made here. We will remember all the bright times—singing “Jesus Give Us Your Peace” at Mass, turning each other’s rings on Ring Day, signing each other’s skirts, and finally, today, our graduation. Today is a beautiful day--the sun is shining, reflecting the bright future ahead of us. However, we will remember all the times that it rained—when the rain and mud soaked through our shoes as we trudged through freshman orientation at Camp Mariah, when the flood warning on our junior prom resulted in a lot of unplanned hairstyles, and when the rain on Ring Day made our sunglasses look a lot less practical. Sure it rained, but it didn’t dampen our spirits. We moaned and groaned, but the rain made us laugh together as we wrung out our hair.

It rained a lot during our four years in high school, but sometimes, metaphorically, it also poured. We poured out our tears when we lost our dear classmate Eira. We will never forget the disbelief and grief we felt at this loss. However, our memories of Eira—her kind smile, her sweet personality, her beautiful artwork—are even more precious to us. Eira is still with us. She brought us all closer together, and she taught us to value every day we had together. Eira helped us bond and grow as a class.

Whether you’ve been at Ursuline for almost a decade or just a couple years, Ursuline has transformed us. The person who first entered the doors on North Avenue is not the same person who will leave through those doors today. We entered young girls, inexperienced and perhaps a little unsure of how to handle the obstacles we would face. But now, we have been privileged with the gift of not just an education, something that so many women around the world know only as a distant dream, but an Ursuline education. Ursuline has inspired and empowered us as women to think for ourselves.

We are about to enter the real world with a wealth of opportunities and gifts. We will be lawyers, doctors, writers, engineers, teachers, entrepreneurs, artists, administrative assistants, wives, and mothers. The real world is an exciting place-- beautiful, vast, always changing; but the real world is also flawed and often frightening. I think most of you have read Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps you remember these lines: "She knew that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils." Charlotte was right. We will experience a myriad of blessings and challenges, achievements and disappointments, love and indifference. At times our faith in God will be tested, and we will be unsure of what to do, but we are equipped to face whatever life has to offer us thanks to the courage, capability, and character we've developed at Ursuline. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "A woman is like a tea bag; you never know how strong it is until it's in hot water." We will succeed at times, and we will fail; we will get ourselves into trouble without trying to, BUT we will remain intelligent, independent, and confident women with an unbreakable spirit—Ursuline women.

Take with you all the lessons you've learned at Ursuline. As we pass through the doors for the last time as Ursuline students, we will leave together, as a class. We will go our separate ways, but no matter where we are or what we call ourselves, Ursuline will forever be a part of us, and we will always be a part of Ursuline.

Congratulations to the Class of 2015! I have faith in you all, that you will continue to uphold the Ursuline values long after our graduation today. God bless you all. Thank you!