

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS at The Ursuline School Commencement  
May 19, 2017**

**By Mrs. Eileen Davidson H'12 P'90 GP'19**

Welcome to the graduates, the Class of 2017, who have been working toward this day since they entered Ursuline some four, or even seven, years ago. Welcome to the parents who made the Ursuline opportunity possible for your daughters; for many, at great sacrifice. Welcome grandparents, who can enjoy this day knowing you contributed to your granddaughters' and great-granddaughters' success by your very presence in their lives and in the lives of their parents.

Commencement is a time to reflect on the graduates and to celebrate their accomplishments. We pay tribute to each and every one, we commend their parents, and we recognize the faculty who empowered these 160 students to succeed. I would ask that you join me in a round of applause for the faculty and special recognition for the faculty who will be retiring this year: Mrs. Suanne Culligan, Mrs. JoAnn Gramaglia, Mrs. Mary Ellen Loveless, Mrs. Kathy Salandra, Ms. Barbara Spiridon, Mrs. Marcie Syracuse, and staff members Mrs. Angela Paolucci and Mrs. Jean Trotta.

Although we think of commencement as an ending, it is actually the beginning, a "going forward" for this Class of 2017.

I always take great pride in sharing the connections that these young women have to the Ursuline community, past and present. In this class sitting before me 25 have younger sisters in the school; 43 have sisters who have graduated; 30 are the nieces of alumnae; three have great aunts as alums; and six mothers, one grandmother and two great-grandmothers are alumnae!

The class of 2017 also has the added distinction of having four sets of twins in the class! Last year they welcomed eight students from Good Counsel into their class.

They have submitted more than 1,658 college applications - 46% of the class applied early - and they have won more than \$29 million in college scholarships.

They are a class that has the distinction of having a classmate who can choose between Harvard and MIT. They have a Con Ed scholar athlete and 16 athletes who will continue their athletic pursuits in college. Each and every member of the class shines in her own way and all share in the pride and joy of their classmates.

Each year at graduation, I try to capture the unique identity and personality of the graduating class. This class is understated, mellow and has accomplished great things quietly and collaboratively. In September, the Senior Retreat set the tone for reflection and heightened consciousness which has prevailed all year. In October, we celebrated an “Around the World” theme for Ring Day which has similarly characterized this past year. Together we traveled to Cambodia through the pages of *The Rent Collector*. Author Camron Wright shared his personal reflections and we came to identify with the characters as we pictured the faces of those people living on the edge of a marginalized society. Our eyes were opened to their inherent dignity and we were able to appreciate their perspective, recognizing that it’s not *where* you live, but *how* you live that matters.

We were also enlightened by our Global Education & Serviam Symposium when we became aware of global consumerism and the ultimate high cost of cheap clothing. This was the fourth global symposium in our series which began in 2014 with the theme, Educating Girls Around the World, then the global health issue of Trachoma, Global Climate Impact and this year the myths of “Fast Fashion.” From the environmental effect to the social justice issue of fair trade, “cheap” often comes at far too dear a price. In the words of Pope Francis: “Every person ought to have the awareness that ‘purchasing is always a moral, and not simply an economic, act’.” We are fully conscious that in the simple choice of a T-shirt we purchase in Westchester County, our lives are inextricably interwoven with the lives of factory workers in Bangladesh.

Celebrating the global village we indeed share, we welcomed Ursuline schools from around the world: Brescia House from Toowoomba, Australia, and Brescia House from South Africa. Our guests shared their Ursuline school’s unique culture through music and art and in so doing ignited the desire of our students to visit them in turn. Ursuline New Rochelle explored the world as well, traveling to Australia and Peru, and immersing ourselves in world languages in Italy and Spain.

Such global exchanges enable us to share our differences, similarities, and our varied points of view. Networking with our sister schools expands and strengthens our Ursuline heritage and legacy. For the first time this year, a cohort of Ursuline schools has developed a Global Scholars Program. Along with the Ursuline Academies of St. Louis and Wilmington, Delaware, we have participated in an independent course of study focused on global awareness. This class has seven Global Scholars who are recognized by the Ursuline Education Network for their completion of a Global Honors Program. I am so proud of their initiative and sense of adventure in taking on this relevant work and putting The Ursuline School of New Rochelle on the map with this timely and innovative program.

Graduates, you are ready to take on the world. You have been encouraged to think, question, and defend your opinions. You have been presented with global issues and brainstormed solutions. You have been challenged to develop your moral compass and see the world through an ethical and moral lens. You became globally aware by discovering new places either in person or through the vicarious literary adventures we experience through a good book. In the words of James Thurber: “Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness.”

Your life’s journey and this day’s events are transformative. I welcome you today as a member of the the next Ursuline identity group where membership definitely has its privileges. You join the women who have gone before you and upon whose shoulders you stand. The 8,000 plus women who honor their Ursuline education by continuing to be women who learn, lead and serve. Courageous women who have opened doors making it that much easier for you to achieve your dreams as well.

The Ursulines, some 500 plus years ago, were started by a woman who, like Reshma Saujani, could give a TED talk on bravery. This woman, St. Angela, although diminutive in size, cast a large shadow. She dared to challenge what was in place and offered a new option for women; a new form of religious life, The Company of Women. She persisted even against the initial counsel of the Pope. Today, her followers, those who are members of the Ursuline congregation as well as we lay people who treasure her legacy, send you off with utter confidence in your ability and your humanity. To quote an immortal woman of science, Marie Curie: “Life is not easy for any of us. .... We must have perseverance and,

above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.”

Each one of you is indeed gifted for something and Ursuline is immensely proud to have played a role helping you recognize and develop your unique abilities. God bless you all and may he keep you in the palm of his hand.