

The Ursuline School
Commencement Address 2022
by Dr. Colleen Melnyk
May 20, 2022

Good morning.

It is my privilege to preside over the 125th graduation of The Ursuline School.

Parents, families, we are so happy to celebrate this accomplished class who have demonstrated maturity and joy throughout their years here.

Each class is distinctive.

You, the Class of 2022, are truly extraordinary.

First, your Class embodies an important milestone for The Ursuline School. Yours is the 125th commencement of The Ursuline School.

You are a testament to the fact that we are rooted in a solid foundation, yet we are forward facing and future oriented.

Second, this class has held a ringside seat to a remarkable period over the last two-and-a-half years AND you have thrived.

Your high school years were disrupted by acute social change and a worldwide pandemic.

Yet, this past fall, when you returned to school for a full year of in-person learning, you beautifully demonstrated your ability to operate with a growth mindset.

There is a lot you can be proud of.

- You and your classmates were accepted into 220 different colleges and together, you have earned nearly \$23 million in college scholarships and awards.
- Despite interrupted sports seasons these past few years, a number of you will be able to compete in your sport at the college level.
- Remote learning did not deter the science researchers among you – you completed your 3-year research and clearly demonstrated an understanding of scientific methodology.
- Hybrid schedules and Zooms notwithstanding, the Global Scholars finalized and presented capstone projects that considered specific global inequities and offered thoughtful solutions.
- The visual artists in your class displayed excellent skill development and creativity in your art portfolios, whether in the Virtual Art Shows in the past two years or this year in person.
- The performing artists among you delighted us last year in our first ever outdoor music and dance recital, and this year enjoyed performing in our usual spaces.

Each of you, in your own way, persevered, progressed, and achieved excellence.

Perhaps more importantly, you each possess attributes which will hold you in good stead as you continue your educational journey.

Your teachers describe you as an adaptable group; living through immense challenges has brought out your resilience.

In addition, you are: unafraid to try new things; remain open to new ideas; and are great problem solvers.

Those aren't empty words! They are ringing endorsements that you embraced the real deep learning cycle of inquiry, exploration, curiosity - motivated to try additional investigation – in other words what we try to capture by our motto: Educate Inspire Empower.

Despite the uncertainty of the last several years, you, the Class of 2022, continued to show compassion and kindness towards each other. And, you have expressed great care for others. I'm not just referring to the 6,000 hours of service that you logged but that you, as global citizens, responded both to local needs and international concerns - food drives to replenish neighborhood food pantries and fundraisers to help Ukrainian children.

What a beautiful legacy and what a testament to The Ursuline charism and mission.

I would add one other phrase to describe you: faithful members of a strong Community that has existed for 125 years.

Though you may think you have endured a singular experience, there are some surprising parallels between you and the FIRST graduating class of The Ursuline School.

You may know Sister Irene Gill founded the Ursuline School in New Rochelle in 1897. Mother Irene, as she was known, was truly a woman ahead of her time and there is some mystery and intrigue to this "founding" story. It involves a fire and some secrets, but it has a happy ending! Graduates - come back to visit us this fall and I will tell you more!

The first student enrolled in The Ursuline School was named Mary Brady and her nickname was Maisie. We know a lot about Maisie Brady. For example, she and a number of her classmates survived the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. Five years later, she and her fellow alums were granted the right to vote when the 19th amendment was passed. Maisie went on to become an educator and taught locally. She now rests here in New Rochelle.

The first graduates of The Ursuline School experienced great social change and survived a worldwide pandemic.

Maisie Brady and her classmates had limited career options when they graduated from the Ursuline School. They could become teachers or nurses, or nuns. Records of the time indicate that many of these women also went on to become wives and mothers.

Despite the finite opportunities presented to those early graduates, they shared a deep faith and optimism in their ability to go forth and find their place in society at a time when society was evolving. In addition, they relied upon each other as a **community** to move forward in the world.

There are other common experiences that connect you to Ursuline alumnae across the generations.

Many of the traditions we celebrate today are the legacies that have been handed down from generations of our students to each other.

On Ring Day this past October, you walked across this stage through the giant Ring, as every senior class has done since 1941, and received your Ursuline ring. That day represents simple but powerful things: unity, togetherness, and joy. The crossing of the threshold symbolizes connection to the school community summed up in the Latin phrase inscribed in your rings: *Ac Fui*, meaning, “I was there, I was a part.”

Like Maisie and her classmates, you have been a part of a unique and pivotal time not just for our school but for our nation and the world. The last several years have produced a global pandemic, political divisions, civil unrest, and global conflict.

Despite local and global challenges, you leaned upon our rituals, our heritage, our core values, and our community to persevere and move forward.

And, you did this with joy!

You smiled as you tinkered with new tools in the iHub.

You beamed as you worked together on assignments in the Christina Jun Murphy Commons.

You laughed in the Kulsar & McCarthy Lobby, playing and singing around our new Grand Steinway piano.

Finally, you serenaded faculty and classmates on your last day of school.

May these new traditions that **you** initiated continue another 125 years, and when **your daughters** enroll in this school, you can tell them, “My class started that!”

As you begin your journey into the next phase of young adulthood here are a few questions to ponder:

How has this experience transformed me? How has this **community** impacted my formation as a young woman entering the world with all the gifts and attributes that I was born with?

How have I created community?

Your participation and your presence connect you to a global sisterhood of Ursuline alumnae.

The experiences and rewards of being a part of The Ursuline Community connect the past to the present.

Know you are equipped to move forward, take chances, and try new experiences.

You have been seen, recognized, and will forever be loved by all of us here at The Ursuline School.

May God bless you and may you never forget that Ursuline is your home.

I pray that St. Angela watches over you all your days and that St. Ursula protects your future.

Parents, families, graduates, in the words of the esteemed philosopher - Taylor Swift:

“I don't know about you
But I'm feeling 22”

And I'm sure that on this exceptional day, when we are all so proud of these graduates,

“Everything will be alright if
We just keep dancing like we're 22!”

Congratulations to the Class of 2022!