Good evening, Dr. Ciancaglini, Mr. Dioli, Religious of the Sacred Heart, faculty, staff, members of the Board of Trustees, parents and families and most of all, the Sacred Heart Prep Class of 2005.

It is a privilege to be with you tonight as you celebrate this once in a lifetime step on your journey, a moment of merger of past, present and future. A few years ago at Sacred Heart in New Orleans, a graduating senior left a note on my desk saying, “Sacred Heart should not be called a school; it should be called a gift.” And it is that gift for which give thanks tonight.

We gather on the eve of the feast of the Sacred Heart, a day when religious of the Sacred Heart and Sacred Heart communities and schools all over the world celebrate our heritage and mission: to discover and make known the love of the Heart of Christ in the world. What a great feast to send you forth – go and be LOVE for the world; put love into all you do; be God’s heart to your world; see all things with the eyes of love; do small things with great love.

In the 35 years I have visited this campus, it has been transformed – from boarding school to day school; from single sex to coed, from a school to a multigenerational community. Your Sacred Heart education has been about transformation, and that is the power you carry away tonight – the gift of being a transforming presence in our world – a world of devastating tsunamis, post 9/11, the violence of war, the tragedy of homelessness and poverty, and also a world of incredible beauty, goodness, love, diversity, and compassion.

LOVE is the most powerful transforming influence in the world. and it is the single most important aspect of the mission of Sacred Heart education.

“Let love be your life for all eternity,” wrote St. Madeleine Sophie.

Recently I drove on country roads through my home state of Iowa, pulled over to the side of the road and watched the farmers plow and till the soil, plant the seeds and wait for rain. I thought of and prayed for you and all of the 2005 graduates of Sacred Heart schools in the U.S.
Your years at Sacred Heart have been ones of plowing and planting, watering, weeding and waiting. That is one of the things parents and educators do best – sow seeds, let go, trust...

Your education has also been about discovering your particular mission in life, that one special gift that only you can give in your unique way. A part of God’s glory will remain unrevealed without your gift.

When I was an irritable adolescent, my dad told me one night when we were out watching falling stars, “Shirl, the world would have been incomplete if you had not been born.” He sowed a very precious seed in my heart that evening.

I hope each of you leaves here tonight with that same deep conviction – the world will be incomplete without your special gifts, your piece of the Heart of God.

During these school years, through success and failure, laughter and tears, you have begun to discover who you are and how to get where you want to go. Some of you have been wildflowers, others roses, some have gone by land and some by sea; some are sparrows and some are eagles; some are in sandals, treading lightly, some in boots, climbing high. I hope we as your families and Sacred Heart community have encouraged you to be who are you are, to find your own way.

You as a class have great gifts and talents – academic achievements and awards, actresses and actors, artists and athletes, the Sacred Heart Society... You have been described as a class that has gone beyond requirements, who are spirited and generous and supportive of one another. You are committed to justice and service and diversity, that you have strived to implement the goals of Sacred Heart education into all that you do.

And now all those gifts can be shared with a wider community - the world community.

“Those who serve others most compassionately seem to work on a level that has to do with radiating love. It is important that you have a brain (the scarecrow knew that!) and use it but there is a reality deeper than that. When love radiates through your life, then you use your intelligence to give your work flesh. But the transforming energy, that which can change events, that heals, that helps, that serves, come from deep inside, from the heart.”
(paraphrase – Julie Glover)
Build your life as a work of art, a life in which you notice the smell of salt water by the sea, a life in which you stop and watch how a brown pelican circles over the water or the way the face of an elderly religious lights up as you walk in the door or the way your parents’ eyes well up with tears when you say, “Thank you.”

You are surrounded by parents and families who cherish you, Sacred Heart educators who love and challenge you, friends who stand by you, elderly religious who delight in you, a world which counts on you, a web of relationships in the national and international alumnae and alumni association which needs your voice and your heart.

Tonight is a night of gratitude, a night to bless one another. Blessings are all around us but we have to stop and look and listen for them. Sometimes we are just too busy to notice. Our palm pilot calendars, our beeping blackberries, the latest web site will always be there, but what greater gift can we give one another than the gift of presence, of attentiveness, of gratitude – not just for the new car or the finest education or the college scholarship, but gratitude for the gift of life in this world of wonder, for the simple looks of love, for the understanding heart.

Tonight you gather all the fragments of your years at Sacred Heart, so that none of them will be lost. As Mother Stuart wrote 100 years ago, “It is all part of the story, and the story is God’s love for you and yours for God.”

You will have many challenges ahead of you:
- To live the ways of peace in the midst of war
- To continue to love the church in spite of scandal
- To believe in the political process while surrounded by corruption
- To live simply in the midst of greed
- To take time for prayer in the midst of frantic activity
- To believe in the goodness of humanity while surrounded by violence
- To care for the earth as it continues to be desecrated.

This afternoon I took your class list and saw among the roses at Oakwood and prayed for each of you by name.

And so tonight this is my prayer for you:
- That the fire of God’s love, as expressed in the Heart of Christ, will permeate everything you do, all that you are.
- That you will be men and women of prayer, with a deep faith in God, in yourself, in others, in your world, which is entrusted to your care.
- That you will not only think things through but that you will pray them through, listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit.
That you will be life long learners, whose hearts and minds and souls are constantly thirsting to know more, be more, love more, believe more.

That you will continually discover your own unique, God-given gifts and have the courage to share them because the world will have an empty place in it until you do.

That you will be witnesses to wonder and will take time out of your busy lives to sit by a quiet mountain stream, to photograph a sunset, to write a poem, to wish upon a star, to walk gently upon the earth, that you will be grateful recipients of the quiet whispers of God’s daily gifts.

Most of all, I pray that you will be witnesses to the love of the Heart of God – the end, mission and purpose of Sacred Heart education.

Thank you, parents, for entrusting your children to Sacred Heart, for sacrificing, supporting, loving not only your children, but all those gathered here tonight. And thank you, faculty, staff, administration and Religious of the Sacred Heart for planting seeds, for nurturing, for leading out, for lighting the fire.

And so seniors, God speed. Your high school years have ended. Go bless your world; go and be God’s HEARTBEAT.