

*SHCC Graduation Ceremony*  
*10 July 2013*

Sister Veronica, distinguished guests, teachers, parents,  
fellow Sacred Heartists and Graduates,

Thank you for having me today.

I know graduation is a special occasion. It is a time for celebrating growth and achievements, for bidding farewell and saying thank you. As I was gathering input for what to say today, a friend suggested I look for a profound quote that offered encouragement and inspiration. Then there were others who said I shouldn't worry, as no one would listen to me anyway. Even on a matter like this, there is no lacking of diverse views! In the end, I have decided to share a few thoughts about change, setbacks and risk taking.

On my graduation day 26 years ago, I sat where you now sit. I must have listened to someone sharing his or her wisdom. But honestly I don't remember a word of it. I can't even tell you who spoke. All I remember was sitting there asking myself: What will I do, where will I be, a year from now, ten years from now? Everything was up in the air, full of suspense and excitement. I also remember the unease, knowing that I would have to start all over again: walk new corridors, meet new faces, crack new jokes, and learn new nicknames. Graduates, today is your turn to face this challenge. When you turn and go, you too will have to rebuild what you relinquish today. Do not ask yourself whether you are ready. It doesn't matter. You don't have a choice. This is what graduation means: it means you have to move on.

As you do so, remember that Sacred Heart has given you opportunities for learning and growth, for reflection and innovation. Your education here has prepared you well for the leap, casting a safety net when you swing on the trapeze. So, gather your courage, embrace the change and venture on.

Change, as I have learned through the years, is the norm in life. I joined the Government in 1990. In a matter of 23 years, I have taken on 13 different jobs. The certainty of a pay check at the end of the month did bring a sense of security. Still, each job was a new challenge, with new subjects to learn, new skills to harness, and new bosses to manage. Even after having done it so many times, every time when I have to move on, I still find it hard to go beyond my comfort zone and tread into the unfamiliar. By experience, however, I have learned that the best response is not to refuse change, but to shake off the "whys" and "what ifs", and rid myself of confusion.

The process of change can be tough, but think about all the excitement ahead if we are stalwart enough. Speaking for myself, with each change, often there are adventures I never imagined just waiting around the next bend. Often, I find friendship that springs from new experience. Often, I discover that there are so many options in life, and so many ways I can grow. So, to the graduates, I want to say this: walk your path one step at a time. Find confidence within your heart and let it be your guide. Sooner or later, you will discover that you really can endure, and you really are strong, and you really do have worth. This is what Sacred Heart expects of you.

Now I am not giving you rose coloured glasses. Life in the real world is not a piece of cake. As we travel through life, there are always those times when decisions just have to be made; when the choices are hard, solutions seem scarce, and the rain seems to soak our parade. Life's circumstances are not always what we may wish them to be. The pattern of life does not necessarily go as we plan. A friend of mine once said: "future has a way of falling down in mid-flight".

So, what do we do? Well, we all know what to do. Stand for what we believe in, regardless of the odds. Persist no matter what. Do more than is expected. Be the best we know we can be. Yes, we know the answers. We also know they are tall orders, easier said than done. Still we should try – try hard, but take it easy.

Along the way, when we need to take a rest, to recharge, I suggest we rely on commonsense, see things in proportion, and celebrate small successes – "successes" such as waking up on time, or clicking the "save" button just before the screen blacks out! As Oscar Wilde says, "life is too important to be taken seriously"!

On the subject of setbacks, I think it helps to remember that they happen to everyone. And it helps to recognize that try as we may, certain adversities cannot be overcome. In time and with experience, we learn to accept our defeats with our head up and our eyes open; with the grace of a grown-up, not the grief of a child. The experience of emerging from setbacks varies, but it always teaches us things about ourselves that we could have learned no other way. It tests and reinforces our relationships with friends and family.

At the end of the day, life is not a check-list of acquisition or achievement. Life, as we have learned from our school song, is "a gift of beauty rare". At the same time, it can be difficult, and complicated, and beyond anyone's total control. The humility to know these enables us to survive life's adversities and appreciate all its wonders and beauty.

Before I overstay my welcome, let me end by sharing with you a poem about taking risk. It is called "True Freedom" -

*To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.  
To weep is to risk being called sentimental.  
To reach out to another is to risk involvement.  
To expose feelings is to risk showing your true self.  
To place your dreams before a crowd  
is to risk being called naïve.  
To love is to risk not being loved in return.  
To live is to risk dying.  
To hope is to risk despair, and to try is to risk failure.  
But risks must be taken,  
because the greatest risk in life is to risk nothing.  
The person who risks nothing does nothing,  
has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing.  
He may avoid suffering and sorrow,  
but he simple cannot learn and feel.  
Chained by things that are certain, he is a slave.  
He has forfeited his freedom.  
Only the person who risks is truly Free.*

To the graduates, I encourage you to cast your dreams to the stars. Soar high. I wish you true freedom, a wonderful journey, and safe landing!

Thank you.