

Assumption College for Sisters: Commencement, May 15, 2010
(Linda Stamato, Board of Trustees)

Sister Joseph Spring, Sister Joan Daniel, Monsignor Anginoli, my dear friend, Sister Pierre, Religious, other faculty, trustees, members of the administration and staff, guests, families—and—graduates: It's a privilege to be here, in this place, on this day....doing this... and, it's daunting.

You, Sisters, who are graduating today, are part of an unparalleled tradition.... Just a few observations on this score:

- Catholic Sisters were among the first to stand with the underprivileged, to work among and to educate the poor and underserved, to care for the afflicted, suffering from disease;
- Catholic Sisters continue to provide shelter and food to satisfy the basic human needs of the economically and socially disadvantaged and to advocate relentlessly for the fair and equal treatment of all persons;
- Catholic Sisters work for the eradication of poverty and racism and for the promotion of nonviolence, equality and democracy in principle and in action;
- The humanitarian work of Catholic Sisters with communities in crisis and refugees throughout the world positions them as activists and diplomats of peace and justice for some of the most at-risk populations.

You will continue this tradition, when you return home...when you accept mission assignments...for you are the “port in the storm”—when all is overwhelming, often depressing, disappointing, even horrendous—for, in you, there is promise, in you there is faith and optimism and expectation for a better world, small pieces of it, perhaps, but no less significant... small pieces matter...

You will make a new world....

May I tell you a story that, to me, tells me my faith in you is well placed? Two stories, actually, one “local” and the other “global”—both deeply personal and both having to do with developing opportunities for women and recognizing their potential to make the world a better place:

The first is a story at which my mother is at the core. It tells me "who she was" and, at least partially, who I am as a result.... How (and why) I found my voice, you could say: When my sister, Karen, and I were quite young, fourth or fifth grade I guess it was—1949 or 1950, that long ago—we attended church one Sunday morning and heard the priest ask for volunteers to be altar boys and we thought we'd like to be them so we asked our mother if we could go to the orientation meeting that evening and she said 'yes' and that she would go with us. When we crossed the threshold and saw the gathered (all male) crowd, we were stunned (What was up with us anyway? How come we didn't get altar boys?) Anyway, my mother pressed on, announced we were interested in participating, much to the priest's obvious chagrin; and, anyway, we were told we couldn't and that was that. We left. We were humiliated; we blamed our mother, of course. “Why did you bring us here? Why did you subject us to this miserable experience?” My mother calmly (but as I remember it, with a strained, severe, and profoundly disappointed look on her face) explained that the Church would change, it would become more inclusive, but for that to happen, people needed to bring attention to the changes that had to be made and to be the instruments for those changes to happen. And, that we were doing just that.

Instruments of change....like you.

I never forgot that night, neither the arriving, with anticipation, or the grim departure, but there was also an odd and sort of gratifying sense—perhaps it was a sense of promise—too. And, I have to tell you that there isn't a Sunday that I don't smile and pause to look up as the altar girls execute their tasks during the Mass.

Yes, the Church does change.

And so does the world....thus the second story:

The “global “story” I want to tell you, draws from a book, appropriately titled, “Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide”, by Nicholas Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn. In stories of challenge and individual triumph, they argue that the paramount moral challenge of this young century is the struggle for gender equality in the developing world...that one study after another shows that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty....and that the emancipation, empowerment and education of girls and women will advance peace and prosperity for all...

The book takes its title from a Chinese proverb: “Women hold up half the sky.”

I may be prejudiced but I expect it will be you and your Sisters, 60,000 plus strong—around the world—who will be the instrument of the change the world needs, not by the positions you hold or the titles you carry, but by your works and your wisdom, your compassion, your talent and your leadership....

As Nick Kristof put it in a recent column (“A Church Mary Can Love,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2010), you are the pioneering Church that does far more good in the world than it ever gets credit for, that saves lives, that toils in obscurity to feed and educate children, care for AIDS orphans, lifts people from poverty. Nuns, he says, may be “the very coolest people in the world today.” Nuns—the coolest? Well, what do you know about that?

I'd say, it's about time! And, it is, your time.

I am privileged to stand before you, to address you, to encourage you....

Blessed are you women...you are the daughters of God and you will do good things, for others....

You will continue on the path that has been set for you and you will, I am sure, add immeasurably to it... Don't lose heart, be strong, be courageous, be faithful.... be who you chose to be....

As I have been blessed by this place, Assumption College, and the Sisters who breathe life and purpose into it, I ask the privilege of bestowing a blessing upon you as you leave. And so, I conclude with a prayer, an adaptation of the prayer for priests:

'I ask God and his blessed mother, Mary, to encourage you, to strengthen you for your work, to lift you when you become cast down, to forgive you when you fail, to enlighten your minds with the truth of the Gospel, to inflame your hearts with love and fill you with the overflowing joy of God's grace and the support and affection of one another....'