

Dear young women and men, graduates of Resurrection Catholic Secondary School, forty years ago (that sounds like an awful long time ago, doesn't it?) I sat where you are – newly graduated from secondary education, at that time at St. Jerome's High School.

Today I find myself certainly older and hopefully wiser, and every day more aware and grateful for the formation that I received as a graduate of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. I specifically use the word 'formation' because we leave as graduates of more than just academic subjects, or with accomplishments in athletics, art, music or drama. We leave this phase of our lives with more than just what we discovered in books or during classes, but with a formation in and for life. Specifically, in a Catholic atmosphere, a formation in the life of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Risen Saviour, and for life – a life of love and service to be shared in gratitude for all that we have been given.

When I was Director of St. Andrew's School in La Paz, Bolivia, it happened that someone on our staff knew the coach of the Bolivian soccer team, Javier Azkargorta, a Spanish psychologist. He had led the national team to qualify for the World Cup, played that year in the United States. We invited him to come to the school, and the students – the teachers too – were really excited about meeting him. It was like having the Pope, the Queen and the Prime Minister all there on the same day. After he addressed the student body he went into the gym to talk to the Grade 11's and 12's. He gave an inspiring talk – as a psychologist and coach. He said that the most destructive words that any child or teen can hear is "You can't". All too often children and teens have grown up hearing this over and over again, in particular from significant adults in their lives. I pass on to you, graduates, and all of you, this message tonight. "You can!" Set your dreams high! One of the characteristics of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations is to be a *"lifelong learner who develops and demonstrates their God-given potential"*.

Tonight I am particularly humbled and grateful for this honour bestowed on me as Distinguished Graduate.

If someone had told me that one day I would be receiving this award, I wouldn't have believed it.

If someone had told me that I would serve five years as Director of a School in Bolivia, I would have laughed in their face. I would never have imagined that I would learn Spanish and serve in the missions of Bolivia (for twelve years, nine months and thirteen days).

If someone had said that I would serve as Dean of the Waterloo Region for two years, or that I would serve as Provincial Superior of the Ontario-Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection for three years I would have said, "That will never happen."

Or, that I would find myself serving my religious community and the Church in Bermuda, especially as Vicar General of the Diocese (the Bishop's 'right hand man'), I would have said "Not me".

Although I might have often said to myself, throughout my life, "I can't", there were other people – among them the generous and talented teachers and community I experienced at Our Lady of Lourdes School, St. David's and St. Jerome's who kept telling me "You can!" I finally believed them, and that opened me to tremendous adventures in life that have led me to accomplish things and be someone I never dreamed or imagined. It may have been in the mind of God, but it took me every day, as a lifelong learner to not only believe it but to live by it. Dear young men and women, let us not short-change God and limit ourselves when people say "You can't" or we fail to see the gifts and talents that God has given us. Our gifts and talents are to be recognized, appreciated, well used, and shared generously.

I wish to sincerely thank the Board of Trustees for this cherished award. I pray that I will always be worthy of this great distinction and recognition. I wish success to the lifelong learners graduating tonight, and blessings on all the partners in Catholic Education in the Waterloo Region. Thank you, and God bless you.