



# ACADEMY OF THE HOLY NAMES

## **135<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises Opening Address – Alexandra Cristalli '24**

Good morning, Bishop Scharfenberger, Members of the Board of Trustees, Sisters of the Holy Names, Alumnae, Dr. Kilbridge, Mrs. Taranto, Ms. Witherspoon, faculty, parents, families, friends, and members of the class of 2024. My name is Lexie Cristalli and as class president, it is my great honor to welcome you to the graduation ceremony for the class of 2024.

It is with sincere gratitude that I stand here on behalf of my classmates and thank you for being with us today as we celebrate this special milestone and recognize the blessings God has bestowed upon us. Bishop Scharfenberger, you have shown us how to be more Christ like revealing the gifts of the Holy Spirit; love, joy, and peace. Nothing has brought more joy to our high school days than a Bishop's Holiday, a day off. Dr. Kilbridge, you have led our school with honor, respecting each student and supporting our needs and interests. It is always nice to start the day with your kind greeting at the door. Mrs. Taranto, you have taught us to draw upon our might, changing our mindset to believe we can improve not only in math but any subject or situation we find challenging.

Our teachers and coaches have worked diligently to provide an exceptional education grounded in tradition and faith that includes the opportunity to take a variety of classes from AP Art to Computer Science, English, Mathematics, Science, World and American history, religion, language, and college level science research. We also have had the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and classes that allow us to explore our interests including choral ensemble, mock trial, service clubs, leadership programs, and more than 12 different sports to



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name just a few. We leave AHN with the gift of wisdom, the ability to make wise decisions not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom.

The class of 2024 would like to extend our love and appreciation to all the faculty. We are incredibly blessed to have been your students. You all have spent countless hours planning, teaching, grading, and offering extra help to us. You have encouraged us and cheered us on. You have attended our sports games, concerts, plays, driven us by bus, supported our bagel and bake sales, traveled with us nationally and internationally, and taken part in the pep rallies. You were open to our ideas and listened to us. You encouraged us to advocate for ourselves, and taught us many lessons, including what it means to be resilient, respectful, and responsible. Your dedication to us has not gone unnoticed and we thank you for all you have done.

I must thank Mrs. LeBuis- Koenig, for being our senior coordinator. You have kept us organized, arranged class meetings, events, and made this ceremonious graduation happen. No detail has been missed. Ms. Manning, we are honored to share the last day of high school with you. Congratulations on your retirement after 45 years of dedicated service to the students of Academy of the Holy Names. You are the forewoman of girl math. Mrs. McGarry, we appreciate all that you have done to get us to our next destination. You worked with each of us personally to make sure that we landed at the right college, setting us up for success and we thank you.

To our parents, families, and friends, we sit here today because of your love, support, and devotion. You believed in us. You invested your time, energy and money into us and our education. You committed to preparing us for life beyond high school but made sure we had



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happy days, kept us on track, and assured us when we had a tough day. We thank you and we love you.

As I look at my classmates, I see a class of 36 incredible young women who are confident, intelligent, independent, and ambitious. Each has accomplished great works whether in the classroom, outside of the classroom, or both. We participate in service work, clubs, extracurricular activities, sports, and paying jobs. Collectively, we have completed more than one thousand six hundred seventy hours of service over 4 years to many organizations including Night Out for You, Logan Strong Foundation, the Ronald McDonald House, the Melodies Center for Childhood Cancer and Blood Disorders, the South End Children's Café, St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, The Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY, Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital, Street Soldiers, and many more worthy programs. Our varying interests make us interesting people. The class of 2024 had the most amount of collegiate scholarship money than any class before, over \$16 million. We have among us twenty six members of the National Honors Society, five Eucharist Ministers, four student athletes who will play a college sport, founders of the school French club, award winning writers, artists, campers, leaders, Presidential scholars, college honors program students, Alter servers, a founder of "Swing for a Cause" benefiting assault victims, a basketball player who scored 1000 career points, a lacrosse player who scored 200 career goals, a state qualifier of the 1500 meter in track and field, a volleyball defensive player of the year, a recipient of the volleyball coach's award, the first ever Holy Names Softball captain, a winner of the National African American Recognition Award Presented by the College Board, an intern with the Neural stem cell institute, an intern with the



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Department of Neuroscience and Experimental therapeutics, a recipient of the Rensselaer Medal for outstanding achievements in math, science and extracurricular activities, an AP scholar, a member of the 76th Annual Tulip Court, a Shamrock Queen, a baker, a guitarist, and a ballerina.

We are also a class that started a new tradition at Holy Names which is an incredible accomplishment. Seniors can now paint their own parking spot. The many accomplishments individually and together reflect who we are, the Holy Names young women and all that a Holy Names education offers.

To my fellow sisters of the class of 2024, I offer you my most sincere congratulations on your college and university acceptances. The dedication to learning, sports, service, and the many different activities has paid off and I know we are ready to launch.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola said, “Live with gratitude and optimism for the future.” These words seem most fitting today. Graduation is a day when we can easily identify all that we have to be grateful for and what we look forward to. My heart is filled to the brim with gratitude. How lucky I am to have received an education founded and supported to this day by the women, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, to have grown up with each of you on this stage, to have served as your class president, to have relationships with trusted adults in this school, to have enjoyed the Holy Names traditions together. These years have provided memories that will last a lifetime.

I am optimistic for all of us. Given the accomplishments we have already know, it is most plausible that more are to come as we pursue our interests, dreams, and passions.



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I am honored and humbled to be your classmate, friend, and sister. May God continue to bless the Class of 2024 and all who have bestowed their blessings on us.