Faith, family, friends and Niagara University. All these relationships matter to us. And in these contexts, each member of the class of ’65 no doubt has experienced life’s vicissitudes: agony and ecstasy, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, lots of memories most of which are happy but some of which are sad. For the wonderful experiences we give thanks to God, family, friends and Niagara. For the difficult times, the sad times, we pray to God for strength and mercy, and the resolve to learn from life and pass on to the next generations our individual and accumulated wisdom. We are here this weekend to celebrate our relationships to Niagara University.

1965, US historians remember this as a transitional and tumultuous year. Your transition from university life to the real world looked a lot different for your class than previous classes. During 1965, the USA embarked on its war in Vietnam. Yours was the first class in which many classmates left Mount Eagle Ridge and went to fight in Vietnam. Eventually 60 men and 10 women Niagara nurses entered the military. Two classmates received the Purple Heart. The emails exchanged among classmates have been collected into a booklet; the memories communicated in the emails are very moving. Countless life-lessons can be derived from those experiences.

The transition from NU meant saying good-bye to various professors: Charley Edgette, Nick Caggiano, Dan McGuire, Tom Morton, Everett Ockerman, Sr. …………………………, Fr. Vince Swords and Fr. Joe Cahill were successive presidents, Fr. John Burns, Fr.:Big John” Caine, Fr. Joe Ganley. Since that goodbye in 1965, Most but not all of those professors have passed on to the Lord. From among the Vincentians, I think only Fr. Fred Gaulin remains alive.

Since your transition from NU, NU itself has experienced many transitions. The number of buildings on campus have doubled from 13, to 26. Women no longer are restricted to off-campus housing, but now make-up 60% of the student population. The dress code has changed for everybody; men rarely wear dress shirts and ties, women rarely wear skirts and blouses. More casual attire adorns the campus. No longer do we have a curfew or bed-checks. Your class graduated its first women in the College of Business.

Transitions occurred not only at NU but in the country’s culture. In 1963, we had witnessed the assassination of John F. Kennedy. And a few years later, in 1968, we would witness the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. Race riots erupted at Watts in Los Angeles, and immediately after Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated swept from coast to coast in 125 major cities. Culture saw the rise of the Beatles’ yearning for” Yesterday,” and the Rolling Stones lamenting they couldn’t “Get No Satisfaction,” and the Supremes begging, “Stop in the name of Love.”
The Catholic Church was concluding its Second Vatican Council. The spirit of *aggiornamento* focused on the Church being in the modern world and not isolated from it, ecumenism with our Protestant friends and respect for all non-Christian religions. Liturgically, the priest celebrant began facing the congregation, speaking in the vernacular, and we all began receiving Communion under two species, while singing like our Protestant friends. The tumult in the Church resulted in weekly Sunday Mass attendance plummeting from 1965’s rate of 55% to the current 25%. In your graduating year, we had three dozen Vincentians on campus, and now, nine, including happily one man from Vietnam and another man from the Congo. In the USA, in 1965, we had 58K priests, and now, 50 years later, we have 38K even though the Catholic population keeps increasing mostly due to immigration from Latin America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

We have seen a lot in the past fifty years. What remains most important to you? ... Faith, family, friends and Niagara University. Culture has changed. The political and economic world keeps changing. What remains constant are the blessings, and the joys of our foundations in and relationships in faith, family, friends and Niagara University.

Today’s liturgical readings warn us of God’s judgment. They appear to be quite ominous. But our Lord is one who sees the hearts of people. The gospels use that phrase ten times. Over the course of our lifetimes, our hearts have been broken many times. When our hearts are broken, they become open. As our hearts become increasingly broken over the years, our hearts have the opportunity to more and more reflect Jesus’ open heart. Let’s use the experiences of the past fifty years to let our hearts become more and more open, ... to become more and more like Jesus’ heart, ... to grow in our gratitude for our faith in God, our families, our friends, and Niagara University.