President Schatzberg, Board of Trustees, members of the faculty, distinguished guests: To the staff members and all who helped in preparing this special day and ceremony, thank you very much! It is indeed a distinct honor and pleasure to be with you this evening.

To the class of 2006: Congratulations! Although time does not permit me to acknowledge each of the 532 graduates individually, please accept my deepest congratulations to the 237 men and women receiving Associates in Arts Degrees, the 192 men and women receiving Associate in Science Degree; and the 103 men and women receiving Academic Certificates: I congratulate all of you for your accomplishment.

To the parents, families and friends of the graduates, I share your pride and happiness on this very special day. Celebrations are a very important part of our American traditions – they give us a great excuse to have a party! But more seriously, celebrations provide inspiration, reaffirmation, and encouragement that goals can be set and can be achieved.

Each of our graduates are here tonight having achieved a very significant accomplishment. You set a goal, you worked hard and you achieved your goal. Many, many students cannot make the same claim. Each of you can probably think of several people who started out here at Cape Cod Community College with you and are not with you today. You overcame work issues, family challenges, financial and many other challenges – your perseverance has paid off – my most sincere congratulations to each of you.

Some of you may be wondering why, President Schatzberg, would ask me – another College President to serve as Commencement Speaker. Let me offer three reasons why I think I’m here.

First: President Schatzbert and I, have a deep and abiding respect for the contribution that community colleges are making in advancing the ideals and values of this nation. Indeed, without community colleges, there would be no path for thousands of American who seek to grow professionally and personally. Community Colleges are helping millions of Americans achieve the “American Dream.” Did you know that nearly 50% of all Americans in higher education are matriculating at Community Colleges. There are over 11.6 million students enrolled in Community Colleges with nearly 4000 here at Cape Cod Community College. Many of you will go directly into the workforce as nurses, computer technicians, dental hygienists, early childhood educators, police officers, hotel and restaurant staff; and 19 of you will receive, for the first time, degrees in massage therapy. Congratulations. Others of you will leave CCCC to matriculate in four year institutions. You graduate from this institution with an excellent track record that prides itself on being innovative, creative, and offering excellent programs. CCCC is critical to our Cape Cod economy and to our Massachusetts future.
Second: Cape Cod Community College and Wheelock College have a long and important history together. Since 1991, Wheelock has offered the Master of Science in Early Childhood Education at Cape Cod Community College. With the support of the Cape Cod Center for Graduate Education, Wheelock has graduated more than 100 individuals who live and work on Cape Cod. In addition, our undergraduate program in Early Childhood Education is coming to Hyannis in the fall of this year. This partnership to enhance the field of early childhood education is a new and exiting part of our connection to CCCC. We hope that many of you will decide to attend Wheelock at our Boston campus or right here on the Cape.

Third and Finally: On a personal note, I am a living example of the “American Dream” that I referred to a moment ago. I know first hand that America – with all its warts, problems, and issues is still a place where dreams can come true. I stand here this evening as a witness. The great granddaughter of slaves, the granddaughter of rural farmers, and a first generation college graduate. I stand here just four generations from slavery. I am a college president – not one who rose through the ranks of academia but as someone with confidence, talents, and skills who has been given a wonderful opportunity to lead. So, I know that America can actually live up to its lofty ideal of opportunity for all.

I suspect that there are others in this tent this evening who can testify that through hard work and perseverance, goals can be achieved – dreams can come true. I also suspect there are people among you--the graduates-- for whom your degree represents overcoming unimaginable obstacles. I believe that some of you will walk across this stage this evening having taken very serious risks to earn your degree. You earned your degree with the hope of a better future for you and your family, a better future for your community and indeed for this nation. My wish to you, one and all, is for the very best that life in America has to offer.

As I began to prepare this commencement address, I thought about what core message I wanted to convey to you this evening. I tried to recall my own graduation ceremony and it occurred to me that I don’t remember one single thing my commencement speaker said! I know that tradition requires that commencement speakers are to give great words of advice and wisdom about how to be successful; or to tell you what wonderful accomplishments are expected from you; or to comment on pressing issues of the time.

So, I want to ask you to think briefly on the theme: **Be a catalyst for change.** I offer two observations on this theme:

First, you are a catalyst for change. Each of us can be a catalyst for change in our personal lives, in the communities in which we live and work, in our nation, and indeed, in the world. By virtue of your sitting here today, receiving a diploma or certificate from Cape Cod Community College – you are a catalyst for change. You are not the same person you were when you started at CCCC. You are a changed person, a better person, a more accomplished person. You are a perfect example of what I mean when I said be a catalyst for change – change begins first with you. As Shakespeare wrote, “To thine own self be true.” As you live your values you serve as a role model, as an inspiration for others and of course, you shape a life – both personal and professional – that is truly authentic.
Last week, Wheelock honored three remarkable individuals who are catalysts for change and who serve as an inspiration to many. Jack Williams, award winning television anchor and founder of Wednesday’s Child; Victoria Rowell, Emmy-nominated television actress and advocate for children in foster care; and Harry Spence, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. Jack and Victoria have used their celebrity status to educate and change the world for many of our most vulnerable children. Harry has spent his entire career changing large bureaucracies to make them more responsive and effective for our most needy citizens. Honoring these people for their efforts was inspiring for all because we were reminded that each of us can make a difference. Each of us can truly be a catalyst for change.

My second observation on being a catalyst for change is this: Our nation was built by and thrives today on people who are change agents – those who spark the fire of change and turn their passion to action. We all have our own personal heroes or heroines who by their actions were catalysts for change. I like to think of them as catalyst lighters. We know the names, we know the stories. I strongly believe that we are here tonight because many, many people believed enough in the ideals of this county to expose its lies, its injustices, and its wrongs. Because they dared to be catalyst lighters. We stand on the shoulders of thousands who made it possible for us to reap the benefits of change and growth?

Now that I have offered my feelings on the theme of catalyst for change, what do I think you should do with it? Add your voice in moving this country forward while maintaining it’s grand and glorious ideals. What will we leave for the generations to come? Clean air and water? Equality in education, a democracy where everyone can vote and every vote really counts? Will we leave the generations to come an America where poverty does not exist or an America where there are no barriers to achieving our dreams? I suggest to you that holding America to its ideas and promises is not just the responsibility of others; each of us has a role and responsibility in this noble effort.

Two weeks ago, I was in Washington D.C. to attend the Rally against genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Thousands of people – black, white – young old, Christian, Jew were there with signs: “Never Again”, “Not on my Watch”, “President Bush act now”. They came by car, bus, airplane, even on foot. Each a catalyst for change. Each saying by their presence, that this democracy must use its influence and power to fight for human rights here and abroad. President Bush heard the voices of thousands of catalysts - and he acted. While we still have a long way to go in Darfur – thousands of men, women and children have hope.

And so as I close, forgive me but I find that I can’t resist doing something that many commencement speakers do (and of course College Presidents): leave you with a word of advice.

I urge you to build into your lifework not just a wonderful and fulfilling professional career. As you continue to be a catalyst for change, I encourage you to seek and develop a sense of inner peace. It takes commitment and time but – trust me- it’s worth all the time you devote to it. You see, it is the sense of inner peace that will give you the courage and confidence to stand up for what’s right and just. It’s the sense of inner peace that will give you an extra bounce in your step; it will add a greater sense of joy to each of your accomplishments in life.
It’s inner peace that will help you forgive someone even when you’ve been wronged. It’s that feeling of inner peace that will bring joy to your heart at the success of others, even if that success comes, in part, at your expense. It’s that inner peace that will give you the courage to admit your mistakes and ask for forgiveness. It’s what will bring forth words of wisdom and serenity in moments of madness and noise. It’s that inner peace that will pull you up when you’re down. It’s that inner peace, that quiet voice that will calm you when you’re most angry. It’s that inner peace, that quiet voice – that confident voice that will tell you, when you are at your lowest moment: You can do it! That moment in your life when you don’t feel like going on, that moment when you just can’t imagine anything worse could happen to you. It’s that small quiet confident voice that says: It’s OK; joy will come in the morning!

Once again, please accept my most sincere congratulations on this milestone in your life. You have my very best wishes this evening. Go forth with confidence and be a catalyst for change!