I’d like to thank Ms. Pam Hayes and Ms. Lori Wilson for inviting me to this celebration of one of our 20th century prophets, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. My name is Sister Barbara Dawson and I am the head of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in the United States and Canada. We are the sisters who started this school more than 150 years ago and who continue to help your school live the mission of Sacred Heart education through the Goals and Criteria.

I am happy to be here on this day in particular because I believe that Martin Luther King has a lot to teach us. I believe he is one of the important prophets of our country. A prophet is someone who shows up in the history of a people especially when things aren’t going well, when things are difficult, when people are not getting along with each other, when there is a crisis of some type or another. A prophet is often someone who has a message from God about how to live, how to act differently. Martin Luther King Jr is a prophet like Mother Theresa, Mahatma Ghandi and perhaps today Pope Francis

Most of you know that Martin Luther King lived in a time in our country when there was a growing sense about the injustices that existed in society particularly among people of different races and ethnic origin. As a preacher and a leader among the African American community Martin Luther King felt called by God to do what leaders and prophets and people of the gospel are called to do – to point out where things are going wrong in the way people act or the way people treat each other and to encourage and help people to do the right thing.

In one of his most famous speeches he shared his dream for a better future….

[*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.*](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/martinluth115055.html)

[*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/martinluth115056.html)

He was someone who had a vision of how our country and our world could be a better place. He spoke with great strength and conviction that things were not good – that there was a great deal of hate and violence. Rather encourage people to fight or to put down other people, Martin Luther King was someone who called people to be their best selves as individuals, as citizens of our country. And he has something to say to us today that will help us become the Sacred Heart girls and women that we are called to be in these times.

While most of us don’t think of ourselves as prophets, everyone in this room has a dream for themselves, for their families, for your community and maybe even for the world. It is important for each of us to remember that Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa and Mahatma Ghandi and even Pope Francis were young people just like you. When they were in school they probably did not think of themselves as someone who would make a huge difference in life. I know that each one of them learned to think and pray about what they saw around them. And one day, they felt called by God to speak out and say that the world could be a better place.

Probably each one of us has a dream about the way things could be better – in our family, in our classroom, in our neighborhoods, maybe even in our country or world.

I’d like you to take a moment and go inside and picture for yourself: what are your dreams for one day??? Think about the dreams you have for yourself. Think about the dreams you have for your family. Think about the dreams you have for your community.

MLK’s dreams were not just about himself. They were for his community, he had a dream for the future where his children could grow up and live a safer, better, more peaceful life. So his famous “I have a dream” speech calls us to think about what is our dream for our community? And community isn’t just about our friends and family? Martin Luther King was a strong man of faith who thought about the words of Jesus when he asked the question “Who is my neighbor? And he reminded people to love their neighbor as themselves….this was not a theoretical thing – it was very practical…how are you called to build community, to become a community, to care deeply about people who are not necessarily your friends.

We are all Sacred Heart people in this room. And we all know about the Goals and Criteria. I think Martin Luther King would have liked the Sacred Heart Goals. In fact, in many ways he built his life around the values that we live in the Goals and Criteria. His dreams were rooted in Goal I – having an active faith in God. He was definitely a Goal III guy – a sense of justice that compelled him to action, to dedicating his life to the cause of justice for his people. And Goal IV, a deep sense of community and a commitment to building a community that had a place for everyone.

I’d like to tell you about one of my dreams for the future. My dream is something that I am passionate about. I don’t really know where this dream came from, but I have a dream for the children of our world. I’m a sister so I don’t have any children of my own. But I have a passionate dream that all children will have the chance to have an excellent education – like the education that I had when I went to a Sacred Heart school and the kind of education that you have going to school here at Sacred Heart Greenwich. It really gets to me that some kids have the chance to go to a great school and other kids go to school where they don’t even have books, or clean classrooms, or a gym or maybe even their own desk.

A few weeks ago I had the chance to visit our Sacred Heart sisters in Uganda and Kenya in Africa. I visited a school where your school has helped to get desks and little computers and even food for their lunch for about 400 children who attend a Sacred Heart school in a place called Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. These boys and girls come from very poor families, where they probably don’t have enough money to even have a healthy dinner. And yet, these children were getting the education that I dream about. And I realized that you, the students here at Sacred Heart, were helping to make my dream become something that was actually happening. It was because of you and other children here in the United States and in other places around the world where we have generous Sacred Heart students, that these young children were getting an education, were having the possibility of going to high school and even going to the university.

So, first I want to thank you on this day when we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr – that you have been a part of making a dream become real in a very poor area of Africa.

Then I’d like to ask each one of you to think about what you might do to make your dream for a better world, a happier family and better school, a place where everyone is included and has a place. In honor of Martin Luther King, let’s just take a minute to think about one thing you might do to improve the world in which you live. It might be to reach out to someone who you don’t know so well, someone who might be having a hard time. It might be to help improve the environment by doing a better job of recycling. It might be to think of a project that will help some other children who don’t have all the opportunities you have to have a great education. Maybe in the next few days you could talk together in your classes about what little (or maybe big) things you can do individually and as a group to make the world just a little bit better, a little kinder.

I’d like to end with something that Pope Francis said when he met children about your age in New York City at Our Lady Queen of Angels School. What he said to those children I want to say to you

*Whenever there are dreams, whenever there is joy, Jesus is always present. Always!*