

Graduation Ceremony Address

Before I begin, please permit me to shower my sincere blessings on all of you who are graduating today. I am sure your families and others who have aided you along the way share in this joy, and for me personally, celebrating this notable occasion with you today, gives me immense pleasure.

What sort of a student life did each of you undergo at Sophia as you prepared for this moment of graduation? I guess myriad memories are arising within you right now. Each of these moments will remain with you as valued treasures, to guide and support you in the years ahead.

Sophia University has often been defined as an institute imbued with a keen trend towards internationalization and globalization, and during your days in this campus, you perhaps have heard this asserted time and again. While we are indeed proud of this status, yet what truly counts is not just the fact that our campus is endowed with a global setting. Rather, what matters is the reason why we pursue internationalization and globalization, and what those words imply in terms of action. Since its origin in 1913, Sophia has espoused neighborliness and cosmopolitanism as pillars of its educational philosophy, sharing the view of “For Others with Others,” with over 80 Jesuit universities worldwide. At its core lies the belief that true leaders are those who care for the socially disadvantaged, and who stand alongside others.

Leaders like these are gifted with multifaceted perspectives, creative flexibility, and the capacity to reconcile opposing views and conflicts, virtues that are crucial not just within Japan, but across the global community.

Earlier, Fr. Firmansyah of the Catholic Jesuit Center introduced a passage from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark. In it, Jesus says: “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

The Greek word “diakonos” which translates as “servant,” conveys the very image of leadership that we hope you carry away with you as Sophia graduates. The servant referred to here is not one who labors for the strong or mighty, but a leader who strives for those who find themselves in the most trying situations. These are leaders who truly act as “servants.”

“For Others with Others” is a genuine expression of the educational spirit of our university. It calls upon us to value not merely the “others” who live in propitious situations, but also to walk alongside people of a diversity of backgrounds, especially those who are socially sidelined and vulnerable, and to act on their behalf.

My own obligations involve journeying within Japan and abroad, and meeting local members of the Sophia Alumni Association (Sophia-kai). I see how our graduates, that is Sophians, are active at the forefront of groups and organizations, in a variety of sites across Japan and the world. Some occupy visible positions of leadership, while others make decisive yet often unseen contributions. With quiet devotion they ensure the fact that projects move onward, they organize collective efforts, prepare plans, and manage logistics.

There are others who sustain the safety and security of their families and local communities, and some even contribute to society via their research. I perceive in the achievements of our graduates the spirit of caring for others, which has always been at the heart of Sophia University.

What is even more notable is the fact that many Sophians do not boast or show off their contributions, as something unusual. Rather, they perform them in the course of their daily lives, with quiet dedication. This, to me, is the most valid evidence of working for others with candor and modesty, from one’s own place in society.

Briefly stated, the essence of Sophia University’s internationalization and globalization does not lie merely in the number of courses taught in foreign languages, or in the number of its worldwide students. Rather, it involves enduring work and research that sustains the socially vulnerable, by building upon the education and research that you have received here.

As you commence your next stage in life, various distinct paths will unfold for you, and in that sense, today’s degree conferment ceremony marks a fresh beginning. That each of your voyages be lit up by hopes and dreams, and that they lead you on to a life prolific in fulfillment and meaning, is my heartfelt prayer for you. May you flourish in your chosen fields, and become leaders embodying the genuine spirit of “servants.”

I convey my sincere felicitations once more on your graduation.

September 19, 2025

Miki Sugimura
President of Sophia University