

WELCOME

On behalf of the class of two thousand nineteen, the school board, administration, faculty and staff, we welcome you to this magnificent Cathedral of St. Joseph, the mother church of the Archdiocese of Hartford. In the presence of God, we are privileged to celebrate this milestone moment ... the 50th Commencement Exercises for St. Paul Catholic High School.

Bishop Betancourt, several St. Paul students were present at your beautiful ordination as a bishop here at the Cathedral last fall on October 18, 2018 (two thousand eighteen). Known as a man who desires to be a servant in all you do, we are honored to be able to welcome you to your first high school graduation in the Archdiocese of Hartford confident that you will be presiding over many more St. Paul graduations in the years to come. Thank you for being with us this evening.

I wish to publicly thank Archbishop Blair and the Archdiocese of Hartford for their continued spiritual and financial support of our school. We are grateful to Sr. Mary Grace Walsh, Provost and Dr. Michael Griffin, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, who will be retiring at the end of this school year, and all at the Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis for their professional guidance and partnership. Dr. Griffin, thank you and best wishes!

In addition to Fr. Hector, I'd like to acknowledge other guests priests in attendance this evening: Msgr. Gary Simeone, chair of the St. Paul School Board, Msgr. Thomas Ginty, Rev. Alfonso Fontana, Rev. Jack Pahl, and Rev. Ed Przygocki '72 and seminarian Colin Lane. Thank you for your valued support of St. Paul, our students and their families.

It was a gift when a young, charismatic priest, along with his small pioneer faculty, greeted the first freshman class of St. Paul on September 7, 1966. The school grew grade by grade over the next three years until it celebrated its first graduation on June 12, 1970 here at the Cathedral of St. Joseph. It's God's blessing that our founding principal is with us tonight to celebrate the 50th graduating class of the school he first shepherd.

Allow me to share a few of his thoughts published in June 1970 in an article in the Sword, the SP newspaper. They are as relevant now as they were then.

“It’s ten o’clock in the evening and I’m sitting in my office at the end of another day. St. Paul is very quiet and a stillness settles upon this beautiful campus. Four years have passed since that bright sunny morning when 150 Freshmen walked through the front doors for the first time. I can remember that day as if it were yesterday. One hundred-fifty excited, confused, anxious, uncertain, bubbling Freshmen who became in one instant a study body.”

“These four years have been the longest and the shortest I have ever known. We have shared them together. There has been much happiness, some sorrow, many victories, some defeats, much love, inevitable misunderstandings, laughter as necessary as the air, and heartaches as much a part of life as time. I would not have missed any of it, nor the chance to have known the class of 1970. They gambled that what was said about St. Paul would come true and I believe it has.”

“On the eve of their graduation, I wish the following for our Seniors: a life filled with love for Christ Jesus and His brothers and sisters on earth; a life filled with hard work never content with second best ... never satisfied with the mediocre; a life filled with deep concern for the less fortunate in society, the mistreated, the forgotten, the underprivileged, the unloved; a life so filled with conviction and the values of Jesus that men and women everywhere will know more peace, more joy, more self-respect because they have come in contact with our graduates. It will be my prayer that these Seniors will become the bridges over life’s troubled waters, helping others to a happier and more fulfilled life. If these Seniors, whom I love, become such bridges for mankind, then St. Paul Catholic High School shall surely have served the cause of Jesus Christ.”

To meet him is to never forget him. It is my privilege to welcome the founding principal of St. Paul Catholic High School, my high school principal and still an inspiration to this day, Rev. Edmund O’Brien.

Mr. Cooper, dean of academic life, Mr. Wallace, dean of student life, other members of my administrative team, distinguished faculty and staff, thank you for your tireless efforts to deliver on our collective promise to be a truly great Catholic high school. Your caring servant ministry is a passion of faith, mercy, and love. It does not go unnoticed, thank you!

To the Class of two thousand nineteen, tonight, we celebrate each of you, fully understanding that your journey did not come easy or without sacrifices.

However, the path that has led you to this point was not meant to be simple or easy, but instead it was meant to be enlightening.

While the effort and accomplishments are ultimately yours, they were not achieved alone, that's why your family, friends, teachers and coaches ... why we are all here this evening to share in your celebration.

For the decision to send you to attend St. Paul ... for the selfless sacrifices they have made ... for the unconditional love and encouragement they have given you ... for the times that you may have unintentionally taken them for granted, I ask you to please stand, turn to your parents, grandparents and guardians and to everyone assembled here this evening ... and join me in thanking them for this well-deserved and proud moment.

Impressively, we have 27 legacy parents, first generation alums who have sons and daughters graduating this evening and a legacy grandparent. Thank you for passing down the St. Paul tradition from one generation to the next. Please stand and be recognized.

Once again, I extend a warm welcome and my personal thanks on many fronts to everyone for making this evening possible.

PRESENTATION OF DIPLOMAS

Maggie & Jordan, thank you for your graduation addresses. They were beautifully written and delivered capturing the essence of a St. Paul education ... an intentional learning experience focused on our clear mission and core values. It was reassuring to hear Maggie describe so eloquently the significance of our five core values. In many cases, they have transformed from simple words your freshman year to a deeper understanding and the living fabric of your being. Trust that they will continue to be your

foundation and personal roadmap as you venture forward striving to be the best version of yourself that you can be.

Mark Twain once said, “The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.” Tonight is another step closer to the day you find out why.

As I look out this evening, I truly believe each of you is in a different place than when you first arrived at St. Paul but our journey together the last several years wasn’t just to prepare you for tonight ... no, more importantly, it’s been to prepare you for the rest of your life.

As a result of your St. Paul experience, I remind you that the diverse roads you take to find out why ... your road less travelled ... is found not only in your mind, but in your heart and in your soul. May your thirst for knowledge be seen as a mission of service, and that you leave this cathedral tonight with a conviction of being a source of good and a living instrument for peace and justice in your own life and in this world.

That is why you are graduating from St. Paul tonight with both a diploma, attesting to the knowledge gained and a servant towel that you received Sunday at our Senior Class Mass, reminding you that you will find meaning and purpose, peace and joy in your lives by serving God and mankind.

While Jordan mentioned that your class was labeled GPS ... gifted, promising seniors at the beginning of the year by Mrs. Kendrick, and that you are as we celebrate tonight the brilliance, talent, passion and unlimited potential that is inherent in each of you, I also suggest that you take that GPS label firmly believing that you are now being called to be ... God’s precious servants. Then St. Paul Catholic High School ... some 50 classes later surely continues to serve the cause of Jesus Christ ... for that is the reason we exists.

One last Monday morning assembly reflection. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 16, Jesus asked his disciples one of the fundamental core questions in life, “Who do you say I am.” Undoubtedly, you have reflected on this question many times and will continue to do so throughout the various stages of your life. I suggest that there is another related and relevant question for you to answer, Who do you say you are?

When you come to appreciate and choose to live your life as St. Paul our patron saint professed and you’ve heard me say several times, “It is no longer

I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” when it is your eyes with which He looks, your ears with which He listens, your feet with which He travels the world and your hands with which He reaches out and uses the knowledge gained to improve the lives of others ... when leading by example you are moved to transform your piece of the world for the better ... it is then that you will celebrate the day you find out why.

Well done thy good and faithful servants. You are a class that has upheld your special recognition as the 50th graduating class in the history of St. Paul Catholic High School. However, the time has come for you to leave the comfort of the nest, to spread your Falcon wings and soar following the exciting and diverse plans that lay in front of you. My prayer for each of you is that God may grant you the courage, wisdom and mercy to continue to grow more fully in His humanity and as Sam proclaimed earlier, may He bless you with an abundance of the greatest gifts that life has to offer - faith, hope and love. God bless you all.

Bishop Betancourt and Dr. Griffin ... having fulfilled the requirements for graduation as set forth by St. Paul Catholic High School, the Archdiocese of Hartford, and the State of Connecticut, it gives me great pleasure as president and an alum of this school, to present to you for the purposes of granting diplomas, the class of two thousand nineteen.