

Gabe Duncan

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Salutatorian Speech for Graduation

Good evening Superintendent Mara, Mr. DuPont, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Wallace, Reverend Fathers, faculty, staff, parents, families, friends, and the Class of 2022. Welcome to this monumental event in which we, the Class of 2022, celebrate an unforgettable achievement and look forward to the next step in the path of our lives as our time as students at St. Paul Catholic High School comes to an end. It is my privilege to speak with you this evening as the Salutatorian of the Class of 2022 and to represent the hard work, perseverance, and passion that my classmates and I have shown.

Over the four years we have spent in high school, there has certainly been an extraordinary amount of change that we have had to face, such as finding our place in a new community, encountering a variety of exciting opportunities, and dealing with unprecedented struggles. As an incoming Freshman from a small school, I entered Saint Paul knowing very few of my classmates, and I can now personally say

that it was a blessing to become a part of something bigger. Once again, we all will have to experience another vital change in our lives, as we prepare to take on a new challenge beyond high school and discover an enhanced, more personal version of independence.

One thing that I have come to recognize is that change is inevitable, and how we choose to deal with that will shape our lives. Nelson Mandela, a man known for his courage and integrity, once said, “When people are determined they can overcome anything.” Although it is a very simple statement, there is still a deep significance behind it. Because change is constantly occurring, we must learn to not only adapt to it, but also to take advantage of it. This means taking the negative aspects of unpredicted events and learning to “overcome” them, as Mandela put it, in order to create positive circumstances, which requires each of us to put into practice the determination found within ourselves.

During my time at Saint Paul, I have discovered three specific ways to help turn what may seem to be an intimidating adjustment into a beneficial transformation. They are being open to new possibilities, being resilient, and being true to your values. The first point, openness to

potential opportunities, has come up quite often in my high school career, and I am sure many of you have tested this method occasionally. The first time that I broke out of my comfort zone in the past four years of my life was when I decided to run for Class President our Freshman year. Although I knew very few of you at the time, many of you offered me your support, allowing me to turn an ambition into a reality. As a result of pursuing a change and confronting my nerves, I achieved what I set out to do and found something that I could truly associate with for the duration of high school. As a class, we have spent countless hours trying to figure out what works best for us, and one thing I have learned from this is that it takes time, effort, and, once again, determination to develop ourselves and to find our niche. My fellow classmates, I encourage you to embrace versatility and to be willing to take chances in your future endeavors, since one of these chances may be the key to your success.

Resilience has proven to be an essential part of the high school experience, and I have often found myself struggling to uphold this value. Of course, one of the first things that arises when thinking about

challenges is the COVID-19 experience. Surprisingly, I initially handled this change pretty well, and I actually felt like I was improving myself physically, mentally, and spiritually while at home during the spring of our sophomore year. However, as soon as junior year arrived, I noticed that the pressure of stress and exhaustion started to weigh down on me after being away from an authentic learning experience for a significant amount of time. Unfortunately, my negative reaction to this crisis persisted much longer than I had hoped or expected. I feared that my hard work up to that point would not pay off and that I would lose my dedication to succeed. Luckily, I took the time to put things into perspective and realized that others have to endure much more severe challenges than myself on a daily basis, such as poverty and grief from the loss of a loved one. Now, I strive to find a renewal of motivation and encourage myself to work harder. I am aware that each of us has had our own reaction to this event, and we all handle difficult situations differently. However, if there is one thing that I can take away from these struggles, it is that each of us should look to dominate a tough

challenge, rather than let it consume us. If we find the courage in ourselves to do this, we will then demonstrate true resilience.

The third way to handle change, being true to your values, can be the most difficult concept to grasp when relating it to change. One experience in my lifetime that I have been fortunate enough to encounter was my involvement in the karate school Torrington Family Kempo. As a former second-degree black belt at TFK, I have learned that the Japanese martial art karate consists of much more than physical self-defense techniques. It embraces mental preparation, and it also emphasizes three specific virtues, which are self-control, self-discipline, and respect. Although I have undergone an irreversible amount of change throughout my high school years, I continue to rely on these three virtues that a community I had been a part of for more than half of my life has shown me. Just as Torrington Family Kempo has been more than a place of physical instruction to me, Saint Paul Catholic High School has proven to be an environment that extends beyond the classroom to each of us. Through the five core values of faith, character, community, excellence, and service, Saint Paul has acted as an effective

influence in our own abilities to handle change and to experience progression, and these core values have further developed the qualities we have acquired in our past. Over time, our perspectives, personal interests, and beliefs will undoubtedly transform as a result of an increase in individuality and experience. However, when we progress, it does not mean we must abandon everything from our earlier years. Class of 2022, I believe that we can effectively embrace improvement and positive change by building off of the indelible lessons and values we have retained as younger individuals, which we have done throughout our Saint Paul careers.

Although it may be challenging at first to picture ourselves moving on from a place that has offered us so many memories, lessons, and friendships, let our minds fill with excitement at the thought of our promising potential as a result of attending such an impactful school. You all will find it beneficial to consider becoming the dynamic and versatile individuals that Saint Paul has encouraged us to be. As we reflect on how being open to new possibilities, being resilient, and being true to our values play a crucial role in each of our personal journeys,

allow these guides to light our way as we encounter change in our future endeavors. Once again, over these past four years, we certainly have strengthened our abilities to explore the unknown, reignite motivation within ourselves after enduring hardships, and embrace our true selves. Finally, as we move forward, let us remind ourselves that we are called to pursue a life of constant growth as disciples of God. Thank you.