

St. Francis DeSales Commencement 2022 Principal's Perspective-Mr. Dan Garrick '79

Good morning... On behalf of the faculty, staff, administration, the Parent Advisory Board, respected Alumni from the class of 1972 -our beloved school's 9th graduating class, and most significantly the Class of 2022, I wish to thank you, our loved ones, for joining us this morning on this most joyous occasion as our community celebrates the 59th Commencement of this wonderful place.

I would encourage our graduates to take a moment to bask in the significance of your special day. By simply taking a look around, you should be able to arrive at a true understanding of how much love your families, friends, teachers, have for you. It is my sincere hope that you take the opportunity, whether today or in upcoming days, to thank those who have enabled you to arrive at this point in your journey- Especially to thank your parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers and friends for the roles they have played in your accomplishments. And while I believe all of these people are due a deep sense of gratitude, I believe it is even more important that you take the occasion to thank God who has graced you with abundant blessings, and will continue to do so throughout your life.

Before I share my Principal's Perspective with this wonderful Class. I would like to take this opportunity to thank several individuals and groups who have shared their words of wisdom or talents with us over the last several days...beginning first with Father Wilson who delivered an absolutely beautiful Homily on Thursday evening at your Baccalaureate Mass. When he reminded the Class of '22 that Christ has called you to Holiness. To live lives of purpose, to live in a way that you will bear witness to the sanctity and dignity of life through your actions. Father Wilson rightfully reminded you that living in this manner will not be easy and that it will take faith and courage to stay the course. But during those times when your moral compass may be challenged you will be able to draw strength from the many examples from the Saints. But when Father was speaking to you about the Saints I believe he was not only referencing the poignant messages from such Saints as our Patron Saint or Saint Philip Neri but I believe he was also referencing those people that aspire for Holiness each day and therefore inspire you for Holiness as well. Those people that help you shine Christ's light and spirit of hope- meaning your parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, clergy and

friends. Class of 2022 I would encourage you to heed Father Wilson's message. I believe his message was a great affirmation of our school's mission; moreover, I believe it is a great affirmation of the "heart" of this beautiful class.

I would also like to thank Sister Lorretta who delivered such a powerful innovation to begin our Commencement today. Sister Lorretta, your prayer was as powerful as your daily presence at the student entrance. Thank you for greeting our young people each day with love and kindness as they arrive at school. Seeing you, Sister Guerline, and Sister Monique is a wonderful affirmation of Christ's presence not only in our school but our world...thank you Sister

To Vanna and Maddox, thank you for capturing the many memories associated with your class' collective experience.

Vanna thank you for your wisdom. I would agree with you 100% that the composition of those who makeup this class was not a mere coincidence. To believe that would be a profound disservice to the journey that you have all shared. I would also like to thank you for your powerful message on avoiding the use of comparison as a measure of success. You are absolutely correct that to focus on the "What" vs. the "Who" is a profound disservice. The "Who" God has created each of you to be is what is most important ...and from my perspective the "Who" is pretty remarkable.

Maddox, I want to begin by expressing my gratitude for your courageous example and thank you for defining what "family" truly means. There is no doubt that you have a Guardian Angel from above who is smiling proudly today. By so eloquently defining family you revealed the "heart" of this class. As I told you and Vanna when you were rehearsing your speeches I am always amazed at how the messages of our student speeches always compliment one another. Maddox, I believe you have captured "The Who" of this remarkable class through your journey. Once again the power of the Holy Spirit has shone through both of you. Maddox, I can say without equivocation that you are correct that this class has lived what it means to be family. As is the case with virtually every family there are times when things were difficult and certainly not perfect ...but as is the case with all strong families you were ultimately there for one another when it was needed the most. Our community has been inspired and enriched by your love and compassion for one another.

Vanna and Maddox I believe the Class of 1972 and all of your fellow alumni are quite proud of how the Class of '22 has added to the wonderful legacy of SFD by not only embracing the teachings but by also adding to them...thank you for inspiring us.

Thank you to Coach Ryan Wiggins for sharing your Teacher's reflection. The essence of your Message to "Love to live" was a wonderful extension of Father Wilson's emphasis on the sanctity of life. If we have learned anything over the last several years in the midst of a Global pandemic I believe it would be to not take life for granted as there is sanctity in all life. The tragic domestic and international events of recent weeks underscore the sacred nature of life. Class of 2022 the manner in which you live each day would suggest that you understand this well. I would ask that you heed Coach Wiggins' Advice and take your zest for life with you; moreover, make life better by utilizing your penchant for creativity to be problem solvers. We need that now more than ever.

Thank you to Mr. Steller and our band for sharing their gift of music with us and reaffirming why they truly are the Pride of the Stallions. Additionally, I would like to thank Mrs. Crumpler and our Horizon Liturgical group for lending your tremendous gift of vocal music to our Baccalaureate Mass on Thursday.

Today's commencement has special meaning for one of our veteran staff members Ms. Chris Johnson, who will be retiring from Saint Francis DeSales High School after 52 years of dedicated service as a mentor, colleague, friend, and surrogate mother. Ms. Johnson is the personification of what it means to be a missionary disciple and I personally wish to thank her for making a difference in the lives of thousands of young people. You have embraced your call to serve as Jesus did. Ms. Johnson, thank you for exemplifying a life of service to others. Please join me in thanking Ms. Johnson for her love and care of our young people and her colleagues. God's Blessings in your retirement.

Class of 2022 we have been blessed to witness your love and kindness in both little and profound ways. Whether it was a simple smile in the hall or being present for a classmate who was grieving the loss of a loved one God's grace has been distributed through you and for that I say thank you. It is my prayer that you will always embrace your call to share the sweetness and joy that is associated with your love of God and in doing so you will continue to make our world a better place.

To the Class of 2022...I must admit writing my Principal's perspective has always been a challenge for me as I have a hard time saying farewell...this year was certainly no different. I think all the parents present today can relate. We are all feeling a myriad of emotions: Pride, love, joy , apprehension, and if we are completely honest some sadness. Eighteen years ago God brought 216 sets of parents a beautiful gift...or in the case of the Shaffers a set of gifts...those 18 years literally seem like it was yesterday. I am sure if all the parents close their eyes they can remember the day that each of you were born, when you uttered your first words, took your first steps, went to school for the first time, when you graduated from kindergarten, when you graduated from middle school , and now here you are at one of the biggest milestones of all...I know that parents can be guilty of smothering their children at times...but students please indulge your folks even if they are a bit emotional these days –you will understand one day, I promise

As I was gathering my thoughts for the class of 2022, I began as I usually do by listing the lengthy list of accomplishments associated with your class. And while this list is impressive it occurred to me that your list is exactly that, a list, and as Vanna articulated so powerfully, what you have done or what you will do is not your sole measure nor is it what distinguishes you from those classes that have gone before you. Do not get me wrong, the Class of 2022 has accomplished some really remarkable things...but what I want to emphasize is what makes this class unique and quite simply a list of honors and awards simply does not do that justice. As I was working through my thoughts I kept coming back to the settings where I saw you at your authentic best. In every instance it was when you were together as one. It did not matter the setting: in the classroom, on the court, on the field, in the theater, in Mass I witnessed genuine joy, compassion, laughter, tears and most noticeably love. It became abundantly clear to me how much you value your relationships. If that had not been the case your class could have easily splintered when it faced some

adversity early in the year. Instead you cared and respected one another enough to work through the challenge and grew even closer as a result. And in so doing made our school an even better place. The thing that has been noticed by those who work with you each day is how comfortable you were in conveying your love for one another; moreover, you seemed to possess a genuine appreciation and respect for the unique gifts and talents of your classmates. It is very clear to our faculty why COVID protocols were such a challenge...Physical distancing was far from natural for a class that is so connected. I thank God every day that things started to ease up for us during your Junior year and by this year you were able to experience a return to All-School Masses, three powerful Kairos Retreats, the return of incredible student sections at athletic events, and an enjoyable Junior-Senior Prom and After Prom. These are not merely events, they are traditions that speak to who we are and it was gratifying to see you embrace them fully.

To me that is at the heart of this wonderful class... your genuine care and support for one another has not gone unnoticed. In a day and age when people seem to be increasingly self-absorbed, the Class of 2022 genuinely pulls for one another. The amount of empathy, care, and support that you have continually demonstrated toward one another and our community has been exemplary. Your ability to be there for one another during times of joy and times of trial has been inspiring. This has been especially evident with your class not only in this your senior year but in the past when you have been fully present for one another through the loss of loved ones. We have been blessed to witness your daily gestures of kindness both big and small. Thank you for lifting one another with love and thank you for also inspiring our faculty, staff and administration during times of unprecedented challenge. You have provided us with light and hope for our future.

When you arrived here four short years ago I encouraged you to fully engage in your high school experience as it would go by in the blink of an eye. I am happy to say that I believe you did a wonderful job of living that advice. In my estimation your class has taught us all to not only cherish the moment, but to do so together. That is not always easy to do; in fact, society often encourages you to do the opposite. Please accept my appreciation for leading our school in such a way that it was abundantly clear that great things happen when you work collaboratively; moreover, when you demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice for a friend. Please do not change your approach---take this with you to your new communities. Our world needs this approach now more than ever before...in fact I wish the leaders of our

country could spend some quality time with you so that they would fully understand that far more is accomplished through unity rather than division.

What a tremendous legacy to leave for your family, friends, and teachers. Thank you for reaffirming that what is most important are the loving relationships we have with one another and with Christ. To me that is the distinction between being merely a community and being a family. And make no mistake Saint Francis DeSales is a family.

Graduates in late August 2018 when you entered our school for the first time I explained the three pillars of this special place: Those pillars being Faith, Family, and Tradition... Furthermore, I explained the vital role that each of these would play in your development as a person. I spoke to you about the inherent responsibility that came with being a student of this wonderful and tradition-rich place. But the thing that I really wanted to emphasize and make sure that you took away from that meeting was a very simple challenge. I am sure that you remember that challenge... The challenge was to build upon the efforts of those who had worked so diligently to establish St. Francis DeSales as a school noted for a strong commitment to faith and community- wonderful alumni such as those with us today from the Class of 1972. I also asked you to leave a positive and lasting impression on the school by sharing your unique God-given gifts. In essence, I asked you to leave DeSales a better place than you found it. It is with a great deal of pride and certainty that I can say that you have met this challenge with remarkable grace and for that our entire community is deeply grateful.

While we all acknowledge time passes much too quickly The faculty and I have been graced with the opportunity to watch you grow and excel spiritually, scholastically, socially and emotionally during your four years. We have been blessed to walk with you during your faith journey and we have been blessed with the evidence of your faith growth through Liturgy, underclass retreats, your Kairos experience, and your countless acts of service to those who were in need. We have watched you work feverishly in the classroom as evidenced by the options with which you have been provided for your post-secondary education and the numerous and well-deserved awards and scholarships that you have amassed. This class has left a legacy of success in all that you do – noting that you have 13 classmates who will graduate with the distinction of Summa Cum Laude; 84 Magna Cum Laude and 25 Cum Laude led by your number 1 ranked classmate Katie Le; National Merit Commended Scholars in Joseph Berendt, Andrea Millenbaugh, Kevin

Morales, Michael Sabatino, and Grace Vance. State Award winning artists Phoebe Kraus; POL State Champion and National Finalist Pius Edzie; Four National Qualifiers for National History Day in Ashley Allton, Juliana Barnhart, Kate Stone and Grace Vance. Your class will also be remembered for your willingness to serve: Whether it was going RTR, Saint Stephens, Christmas in the Courtyard, SVDP, Stallions for Life, your parishes, Retreats, Damascus Summer Camps, and countless other charitable causes such as raising money for those impacted by the War in Ukraine, or assisting SFD families facing unexpected challenges - you have bought in 100% and brought the face of Christ to those in need. In addition, as we heard earlier today that one of your classmates will be proudly serving our country in the Armed Services. We thank each of you for your commitment to serve others.

This class has brought many smiles to our faces as we have watched you shine in the performing arts. Your performances in theater, band and choir have been a joy to behold. We will always remember the leading roles of Pius Edzie and Sandra Garcia in the Fall Production of Clue and the talents of Jalen Carpenter, Jessica Alvarado, Abby Snide and Pius Edzie in The Spring Musical the Addams Family. In athletics you have enjoyed tremendous success over your four years: (How about this for an impressive collective resume) and while all of these athletic accomplishments are noteworthy we are most proud of the fact that this class features over 18 Academic All-Ohio Athletes. It is clear to me why the student athletes of our school are valued by College programs across the country because our athletes are first and foremost student-athletes

And while people take notice of the standing ovations associated with a successful show or the hardware that comes with a league, district, or state championship, what is truly most valuable and memorable will be your dedication, work ethic, passion, cohesiveness, loyalty and resiliency... When all is said and done that is really what matters the most. It is also important to note on this day of recognizing the “Who” as opposed to the simply “The What” that we also realize that there are valuable blessings when we may fall just a little bit short of our goal. It is in these trials and tribulations that we become wiser, stronger, and arrive at a fuller appreciation of the importance of faith in our lives.

It is clear to all of us who have been blessed to join you on your journey that it has been your genuine love for one another as a class that has contributed

mightily to your well-deserved success. Your willingness to place others before yourself has empowered all around you to be the best version of themselves that they can be . You have embraced the school theme to “Forward with Faith” and as a result our school’s faith environment has been enriched

I encourage you to maintain that approach to life. The issues facing us as a society today are great; however, sharing your talents in a purposeful and meaningful way will enable you to meet these challenges.

I think it is important to share with those gathered here today that there are 216 reasons for all of us to be hopeful about our future. The faculty, staff, and administration have been blessed to witness these young men and women work collaboratively to make a difference in our community and our world. They have made a conscious decision through their daily endeavors to live the advice of St. Francis DeSales when he stated: “Be who you are and to be that perfectly well”

As the Principal of my beloved Alma Mater I am humbled that I have been afforded the opportunity to work side by side with the class of 2022. You have lived your faith and you have done it with resolve and purpose and by doing so you have added richly to the legacy of our school community.

Class of 2022 it is now time for you to take your rightful place as proud alumni of St. Francis DeSales High School... As Coach Wiggins stated earlier, welcome to the club! I know I speak on behalf of our entire community when I tell you how much we appreciate what you have added to the tradition of our school...And I implore you to do as those before you have done - stay connected to your Alma Mater much like these lovely people from the class of 1972. In fact, allow yourself to take a glimpse into the future of what the world will look like in 2072 hopefully on a Sunny Saturday morning...will you still be tied to this wonderful place? The beauty of our community is the fact that our alumni have never lost track of their roots.

It is my sincere hope that your experience here at St. Francis DeSales High School has been positive, faith-affirming, and full of growth. As you embark on the next phase of your journey I hope that you maintain the friendships that you have established here and that you will always remain true to the teachings of Jesus, your parents, and your teachers.

Please find comfort in knowing that we will pray for you each day...It is my sincere hope and that of all those present today that God will Bless you always with the treasures of family, friendship, and health.

Before we end this morning I would like to take care of a few logistical items... I thank Mr. Steller, our concert band for our beautiful music today; I thank the members of the Parent's Advisory Board, and our National Honor society juniors, under the direction of Mr. Early and Mrs. Evans for their assistance today; I wish to thank our maintenance staff for their outstanding efforts preparing for this wonderful day. I wish to thank God for getting us all here safely. I would ask that following the singing of the Alma Mater you allow the faculty and students to depart the stadium and make their way clear of the walkway of champions. You will have the opportunity for pictures in the school and our two beautiful courtyards after the ceremony.

Fellow Alumni rest comfortably knowing you always have a "Home" at Saint Francis DeSales High School. Please know we hold you in our prayers. Class of 2022 I am going to leave you with some worldly advice from one of your childhood cartoons "Gravity Falls" " You cannot force someone to love you. The best you can do is strive to be someone worthy of loving" ... Class of 2022 please know that WE LOVE YOU!!! God's Blessings on a dynamic and joy-filled future.