

Hello, my name is Owen Eckstein, a member of the graduating class of 2023.

First I would like to welcome Mr. Garrick, Mr. Jones, Mr. Heil, and the parents, friends, and family members here today. I want to thank those who have given me this amazing opportunity to speak with you all, and I am truly honored and blessed to be representing my class today. I also want to thank everyone who helped me prepare for this speech, and everyone who encouraged and supported me, including my amazing parents and siblings.

Obviously, I know a lot of us are filled with anticipation to hear our names called as we walk across the stage. Some of you may be nervous as we transition to a new, uncertain, yet exciting future.

For others, today will be the last time we may see people that we have shared classrooms with for the last 4 years.

And, of course, for some of you, this moment may be filled with pure joy because it means no more Visio Divinas, Metacognitives, or Calc worksheets.

Everyone of you, however, should be proud of what you have achieved. The diploma you will receive is the culmination of everything you have worked towards over the past 4 years.

What is not written on our diploma, however, is the large amount of time, effort, and hard work required to earn it. It does not illustrate the many sacrifices made, the late nights of studying or the early mornings of recitation.

It does not show the amazing teachers, staff, friends, and families that have helped you along the way, many of whom are present today. These people have created an amazing environment that allows us to become the best we can, something that makes DeSales special. Don't forget to thank those people. As a teacher, my mom reminded me that this moment is as important to them as it is to you.

Our class, arguably more than most, has endured a tremendous amount of tribulation during our time in high school. We have experienced times of uncertainty, fear, and grief. These times, however, only brought our class closer together. When you've gone through such difficult times with a group of people, it bonds you with them in a unique way.

I've certainly felt this bond grow over the past 4 years and I hope all you have too.

At freshman orientation, I showed up having no idea how close we would all become, and the rooms were filled with unfamiliar faces and people I had never met.

When I look into the sea of purple today, however, I see a family. I've got over 200 brothers and sisters who were always there for me and for each other during these difficult times. This year especially has shown me how many amazing individuals are a part of this class. There are so

many people I know that I can always count on. I could go on forever talking about each and every person here today, their unique qualities, and all the awesome things they are going to do in the future, but I won't.

Soon, our paths are going to lead us all across the country.

Whether you are going all the way to Harvard, committed to play a sport, staying at home, or joining me on the Great Migration to Cincinnati, remember the feeling of unity present today. As you look to your right and to your left, take in the great sense of companionship we all share for each other.

Don't forget the special bond that we have created, and wherever you are going, bring the same energy with you. Widen this family through the same support that we gave each other during the hardships we overcame together.

There are so many moments I can think of that encapsulate what we as a class represent: a family. The huge crowds at every home, or away game, especially when the girls won states in volleyball, or when the boys won states in lacrosse.

No matter what team you belong to: whether it be on a field, court, or stage, nothing represents our class better than when we are using our God-given talents surrounded by our closest friends.

Or during our Kairos retreats, where we all grew so close together in an atmosphere of love and care unlike anything else I have experienced before. Whenever anyone asks me what the most meaningful memory of high school was, Kairos is always my answer.

But the uniqueness of our class is evident everyday in school, too. The humor of our class can even be seen in the classroom. Smiles and laughter are a normal part of the day here at DeSales, even when maybe it shouldn't. But if you have ever tried to hold in laughter with your friends, then you know that sometimes it was out of our control.

I hope you all, like me, can think back and remember how enjoyable these classes were, and maybe one day we might even miss getting up early for school, but probably not. As much as the students were responsible for the great class environments, it would not be right to talk about how great our experience has been without mentioning the teachers behind it.

Like I said before, I have had the pleasure of getting to know some amazing teachers and staff members over the years. They have taught me so much more than just their subject matter. Let me paint you a picture,

When you leave here and need help planning your summer road trip across the country, Mrs. Scott is who you should talk to.

And if you need someone to go with, Seminarian Jake is your guy and the best hype man I know.

If you need some extra cash to fund the trip, Mr. Montenaro would be happy to show you the best stocks to invest in.

When you're in the car and need some jokes to lighten the mood, Ms. Johnson has plenty for you.

Or when you get hungry on that road trip, Mr. Ulry would be able to point you in the direction towards the nearest ice cream shop.

Then you'll get back from the road trip and need a reality check and some life advice on what to do next, and Mrs. Sharritts is the first person I would recommend.

And you will eventually find yourself in some deep trouble and hiding in some bushes, Mr. Dvorak will be able to relate.

And I know there are so many other teachers who would be happy to help you along your journey.

Any one of my classmates could have stood up here and told their unique story and the special moments that stuck out to them. Every experience is different and personal, but throughout each one, you will find common themes. Woven into each experience is the same pillars of faith, family, and tradition.

As we begin our new journey, I would also like to congratulate the teachers "graduating with us." I know the DeSales community will greatly miss Mrs. Scott, Mr. Stellar, and Mrs. Griffith who have been a great part of the story of St. Francis de Sales high school.

As you can tell, I am an extremely proud soon-to-be-graduate of St. Francis de Sales high school. There is something special about this place. Maybe it is the uniforms that are so distinctive of our school. Maybe it's the family home rooms. Shout out to Homeroom 209 and the best homeroom mom I could ask for in Mrs. Mascarin. Or maybe it's the calzones at lunch.

But if you ask me, I personally believe that it's the people that make this place special. I've seen first hand how great a community we have here and how we really are like one big family.

Like every family, we have our ups and downs. We argue and fight sometimes, but in the end we are still tied together. And, like my own family, I could not be happier to be a part of the graduating class sitting in front of me.

Class of 2023, Enjoy this moment, you earned it. Congratulations!

