

Principal Garrick, administrators, school board president Mr. Doug Heil, friends, family, and most importantly, Class of 2023, I welcome you all to the 60th annual Saint Francis DeSales Commencement Ceremony. My name is Olivia Ettenhofer, and I am honored to speak today as your class president and valedictorian. We are gathered here at the culmination of our high school journey, to say goodbye to the hallways we have walked down the last four years.

First of all, I want to start by thanking the entire faculty, staff, and administration here at DeSales for making our last four years so memorable. To have received such a great education here at this school has been nothing short of a privilege, and none of that would have been possible without the countless hours you all put in to see us succeed. You have taught us lessons that will be used not only in our future classroom's, but in all of our future endeavors. From Mr. Ulry's international ice cream shop recommendations, Miss Johnson's "peace be with you's", Mr. Steller's impressive traffic conducting, all the way to Mr. Delfino's advice for an extra long weekend, and the copious amounts of eggs dropped on Mrs. Scott's head, you all have made moving on from DeSales one of the hardest things we have to do.

Next, I would be remiss if I did not take the time to thank all of our parents. I think I can speak for every one of my classmates when I say that we would not be sitting here today if it was not for you. You all sacrificed so much in order to allow us to receive the best education possible. From countless hours spent supporting us in our various extracurricular activities, to just checking in on us daily to make sure we were doing okay, your endless love and devotion to us and our successes has never gone unnoticed. Thank you for raising us to be the best versions of ourselves, we are so happy to be able to share this accomplishment with you all.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you, my fellow graduates. I have made the most unforgettable friendships these past four years. I have grown alongside each and every one of you, and your talents have motivated me to seek my fullest potential. Students like Natalie Martin and Biz Trostel, who got out of 8th and 9th period every day because of their insane gymnastics skills. Or Sean Gillmore, who shined on stage in his various Drama Department performances. Who could forget about Richael Saka, easily one of the smartest people I know and who will be attending Harvard University next fall. Our competition cheer team won states this year and lacrosse last year, two feats our whole grade can be proud of. I could go on and on about the various accomplishments of my fellow classmates, but the point is, without all of you, our class would not have been what it was- the amazing family we have culminated in the past

four years. Our class of 2023 has exemplified the strength, intelligence, and resilience we believe in each and every day of our lives here. Our senior year has proved to be such a special one, but I also want to highlight where we began.

At our Freshman orientation, our first official event as an entire class, we were given t-shirts with the year's school theme: "Hope Lives Here." Little did we know that in just a few short months, our world would need all of the hope it could get. Having barely been acclimated into High School, our 14 and 15 year old selves were now locked up in our homes, attempting to learn behind a computer screen. The class of 2023 is the first class to have had our entire high school careers affected by COVID, and looking back on it, the theme "Hope Lives Here" fits our last four years perfectly. We persevered, creating new traditions during unprecedented times, adapting to circumstances unforeseen by any, and never allowing each other to give up hope along the way.

I am so proud of all that we have accomplished. None of this was easy, and at times, it almost seemed like this day would never come. Our freshman year started out normal, with our football Friday nights, homecoming, and semester exams. We met our homeroom classmates, the friends we navigated every morning with, not recognizing that we would not even have homeroom sophomore year. We all know what happened next, and so, a new normal was created. Sophomore year had short lived half day Monday's, school days were split up by last names, homecoming on the football field, and exams were canceled. Athletics were permitted to play, yet they were never the same. However, the class of 2023 pushed through all the challenges we were faced with. Junior year was an entirely maskless year, and things were starting to look up again. We had our first prom, took the ACT, and started thinking ahead to what seemed like ages away: college. Junior year is known as the hardest of them all, many of us taking many more AP classes than before, but our great teachers guided us to do our best. And that brings us to senior year. We brought back old traditions with winter formal and spirit day, completed those daunting, yet rewarding CAP projects, decided where the next chapter of our lives was headed, and now we are here, graduating.

When we walked into the front doors of DeSales four years ago and sat down in the bleachers for the first time as a class, Mr. Garrick gave us a challenge. He asked us to leave DeSales better than we found it. We came into St. Francis Desales with many goals. Personally, I strived to be top of the class, Kairos Leader, and class president, to receive a Letterman Jacket,

and even to give the class commencement speech you are listening to right now. In achieving these goals, I believe we have done our part in leaving DeSales better than we found it. However, there is one goal we have yet to fulfill, and it involves all of us. I would love to have a post on instagram with all of us in it, and I was hoping PPT could help us out. So if you could all turn around and strike a pose, then maybe I could fulfill my last goal before I graduate.

Speaking of leaving DeSales better than we found it, I would like to leave you all today with that same goal. Wherever you may be going, whether that be across the country, or 15 minutes away like me, I challenge you to leave every room you walk in better than you found it. Like we all learned together freshman year, Hope does live here at DeSales. However, it lives within each of us as well. I *hope* that no matter what life throws at you, that you will always continue to persevere. I *hope* that you never give up on the dreams you all have. I *hope* that you always push others to be their best. I *hope* that, wherever you may go, you will never forget where you came from. I *hope* your faith stays strong, and that God will guide you forever and always. And finally, I *hope* you have achieved all that you were looking for in these four walls, for no matter how much adversity we may have faced, we bleed purple through and through.

These may not have been the easiest years, but they sure have been my favorite. You have all inspired me throughout my high school career, so I *hope* you all keep pushing through the rest of your academic and life journey. Class of 2023, thank you. We did it! Good luck on your future ventures, and go Stallions!