

Graduation Address Class of 2017 St. Michael School (excerpt)

There's a memorable Liberty Street landmark in Pawcatuck, CT, a compass to the Heavens. Pointing upward for 150 years, the St. Michael the Archangel Church steeple was a sentinel to the strength of the faith of believing and becoming.

For a while now that beacon has been missing from the landscape and driving up Liberty Street looking for it left me feeling a bit lost and empty, yearning for that guide to be back in my view. Well, a few weeks ago driving to the eighth-grade car wash, I paused and saw the outline reappearing and now with the trusses in place, the eighth-grade graduation picture was to be taken that morning beneath them. Driving up the hill, I pondered how indicative that picture was in characterizing the strength and sacrifice necessary long ago to build that church, and how, another chapter in that story had been experienced firsthand by the Class of 2017.

I thought about how this eighth-grade class has seen the power of faith and hard work exemplified through the evolution of the rebuilding efforts and how it took the same courage as that of the first families who constructed this project and kept it on the road to success. Their resolve has guided the journey of today's faithful. Little did I know that on that Saturday morning as I drove up the hill and began to contemplate what a wonderful lesson this would be that this special eighth grade class would honor me with this opportunity this evening to be their graduation speaker.

I will never forget this opportunity to share in your graduation ceremony, and it gives me a teachable moment, even in retirement, to parallel the strength of St. Michael Church and its people with the mission of the school. St. Michael School has challenged you "to become critical and insightful thinkers, but, more importantly, to live your faith with a sincere understanding of the values of love, respect, forgiveness, honesty, compassion, and service to others." This is the strength needed to build your future. All who have touched your lives in meaningful ways: those here tonight -your family, friends, teachers, and others not with us this evening who have made a difference along the way, have constructed the framework for your journey ahead. You now will generate the design that follows, what you create, what you dream, and how you set your goals to achieve the things that are important to you....

Stand strong Class of 2017. Your foundation has been built with skills and character and values that will be the core framework to construct the future. It will take faith and hope to face adversity, but you have witnessed the resolve of spirit of those strong Catholics who 150 years ago worked hard to build a church. They possessed all that each generation after them has needed to succeed. Now it's your turn to put your unique signature on the design of what lies ahead...