

SFHS Class of 2008 Valedictory Speech given by Alex Coward

Good Evening Bishop Soto, parents, families, teachers, staff and of course, my fellow classmates. The day we thought would never come has arrived! It's amazing to look back and remember our freshman selves - nervous, shy, worried about how we would make it through 4 years at St. Francis. How incredible is our transformation - physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

It's so interesting that the theme for this year, "Many Hands, One Heart", reflects the growth of our class not only for this year, but for the last four years. We have been guided in our growth by our teachers, parents and God, and molded into caring, compassionate, kind young women who have come to think not only with their heads, but also with their hearts.

Hearts that are full of grace, hearts that put others before ourselves. Our hearts have learned to love unconditionally, and have acquired the ability and desire to forgive. And it is this transformation-the growth of love not only individually, but also in our class as a whole, that truly amazes me the most.

When we first entered this school, we only knew of its reputation for a rigorous academic program: we knew we would have hours of homework, papers and projects, that we would work harder for our diploma than we had ever worked academically. What we didn't know was that in the process of learning literature and mathematics, science and history, religion and languages, we would also learn how to think for ourselves.

We didn't realize that the most important part of our education - questioning what we know, analyzing what is placed before us, and never accepting the group consensus as the only possible answer - would far overshadow any factual information we take away from St. Francis.

What we didn't know was that learning and growing in an environment where having a different idea was not only accepted, but expected of us, would lead us to be far greater students than any amount of studying or memorizing could do. We didn't realize that this environment would allow us to discover for ourselves the fundamental truths - never to just accept them face value, but instead to ask Why? And then find the answer for ourselves.

The confidence we have built in ourselves and in our ability to see beyond what is obvious will not only continue to dramatically impact our education, but also our overall success in life. It is our minds that we take away from St. Francis, more so than our brains; minds that challenge what we are told, and push the boundaries of knowledge.

Our minds now join with our hearts to direct our hands; hands that have prayed countless prayers, eaten innumerable meals, written endless papers, and embraced on both occasions of happiness, and occasions of sadness. Hands that have built homecoming decorations, theatre sets that have held open philosophy books and furiously solved math problems.

These hands, our hands, now spread out in the world. They will be guided by the heart we have all developed at St. Francis to do remarkable things. Our hands will bless the world with music art, and drama. We will forge new ground in the sciences and mathematics, making a difference in politics and business. Some of our hands will go on to teach, to heal, to entertain, but most of all, every one of our hands will go on to serve. Our hands will touch all 7 continents, space, beaches, deserts, cities, farms, mountains. But most important, guided by the heart of our class, these hands will go on to touch the lives of thousands, even millions of people.

Our reputation of "nice" class was given to us not because of one or two or even three students, but because of our class as a whole. Our class has developed a truly kind heart. We have all contributed to the growth of this heart, and it is in living a Christian life, with God at our side, that we may further help this heart to grow and guide our hands to do incredible things.

Our hands will change much over the next several decades. Look at them now - wrinkle free, perfectly tanned, nail-polish that complements our fashionable outfits. Our hands will grow and change, gaining new rings as we start families, becoming more worn as we get hands-on jobs.

Our hands will change from holding books to paychecks, from opening the doors of dorm rooms, to apartments, to houses. We will grasp the hands of friends in celebration, and cradle the hands of friends in times of grief. Our hands will grow dirty and tired at times, but God will always be at our side, to help us wash our hands and start anew.

Our hands will grow pale as we grow older, spotted with age, as we see life through first our mothers' eyes and then the eyes of our grandmothers. Our hands will grow worn with calluses that tell the story of our past struggles and triumphs.

But no matter how our hands may change, or what accessories we may add to them, they will always be guided by the heart and the mind that we have cultivated together as a class, here at St. Francis.

Take the hands of those around you now, (no seriously - do it!) - know that we have made it here, made it to this stage tonight together, with one heart and strong minds. Our many hands have supported and picked up and helped each other through everything these last four years have thrown at us. These hands, our minds and our heart are the reason that we are all here today.

We have made it here because of each other. So as our 462 hands make their way across the stage today and out the doors into our future, let us not leave this heart behind. Let us not leave our heart behind. Take a little bit of it with you, so that it may continue to help you grow and learn and love.