

## **SFHS Class of 2008 Valedictory Speech given by Rebekah Lucien**

Good evening St. Francis faculty and staff, family and friends,

Sitting before you this evening is the graduated class of 2008 with diplomas in tow, who has officially completed Saint Francis High School. We have met the academic requirements that have prepared us for the future and have developed our unique identities by pursuing what we love: clubs, sports, the Fine Arts, and academic teams.

However, I have not yet mentioned a facet of the St. Francis education that is most important and has helped us to respond to the needs of our community and our world. This feature of the curriculum has set us apart from the mainstream culture known as Generation Me.

The reality television show that truly embodies the warped values of our society is the MTV favorite: My Super Sweet Sixteen. Each episode features the daughter of wealthy parents and her coming-of-age party. The children claim they can get whatever they want, and they do! Mothers fly to Paris to pick out the perfect dress; dads give a Mercedes Benz or a Range Rover as a birthday gift. Rappers and singers perform as entertainment for the party. With every dollar spent, I cringe at how many lives could have been helped had the money been spent wisely. In each new episode, the teen tries to surpass the others and have the distinction of "the best party ever". For what? Is competition and accumulation of wealth all that we strive for?

My fellow classmates, the answer is no. We have learned over the past four years how Christian service can be incorporated into our everyday lives. In the midst of a culture that values selfishness as a means to reach the top, we have introduced a new definition of success: the ability to share our knowledge and wealth with those who are less fortunate. The charities we have benefited through Saint Francis are innumerable and the programs the school has created are countless.

We have truly been blessed to attend a school that is so socially responsible. As a class, we have increased social awareness on campus by creating clubs that encourage advocacy: Peace Club, Environmental Club, Key Club, and Alzheimer's Awareness. To a patient in the hospital, you have been a sign of hope and happiness; to a student you have tutored, you have been the most helpful person in the world.

The teachers at Saint Anne's Elementary School, the location of a St. Francis tutoring program, were so eager to tell me how happy their students became at the sight of a Saint Francis student walking through the school gates. Without even knowing my name, children waved and smiled from their classrooms or offered me hugs. Why? Their excitement derives from what a Saint Francis

uniform represents to them. The bright red color of our sweatshirts and the box pleat pattern of our skirts have been associated with care, kindness and stewardship.

These characteristics can be attributed to all of us, regardless of our different personalities and appearances. Transfer those traits from your uniform to your heart and you will continue to re-define success.

In order to love and help others, first you must love yourself. You may think: "how can I not love myself? We spend all day together." That is understandable but I have learned that there is a distinction between self-acceptance and self-love. Essentially, looking in the mirror and saying "Uh, I'm okay" is very different from saying "There is no one else in the world I would rather be."

If you have not begun that journey to self-love, or have given up along the way, I encourage you to try again. God has not created you for mediocrity, so who are you to expect that of yourself? You can reach your full potential in life when you realize that you are destined for success and worthy of your own love.

On the way, you may have feelings of uncertainty, as in all things in life, but do not dwell in doubt. You will achieve whatever you set your mind to. When you fulfill your dreams, use your former doubt as a testament to others of the power of perseverance. In doing so, you learn to serve.

I believe the sooner we realize that there is a world beyond ourselves, the sooner we will realize that there is not a world beyond ourselves. When we realize that everyone shares the same emotions, we can help each other cope despite our different circumstances. As Saint Francis High School graduates, we are one with refugees of war all over the world. As members of this audience, we are all one with the billions of people in the world suffering from illiteracy, poverty, disease, and hunger. The only chasm between us is a gap our generation can make an effort to fill: inadequate resources.

As we move onto the next stages of our lives, college and ultimately adulthood itself, remember that serving others extends beyond school requirements. Better yet, you should serve others in everything: your future endeavors and your relationships. For an example of how this can be achieved, look to the Saint Francis faculty and staff, who have nurtured us academically and spiritually.

Look to those around you, your family and friends, who have given you the best gift in the world: love. Finally, look to yourself. You have made a difference in your community and abroad as a volunteer and a friend. Now, I challenge you to continue your efforts and expand on them. As your awareness of the world increases, I invite you to be led by your internal motivation: your Christian faith, your belief in God, your calling for a specific type of service.

Service is the pursuit of our passions for helping others. All of our hearts are equipped to serve so I urge you to spend the rest of your life living for others.

Our high school graduation signals the official end of childhood: the age of Velcro shoes, toys, and the Disney Channel. All right, hopefully your childhood was characterized by more than possessions and television. Yet, these tangible items symbolize our growth from dependent infants to confident young women.

Therefore, I recall the series finale of one of my favorite shows: Boy Meets World. Yes, many of you remember it now with fond memories, but for those of you did not truly enjoy cable, the show concluded with the main characters returning from college to visit their favorite teacher Mr. Feeny. He told them four things: "Believe in yourselves. Dream. Try. Do good." I sincerely hope the same for you, my fellow classmates, and wish you all the best.

Thank you!