

Our welcoming address was delivered by Salutatorians

**Ethan Graham Desforges**

**And**

**John Edward Cresson**

Ethan Desforges:

Father Matthew, Mayor Cooper, Brother Ray, Mr. Watkins, faculty and staff, family and friends, welcome to Saint Paul's 105<sup>th</sup> Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2016. On behalf of the 167 men on this stage we are gratified by your presence and formally invite you to relish and celebrate this final ceremony with us as we begin the conclusion of our time here.

For the total 6 minutes John and I have to speak with you today, I am here to recount the past up until this very moment. From the athletic aspect, we have won three straight soccer state championships along with a number one rating in the nation. Rugby, which formed during our time here, has earned the title of Deep South Champions. Many of us have earned individual state titles in wrestling, track, powerlifting, and tennis. We have been named district and parish champs in nearly all sports multiple times in our years attending Saint Paul's. From the academic standpoint, we have 8 commended National Merit Scholars among us. In addition, three men were invited to apply for the honor of being named a

Presidential Scholar. Numerous reputable colleges have sent us acceptance letters including Vanderbilt, Notre Dame, Georgetown, UCLA, and even an appointment from West Point. And, though all of these prestigious accomplishments display our achievement here at our Blue Ribbon School, these incredible accomplishments alone cannot fully encompass the true meaning of what Saint Paul's really is.

However, there is a song with great sentimental value to Saint Paul's that can: I Feel Home by OAR. Over the last couple of years this song has really hit home, especially today through the lines "We got nothing to do, and I look at you, I see something that I know and love. Well in the end we can all call a friend, well that's something I know as true. I said it's something free that means a lot to me, when I'm with my friends I feel home." Seniors, we have spent over a quarter of our lives here at Saint Paul's. I do not believe that there is anyone on this stage who has not found his place yet among all the clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities we have. Many of us have developed close relationships with teachers because the faculty members here actually care about us as people, not just as students. From the Friday night football games to the challenge nights, from the parade marching to Field Day, and especially from Senior Unity Day to Senior Retreat, we have continued creating great memories. And, though these memories fade with time, they will never truly be forgotten, and thus will never cease to exist. Every one of us on stage has one of these crosses, and this is a reminder that

we went to Saint Paul's School, and that Saint Paul's is where we will always be, no matter how many miles away we physically find ourselves. Most of us have been in this since day one, and despite the trials we have faced, we have made it through. As we pack our bags and move on in life, we can always call a friend, a brother here on stage with us, and that is something I know as true. "Home to me is reality," and reality is we will do anything for each other. Saint Paul's has made this possible, becoming our home as time has passed. "There are few things pure in this world anymore, and home is one of the few. I feel home."

John Cresson:

As we gather here to celebrate the conclusion of our sojourn on these Holy grounds, I cannot help but to echo what Ethan said about feeling home. There is no better way to describe St. Paul's, for it is here, where strangers became friends and friends became brothers, it is here where incredible experiences branded themselves as lasting memories on our minds, and it is here where we pushed each other to work harder, and to go further, and to reach for the stars. The time we have shared here has truly been special, and I know I am not alone when I say I will sincerely miss our home and St. Paul's family.

However, while we assemble to glorify the past, our capricious minds cannot help but to wander into the possibilities of the future. A future that is no more certain now than in was five years ago or five years before then.

While I am not daring enough to suggest specifics of what the future may hold, there is one certainty I believe in, but before I offer it, travel back with me to December 10, 1950: A time when nuclear war cast its frightful shadow across the face of the world. Yet, despite this unbelievable fear, this ever prevalent threat, Nobel Laureate William Faulkner confessed his belief that humanity would not only endure, but it would prevail.

Now I stand before you today in a world that is ever changing, a world that is plagued with violence, permeated with fear and hatred, and polarized by politics, but despite this, despite all of this I have come to believe that the members of this graduating class will not only endure in this world, will not only survive in it, but thrive in it. We will prevail. This class' ability to achieve wonderful things and to overcome tremendous obstacles serves as a pillar to this assertion. For this is a class whose members possess the ability and the talent to advance themselves, but the compassion to advance others, the drive to improve their own lives, but the magnanimity to improve the lives of others.

I began with a quote from William Faulkner and would like to conclude with one from President John F. Kennedy. What these two share in common is hope for the future, which is sometimes hard to come, but if I can leave you with nothing else, let it be hope—hope in the members of this class, hope in this generation, hope for the future, a humble hope, one that is founded in the Lasallian philosophy,

a hope that each of us can leave every place we go better than when we found it, and in doing so work to make this world a better place.

As we look out from this stage for the final time, it is sad to think that we will be leaving, but it is only our departure that will launch us into a new journey, so to conclude my remarks and our high school careers, so in the words of our 35<sup>th</sup> president, “With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love asking His blessings and His help, but knowing that here on Earth, God’s Work must truly be our own.”

**The Valedictory Address was delivered by**

**Luke Anthony Avenel**

**Jacob Gabriel Broussard**

**Jack Haojing Cheng**

**Patrick James Connolly**

**Ryan Patrick Meraux**

**Leland Matthews van Deventer**

Jacob Broussard (1)

Father Matthew, Mayor Cooper, faculty and staff, family and friends:

Here at Saint Paul's we are blessed with a number of facilities on our campus. The oldest building on campus, and the only remaining building that was in use when Saint Paul's opened in 1911 currently serves as our theater, housing our excellent drama department and our Marian Players. However, in the 105 years since Saint Paul's opened, what is today known as the Alumni Memorial Theater has also served as a gymnasium, chapel, and library. The various functions of this building over the years relate the different aspects of the Lasallian Education received by Saint Paul's students.

Academics are the primary focus at Saint Paul's, as signified by the building's use as a library. However, Saint Paul's students also learn valuable lessons while working to excel in athletic competition, as signified by the building's use as a gymnasium. In fact, when the Saint Paul's basketball team played in what today serves as our theater, they defeated LSU, Tulane, and Loyola University. And while I'm not saying the 2015-2016 Saint Paul's basketball team could have defeated the 2015-2016 LSU basketball team, I'll point out that while Saint Paul's finished the season 31-2 and broke a school record by winning 31 consecutive games, LSU barely won half of their games and never won more than three games in a row this season.

Saint Paul's also teaches its students lessons through other extracurricular activities, as signified by the building's use as a theater, and through prayer and the Sacraments, as signified by the building's use as a chapel.

Furthermore, the only building that each Saint Paul's student and faculty member has occupied, the theater symbolizes the brotherhood that all Saint Paul's students share. This brotherhood is what makes Saint Paul's "a great place to grow up", as stated in the mission statement. Each student begins his Saint Paul's journey in the theater on the first morning of his 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, hearing, perhaps skeptically, about the great brotherhood shared by Saint Paul's students, and ends his Saint Paul's journey taking the class photo in the theater before graduation, fully convinced that he has 166 brothers for life

Jack Cheng (2)

The Main School Building serves as the heart of our school. Many of us share the daily experience of walking through the halls in which many of our predecessors once have. Even when we don't have classes in the Main school building, the looming fear of getting called to the front office for, "In the words of Coach Sears, mis-parked Ford Tundra," Nor the desperate hungers in between classes in which only some remarkably overpriced snacks from Sarge can satisfy.

But in all seriousness this building is where we have developed the heart of our educational Experiences at St. Paul's. It is here where we have cultured an understanding of humanities histories so that we may learn from its mistakes and correct them for our futures, and study its successes so that we may strive to recreate them. It is here that we have become well versed in the literature that the world as to offer and developed an artistic appreciation for the melodic language known as English or if you're really patriotic American. It is here that we have learned about and developed through repeated trials, the theories and formulas that lead to the expected but not assured outcomes of our lives.

But the true importance of the main school building is not measured in the physical growth of our cognitive ability, but rather the experiences we share within the establishment. From the words of the wise writer, poet, and musician Aubrey Graham commonly known by the persona, Drake, “What a time to be alive, you and yours, and me and mine.” And it truly is a great time for us. Your experiences, my experiences, it is through these coherent times together that we have grown closer and banded together as the brothers we are today. As the graduating class of 2016, our memories and actions serve as the legacy and blueprint to our successors, and it is through our experiences together that we have slowly but gradually affirmed the mission here, St. Pauls a great place to grow up.

Luke Avenel (3)

Benilde Hall, or that giant three story building right up the sidewalk. St. Benilde was the first canonized Christian Brother, and almost every Lasallian school has a building named after St. Benilde. The classes inside of our Benilde Hall are some of the most important and underrated classes taught here at St. Paul’s. On the third floor are the Spanish classes. While many people were not fans of Spanish class and did everything they could to get through those two required years, the time I spent in Spanish class has been crucial to my growth into the student and person that I am. Spanish teaches us how to open our minds to other ways of life and to look at problems and our whole lives from a new perspective. Sometimes we believe things are wrong, like an upside-down map, but we just need to look at them from a different perspective. The best way to solve problems and to achieve our goals throughout life is through using many different perspectives and viewpoints.

On the bottom floor of Benilde Hall is one of the most important if not the most important subject we learn at St. Paul's, and it is only fitting that Religion is taught in the most prominent building on campus. The religion classes instill in us the values put in place by St. John Baptist de Lasalle. The five core principles that we learn every year in religion class, and I mean every year, help show us how to be better people not only at St. Paul's but also for the rest of our lives. They teach us how to include every person, to have respect for all people, to have concern for the poor, to take advantage of every opportunity to have a quality education, and, most importantly, to have faith in the presence of God. St. Paul's has shown the members of the class of 2016 that if things are not going in the direction that we want them to go that we need to have faith in God and to never lose our faith or give up on God because He will never give up on us. Ever since I was little, my parents, who I want to thank really quickly for all of the support they've given me over the years because if I don't my mom threatened to punish me, have instilled ideas of faith into my life, and St. Paul's has developed my faith into something that is a vital piece of who I am. To me, Benilde Hall represents so much more than just religion and Spanish classes, it represents the faith that St. Paul's has ingrained into my life and the fact that sometimes you have to look at life from a different perspective in order to solve the challenges you face.

Ryan Meraux (4)

### “La Salle Hall”

As we continue on the tour of our campus, we now stop at La Salle Hall, named after the founder of the Christian Brothers. One thing we should all learn from La Salle Hall is to have a purpose. As many of you know, La Salle Hall was originally a dormitory. From when it was

constructed in the 60s until the 1990s, it best served the school by giving boarding students a literal home. But the school, like life itself, is ever-changing. A dormitory is not needed here anymore, giving the building little use, and it fell into disrepair. But, the building changed. It was converted into things St. Paul's needed most: more classrooms and counseling space. Now, La Salle Hall is a hub for student activity and a metaphorical home for many, a startling change from just 5 years ago, when it was only useful to the people in the art department. In summary, life is not stagnant; we must always be able to adjust to the situation. We must be adaptable, like La Salle Hall, constantly rejuvenating and aiding those around us.

La Salle Hall now contains my three favorite places on campus: math classes, art and band space, and the counseling center. I know many of my classmates here hope to never set foot on the top floor of La Salle ever again, but I enjoyed being up there. I enjoy math because it can explain almost anything in the world. Math might seem pointless and empty to many, but every single theorem was designed to help make sense of the ever-changing world around us. Math teaches us that there is an answer to every problem; getting there is the great challenge for us all.

Then comes the art department. Art and music help explain the one thing that math cannot: feelings. Where math is sometimes hard to grasp, art comes easy to most because it is just expressed emotions. Even though art makes more sense to us, it is just as hard to execute as math. Art takes skill and is hard work, but it is always fun to create, even if it does not look the best. Art is possibly the greatest way to balance out your emotions; I know many adults who still use coloring books to relax. Finally, counseling topped off this great building. It remains the only place where they give you candy for just visiting, and they are

always willing to help out with your problems, no matter how trivial, with a smile on their face.

La Salle Hall, and the people who teach in it, hold great meaning to the St. Paul's community, and the Class of 2016 will remember it because we were the first class to use it for our full career at St. Paul's. I wish to thank all of the great teachers of La Salle Hall who attempted to pass their knowledge on to their students, even when it seemed hopeless.

Leland van Deventer (5)

It would be a great injustice to not only our graduating class but also Saint Paul's to neglect a major aspect of the school's program: athletics and the many facilities that host these activities. From our many state and district victories this year... in baseball, soccer, football, wrestling, tennis, basketball and many more, to our more personal victories, may it be one win over a rival team or achieving a personal physical record, participation in Saint Paul's athletics helps to round our character during our five years on this campus.

I find it apropos that both the oldest building on campus, the theater, and the newest building, the new gym, both share a common history of hosting basketball. Though both buildings have drastically different literal purposes today, their communal purpose of shaping the characters of young men remains unchanged.

From my experience, football made me who I am today. I cannot begin to fathom how many hours I spent in Hunter Stadium doing the same blocking drill ad nauseum, getting yelled at for snapping a ball over Kenny's head one too many times, or applying gallons of sunscreen to myself yet still getting burned because of how pale I am...consequently earning me the name Pasty. These moments, though,

constitute something far greater than just making one a better athlete... they helped us develop a work ethic that we can boldly say we would not be here before you today without it.

Our offensive line coach, Mr. Joe Dickens, rigorously reviewed our grades to make certain that we were fulfilling our academic responsibilities above all else during the season. He constantly spoke of the difference of character between those that were naturally endowed with athletic or academic prowess and those that had to work more in order to make themselves better, and not just in high school but well beyond into life as well.

Self-sacrifice also became a mantra of football, as we learned to put aside selfish tendencies and discomforts for greater causes. Coach Dickens is not alone, however, in his principles, as every Saint Paul's athletic team has its own unique versions of this same mindset. It makes sense why so many of our school leaders and scholars are athletes because of the character expectations instilled by these programs. Though our time here as student athletes is over, I am confident our class will continue to practice these disciplines of self-sacrifice and undeterred work ethic in the future, much like Heap Field and Hunter Stadium will continue to be the training facilities of both mind and body here at St. Paul's.

Patrick Connolly (6)

In a sense, the grounds of St. Paul's School are nothing special. They're comprised of forty acres of fine, arable land, located in a small town known as Covington, Louisiana. By my count, there are 724 trees on campus. In the summer, it gets hot enough to have heat index warnings, and in the winter, it gets cold enough that Mr. Pichon gives

out multiple detentions for kids wearing non-uniform jackets. But St. Paul's School is so much more than a place with a Snapchat filter.

Indeed, these are hallowed grounds that we stand upon today. Even if the ancient wooden beams of the theater rot, or the ghost of Dixon Hall haunts the Main School Building, or Spanish III students sing "Por Ti Volare" so loudly that it rocks the foundations of Benilde Hall, or the students dismantle LaSalle Hall in protest of a calculus quiz that fails half the class during the last week of school, or the screen of the Hunter Stadium Jumbotron burns out, we would still have St. Paul's School as long as we have the land. There is something special in the ground, and I don't mean Brother Ray walking through the tunnels. There is something great about the very dirt of this institution.

In 1630, a puritan man named John Winthrop sailed across the Atlantic, and he delivered a famous sermon, which I guess is the Puritan version of a pump-up speech. The settlement they created, he said, would become like a city on a hill- because the eyes of all people are upon them. Fast-forward nearly 300 years, and a group of Christian Brothers fleeing religious persecution stumbled upon a parcel of land covered in pine trees with only a few buildings in a small town. And, despite the uncertainty of it all- from speaking little English, and having no money or students, they bought the land where we are today. And I'd like to think, in a similar way to John Winthrop, they marched up to Founder's Circle, up the 5 feet of elevation we Louisianans need to call something a hill, and they saw their own City on a Hill. They only had the land of St. Paul's and God at their side, but as evidenced by the young men sitting before you today, that was all these Christian Brothers needed. In closing, I would like to paraphrase John Winthrop's sermon: Therefore, let us choose life by marching onto these hallowed grounds known as St. Paul's School and into the world that we may live by rising up as men of God.