

Our Valedictorian Address was delivered by **Alex Joseph Oliveri, Thomas Howell Carriere, Yehia Gamal Elkersh, & Lloyd Joseph Guillot**

Alex (1):

They say you are what you eat. Here at Saint Paul's in southern Louisiana we eat a lot of gumbo, so you could say Saint Paul's is gumbo. Here's why. The first, most important part of gumbo is the roux. The roux, for those of you who don't know, is a mixture of flour and a fat or oil that serves as a base for the gumbo. It is the foundation, the core, of the gumbo.

Saint Paul's has its own roux; our five core principles. Quality education, Faith in the presence of God, Respect for all people, Inclusive community, and Concern for the poor and social justice. These five principles are the foundation that defines Saint Paul's.

We have all received a wonderful education. We have had incredible teachers who develop friendships with students and go out of their way to help. It is no wonder that we score a 25.9 average on the ACT. We have been prepared well for college.

We have learned to treat everyone with respect whether or not we agree with them. We experienced this in many different ways; for me personally my Speech III classroom debates this year really opened me up to this.

We know to include anyone, regardless of income, ethnicity, religion, or political views. The biggest way we have learned this has simply been through the classroom. While Covington, Louisiana may not be the most diverse place in the world we still all come from different backgrounds and have learned to accept everyone.

We have become stronger in our faith. Every year we have gone on retreats, culminating in our senior retreat, and we pray at the start of every class or practice. This has affected us in tremendous ways in the developing of our faith.

We are more compassionate through service to the community and care for the poor. Many of us have donated blood, given clothing in the warm hearts coat drive, and worked at habitat for humanity or with key club. We have a requirement of ten hours of service per year, but many people go far above that amount.

These have been the roux of our Saint Paul's career; the foundation upon which all of our experiences have been built.

Thomas:

The most basic and filling component of the gumbo is the rice. Without the rice, it's just a fancy broth. Without the students, Saint Paul's is just a 40-acre piece of land oddly placed in the middle of a neighborhood. The quality of students who leave Saint Paul's is what makes it special.

But let's take a step back; I'm willing to bet most people here have experience cooking rice. It's a seemingly simple process, but it's easy to ruin: cook it too long and it'll be mushy; don't cook it long enough and it'll still be hard. To perfectly prepare your rice you may want to invest in a rice cooker. Our parents wanted us to be well prepared to take on college and our young adult lives. Saint Paul's is our rice cooker. You all trusted the 106 year old institution that St. Paul's has become to

prepare us properly for our futures, and I thank you for that. Brother Ray, Mr. Watkins, and all of Saint Paul's faculty and staff have been trained through Lasallian leadership and ideals to cook the rice properly.

When we got to St. Paul's five years ago, we sported your typical seventh grade attire of athletic shorts falling below our knees complemented by neon Nike socks pulled up nearly to the bottom of those shorts topped with our Saint Paul's t-shirts that were worn for the entirety of the summer before eighth grade. With this look, we were ready for high school. We went to open house, we heard stories, many of us even went to football games: we knew what to expect. But what an incoming 8th grader doesn't learn right away is how much he will grow and mature alongside his newly-befriended classmates. You don't fully realize the impact something has on you until you have to leave it behind. As a class, we have made unbreakable, lifelong connections fulfilling, as Brother Ray would say, our mission statement, which is to be "a school which functions well, offering strong academic, athletic, and extracurricular programs in a safe and disciplined environment." It

has been unforgettable, but after living out this mission it is now our time to move on. Although the rice may be cooked, there's still much more to complete the bowl of gumbo St. Paul's entails.

Yehia (3):

After the rice has been cooked to a worm, fluffy, perfection; not too mushy, not too hard, it is time to cook the meats.

In Gumbo, when it comes to the meats, we have options. You can either have chicken, seafood, or pork (which I hear tastes good). The key here is the word "options." Much like the options available for Gumbo meat, at Saint Paul's we have a plethora of options. In extracurriculars, our choices range from community service organizations like the Key Club to faith centered organizations like the Lasallian youth leaders to theater, art club, fly fishing, Quidditch Club, ping pong, National Honors society, Spanish Club, and the Mock Trial Team. Our options are endless and the list goes on and on. Sports. We have 16 sports from football and basketball to soccer, lacrosse, and cross-country (who have

all recently won state championships) to baseball, bowling, wrestling, and powerlifting, students here have various options to express and explore their athletic interests.

Academically, the curriculum allows for freedom in course selection. Students are allowed electives as early as our freshman year, allowing us to mold our own academic courses and follow an academic pathway that fits our desire and our interests. Even within the classroom, we are frequently given options from what book we want to read, to what style of painting we want to utilize, to what topic we want to do research on. This allows us to remain engaged in the classroom and work hard because we are learning about something we are genuinely interested in.

But what is it about options that makes them so significant. It is the freedom. Options allow us the freedom to choose, explore, and express ourselves in genuine and creative ways. Options also give us responsibility. We assume the responsibility of making a decision and learn how to weigh the pros of cons of that decision. Options also helps us think for the future. Students often contemplate how the classes we take or the extracurricular activities we participate in affect our interest, how we develop, our college careers, and even our professional careers

Although after adding the meat, the Gumbo seems ready. Although after being given the freedom of options we seem set and mature, the Gumbo is still missing a little bit of flavor

Lloyd:

The fourth and final ingredient in our St. Paul's gumbo consists of the spices. Just as spices add a special flavor to the gumbo, our spices represent the aspects that make this school unique. One of these aspects is the bonds we are able to form with our teachers. During class, our teachers are mostly what their title says they are: a teacher. But outside of class, we can communicate with our teachers like they are our friends. I know that if I wanted to, I could walk up to any one of my teachers and talk to them about whatever I have on my mind, whether it be school-related or not. That's one thing that makes St. Paul's different.

However, the most important "spice" that we have here at St. Paul's is the brotherhood. I know we say it so much that it almost sounds cliché, but we say it because the brotherhood here is real, and every single person on this stage will tell you the exact same thing. And it

doesn't just include our own senior class, but the brotherhood extends all the way to the 8th graders. In fact, the brotherhood is so strong, that in 8th grade, two seniors literally picked me up and carried me away with them at lunch. But honestly, these 167 young men sitting next to me have been the greatest brothers anybody could ask for. The memories we've created will last a lifetime and the bond that we have formed here is the greatest thing any of us could have asked for coming in to St. Paul's. I know for a fact that this brotherhood will last our entire lives because although we are saying goodbye to St. Paul's now, it will always be remembered as our home. Just as the gumbo is complete and ready to serve, our time here is complete and we are ready to go out and serve as men of God.

