

**Commencement Address 2009**  
**Salesian High School**  
**May 30, 2009**

**INTRODUCTION**

Fr. Patrick Angelucci, Director/ President;  
Mr. John Flaherty, Principal;  
Dedicated members of Salesian High School's administration, faculty and staff;  
Committed members of the Board of Trustees;  
Dear parents, family members and friends of our graduates;  
And, above all, you ... the beloved graduates ... the class of 2009:

It is an honor for me to address you at your graduation. I think I was invited because, like you, I too am leaving Salesian at this time. Only you are smarter than I. It took you four years to get out, while it has taken me six!

Six years ago, I moved into that big house on the hill that stands between your school building and the baseball field, that house in which your cafeteria is located, to which you came many days for Les burgers and chicken parm sandwiches. Often from my office I could look out the window and see some of you arriving in the morning, others on the playground during lunch recess, still others hanging out after school.

Now we both leave together, you having completed your high school years and I having completed my years as provincial. A new and somewhat unknown future opens up for us both.

But before heading out that white gate with the words SALESIAN on them one final time today, let's take a moment to glance back together on your four years. And at the same time, let's consider what Salesian claims to be – and, indeed, has been – for many of you: a SCHOOL, a HOME, a PARISH and a PLAYGROUND.

**FRESHMAN YEAR**

In the Fall of 2005, you entered Salesian High School as the then-largest Freshmen Class in its 85 years history. When you came, it was the school's 85th anniversary year, you may remember.

- You were enthusiastically greeted every morning at the bottom of the stairs by Fr. Pat, who soon got to know your names.
- Early in your freshman year, the new chemistry and biology labs were dedicated by Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez.
- You took your trip to Philadelphia in mid-October, and at the end of the month, Francis Sampson won second place in the annual Halloween Contest dressed as Grandma.
- Br. Manny Gallo taught you religion, and he and Br. Mike Lee animated after school intramurals.
- The library was moved and renovated, and dedicated in March.
- The school play was Damn Yankees.

- And the school held its first multicultural night in nearly a decade, with Dominican food, African music and an Albanian dance.
- The word to live by for your FRESHMAN year was RESPECT.

And a word to live by for the rest of your life is RESPECT. Respect learning. Respect knowledge. Respect wisdom. Respect the mystery of life.

During the past four years, Salesian has been a SCHOOL for you. You have sat in numerous classrooms, completed countless homework assignments, passed many exams. You simplified fractions in Mr. Schoenherr's early math classes so that years later you could balance equations in the more advanced math classes of your Grand Marshall, Mr. Sallustio. You made your freshman English teacher cry ... until after six months you got a new English teacher, Ms. Cullen, who did not cry, while more recently some of you were perhaps tempted to cry trying to complete a research paper for Ms. Danza's AP literature class. Fr. Jim Mulloy guided you through the books of scripture in junior religion; Sr. Barbara guided you through the process of induction to the National Honor Society; Mr. Donovan guided you through the legal intrigues of forensic science.

I hope you have learned from these good teachers and from others that study is not just for high school years, but indeed for all of life. So whether you go to college, or military service or work, always keep reading, never stop learning from others, make the world your classroom, and RESPECT the mystery of life. SALESIAN has been a SCHOOL for you. Let life be your SCHOOL.

## SOPHOMORE YEAR

In the Fall of 2006, you returned as sophomores.

- The new school lobby was blessed, as well as new guidance offices and renovated classrooms.
- Ms. Piazza and others accompanied you to Stony Point for your sophomore retreat day that year.
- December saw a successful toy drive led by Fr. Dominic and the YM Team, while before the Christmas recess, with the coaching of Fr. Abraham, you conquered the freshmen in the Chicken Bowl.
- The marching band was formed your sophomore year, and won 1st place in the St. Patrick's Day parade in Yonkers for its spirited rendition of "Hang on Sloopy".
- The volleyball team won the city championship for the second of what would end up being three consecutive years.
- The school play was All Shook Up.
- And Ms. Rigetti organized Sports For Unity, a day of music and games that was not only fun, but raised money for the poor.
- The word to live by for your SOPHOMORE year was FAMILY.

And a word to live by for the rest of your life is FAMILY. Value family. Be grateful for family. Strengthen family. And create a sense of family for those who suffer without it.

During the past four years, Salesian has been a HOME for you. Not only Fr. Pat, as the father of Salesian, greeted you every morning, but so many of your faculty stood in hallways to welcome you when you arrived in the morning or to bid goodbye when you left at the end of the day. Over the year, a number of guidance counselors gave you their time, their listening ear, their wisdom whenever needed, while Ms. Schoenherr at reception created an especially warm welcome for those who arrived late or with any need. So often you experienced that the administrators really cared, your teachers really cared, the Salesians really cared, the secretaries really cared, the staff really cared. Why does Fr. Pat hate Fridays? Because he and others care about you, and the HOME that is Salesian is empty for the weekend without you.

I hope you have felt during your years here that you are part of a Salesian FAMILY, that this is your HOME, and will be for life. So whether you go to college, or military service or work, always feel welcome to return here for a visit. But even more, value your natural family and strengthen it, value every person as your brother and sister and welcome them. SALESIAN has been a HOME for you. Make a HOME for others.

## JUNIOR YEAR

In the Fall of 2007, you returned as juniors.

- The year opened with the visit of the Rector Major of the Salesians, and the dedication of your renovated school chapel.
- Br. Miguel and Br. Jim joined the school community with their energy and spirit and life.
- In November, school history was made by your Junior class's victory over the then-Seniors in a triple overtime Turkey Bowl thriller.
- But then the school community was saddened by the sudden death of cafeteria manager Les Ring, who never missed a day in 49 years of work here.
- The school play was How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying.
- The tennis team won its first ever city championship.
- And the student exchange program with a Salesian School in England began.
- In your junior year, the school celebrated 40 years of dedicated service of Mr. John Flaherty, your principal, while Mr. Gerry Colaio retired as Director of Guidance ... thankfully he really has not gone away.
- AM Salesian became a regular way to open the school day that year, you started your 50 hours of community service needed for graduation, and the year concluded for you with the Junior Ring Ceremony and your call to be leaders.
- The word to live by for your JUNIOR year was WHOLINESS ... with a W.

And a word to live by for the rest of your life is WHOLINESS. Seek wholiness. Attach importance to wholiness. Pray for wholiness.

During the past four years, Salesian has been a PARISH for you. It has been a place where you have learned that a life lived without God is not a whole life. And so you have had numerous occasions to meet God and to build a relationship with him. In the prayer at the start of each day or each class; in your various class retreats and the leadership retreats; in the school masses here

in this church; in other class masses in your school chapel. You have met the eucharistic Jesus in prayerful adoration on First Fridays; you have met the merciful and all forgiving Jesus in the sacrament of confession. You have met the mother of Jesus in the student rosary service each October, and in the blessing of Mary Help of Christians on the 24th of each month.

I hope you have grasped during your years here that a whole life is one in which you are open to God and never cease seeking Him. So whether you go to college, or military service or work, pray every day, find a church and worship on Sundays, receive communion, go to confession, ask for the help of Mary. SALESIAN has been a PARISH for you where you have prayed. Practice wholeness by making sure God is a part of every day.

## SENIOR YEAR

In the Fall of 2008, you returned as seniors.

- It was a busy year, as you finished all the academic requirements for a diploma.
- Your class obtained over \$6 million dollars in scholarship money for college.
- There were thrilling moments this year, as the soccer team players were triple crown champions for the first time in history, with a 19 and 0 record.
- And as the drama group put on a fine production of Jesus Christ Superstar.
- There were tragic moments as well this year, as you buried both a teacher, Sheila Hanley, and a student, Nicholas Nespolini.
- There were also generous moments this year, as the canned food drive for Hope Pantry fed the hungry;
- the Miracle of Mindo project gathered funds and medical supplies for the poor and sick in Haiti;
- and there was a substantial collection for the American Legion.
- At the mass for high school seniors in St. Patrick's Cathedral, your student council president, Kevin Cavaluzzo, had the honor of addressing Cardinal Egan.
- And just a few weeks ago, groundbreaking was held for a new athletic center, a long-awaited dream for Salesian.
- The word to live by for your SENIOR year was SERVE.

And a word to live by for the rest of your life is SERVE. Serve your friends. Serve those without friends. Serve those in most need.

During the past four years, Salesian has been a PLAYGROUND for you. It has been a place where you have made friends and enjoyed yourselves. You have played basketball and baseball, soccer and tennis. You have bowled, wrestled, ran track, spiked a volleyball. Don Bosco Week was annually observed with such things as penny wars, backwards day, Don Bosco Jeopardy, tug-o-war, eaglemania. There have been 3 on 3 competitions on the outside court, ping-pong competitions in the student lobby.

But in making and enjoying friends, you have also been mindful of those in need of friends, those who live on the edge of the playground, so to speak. You have sought to serve the hungry, the poor, the sick, the disadvantaged. Besides the projects of charity I mentioned above, you

have had Adopt-A-Family initiatives, twice yearly blood drives, and more. In this way, Salesian has tried to teach you that the important question to always ask is not “What can I get?” but rather, “What can I give?” It is more important to do good in life than to do well.

I hope you have understood during your years here that friends are important, but that befriending and serving those in need is even more important. So whether you go to college, or military service or work, always be a friend to others, and particularly to those in need. SALESIAN has been a PLAYGROUND for you. Enjoy your friends, but also reach out and serve those on the edge of the PLAYGROUND.

## CONCLUSION

Well, we have together looked back over your four years at Salesian. You have found here a SCHOOL, a HOME, a PARISH and a PLAYGROUND. You have lived four years giving importance to four words: RESPECT, FAMILY, WHOLINESS and SERVE.

The last word I leave for Don Bosco. He would frequently tell his boys that as they went into the future, as you are doing today, and they had to make decisions, decisions about which they were uncertain what they should choose, they should think way ahead to their deathbed. And they should choose now what decision they believe will make them happy on their deathbed.

I suggest to you, as Don Bosco would then, that while you have successfully passed many exams to bring you to this day – a joyful day for you, your parents and your families – the most important exam is yet to come. The most important exam comes at the very end of our life here on earth.

You and I will find ourselves most happy on that testing day:

- if we have lived with a RESPECT for the mystery of life,
- if we have striven to build up FAMILY,
- if we have practiced WHOLINESS by loving God,
- and if we have tried to SERVE our neighbor in need.

Along with your diploma, take that away from Salesian High School, and you’ll never be disappointed.

*Fr. James Heuser, SDB  
Provincial*