

**Remarks for Archbishop Carroll High School 2011 Commencement
May 26, 2011**

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Bishop Gonzales, Father George, Dr. Stofa, Faculty, Class Officers, Parents, Families, Friends, and most of all, you, the Archbishop Carroll Class of 2011:

Congratulations on this remarkable day! You have reached one of the most important milestones of your life. You will remember this day far into the future --- I know, because I still remember my high school graduation day even though it is a bit farther in the past than I care to admit. (I see the Carroll Class of '61 nodding --- congratulations to them on their 50th Reunion! I'm not quite there ... yet!)

My own high school graduation was so long ago that there was no Diet Coke at my high school -- it hadn't been invented yet, back then in 1970. If we needed to call home, we had to use a pay telephone, and a dime could get a local call. We did long division by hand, pocket calculators not being available yet. We collected Beatles songs on something called "records" that we played on "record players" --- the cool guys called them "turntables" --- and the really edgy kids went wild over Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones. Some things don't change. Texting was writing words on a piece of paper --- in longhand, Palmer Method preferred. We watched three television stations where the prime time shows were all very tame. The Partridge Family, The Brady Bunch and Get Smart were the shows allowed in my house. We swooned over David Cassidy.

So, how could someone with such a deprived background have anything useful to say to you, the utterly cool Archbishop Carroll Class of 2011? Turn off your cell phones and listen up!

We weren't *that* deprived. We had the excitement of the then-successful space program. We watched breathlessly as Neal Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969. We knew that technology was going to revolutionize the world, we just couldn't imagine the age of the iPad and the cloud.

Like you, we were growing up at a time of war, political turmoil, economic recession, ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Our nation was unsettled; the effect of political assassinations, the Vietnam War, the counterculture in the 1960's affected our outlook and sense of duty, just as the terrible events of September 11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the presence of extreme political groups surely affect your world view.

While the years may separate us, our common values unite us. The values do not change. As people shaped by the special mission of Catholic schools, we share a common formation in the deep sense of purpose to serve our world in the best ways possible. We have embraced the values of social justice, the central teachings of the Gospel, that require us to place the needs of others before our own, to uphold the value of all human life through the cycle of existence, to

make the care and concern for the poor a distinctive dimension of our life's work, to express solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need, to be good stewards of all of God's creation.

These are the values that you need to hold fast, keep foremost in your minds and hearts as you take the next big step in your lives, your entrance into college.

Let's talk about college for a minute. Over the years, I've learned that there are some things that college students, especially freshmen, regret too late, that they wish they knew ahead of time. Are these the keys to complete success? Well, not exactly, but they sure can help.

1. Don't just study what you already know. College is all about pushing your mind. Take courses in topics you've never thought about before. You'll have plenty of time to be an accountant or lawyer or computer engineer --- but this may be the only time you'll have a chance to study Chaucer or to learn Arabic or to contemplate Renaissance art.

2. Pay attention to every direction --- the first time --- you may only get it once. College professors can be somewhat notorious for being prickly and impatient. They don't like repeating themselves. *Pay attention, and this includes reading your official college email!*

3. Ask for help, ask for it often, ask for it again and again. Don't get it about Calculus? There's a Math Tutor for that. Worried about that English paper? The Writing Center is there for you. Feeling blue, homesick, lonely, stressed out? The college counseling center is one of the liveliest spots on campus, and you should not be afraid to ask for help. You will have access to advisors and counselors galore --- use them, they're there for you!

4. Don't phone home. Every parent just gasped. What does she mean, "Don't call mom and dad"? Well, I don't mean it quite that way --- of course you need to keep your folks informed. But you are in college to learn how to become an adult, and independent actor, a self-directed, self-confident individual. Try to resolve problems on your own at first, seek out the help of your advisors and counselors on the campus, they are there to show you how to get it done. Believe me, your folks and you both will feel great if you are able to report success.

PS --- parents: help us out with this. Help your beloved son or daughter to grow up well by helping them to solve problems on their own. Choose what battles are appropriate to fight with them, and which meetings with the dean they should take on their own.

5. Stay healthy. Get up, get out of your residence hall, work out, play sports, be involved. Don't let the Freshman Fifteen sneak up on you! Speaking of the freshman 15 --- the worst possible way to spend your college days is in an alcoholic haze. Just don't go there at all! You can and will have a great time --- and you'll have far better memories if you stay sober while having that great time.

Finally, remember everything you learned here at Archbishop Carroll about the importance of service in your life --- and do it all again and again. Eyes are rolling --- "I did that already!" you say. "Why do I have to do it in college, too??"

Well, first, at a very mundane level, doing service work in college can open up opportunities for jobs and careers. Many college graduates discovered their passion for life NOT through regular courses but through their experiences and networks of contacts developed in service learning. Service learning and internships are extremely valuable ways to be sure that you will have full employment upon graduation --- not a small consideration! I see parents nodding.

But service is far more important than simply attending to good secular manners, networking in the hopes of landing a job, or trying out career paths. Service creates a moral center for life. As the great Marian Wright Edelman (founder of the Children's Defense Fund) once said, "Service is the rent we pay for living. It is not something to do in your spare time; it is the very purpose of life."

We've all spent a lot of time this week looking at those appalling photographs from Joplin, Missouri. So many lives lost, thousands of families devastated in an instant. Let's remember them in our prayers even as we ponder the meaning of such awesome destruction as a call to action in our own lives.

That devastating tornado is a meditation on the fragility of life. True religious and moral justice reminds us that those of us who have so many gifts --- including the gift of a great Catholic education --- have a profound obligation to put these gifts and talents to use in the service of others. Justice is what we owe to others as payment for God's gift of life to us. And that life is, ultimately, very short. So, there's no time to lose in being about the work of service for justice, which is essential for peace.

Seeking out opportunities for service during your college days will help to ensure that you stay grounded in the moral and religious life you have cultivated here at Archbishop Carroll High School. You are from many different faith backgrounds, but through this great school you have learned that Catholics and Christians, Muslims and Jews and all persons of faith share a great commitment to living lives of service as part of the commitment to lives of faith.

Your mission statement here at Archbishop Carroll frames this purpose well: "Archbishop Carroll High School seeks to develop leaders who are rooted in Gospel values and committed to meeting the challenges of building a just society." You now carry that mission with you to your new campus community.

All around us, we see grave threats to justice in our society, and you will encounter some of these dangers in college.

Sadly, in college, you will sometimes see injustice among students who bully and harass each other, sometimes acting in deliberately cruel ways because that's what a fraternity or sorority expects. You don't want to join any club that humiliates you or other people to gain membership. What kind of life is that? Remember, you are bearers of Carroll's mission in social justice.

Young men: you will be tempted to go along with the injustice the crowd heaps upon women, treating your female companions badly, using unutterable words against them, committing the

worst possible acts against them. Have the guts, the manhood, the sense of duty and justice to stand up to your friends, to stand up for the dignity and rights of women.

And, by the way, show respect for each other. There are certain words that you should not even use when you're alone with your friends, when you think no one else can hear. You must live consistently, not fraudulently. What you say in private shapes the person you are in public.

Young women: you will be tempted to be submissive to get along, to go along, to be popular, to have that kind of fake love that is ultimately, always betrayed. You will be tempted to be cruel and cutting to others as a way of securing your place in the group. That's not power, that's oppression. Real power is in your brain, your abilities, your self-confidence in the classroom and in the leadership for good you can exert on your campuses and in your communities. Stand tall and proud against the group that tells you that you have to conform to be somebody --- you are only somebody when you can stand up on your own two feet!

You will hear the crowd diminish and degrade other people because they are different, because they speak with accents or their skin color is lighter or darker or they were born in another country or their beliefs are strange or they have disabilities or their friends are not whom you would choose for your own. When your so-called friends taunt others with ugly names, remember the different lives you are called to live as people of justice, hope and peace. Stand up for the uninvited, the unwanted, the reviled, the mocked, the taunted. But for God's grace, there go any one of us.

Remember the command of the Prophet Amos, that "Justice must roll down like the river," its righteousness flooding the fields and valleys of discrimination and poverty and fear and hatred.

With the power of your faith, formed in your families, burnished here at Archbishop Carroll, strengthened through the higher learning you will gain in college, you will be able to ride that crest of Justice with Amos, bearing your witness to the larger needs of the human community.

With the gifts of knowledge and even wisdom gained through your educational advancement:

You will shine the light of your knowledge into the dark corners of fear and despair in our city.

You will speak up for the voiceless whose hope will grow immensely with your compassionate advocacy.

You will insist on racial justice in every community and corporation you inhabit.

You will call out deception, root out oppression, confront the tyrant and lift up the Truth.

You will be bearers of charity, people of peace in the communities you will touch and transform.

You will do all of this with faith in abundance, rooted in your clear commitment to the Gospel teachings on social justice.

You will be the pride of your families, the joy of your teachers, the latest legends of Archbishop Carroll High School.

May the Lord's blessings be with you through all of the days to come.

Congratulations, Class of 2011!