The Class of 2017: What the World Needs Most

As co-valedictorians, William Donohoe and Justin Hineline excelled academically to earn their spots. Along with their classmates, they achieved a composite ACT score of 28, compared to the Wisconsin average of 20.5 (2016), and received nearly $500,000 in college scholarships. However, in their valedictory remarks, both seniors focused more on the responsibility these 11 graduates have going forward. Since St. Ambrose Academy graduates have the intellectual and spiritual foundation for pursuing sainthood, William stated, “…this commitment to grow in holiness is our obligation, and I know it’s what the world needs from us.” Justin Hineline quoted St. Josemaría Escrivá, “As a lay person… you can, and should, sanctify the world and sanctify yourself in the world.” He added, “This is the core of what St. Ambrose has prepared us graduates to confidently do.” Both William and Justin will fulfill their sense of responsibility to others in the US Naval Academy and the UW-Madison Army ROTC, respectively.

Christian Virtue Award winner Grace Ganser (pictured) is applying virtues she honed here at a coffee shop this summer: “Going to work proves my need for fortitude. I love my job… however, there are days when waking up isn’t my favorite thing and dealing with a difficult customer is frustrating.” Yet, she prepares for her culinary school, she tries to understand and love her customers. Even the smallest human interaction is a moment to see God and live His compassion.

The Class of 2017 clearly understands that the world needs smart, holy young people, and they’ve become those people.

aluMNi Profile:

Chris Peuk, Jr., Class of 2014

How does a welder apply his classical education on the job? While Chris Peuk, Jr. might not be quoting St. Thomas Aquinas at Franklin Fueling Systems, he is applying what he learned in moral theology: “At work, I try to be patient and forgiving.” Chris also makes the case for how his classical education is entirely relevant for work in the trades: “St. Ambrose taught me more than just how to write a good paper. Using the Socratic method taught me how to take constructive criticism from peers and communicate well with others. These skills are essential to optimize decisions and complete tasks accurately and efficiently.”

Chris’ skills and his work ethic helped him achieve immediate success in his field. Shortly after graduating, Chris completed the Madison College welding Program in 2015 and landed his first job as a stainless TIG welder, days after his first interview. While he admits there is always room for improvement, Chris has honed his welding skills to such precision that his company selected him to accompany a lead engineer to In-Motion Robotic in Tennessee to assess a robotic welder. Chris explains, “My purpose was to advise how to improve weld performance and overall quality and also to learn to program the robot to perform certain tasks.”

Chris couples hard work at a job he loves with living out his Catholic faith “through prayer and adoration” – he is a successful Catholic, classically-trained welder!
GOD IS Gift!

We completed another outstanding year of hard work and blessing. There were more academic and club successes than we can mention here, and our co-valedictorian addresses were hand-picked for Bishop Morlino’s Catholic Herald column to illustrate the fruit of Catholic education. We rejoice in these students, because they learn with skill and confidence that God is pure gift, and created in His image, we are meant to be that way, too.

SELF-GIFT is Beatitude

Following the Trinitarian blueprint, students discover their purpose here at SAA: to make a complete “gift of self,” which has power to birth untold good in our world.

Yet today, in so many dimensions of culture, media, and even school – self-indulgence is sold as happiness (“my way”). This spirit of demanding, hoarding, and satisfying every desire so often creates “hell on earth.” It’s why the Church and John Paul II are so incisive: “Man cannot fully find himself, except through a sincere gift of himself.” By putting the good of others first: we learn who we are, others can help students understand our purpose, and we find lasting beatitude.

CONSIDER HOW WE Got HERE

2017 is truly momentous in light of severe moral decline in the West. This year we mark 500 years since the Protestant Reformation; resulting in a divided Christian world. However we approach this event, we know a divided army is not as effective in authority and influence (a move against Christ’s Church). We also mark 300 years since the rise of organized Freemasonry; denying the exclusivity of Jesus as Lord (a move against Christ’s Kingship). And it’s been 100 years since the Bolshevik Revolution spread atheism throughout the world (a move against belief in God). Can we recover from such distancing from God?

THERE IS A WAY!

It’s not coincidental we also celebrate 100 years since Fatima. Our Lady confirmed the harsh reality of hell, yet her urgent message was that her Son is endless Mercy. The wise person sells everything to have Mercy, throws off every transgression to fellowship with Mercy, sacrifices all to worship Mercy and make Him known. We’re invited to return “Love and Mercy itself” with a complete gift of self.

THAT’S WHY WE do CATHOLIC education!

We want students to want LIFE! To know Jesus – to know Mercy – is to know Life and happiness. The best way to help our kids thrive is to introduce them to Jesus and make Him welcome wherever we are. Living with Jesus helps students understand and avoid the unhelpful choices that drag so many people down today.

Yet it’s not common to receive our catechesis from heaven like those Fatima children. More typically, we require careful instruction in faith and morals to embrace Christian teaching and life. If we neglect this normative process, how can young people come to know, love, and serve Jesus fully? An education that hides the mystery of God may stick!

Such is the case with Millennials. Only 23% have attended Catholic primary school, and only 5% attend Sunday Mass. Since we are what we eat, it’s vital we feast on Christian truth in our home and church, school, and our private time – and examine the educational forces that impart or work against Communion, because the stakes are ultimate.

Here at SAA, our pedagogy is classical because it’s superlative in developing clear thinking and expression, and Catholic because God is our foundation and future. These two approaches unite in purpose: “Christ is Everything for Us!” The Class of 2017 and numerous graduates before them joyfully own this truth and spread its beautiful fragrance everywhere they go and thrive.

BEST OUTCOMES – ONGOING NEED

Effective Catholic education is indispensable for producing lifelong faith and helping students reach higher achievement, because they want to maximize their self-gift. Given that our students academically perform top in the state and receive sizable college scholarships, SAA is one of the best investments we can make. They excel in post-secondary training and are empowered to sow Christ’s blessing in leadership positions where His Light is needed most.

Your help is needed now and ongoing, because even with tuition at half the national average, 40% of families need help to provide their children these advantages. The Catholic education model is different than 40 years ago. We depend on talented lay teachers, which requires just and competitive wages to staff the best and brightest. St. Ambrose needs you to make this annual investment to be a gold standard in education for our future.

In recent months, several families – concerned they’d have to leave St. Ambrose – indicated they need additional aid next year requiring an incremental $15,000-$20,000 from our tuition assistance fund. We hope you agree: they stay, and we’ll find them help! Like all families, they’re asked to contribute in other ways to create school equity, and we work tirelessly to grow support. Thank you for making your BEST one-time or recurring investment today – before school starts in one month! – to help us form and send more gifted Guardians into the world. It’s making the best difference of all!

2 Read Dr. Connie Nielsen’s explanation of classical education at https://www.amboseacademy.org/classical-education
3 Same CARA study as footnote 1.

Photo courtesy: Andreas Praefcke - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pf%C3%A4rrich_Pfarrkirche_Marienstatue_aus_Fatima.jpg