



In Joy and Hope

by

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A significant moment

During the next few weeks, I will be present at a number of baccalaureate and graduation celebrations. Not only will these celebrations be an important moment for the graduates from high school and college, it is a significant time for me as well as our society. Such celebrations do not happen by accident. They are the result of the investments of time, effort and energy on the part of students, as well as administrators, teachers, parents and the community.

Graduations and baccalaureate celebrations are a time of joy and happiness. And they should be. We celebrate with young people an important moment in their lives as they complete high school or college. Such events create a unique excitement. Yet, we could well ask what makes these events possible?

The ministry of teaching

At this time of year, we should be especially grateful to a unique group of dedicated and competent people in our society. These people are the teachers, staffs, and administrators in our schools.

Teaching is a unique ministry. Men and women share the gift of their knowledge and insights with others. Such a task is not easy in today's world. Today's world emphasizes the marvels of technology and the easy access to knowledge through television, the Internet, CD encyclopedias, and the computer. These are important tools which I'm using to type this column. Yet, education today calls for more.

The educational process challenges people to think, to read, to reflect, to establish values that will make a difference. Teachers are the invaluable guide to access such skills and competences.

Thank you to all those who share the ministry of teaching in our grade schools, high schools, and colleges. You invest your gifts in other human beings. Your patience, encouragement, and expectations can make all the difference. Thank you for the gifts you share.

Family and society

Key to the educational process is the support of parents and families. If education is to be important to our young people, it must be important to us as parents and adults as well.

Education is not an enterprise that ends on the day of graduation from high school or college. It is a lifelong process in which each of us must be engaged. Parents and families need to set an example for the importance of education through our commitment to ongoing education in our own lives. It is also obvious that the graduation of young people is the result of the sacrifices and generosity of parents and families. Thank you for sharing these gifts.

Society needs to recognize that our investments into the educational process is an investment in the future. Education not only prepares young people for the future; it creates a future. Education must be a priority for our society today which does not hesitate not only to pass on the gift of knowledge and skills, but values as well.

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A significant moment

Commencements

Though graduations and baccalaureate services celebrate the conclusion of an educational process, we often refer to such celebrations as "commencements."

Commencements indicate a beginning experience, and in many ways, this is what graduations and baccalaureates are all about. After investing so much in the lives of young people, they now "begin" to live out the challenges that education has offered to them.

As I look at the faces of young people at different schools over the next few weeks, I will pray that this "beginning" experience will be filled with hope and joy for them. I will pray that they will share generously with all of us the gifts they have received.

More than anything else, I pray they will respect the gift of life that God has shared with them. I pray they will use their mind and skills for their own good and the good of the world in which we live. I pray they will always recognize God as the source of all their gifts and recognize their accountability to God and to society today.

I pray they will appreciate the gift that countless people have shared with them that makes their graduation possible - parents, families, teachers, friends, and countless others. Such relationships enhance the quality of life and I pray they will enrich the lives of others in the years ahead.

Finally, I pray that they will share their gifts with others without thinking first what they will get or receive as a result of such generosity. Young people have so much to offer to all of us. I pray they will be generous.

A time of grace

Graduation and baccalaureate services are finally a time of grace. I pray that young people will recognize and appreciate the religious values that others have shared with them. I hope they will recognize how important it is to have a relationship with God and the church as a community of faith. I pray especially that they will seek ways to serve the Christian community in various ministries within the church community. I hope they will recognize the importance of celebrating the Sunday liturgy each week, the joy of reconciliation, and the difference that prayer can make in their lives.

Yes, graduations and baccalaureate services are important moments in the lives of countless young people these days. May they be moments of grace, peace and hope. Congratulations to the graduates of 1997. May God's gifts of grace and peace be yours in abundance.