**COMMENCEMENT SPEECH**

**FOR**

**LARK WILL**

**REVISED**

Hello everyone, It is a pleasure and quite a privilege to be here with all of you at the 2017 Commencement exercises for Bishop Kenny High School. (**If there are any people you want thank, do that here**). I would like to thank\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for asking me to speak to all of you today and I'm so glad I accepted.... so many really important moments of my teenage years happened here and through those memories, I feel how connected we are as we literally share this common ground, and it's clear that even four decades reaffirm the bond. To the families and friends of the class of 2017, I want you to know that the graduates really thank you for your support and commitment to their success. We may not always express gratitude as frequently or as generously as we should. In life we sometimes tend to take for granted those closest to us.... now is the perfect time to begin the practice of sincere acknowledgement. The time has come to affirm that you graduates are officially "leaving the nest," it's time to start using the tools and strategies that you've been taught so far. Learn the power of acknowledgement and use it. **Thank you**.... Did you see how I did that? (**Wait for the laugh**). If there's one thing I've learned in "life after Bishop Kenny," it's that acknowledgement goes a long way, especially if it's well deserved. To the faculty and administration, I want to thank you as well. I don't know if there is anyone here today whose tenure has spanned the past forty years (**if there is, we can revise this and name the person or people still there**), but whether you've been a part of this fine school for more time or less, I know that you've still upheld the mission and principles of Bishop Kenny. To the students and graduates... I am sure I speak for everyone here when I say.... Thank you for the discipline... the focus... the consideration and most importantly.... the will power.... it has taken....for you to ... **put down your phones** for at least half an hour.... that took strength and courage! I was hoping you would be able to do that! (**Wait for the laugh**).

It's really amazing to be back at this campus that meant so much to me when I was a student here. Clearly my time at Bishop Kenny was life defining and experiences from years ago stay with me and come back to **haunt** I mean inspire me (**Wait for the laugh**). Ah the memories... I remember how all of the classes began with prayer and willing good to one another.... how we truly wanted the best for each other... the times we spent in junior ROTC... ...the field trips... the discoveries... those moments come back to me and I find myself smiling and transporting myself back to those days... and I remember the echoes... in the hallway... the rhythm of Sister Ann Raymond's "delicate" footsteps... **stomping** so **determined** down the hall... Oh how her presence inspired me... to **duck and cover.**.. (**wait for the laugh**)!!!

High school graduation is a **BIG DEAL...** it was when I graduated (**if you want to make a joke you can say**) a hundred and fifty... I MEAN **forty** years ago.... (**Wait for the laugh**) same difference.... because as we move on from high school every new place and each new experience becomes the object closest in our "rear view mirror" of life. But significant experiences stay with me, as is proven by my visit here today. So much has happened to me since I graduated from Bishop Kenny (**Name 2 or 3 milestones**). Upon leaving here, I went on to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ University. I began my career in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and throughout the years and all the places I've gone to and through all of the experiences I've had, my educational foundation that I earned from this school has served me well.... you know... like a really good and comprehensive app that keeps upgrading itself... and speaking of.... what about those new Facebook features? Oh... never mind... I forgot... Facebook is for old people.... (**wait for the laugh**)...

Graduates, today is the first day of the next phase of your lives.... **VACATION**! (**Wait for the laugh**). Okay... don't get too excited... you've worked hard and you've earned the right to take what I hope is a much **EARNED** rest.... but remember something... you may have just completed high school .... but you're just beginning the upward climb that will continue throughout most of your lives.... if you're lucky and blessed. Take a few days to relax and celebrate, but remember... success comes to those that **work** for it. Life is about to get a lot more complicated. Keep this in mind... you've most likely spent the past four years climbing the "ladder of achievement" here at Bishop Kenny... but unless you know something that I don't.... your "arena...." the next place you will make your mark in life... is probably going to be bigger, more competitive, and a lot less familiar. For those of you that are off to college or university, the cycle of learning and adapting begins all over again. For those of you that are going off to work, you will also be in new and unknown surroundings.... Boy can that be **nerve wracking**!! (**Wait for the laugh**)... Looking back on all of the new environments I have had to learn to navigate, I have to say, it can be tough.... it has the potential to be stressful... and every new and strange situation has a special purpose.... and that is to encourage you to learn and **grow**.

Graduates, you are at the beginning of your adult lives. Everything is ahead of you as the world awaits your unique participation. I was thinking about that when I had a real revelation the other day. I was in my kitchen and I noticed it was almost time to change the roll of paper towels.... and then it hit me....and you may not appreciate this because you're young and your entire lives are ahead of you... or you don't go in the kitchen much, nor do you notice the paper towels.... but you **SHOULD**... (**Wait for the laugh**) but looking at that rapidly thinning roll, it dawned on me... life really is like a roll of paper towels... all big and soft and fluffy at at the beginning, filled with untapped potential and a ready willingness to absorb all they touch, but as you get towards the end, it gets used up really fast... (**wait for the laugh... also note that I really had this thought the other day but it was when I looked at a roll of toilet paper... is that too risqué to say? So I switched to paper towels).** Believe me... and you can ask any adult that you know... the older you get, the faster life whips by..... why do I mention this? Because I want you to make sure your life **counts**.

I once heard an expression that goes, "If you think you're too small to make a difference and be effective, you've never encountered a mosquito in bed." (**Wait for the laugh**). As you continue to learn and as you continue to experience all sorts of different things on your move to the next new phases of your life, please... pay attention. No one in this world can afford to stay small or to think that they don't matter... that they're too insignificant to make a difference. That's just not true. YOU'RE IMPORTANT and you're going to be more and more important as you get older and gain experience. Keep your eyes and ears open. Ask questions. Do what is necessary to have a greater understanding about life. Every fact and every bit you see and learn becomes an essential tool to increase your understanding about life and the way things work.... and by things, I mean relationships... both personal and professional...to people and to concepts. Like the commercial says... "The more you know...". It's so important to get informed, be informed, stay informed. High school graduation signifies a passage... one in which you go from a teenager to a force in your family, your community, and the world. Over the next few years you will continue to discover the power and impact of your words and your actions. Enjoy these next couple of days off, because soon you will be called on to take your place in the future. It's time to look up from your phones and find your path in life... and you need more than Google maps for that!! (**Wait for the laugh**). It's so important to aware of how to find what you need, discover your direction, and learn to work towards your goals.

In the learning and growing process, embrace each situation... and even if you fail, remember that failure is the best teacher. Failure is usually one of the most valuable motivators in life. I'm not saying that you should intentionally make mistakes. That's not it at all. One of the most important aspects of "the gift of WHOOPS" is how it sneaks up on you.... you know... you think to yourself... "I GOT THIS!! I can handle this task!! DONE!" You complete your work... you turn it in... and then.... let the "skin crawling" begin. The goof has been discovered. Instead of crawling under a rock....hiding.... running away in denial... LEARN. Learn to pay attention... remember that feeling of mortification. And rise to the experience. I've BEEN to THAT mountain. I know... and I STILL FEEL queasy when I think of my failures. I remember when I began my career.... thirty years ago... before the Internet...yes... THAT Long ago... I was in finance and working for a company in which I had to present a critical financial statement (**please add further details as needed**). There were facts and figures... and LOTS. OF. BIG. NUMBERS. And in one set of numbers, the fourth decimal.... to the "NTH degree..." was out of place by ONE SPOT. ... ONE DOT created a mistake that resulted in a discrepancy of MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. I didn't think... I **KNEW** I was **TOAST**. I had messed up precise calculations for many brokers.... and they were tough... Sister Ann Raymond's discipline was NOTHING compared to the gauntlet I was about to face for that ONE. MISPLACED. DOT. My supervisor called me in and sat me down and instead of placing my head on that proverbial "platter," he said to me, "You made a mistake. I will not judge you by one error, but LEARN from this. Respect the process. Pay attention. Check your work." And so that decimal point has followed me throughout my life and career and it's kept a watchful and vigilant eye on my performance and progress. Someday you'll discover YOUR dot. I invite you to welcome it... face it's consequences... and carry it with you always.

Let no experience go to waste. Don't be shy... speak up... or as a billboard along the highway said, "Next time you think you have a bad idea that's not worth sharing, remember there was once a guy... who stood up in a meeting... who said... "Let's make a movie about a tornado filled with sharks." (**Wait for the laugh**). Really... don't be afraid to speak up! And if you think you might not have something worthwhile to contribute... if the thought of getting up in front of a new crowd to share ideas terrifies you, remember the words of Henry Kissinger.... and if you don't know who Henry Kissinger is.... look it up... get into the habit of exploring for your own satisfaction... anyway, he reminded us, "A diamond is just a chunk of coal that did well under pressure."... and so will **YOU**! Each one of you is a diamond in the making... waiting to be polished as you become "**BRILLIANT**!"

My time at Bishop Kenny set the foundation for my entire life. I learned to be aware, respectful, and observant in what it means to have faith. It was here that the Golden Rule showed me how to appreciate and respect and the Sermon on the Mount gave me precious tools and responses to the questions I would inevitably face in life. (**I am abbreviating here because the speech is getting long... we have to figure out what to edit**). My Bishop Kenny education gave me the the ability to appreciate future lessons. When I was a student at Emory, I studied world religions and in that class there was an exchange between the Dalai Lama, rabbis, nuns, priests, ministers... all coming together to explore, "How do we co-exist?" The Methodist minister brought up the "happiness survey" which is a study involving the residents of one hundred and ten nations.... for a while the Buddhist nations consistently led the survey results, so the Dalai Lama was asked who **he** admires... who does he see fostering a sense of community and mutual respect... and he said one of the people he admires most is Jesus Christ. Show mercy; care for others.

And while we're at it, I've been asked what can be said to parents that are nervous.... apprehensive... concerned about their precious graduates growing up and leaving the nest.... simple. Mom, Dad.... please trust that you've raised your children right... that you've given them a solid foundation in moral, religious, and ethical, intellectual, and humane principals. The graduates are now old enough to apply those lessons learned here at Bishop Kenny... and at home... and to live their lives as part of a conscious, caring, community... no matter where they may go. The lessons they've learned will be renewed as they are practiced. Support them in living their own best lives.

I hope I've given you a lot to think about. Someday one, or two, or several of you will also accept the opportunity to stand here and congratulate the graduates of Bishop Kenny. What will be your message? What will be the valuable lessons you'll be inspired to share? What will be the challenges facing high school graduates in ten, twenty, or thirty years? We have no way of knowing but the one thing we can do is to be vigilant in remaining aware of our environment while being present and focused on learning. Be **interested** in order to be **interesting**. I think we can be fairly certain that the world you will inherit will be increasingly complex, competitive, and challenging. I encourage each one of you to start investing in yourselves and that will be the best investment into the future of world. Thank you all!