

Duchesne Academy Commencement Address: “Clichés”
Kelli KICKERILLO, Duchesne Class of 1999
May 17, 2024

Clichés are what you write when you don’t have the energy or inspiration to think of a new way to express an idea. It’s a phrase or opinion that is overused:

You can’t judge a book by its cover

The grass is always greener on the other side

Ignorance is bliss

Read between the lines

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step

Love is blind

A leopard doesn't change its spots

Think outside the box

Time flies

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree

There's no “I” in “team”

When it rains it pours

Okay...maybe a lack of original thought. But you know what? A lot of these are true. They are common lines of inspiration read to graduates. Whether in the simple form I just read or in a more elaborate explanation carefully disguised using different words, so no one is the wiser and thinking that the speaker is just reading you this list like I did. The thing about clichés...they’re true.

Ignorance is bliss: You can happily walk into your Global Studies class ready to have a regular discussion and lesson with your teacher and BOOM! Pop quiz. You sure were blissfully ignorant to the fact that the teacher was going to spring that quiz on you.

Let’s take *time flies*: Think back—you are four years old, dressed in dress uniform, and it’s the first week of May. You’re walking to the chapel to watch your first May Crowning, then you blink and you’re sitting in a white dress with a lace crown on your head listening to me talk about clichés. Those 14 years sure flew by!

So, I come to you today, the graduates of the Duchesne Academy class of 2024, not to spew clichés all over your celebration. I come to you to make you recognize that there are phrases, methods of doing things, there are traditions, and ceremonies that we perform, practice, create, that may seem uninspired, unoriginal, elementary, or even just plain dumb—clichés—but at the root: they are true. They are meaningful. And they last.

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My name is Kelli Kickerillo. I am a graduate of the Duchesne Academy class of 1999. And I grew up on this lawn, in front of these buildings, learned clichés in these classrooms, practiced traditions walking these halls, absorbed lessons sitting over there in that auditorium, and graduated in that gym because it rained on my graduation day. I was guided by the *Goals and Criteria of the Sacred Heart* that were instilled in me for 13 years on this campus...and they last, too.

I graduated from Duchesne and I didn't go very far: only about eight miles down Memorial Drive to the University of St. Thomas. I learned a lot there. I honed some skills that I use every day in my job working in my family's land development and home building business. I kept learning on the job after I got my undergraduate degree. I got married to an incredible man. I had a baby who is now an incredible little boy. I keep learning. I keep honing skills, I keep parenting, traveling, meeting new people; I keep cultivating new relationships. But this place—the Goals I learned from these religious women, my incredible teachers and the staff around campus, the parents of my friends—they have been the most important lessons of my life. Each of you today will go off and conquer the world in the way you were born to, but I promise, being a graduate of Duchesne Academy will be something that defines you forever.

“How silly?”

“How short sighted?”

“How small?”

“My elementary school, Middle or Upper School is what will define me?”

Well, here's the thing: the *Goals and Criteria of the Sacred Heart*—no matter what religion you practice, no matter what God you pray to—these Goals give you a foundation of faith, intellect, social awareness, community, and personal growth. I promise these are the most important values of life. They are the five mainstays I know I can count on and come back to when life is giving me an easy time or a hard time! My father says: “if you have a good family, your resources are pretty stable, and you find a way every day to enjoy your life, quit looking.” And I live by these words from him and by the Goals. These ideas share the same principle. Quit looking. I am not saying to not explore, learn, invent, or conquer; I am simply saying that you have a foundation that is solid because of Duchesne and the education you received here, and it will serve you beautifully in life. Thank your parents or whoever helped you get to Duchesne. Thank them like I thank my parents for the gift of being a Child of the Sacred Heart. I promise this foundation will stand the test of time.

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So, you heard an abridged version of my life story: Came here at five and now, at 42, I am right back here. Oh boy, now *I’m* sounding like a cliché. Predictable.

Small town. Didn’t go to an Ivy. Didn’t get a PhD. Haven’t won an Oscar or the Nobel Prize. I am not a doctor or a lawyer. But I have lived every day being the best person I can be. I know the value of hard work, the importance of family that was modeled every day to me by my mom and dad, the joy in learning new skills. I give my time to others and causes that I believe in, I put my son first, and I know that when in doubt I can talk to my God, and he will listen. The Goals are alive in my daily life and that’s enough of an accomplishment for me even if it is sort of a cliché.

But you know what? I think each of you graduating tonight already know that you’ve witnessed and learned something very special here at Duchesne. Most of you will go on to live much bigger lives than I live, but you know that the Goals are a good foundation.

A few weeks ago, I asked to meet with some of this year’s graduates. I asked to meet with lifers and students who were in leadership roles for this class. I wanted to see how very different 1999 and 2024 are. I was a lifer (okay full disclosure: almost...I started in kindergarten!) and I was the president of my Junior and Senior classes. So, I wanted to see what 25 years of change looked like. I wanted to see how someone with the same Duchesne resume as mine looked today. I knew that on paper we are the same, but in reality, my 90s high school experience was very different from a modern, post-Covid high school experience where you learn by a MOD in bins, and I learned by trimester in periods.

Well, here’s another cliché: the more things change the more they stay the same. At least at Duchesne. The moment the seniors walked in the room...the Goals hit me in the face. Extreme intellect, dedication to their community, genuine faith, empathy for others, and conviction of self were all embodied in your fellow classmates. Naturally. They spoke up. They asked me questions. They weren’t demure. They didn’t make themselves small in front of a much older woman. They told me they wanted to learn, and they also delighted in the excitement of learning. The group described your class as unexpected, as being connected, as opposites attract, and a mesh of personalities. They said that the 72 of you are charismatic, fun, full of tenacity. You get things done and are the perfect tornado who would be very missed (it might be too soon for that tornado reference!). They also shared how much they wanted to stay in touch after graduation. Almost instantly, I saw myself in all of them. I saw my friends, my classmates in all of them. I am not afraid to talk. My friends—who are sitting right over there—and I are not afraid to disagree with people. We are not

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afraid to compliment people. We are open to new ideas and want to make whatever experiences we have better. We are Duchesne girls. When we met, this group of Seniors showed me who they are and who you are as the Class of 2024. We share so many of the same qualities as Children of the Sacred Heart. These qualities are solidified by the traditions of Congé, powder puff football, Goûter, Espacio, senior pranks, and wearing that white crown. These qualities begin here at Duchesne. Every day, little by little, Duchesne girls absorb a type of “no fear” that I don’t see in others. So collectively, we are a product of the Goals.

All of this to say: the *Goals and Criteria of the Sacred Heart*, after so many days of tests and projects and games and assessments and celebrations, might have become hidden or less prominent to you as seniors, but they are still there. Holding their truth, guiding you. I challenge you to see the Goals in your life after today. Let them start getting bigger when you need them, uncover them again in 20 or 30 years when you are trying to teach your son about wise freedom playing MLB the Show like I do! Exercise those Social Awareness muscles that became so well defined during your Social Awareness projects. Enjoy lifelong learning and uncover the similarities and differences in people who are different from you. I challenge you to try to see the truth in clichés. Enjoy the mundane, repeat silly phrases, continue traditions, take these Goals learned here and OVERUSE them. They will serve you well, they are true, and they last.