



President John J. Hurley
2022 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

On behalf of your faculty and staff at Canisius and your families and friends, I want to extend my sincere congratulations to you, the Canisius College class of 2022!

Commencement is a time of great personal triumph and celebration. As St. Paul writes, you have run the race and have competed well. And you have now received your Canisius College diploma. We, your families, friends, faculty and administrators applaud you.



So, graduates, your career at Canisius is now complete, and we send you out into a very challenging world. I do not need to remind this class of what you endured throughout the pandemic.

I salute you for your perseverance! As we commend everyone's tenacity and creativity throughout this time, we also mourn the loss of more than one million lives in the United States from Covid-19.

We recognized today the courage and commitment of Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in absentia, for his bravery in leading his country against an unprovoked invasion by Russian forces, a move that has evoked memories of the terror of World War II.

And then last weekend, the horrific, racially-motivated massacre at our local Tops Market, just a few short blocks from this campus, has terrorized a community and brought into sharp focus, once again, that our struggle for racial justice and equality in our nation and sadly, in our city, is far from complete.

Graduates, I am afraid that the stark and painful realities of our world are immediately in front of you. Peace has been shattered in the Ukraine, and it remains elusive on nearly every continent. Millions of innocent people are victims of war and violence, forced to become migrants and refugees seeking safety in a foreign land. We are infected with the sins of racism, hatred and intolerance. The health of our planet and its inhabitants has never been more threatened. And we are hostages to a world of social media that has warped traditional notions of true and false, good and evil, right and wrong.

When the going gets tough - and believe me, the going has gotten very tough - you may be tempted to throw up your hands and conclude that the challenges are too great, or that there is little that one person can do to make a difference. And you may wonder today, what do we expect of you, graduates of a Catholic and Jesuit college like Canisius? What does the world expect of you?

Rest assured that your Canisius Jesuit education makes you a very different kind of person. Our world so desperately needs Canisius graduates. You graduates have learned to be critical thinkers, analytical readers, effective writers, and persuasive communicators. Your education has taught you to understand morality and ethics, and to embrace the search for truth. You have discovered the value of deep and long-lasting friendships. Your social consciousness has been awakened and developed; the diplomas you received today certify that you are indeed men and women for and with others. And, we hope, you have learned what St. Ignatius Loyola himself learned - that life is all about the search for God, and it is the process of that search that transforms lives.

Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, a former Jesuit Superior General, once said that the real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become. The real measure of Canisius College lies in who you - our graduates - become. It's an obligation that comes with your Canisius diploma.

Fr. Kolvenbach said that we should educate students for a well-educated solidarity, whose hearts are touched by direct personal involvement with innocent suffering, and whose contact with the gritty reality of the world cause them to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively. This is the essence of the promotion of justice in the world.

The events of last Saturday on Jefferson Avenue should convince us that there is no time like the present to take this advice to heart and act upon it. Just a stone's throw away from this arena, there is great personal suffering. Is there any more gritty reality than the site of innocent people shot down while shopping for milk or a birthday cake, or grieving family members standing before cameras gasping for the words to

express their grief and anger? We need to stand in solidarity with our neighbors and the entire Black community in Buffalo, but we also need to remember that Buffalo, unfortunately, is not alone. Wherever your journey takes you in life, you need to feel the pain that innocent people experience, think about it critically, respond to the suffering and commit to engage in the struggle against racism and intolerance.

The late Jesuit Fr. Dean Brackley once wrote that Catholic education is at its best when it gets its students to understand the real world and all its problems and when it gets its students to focus on the big questions – life and death, good and evil, injustice and liberty, love and hate.

Fr. Brackley wrote, “In the language of faith, the Cross is the center of reality – Jesus’s cross and all other crosses.” Our graduates need to understand the crosses that we erect in people’s lives each day: crosses of racism, crosses of intolerance, crosses of discrimination, crosses of hatred, and as we saw last weekend, crosses of horrific violence. As we look at the world and now our city, we see Golgothas on the landscape, some within sight of this very campus. And so Canisius Class of 2022, I urge you, I challenge you, I implore you to go out into the world and take people down from their crosses!

Listen empathically to all those you encounter, but when the time comes, be courageous in defending truth and right and condemning falsehoods and wrongs. In your careers and in your private lives, always do the right thing. Search for God in all things and in all people. Remain compassionate and stay attuned to the needs of the least of God’s people. And, treasure always these words of the great St. Paul: “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

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Forty-four years ago this month, I walked across the Canisius stage to receive my diploma. Our speaker that day was Jesuit Fr. Cesar Jerez, a witness to the violence and oppression against the poor in Central America and a close confidant to St. Oscar Romero of El Salvador. Believe it or not, his challenging words that day about the injustices faced by the poor in Central America, the complicity of

the United States in the political systems that sponsored the oppression, and our personal responsibility to work for peace and justice have remained with me throughout my adult life.

I recall that moment on this, my final moment on the Canisius stage. As you’ve heard, I will retire after 25 years at Canisius, the past 12 as president. Like most of life, it has not always been easy, but it has always been gratifying, and it has been an absolute honor to hold this position. I am grateful for all the gifts that God has given me, among them, the thrill of being on this stage each year and watching the graduates come forward with these incredible looks of pride and accomplishment written all over your faces. Today is no exception, and I want to thank you for inspiring me and all of us at Canisius with your hard work, your dedication, your scholarship, and your optimism. Believe me when I say that you are a source of great hope and consolation in this troubled world.

As you depart, please remember to stay close to Canisius throughout your lives. Nurture the friendships with your classmates and remain a part of their lives. You will be in our prayers always and you should know that no matter where life takes you, no matter what challenges you encounter, you will have a home here at Canisius. Come back often. May you find, as I and as thousands of Canisius alumni over the past 150-plus years have found, that your lifelong relationship with Canisius is the defining difference in your lives.

With these challenges and in whatever opportunities you pursue in life, may you have true success and may you live healthy, productive, satisfying lives with meaning and purpose.

May God bless Canisius College and our graduates. Long live the great Class of 2022!

May 21, 2022
