

Thank you. I am honoured and humbled by this award.

I am blessed to be joined tonight by my mother Betty, my two beautiful daughters, Tara and Megan, my grandson Devlin, who's in grade 5 at St. Dominic Savio, and my darling wife Noreen. Indeed, it does take an entire family and village to raise and educate any graduate. None of us are islands unto ourselves alone.

Permit me to say a few words to you graduates.

I'm honoured and humbled because, as I remember it, I was quite an ordinary student in high school - at St. Jerome's - not a brilliant scholar - but my experience was rich - the extracurricular activities especially provided me charged stimuli and colourful memories: boxing, football, orchestra - it's really too bad that governments always want to cut the tastiest part out of the educational pie.

Like you, I was a student, and like you, I had diligent and dedicated teachers - real educators - who devoted their working lives to turning their students inside out - to bringing out the best in them. The names of these teachers mean nothing to you - they are long gone from the classroom - in the main, those who inspired me were my English teachers. They caught my imagination, they rattled my brains and my soul, they

challenged me to plumb my depths and chart a meaningful course - Joe McKay, Austin O'Leary, Bishop Bryan Hennessey and Bill Klos.

Look around - remember! You have also had teachers from whom you will stop and draw inspiration for many phases of your lives - for they have imbued in you enthusiasm for the truth.

I'm honoured and humbled to know that I am the first ever recipient of this award.

When I think of all who have graduated from this great Catholic School system in Waterloo County since Fr. Eugene Funcken brought it to life, before Canada was born - and generations before my father immigrated from Ireland - I am simply overwhelmed - I stand here for all of them today.

The Catholic school system persevered, then prospered here. St. Jerome's University, Hamilton Diocese's only Catholic University, grew out of Fr. Funcken's small log cabin in St. Agatha and the great College High School he founded in downtown Kitchener, where I graduated and where my son was in its last graduating class - 15 years ago. But of course, out of its ashes, like a might Phoenix, rose your great school.

So you are directly connected to Fr. Funcken and his religious order - after all, your school's name is a living memorial to that brave band of priests and brothers - the Congregation of the Resurrection.

But it isn't only the Resurrection's who must be credited with the founding of the system whose product you are. The SSND of Milwaukee came at Fr. Funcken's invitation and became the true workers behind the elementary system here. It was they who created St. Mary's High School for young women on the site where your Board offices also have a Phoenix-like rebirth.

Why all this talk about heritage buildings and long gone teachers!

The education system created, inspired and guided by those ancient folk has outlived its structures.

It is the idea that has lived. It is the concept that has flourished. Catholic Education in Waterloo County has lasted more than a lifetime - more than several generations.

Seldom do people your age any longer see high school graduation as the end of formal education. That wasn't always the case. I grew up in an era where, for many, a

high school diploma was enough to launch a career. But no more - you know that's not enough. Some of you will enter apprenticeships for the skilled trades, many of you will expect to graduate from college or university. A few of you will aspire to a professional career requiring post graduate studies. And some of you may even attend Teacher's College to imitate your mentors.

But even then you won't - you shouldn't - be done with your formal education.

You will soon come to understand and believe in life-long learning.

Many of you will embark on 4 or 5 different careers over your lifetime - all requiring some kind of formal training. And it's never too late - you can always learn - you can always go back to school! I know - because I did - more than once - after grade 13. I studied music and did laundry for a year, then I went back to school to SJU for 4 years - then worked in the construction industry for nearly seven years, then took my LSAT's and I went to back law school, this time - with my wife and two kids, on an exciting journey to the University of Ottawa. Then, after starting my own practice and after working as a lawyer for 22 years, I was appointed to the bench three years ago - and at 57 years old, I went back to school - New Judge's School.

And now I must spend at least 10 days every year returning to a classroom to learn or relearn the law.

But this is not about me - it's about you, and this certainty for you - you will have choices to make - and some of them will be scary - but they are delicious choices - after all, they are about your future. Be not afraid of the future - take comfort in the choices your parents made - be grateful for their sacrifices and always keep a special place in your heart and mind for those teachers with whom you have really connected - because, if you do, as you take the many paths through your life-long schooling - their words, their examples, their lessons can and will be a real inspiration for you - an enthusiasm for the truth.

Don't just enjoy that enthusiasm. Use it! And when you leave these walls with hearts both brave and bold, you will take your place in life to glorify the true Phoenix, Christ, and rise up like the Phoenixes you are to each new learning challenge. Live long and prosper!