

**CBHS Class of 2019 Valedictorian Speech**  
**Alanna O'Neill '19**

**PAUSE-TAKE A BREATH-ENJOY THE MOMENT**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Alanna O'Neill, and I am honored to be speaking to you tonight as the Valedictorian for the Christian Brothers High School Class of 2019. On behalf of my fellow classmates, and myself, I would like to express our tremendous appreciation to all family, friends, mentors, teachers, and staff who have shaped us into the individuals we are today. Thank you for your endless love, encouragement, and support throughout all of our journeys to this moment.

My job this evening is to impart some insight into who we, the Class of 2019, will be in the future and what it will take for us to get there. I have thought long and hard about this idea, and the truth is, - I have no clue. I do not know what my or my fellow classmates' lives will look like in two, five, or twenty years – nor do I think I should know. When I was deciding what high school to attend only four short years ago, CB was hardly on my radar. I came from a relatively small public school where everyone I knew was heading off to the same high school together, and there was no doubt in my mind I would be going with them. So when my parents suggested that I shadow at CB, I agreed, with no true intention of ever attending. However, it was undeniable on that shadow day that something about CB resonated with me. Still, I fought against it all summer, wanting so desperately to go off with the people I knew and what I was comfortable with. And yet, the first day of school rolled around and I decided to give it a shot. As I walked on to campus for the first time, staring up at the “Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve” sign, I heard the words of my dad’s favorite Yogi Berra quote - “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” If I had not taken that fork in my road, I would never have met all the incredible people or made all the amazing memories I have from CB. I would never have met my now two best friends in history class, found a community in band I could call my home, or experienced the tremendous love I felt on Kairos. We are all bound to stumble into several difficult and intimidating

crossroads in our futures. For some of us, that might be the realization that the major we choose isn't something we are truly passionate about it. Or maybe it will even be a career change we are contemplating. For others, it could be the choice to make a big move across the country or even the world, or maybe the decision to leave a relationship in which we are no longer happy. So while I can't tell you how to decide which path to choose, I **do** know that it is impossible to know the beauty of what lies ahead if we stay safe and trapped in only that with which we are familiar. As we branch off into the beginning of our new lives, we shouldn't feel obligated to stick to our plans. We must explore the possibilities and embrace the opportunities, because regardless of which paths we choose, only **we** have the power to make the most of the decisions we've made.

Until now, our class has been defined by our simultaneous tenacity and compassion. In fact upon asking my fellow classmates what words they would use to describe our class, the most common responses I received were determined, driven, supportive and caring. We have **perfected** the balance between ambition and empathy. Through the stress of balancing seven classes, navigating the complexities of friendship, and discovering who we are, we have never failed in lifting each other up. Our top priority has always been to get through this together, - as a team and a family. I know I would not be delivering this speech today if not for all the amazing support I have received over the years, whether that be in your patience in explaining a math problem to me or just in lending me a listening ear. So while, yes, we must strive to reach the stars, we must not forget the longer phrase our class motto stems from – per aspera ad astra or through hardship to the stars. We are able to celebrate today on the other side of all the struggles high school offered because of the humanity we **consistently** showed one another. While I would love to reassure you that we have been through the worst of it, the truth is there are still many obstacles that lie ahead. From paying our bills, to finding a job, to raising kids, there is still much that will bring us worry, but the **only** way to navigate these endeavors is to remember that everyone around us is trying to navigate them as well. No matter how confident others may seem to be, it is more than likely that they are trying to figure it all out, right along side us. **None** of us have gotten to where we are today by ourselves, and **none** of us will make it through our future hardships by ourselves either. We must strive to be our best selves and

fight for our ambitions, but we can't be afraid to look for help when we need it and we must **always** be the first to offer help when someone seeks it. When we look back on our lives, we may remember the promotions we received, but we will remember more deeply the way we made others feel. We must lead lives of compassion so we can reflect proudly on the impact we had on those around us and continue our class' legacy of refusing to leave anyone behind.

Lastly, we must always be grateful for the foundations we have developed here at Christian Brothers. As we head down our new roads to the future, we must trust that the characteristics we have developed at CB will allow us to thrive, but in case you ever feel lost or incomplete along the way remember the wise words the philosopher Rumi once said, - "Maybe you are searching among the branches for what only appears in the roots." Some among us may become Supreme Court Justices, researchers who work on curing cancer, or teachers who shape the next generation. Along the way to these goals we will only develop further into the most fulfilled versions of ourselves, if we stay committed to our values. We must not allow the commotion and excitement of new experiences to detract from who we are at the core. Cling to the principles of inclusion, respect, faith and concern. Only in staying committed to these ideas can we maintain our integrity and discover what brings us joy. If we ever need a reminder of what we are searching for, we need only to return to our roots – the loving and open community of CB. Our class will **always** be waiting to support you. So to my fellow classmates, congratulations, it has been an honor and pleasure to grow alongside you, and to all who supported us, we have learned and we are ready to serve. Thank you.