

2024 Senior Address

by Marcus Hershberger

Thank you, Mrs. Howard. And thank you all for choosing me to speak. It's such an honor to be up here and to send us off, the class of 2024. Let's take a moment to recognize the families that have come here to support us. Let's give them a round of applause. I also want to thank the other guests in the house tonight -- CAJ faculty and friends. Thank you for being here.

Class of 2024, we began our lives at CAJ at different times, but we all experienced the international nightmare of COVID-19. And most of us students, as we all remember, were fresh into high school at the height of the pandemic; temperature checks, masks, social distancing were the new normal. Seniors, it's been a while, but the Japanese government advised us to avoid what they called the "Three C's" of COVID-19: "closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings." Since our journey in high school was right at the beginning of these "Three C's", I think it's fitting that we end our time in high school with the new-and-improved "Three C's of the Class of 2024". Instead of avoiding these "three C's", we should cling to them as we go off into the world.

The first 'C' we should cling to is Community. Seniors, when I see us, you know what I see? I see diversity. Each of us brings something new and fresh to the table. We have future academics going to prestigious universities; eloquent writers, speakers, and thinkers; we have powerful athletes who display amazing leadership on and off the court; we have talented musicians and vocalists, people who excel at multiple instruments, and who spent years developing their vocal ability; we have outstanding actors and actresses; members of renowned servant leadership teams; and we even have our own entrepreneur, Sunwoo Park! Let me ask you: Would we have these skills and that passion if we didn't have anyone to challenge us? To love us? To drive us to excellence? The community of CAJ truly is unique; I think it's safe to say there aren't many communities like this one in the world. The CAJ staff is welcoming and warm-hearted -- they really do love us. Mr. Mawhinney, Mr. Fambro, Mrs. Howard, and Mr. Kelleth wouldn't dance "Supershy" at our first pep rally this year if they didn't love and support us. Also, CAJ students are close-knit and caring: there is open interaction across grades. Seniors, I've seen us be proactive about connecting with underclassmen, and helping them; underclassmen, I've seen you grow and laugh with seniors. Athletes in the room -- I'm sure you agree. Elsewhere, in the fine arts -- in band, choir,

drama productions, art classes -- underclassmen and upperclassmen support and challenge one another. Class of 2024, We're leaving this community. And we know, it's sad, scary, to leave a place you've been at for so long. But we need to find communities like CAJ's that will empower us, support us, challenge us. You've heard the saying: "show me your friends and I'll show you your future." It's true. Show me your community, and I'll show you your identity. The first 'C' is community.

The second 'C' is Character. If we watched a movie of our entire lives, from birth till now, how would you feel? Would you watch that movie? In the movie of our lives at CAJ, you know what I've seen? I've seen us grow. We've grown as leaders, as servants, as friends. We led and served in multiple leadership teams this year. In TASSEL, NHS, Student Council, Senior Council, Chapel Committee -- I mean, half of the Chapel Committee this year was seniors! We were spiritual leaders; we helped change Chapel; we started weekly Bible studies. We served at Elementary Field Day just last week; We served in Thailand; we served at 2nd Harvest and Sidewalk Chapel back in middle school. (My mom reminds me that our very own Chris Kinoshita served at Sidewalk Chapel not once but *twice*, and would even go *again* if he could!) There are some of us who have served and led even when no one's watching. Ladies and gentlemen, our character stays with us for the rest of our lives. Whether or not you're not a Christian, we all know, deep down, that what we do in life matters. It will matter to our friends, our families, and our society, and it will affect us. I'm sure many of us have regrets. I do. I regret not learning more names in our community. I regret not looking people in the eye more. Do you have any regrets? Professional cowboy Dwayne Noel remarked that "if you have no regrets, you have no growth." Let's remember how we've grown at CAJ. The second 'C' -- our Character.

The final 'C' is Christ. For some of us we want Jesus at the center of our lives -- we're young but we know we need Jesus. For some of us we're excited to be done with Jesus -- done with Chapel, done with Bible class, done with "analyze this from a Christian perspective". Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? Jesus told this story 2,000 years ago:

There was once a man who had a son. The son went to his father, and said 'Father, I want my inheritance, right now.' So the father gave the son his inheritance and left for a distant country. It wasn't long, however, before he wasted everything he had. He spent all his money -- he had no food. He ended up with a job feeding pigs; he was so hungry even the pig food looked appealing. Finally, he picked himself up and said -- "All my father's

servants get three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, "Father, I'm sorry -- I don't deserve to be called your son." So he got right up and went home to his father. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. The father's heart started to pound, and he ran, and embraced his lost son. The son started to speak: 'Father, I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' But the father joyfully called to the servants, 'Quick. Bring him clean clothes. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. We're going to have a feast! For my son is home! He was lost -- and now he's found.

Many of us, too, are about to leave for a distant country. But when we come back to Jesus we enter into community. If we just come back to Jesus, he'll give us clean clothes, put a ring on our finger, and sit us down to feast. He'll look us in the eyes and say -- "Welcome home."

There you have it -- the three 'C's of the class of 2024: Community, Character, and Christ; Let me end with a quote from a very wise turtle, Master Oogway -- "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift: that is why it is called the present." Class of 2024: this isn't goodbye -- it's just "see you later".

I love you all.

2024 Graduation Address

by Keith Kelleth

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For **now** we see only a reflection as in a mirror; **then** we shall see face to face. **Now** I know in part; **then** I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

When Principal Fambro informed me that the senior class wanted me to be the commencement speaker, I was honored, but a little hesitant. I struggled with writing this speech for MONTHS. Much like you all on so many of your assignments, it came down to the last minute and I still didn't know what I was going to write. I had to ask for an extension (twice), and I'll admit the thought crossed my mind to open ChatGPT. But no, I had to get this right. This is such a big responsibility! I mean, what do I say to *this* class?

The class that sang "Scho-scholosa!" when I subbed for Middle School Choir years ago? The class with the students who made silly movies for digital tools, and the ones who read "*A Long Walk to Water*" with me online during distance learning? I remember those days

so clearly; how could it be that you're now graduating?!

But here you are. Senior Year. 2024. After all of the stress and last minute changes and college applications and AP exams and assignment deadlines and sports schedules and relationships and responsibilities and senior hours and trips and this and that and ***Capstone***! It wasn't easy, but you made it! (And yikes; for a couple of you it was down to the wire there, wasn't it...)

I've known you for so long, and gotten to see you grow and change so much; to see the fine young men and women that you've become!

And now that you prepare to set out onto the next stage of your life, it's a bit sobering, (for me at least), that...

As much as I've loved teaching your class over all of these years, barring the occasional alumni visit, this is probably the last time I'll get to see most of you.

This is goodbye. And goodbyes are hard.

For so many unexpected goodbyes in life, we miss our chance to tell the other person the important things. People's biggest regrets in life often include not telling someone how much they meant to them when they had the chance; not telling someone that they loved them. So what do I say?

Well... **I love you.**

And You are loved by so many others, too! Just look at everyone here today, and everyone connected online. But when I say "I love you," and tell you that they love you too; I want you to know what I'm really talking about. There's more to love than you might realize.

1 Corinthians 13 talks about a few things, but mostly about love. All throughout the Bible there are other great passages regarding love, it's true. 1 John chapter 4 tells us that God IS love, and tells us that the reason people are even able to love is because God first loved us.

But Paul's words in first Corinthians thirteen give us a working definition of love. It's a complex, multifaceted aspect of relationships that is also the very nature of God; and thus is the way human relationships **should** be.

And as a social studies teacher, it's low-key the thing that I most want you to see in my classes. All of history, civics, economics; it all comes down to love, or the lack

of it. So if you'll forgive me one last quick lesson, I'll ask you to contemplate Paul's words.

Listen to what Paul says love is. It's patient and kind. It doesn't envy or brag. It's honorable, unselfish, it's calm, it forgives. Love rejoices with the truth. It protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres.

There's significant overlap between his words here and the fruits of the spirit mentioned in Galatians 5. Do you remember the song?

The fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...

How many arguments would be avoided if we all just had a little more patience? What would the world be like if kindness was our first reaction? How many societal issues; the very topics that you worked so hard to present about a few days ago, would be solved if we LOVED more! Love brings healing, harmony, and hope! Love protects, forgives, trusts, rejoices, and perseveres.

So when someone loves you, REALLY loves you, you can see what it means. They want the best for you, even if it means going to great lengths to make it so. They'll sacrifice for you. They'll celebrate with you. They'll support you, sit with you, offer you kind words. And they don't need anything in return. Think about how many times people have done things like this for you. How often you've done it for each other. Do you see how loved you are??

The last part of the chapter also contains an analogy to describe how we will be; how love will be, in the future, once we are complete in Christ. "... **now** we see only a reflection as in a mirror; **then** we shall see face to face. **Now** I know in part; **then** I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

I am so lucky to teach at this school. Every year, I am absolutely floored by the collection of talents, skills, and gifts that you all possess. You bless me every day, and the only reason I'm able to persevere through all of the demands of teaching is that I get to play the little part God has for me in helping you along the journey to knowing yourself fully as He does.

One more thing happened while I was thinking about what to say this year; It just so happened that my planning block coincided with Senior English, so I got to listen in on the senior's poetry unit. They did such a great job that the teachers hosted a poetry reading for everyone to hear!

Well, students, you inspired me to write something of my own. So, even though my love language is usually “acts of service”, I thought it fitting to end with some “words of affirmation”:

Reflections of You

As I look out upon the '24 class,
And think back on all of the years that have passed:
With So many creative and artistic pursuits,
Your class has some amazing attributes.

Many have a gift for communication,
Praising the wonders of God's creation.
You're faithful caretakers, resilient and strong,
Enjoying creation and righting what's wrong.

You think and you learn and support each other,
In Christ, you all are sisters and brothers!
I'm sad that we have to start next year without you,
Because there's so many things that I love about you:

Joe, I love all of your challenging questions,
And the insightful comments and suggestions.
You know so much of the things you speak of,
But when you speak the truth, you do it in love.

Marcus, I love your heart that's so pure,
You serve with such joy and always endure.

Isabelle, I love your witty sarcasm,
And your artistic enthusiasm.

Maddie, I love the ways that you share
Your faith, your joy, and how much you care.

SooMin, I love your heart for children in need,
You give them joy; you teach them to read!

Kaia D and Joanna, the OG BFFs,
Both actors, both singers, and “Swifties” till death.
You share such gifts and such friendship, that to me
it's clear,
God blessed CAJ having both of you here.
I love how you see truth in songs and in stories,
And just how they reveal our creator's glory.
Oh, one more thing, I love that you know,
It's not Aang and Katara, it's Katara and Zuko.
(*Sorry, inside joke for Last Airbender fans...*)

Natsumi, I love how you've managed to combine
An industrious spirit and innovative mind.

Ayana, I love how you can pull yourself through
Even when there's things you don't want to do.

Taizo, you showed up and quickly impressed me,
With your knowledge of econ and financial
investing.
And I love that underneath is a gentle soul,
With creative ideas and artistic goals.

Rebecca, I love how much that you persevered
You've come a long way from that 8th grade year.
You've grown so much since those early days,
In language, sports, arts; so many ways!

Daniel, I love how you've learned to be humble
And how to pull yourself up when you start to
crumble.

Makishi, I love how you're always so chill,
But you still know how to work when it's time to
get real.

Chajah Kato, I love how you've found your voice,
And that you use it to fight, to support, or rejoice!
You have such a strong conscience and a passion for
right,
(Navajo: bidazhdiilkaal) bee-dodge-duh-eee-luh-
kaahl),
keep on fighting the fight.
(*I hope my Navajo was OK...*)

Minjun, I love your self-motivation,
And all your future business aspirations

Chris, I loved the way that you served the whole
school,
Solving Council issues while keeping your cool.
You really loved them, and it was time well spent,
Happy to serve with you, Mr. President.

JangGun, I've told you in all that you do,
Stop comparing with others, I love to hear YOU!

Eastin, I love how you light up a room
Wherever you go it seems happiness blooms!

Esther, I love how you sacrificially served,
To give your friends the event they deserved,
I hope you realized when stressed and your energy
spent,
We love YOU much more than any event.

YunSeo, I love how you always have lead,
With all your heart, your soul, and your head.
You contemplate quietly, but when you do speak,
I see the passion and skills that lie underneath.

Ryosei, I love how you're so kind and patient,

Slow to anger and never complacent.

Eri, I love how you can stay optimistic,
It's one of your many great characteristics!

Elliot, Nathan, Spencer, Kade, Zeke!
You know I love my fellow D&D geeks!
That term may sound odd, but to those it's ascribed,
I hope you see it like me; as a badge of pride!

Elliot, with your love of facts, details and such,
I love your work ethic, but don't work too much!

Nathan, I must admit that I hardly knew you,
But I love how you treat your friends the way you
do.

Spencer, I love how you GET modern games,
The morals they show, and the truths they proclaim.

Zeke you've got style and this quiet, cool mystery,
And I love how you understand the lessons of
history.

Kade, you and I like so many same things,
Movies, books, music, TV shows, and games.
But the thing I love most and want to applaud,
Is the fire you have for our living God.

Charlotte, I love how you so quietly care,
If someone's in need, you'll always be there.

Jahnavi, you're always so friendly, and I'll
Always love the way you can make people smile

Sunwoo, I love that you're already feeling
The need to show Christ in your business dealings.
Be it AI, innovation, or something else altogether,
I hope God blesses all your endeavors.

J, I love the great perspectives you see,
And how when you wrote in my classes, it
challenged me!

Ashlie, I love the excitement you brought
Whenever you realized you knew more than you
thought.

Tryphena I love how you have expressed
All of your talents that have made us so blessed.

Kosuke, I love how wholehearted you've been,
With every speech, play, assignment; you're always
all-in.

YJ, the way you mix your faith and your learning,

I love your mind that's ever so sharp and discerning.
As you move on to life beyond college
Never stop seeking after knowledge.

Leon, I love your charm and your grace,
When you try to bring smiles to everyone's face.

Yukari, with a sword you have incredible skill,
But I love that with a pen, you are mightier still.

Mana, oh what a blessing you've been,
I love your writing, your speaking, and your violin;
There's so many wonderful things that you can do,
Even the Ivy League will be lucky to have you.

A couple of you I didn't really get to know,
I'm sorry **Fuka**, I'm sorry **Miho!**
You weren't in my classes, but still I learned
Of the wonderful reputations you've earned.
I've noticed your talents and skills other ways
In artwork and projects put on display;
And even from that I love how you've blessed
The students and teachers and staff and the rest,
Plus your classmates, they love you, and in them I
trust,
If they say you're great, then be great, you must!
(*Sorry, I went a little bit "Yoda" there...*)

That's everyone here, but there's two you're not
seein',
You know I love you, **Hiroshi** and **Ian!**
They may have left, but they're still a big part
Of both your class, and of my heart.

So many wonderful traits you possess,
This class I'll remember as one of our best,
But for now I'll try to keep my eyes dry,
As I fight back the tears from this love filled
goodbye.

So... that's my goodbye poem. Hopefully, it's a fitting
farewell.

I only said a few words, but you have SO MANY
MORE amazing things to love about you. I'm really
going to miss this class.

But here's the thing that can soften the blow a bit and
makes this goodbye tolerable:

If what we're seeing NOW is only the unclear
"reflection as in a mirror"...
If you're already NOW as amazing as you are...? Wow.

On the day when Completeness comes, I'll get to see
you **THEN**. And I can't wait to get to know the real
you, **FULL YOU**, face to face.

You're incredible. I love you all.

Congratulations, graduates.