



## Address to the First Graduating Class, Fountain Academy of the Sacred Heart, Halifax, N.S.

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Mrs Donnelly; Mr Bursey, Chair of the Board, past Board Chairs, Sister Mahar, Sister Connolly and other Religious of the Sacred Heart; Mr Marchand, Miss Scott, and Mrs Carter; Graduates; Parents; and Friends:

As you heard in the introduction, I have been associated with the family of the Sacred Heart for the past thirty-four years; this campus has been the

site of my most rewarding experiences as a teacher and a parent; it has been the source of my dearest and longest lasting friendships; it is, truly, my second home.

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour to have been asked to speak today to the first graduating class of the Fountain Academy of the Sacred Heart. This beautiful Nova Scotia spring day is one that has been long dreamed of, prayed for, and hard won by the contributions of many, many people. Thank you for letting me share it with you.

Our beloved and iconic former Pope, John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter "Novo Millennio Ineunte", issued in 2000, at the close of the great Jubilee Year and looking forward to the third millennium after the birth of Jesus, focused on the following phrase, which he was to use repeatedly in addresses, homilies, and other communications during his papacy: "***Duc et altum!***" – "Put out into the deep." The phrase is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, Chapter 5, verses 2 – 6:

*"While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing."*

"***Duc in altum*** - Put out into the deep." In that simple phrase we are told that with God's help, anything and everything can be accomplished, as indeed it was when Simon Peter accepted Jesus' command to "lower the nets". Our presence here today is the result of many people who accepted that command.

In 1801, when the 22-year old St Madeleine Sophie Barat founded the Religious of the Sacred Heart, in the wake of the bloody and fiercely anti-Catholic French Revolution, to provide a Catholic education for girls, she was responding to the Lord's call to "put out into the deep", and over the past 200 years, those nets have embraced many thousands of young people across the world.

Mother Mary Aloysia Hardey continued the work of St Madeleine Sophie and "put out into the deep" by establishing some 40 houses and schools of the Sacred Heart, and coming with five other Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1849 to establish the community in Halifax.

In the same way, the establishment of this Academy was the result of a number of people who accepted the challenge to "put out into the deep". Almost from the beginning of his episcopacy in 1998, former Archbishop Terrence Prendergast had hoped for the establishment of a Catholic boys' school. As a former student at Montreal's Jesuit Loyola High School, he understood the value of a faith-based education for young men, and he saw the excellent opportunities for young women provided by the Sacred Heart School of Halifax. At the same time, the Board and administration at Sacred Heart were being petitioned regularly by parents of boys, particularly those who had been educated at the co-educational Sacred Heart Elementary School, for a means for their sons to have the kind of educational experience restricted to their daughters after Grade VI.

And so it was in 2001 that the Sacred Heart Board passed a motion to investigate the establishment of a boys' school. In 2002, a task force, composed of representatives of the Archdiocese and the School was established to study the project. I joined Fr. Richard Smith, now Archbishop of Edmonton, and Deacon Wilf Boudreau who represented the Archdiocese of Halifax, Sr Mary Finlayson, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, Mrs Donnelly the School, and Mr Greg Cooper the parents. In time, Fr Con Mulvihill, now Chaplain at St Paul's High School in Winnipeg, replaced Fr Smith and Katherine Simon replaced Greg Cooper.

I'm not sure who I represented, perhaps all of those who loved and were protective of all that the Sacred Heart School meant and continues to mean to the community in Halifax.

*"Duc in altum"*. We were challenged to "put out into the deep", and the waters of single-sex education for boys were **very** deep. In a province where not a cent of public money goes to support parental choice in education, and where the active Catholic population was static, if not declining, we asked "Were there a sufficient number of families who would support a Catholic secondary school for boys?" In the brave new world ushered in by the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, would the idea of a new school for boys only be challenged as discriminatory? And where could such a school be established? Could a site be found near enough to the girls' school to foster meaningful cooperation but separate enough to preserve the character of the existing school?

There were times that we looked to heaven to complain: *"Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing..."* But the nets were lowered, and the school was opened at Canadian Martyrs in 2005. And yet, many others would have to "put out into the deep" to bring us to where we are today. The Board, which struggles each year to provide resources to support an education worthy of the traditions of Sacred Heart education and the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who so generously support the schools materially and with their prayers, both took substantial risks to bring this Academy into existence. Your principal, Mr Marchand, left a secure position of nearly 20 years at an established independent school (to which we never refer by name) to take on the challenge of building a new and different kind of school.

Parents and students, too, were asked to walk by faith and not by sight. The public school system, generously supported by the taxpayers of Halifax, was about to open a new state-of-the-art high school in the neighbourhood with a full range of academic and extra-curricular opportunities. And yet several families chose to "put out into the deep", investing their money and their time in making the new school a success.

And when it became clear that the school would have to move from its first home at Canadian Martyrs, the Sacred Heart family was once again challenged to "put out into the deep" both to raise money to build the beautiful school in which we gather today but also to learn how to maintain the value of single-sex education in schools which now shared a single campus. The Fountain family responded generously to that challenge as did so many supporters of Sacred Heart education, especially those families who had no sons in the school but whose daughters had benefitted or continued to benefit from the education they received in the girls' school. The American educator, Horace Mann, the first president of my undergraduate college, once observed that all that was really needed for education was a log, with a teacher on one end and a student on the other. Perhaps, but this is some nice log on which we find ourselves.

Well, today we see the culmination of those efforts I have described: a graduating class that has distinguished itself academically, athletically, and in a variety of extra-curricular activities, such as debate, music and drama; a group of young men of whom we can all be as proud as their parents surely are. Perhaps our nets are not as full yet as those of the Apostles, but the catch has been rich indeed.

Today is also a time to challenge today's graduates: *"Duc in altum."* Take this as your rallying cry, and think about what it means in your lives. Fundamentally, it means not to cling to the status quo. It is a command to go beyond the things we know, the things with which we are comfortable, to look beyond yourself and make your skills, your talents, your education, and your very life a gift to others.

And where is "the deep" for all of us? We know that it is a dark and scary place, as it was for Simon Peter. He and his brothers had truly labored all night and caught nothing, but they had, like so many of us, remained safely close to shore, in a sheltered harbor, unwilling to venture into the deep waters where sudden storms and tumultuous waves put their livelihoods and, in fact, their lives at risk.

The "deep" is a place of war, pestilence, famine, and death; a place of suffering, and above all, a place of fear and uncertainty. And even when we hear the words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid," without a deep faith – one of the goals of Sacred Heart education – it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find the courage to venture into that place, much less to struggle against it.

The "deep" is also a place of swirling tides of superficiality. The great Protestant theologian Paul Tillich observed that the tragedy of the modern world was not so much its myriad social and psychological problems as the superficiality of our response to them. "Modern man," he wrote, "has lost the capacity to go into the depth of things." A Sacred Heart education that emphasizes a respect for intellectual values, and a belief that there is such a thing as Truth that is worth seeking, will enable you to move beyond the superficiality of the culture around us and to live your lives as joyful witnesses to truth and the often hidden beauty of God's creation.

You must “put out into the deep” to fulfill the school’s call to “Engage the World”, for it is only in “the deep” that you will be able to build a community of hope, only in “the deep” that your commitment to social justice will be tested and bear fruit, only in “the deep” that you will continue the personal growth that has been encouraged at Sacred Heart.

Having been a supporter of this school from its inception, I know that, despite its remarkable accomplishments, it will face further and continuing challenges. Today, however, you, graduates, bear witness to the importance of the existence and future mission of the Fountain Academy of the Sacred Heart. Your experience in the school mirrors the call of Christ to set out into the unknown – to “put out into the deep” – and to live lives based on faith, hope, and charity, or as it is often defined, “love in action”. As Pope Benedict XVI has written in his encyclical letter, *Spe Salvi* (“In hope we are saved”) “...the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known - it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. ... The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.”

Our world today, enveloped in a hostile culture, entrenched in greed and self-regard, a culture that has become what Pope John Paul II presciently called “a culture of death” is in desperate need of that new life. You are called to bring the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, along with your energy, enthusiasm, and education to the world. These are lofty goals, but they are not easy to attain. For all that Simon Peter had faith in Jesus’ command, when his nets were full, he and his brothers had a hard and dangerous struggle to haul them into the boat. The word charity, “love in action”, implies the demand to love sacrificially, to love at a substantial cost to ourselves, to love by pouring ourselves out for others, especially, as Christ taught us, “for the least of my brethren,” and “for these little ones.”

I have made reference several times to a “boys’ school”, but with today’s graduation, you have become men. It is good, then, to recall the words of St Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians:

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away childish things. We see now as through a glass, darkly; but then face to face. Now, I know in part; but then, I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and love, these three: but the greatest of these is love."

What this means for you, the first graduates of the Fountain Academy of the Sacred Heart, is that you are called to a life of service, to God, in whatever way you know God, and to other people. That service will be devoted first to your family but also to the broader community. “*Duc in altum.*” At every point in your lives, there will be countless opportunities to use your knowledge, skills, and character to serve others, if only you will “put out into the deep.”

Thank you and God bless you.

