

Mark Fitzpatrick—Catholic Schools Week 2010
Distinguished Alum Award Acceptance Speech

Can any of you smart math students out there tell me what year it was 40 years ago?

That's right-it was 1970, and that was the year that I graduated from St. Peter's. I sat in assemblies just like you are doing today, and just like you I wondered whenever some guy was speaking to us if his talk would be long and boring. I'll try not to be long and boring.

Forty years is a long time, and that tells you two things:

Number one--I'm really old.

Number two--Many things have changed.

So how much has changed?

We listened to our music on transistor radios, not Ipods, and when I listened to the Beatles and Elvis Presley they were all still alive..

Our phones were all in our house, and they were tied to the wall by squiggly cords, so we couldn't walk around with them.

When I watched television I had the choice of four stations on a black-and-white TV, while today you can watch 400 stations in high-definition color.

This building wasn't here, and wouldn't be until 1998. For our basketball practices we had a tiny little gym where you now have your junior high classes. It was too small for us to ever play games against other schools. There was no playground equipment either.

You can look at my picture on the 8th Grade composite for that year, and you'll see I've changed a lot. I was kind of geek back then. In fact, I was a real geek. Some people say I still am.

And you want to know something that's really different? Do you know who won the Super Bowl when I was in 8th Grade? Believe it or not--it was the Kansas City Chiefs, and the quarterback was the old guy who is on the sports news today--Len Dawson.

Yes, 1970 was a long time ago, It was so long ago that many of your teachers weren't even born yet. Mr. Jacobson hadn't even started teaching here yet.

But you know what--there are a lot of things that haven't changed since then. When I drove up here today I noticed the huge piles of snow in the parking lot, just like we used to have after a big storm. Those piles will be there until July.

The houses around this neighborhood look pretty much the same. The stores have changed in Brookside, but the outsides of the buildings look about the same, and it's still a good place to hang out.

If you walk around outside the Church and the older parts of the school buildings they look a lot the same as well. Most importantly, what goes on inside these walls is exactly the same.

Today you get the same great education that I had, one that has helped me throughout my life. Your parents, as did my parents, make great sacrifices to send you to this school. Your teachers, as did mine, work many hours to make you the smartest students you can be, and they teach you about the Catholic faith to guide you in your choices.

The theme for Catholic Schools Week is "Faith in our Students-Hope in Our Future". What does that mean? I think it means two things.

First, I think that the adults around St. Peter's and other Catholic schools have so much faith and trust in our students that despite all the problems in the world, we know because of you we can hope for a bright future. I understand this is a very smart group of students, and God has given you all many talents. As I stand up here today, promise me you will use those talents to do good deeds, and make our city, our country and our world all better places to live.

The second meaning for me of "Faith in our Students-Hope in Our Future" is that your teachers and parents are guiding you to find your faith in our Lord. And the teachers and parents at St. Elizabeth, Visitation, St. Thomas More, Christ the King and all the other Catholic schools in Kansas City and across the country are working just as hard to do the same. It is with this faith that you will develop the hope and confidence you need to accomplish many great things as you get older, with God at your side.

To put it simply, faith in you and faith in God, means hope for me, and hope for you.

This school and church is a place I love very, very much. I was married here, and I probably will be buried here, although I hope that's a long time from now. All four of my children graduated from this school, and all have gone on to do well in high school and college. I expect you will do the same.

I have moved away from here a couple of times, but I have always come back. It is my home. I have tried to give something back to St. Peter's, but the fact is I will never be able to give back what St. Peter's has given to me. My parents first taught me about faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but the teachers at St. Peter's helped me understand it better. My parents taught me the basics of doing right from wrong, but it was at this school that I learned to put those teachings into action, as I still try to do today. This place is a lot more than just a bunch of classrooms in a building--it is the place where you are learning the same lessons of life today.

We all share in the pride that comes from being part of the St. Peter's community. If you can remember one thing from what I say today, make it this: respect what you have here. Understand what a very special this place is--one that has served this area for the better part of the century. And after you leave, whether you live down the street or on the other side of the world, give something back so that future students here can be as lucky as you and I are.

I'm really not sure what I have done to deserve being called a Distinguished Alumnus. I can think of many people much more deserving than I am. Mrs. Hair, for one. Mrs. Nan Bone, Class of 1965, who won this award last year. And our former pastor, Fr. Joe Sharbel, Class of 1969.

There's Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Houston, Class of 1968, who has provided dental care to people in Iraq who don't have access to such services. One of my best friends from the Class of 1970, Lieutenant Colonel Jay Haden, is serving our country's military in Afghanistan at this very moment. Another one of my classmates, Sister Jane Heschmeyer, chose the religious life as her vocation. She is a nun in a convent northeast of Kansas City, and she and her fellow sisters make

the bread that we use for Holy Communion. Members of the Ungashick family have donated countless hours and dollars to charity, and one of them even drove a truckload of supplies to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Use these people as role models for your future, for they are living the Gospel every day. They are the real distinguished graduates of St. Peter's, and there are many more of them spread throughout the decades.

But I am proud to be here today to accept this honor. It means more to me than I could ever put into words. I want to extend my appreciation to Ms. Spallo, Mrs. Meyer, Fr. Cook and the rest of the staff for inviting me to come.

Thank you all for listening. Have a great week celebrating St. Peter's and all of our great Catholic schools. May God bless each and every one of you.