



Assumption University

Valedictory Address – Emily Fasteson, Undergraduate Class of 2024 Commencement, Assumption University

Dear graduates, esteemed faculty, families, and friends, thank you for joining us in celebrating the commencement exercises of the class of 2024. We are celebrating today because all **417 graduates** have experienced the transformative power of an Assumption education and are preparing to enter their respective communities, careers, and graduate institutions having been equipped with a unique Catholic liberal education.

A Catholic liberal education is ordered toward the pursuit of truth. We all pursue the truth in different ways: some by studying mathematics, others biology, education, music, business, nursing, philosophy, or theology. We pursue the truth in the classroom, in our professors' office hours, in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, on the field, on the stage, in the lab, in Chuck's, and in our dorms during late-night conversations. Through these pursuits we come to know ourselves and others better. We also come to understand that we are made for connection and understand ourselves best when we can see and experience our embeddedness in the broader community. When we try to understand ourselves in isolation from the rest of the world, it is unclear why our work matters. However, if we can contextualize our work by placing it within the whole of reality, we can see its purpose and end. A Catholic liberal education helps us situate what we study within the whole of reality and helps us understand our purpose as participative members of a community and of society at large.

Walking around campus we have constant reminders of our place in the Assumption community. Whether I am greeting a friend on my way to class, chatting with the librarians who know “my table” in the library, or catching up with a professor who still remembers me by name from that one class I had with him my first semester. I am confident that each one of us has our own examples of the times we have felt especially connected on campus. I hope we can all point to a few people who have drawn us into the community and shaped our Assumption experience. Assumption’s professors do an excellent job making students feel seen and heard in the classroom. The presence of our exceptional faculty both inside and out of the classroom is a testament to how deeply committed they are to helping their students pursue the truth in all its forms. None of us would be here without our advisors, professors, and mentors and their guidance during our time at Assumption.

Our education did not primarily happen in the hours we spent alone studying or working on papers, but in the lively class discussions, time spent in office hours, group review sessions, tutoring or being tutored in the Academic Support Center, club meetings, and casual conversations. We do our best work surrounded by a community of people that know and care about us. Our education reveals to us that we are made to be with other people. This is one of the most fundamental truths of a Catholic liberal education: we are made for connection. This connection comes not only from the ways in which we interact with our peers and different thinkers in the classroom, but from the interpersonal connections we invest in not because they have quantifiable benefits, but because they are good in and of themselves. Our connections are made strong by being active participants in our community, who show up every day and give of ourselves. A singular event does not make the community strong; a strong community is the product of continuous effort, commitment, and dedication.

Just as a strong community is a participative one, the transformative power of our education comes from participating in it. Even as we sit alone reading a core text like the *Confessions* for one of our classes, we are thinking alongside the author—in this case Saint Augustine—and trying to follow the logic of his argument. By thinking alongside the author we do not simply read a text in isolation; instead, we unite ourselves to and participate in the education we are receiving. No matter what we study, the common aim of our education is the pursuit of truth. This aim unifies our education and draws our attention to the fact that we are all pursuing the truth—albeit in different ways—and are necessarily interconnected in doing so. We experience visual reminders of our interconnectedness during some of Assumption’s favorite annual events like the Christmas tree lighting and Duck Day as the campus comes together for a common purpose. These events draw the community closer together by providing a space for our interpersonal relationships to develop and grow. Throughout our time at Assumption, we have experienced our relationships with others grow into a web of support that has held us up and sustained us through each moment. We discover ourselves most fully in and through these relationships as we learn together, share meals together, pray together, and relax together. We reveal the core of who we are in and through our interactions with one another—especially through how we love one another. Deepening this sense of commitment to loving one’s neighbor is an essential component of the formation our Catholic liberal education seeks to impart and it shapes who we are and how we interact with the rest of the world.

Our formation during our time at Assumption is not limited to our classmates, professors, and advisors though. As we think about those who support us, I would be remiss if this Mother’s Day I did not mention our very first web of support—that of our families, and most especially our mothers. Whether our

mothers are here with us today or not, let us remember that our mother was the very first person we were ever connected to and the first person to teach us how to love. The support of our mothers is a generous response to the call to love. This Mother's Day, may we thank our mothers for their model of self-sacrificial love and showing us what it means to be connected to another human being. May we also draw to mind the model of our Blessed Mother—from whom Assumption gets its name—and whom we constantly seek to imitate as she leads us closer to her son. The example of being so closely connected to another shows us the unity for which we are made. Our education points to this unity insofar as it draws us closer to one another and invites us to participate in reality.

When we choose to be participative members of a community and embrace the embeddedness that being part of a community entails, we can rest in the support of those around us and engage more fully with the enduring questions we seek to answer as a result. When we are in the company of friends we are the most free to be ourselves and we are well-disposed to receive and participate in the gift that is a Catholic liberal education. Once we get a glimpse of what an Assumption education is—a formation of the whole person—and what it is for—that is, the pursuit of truth—we can understand that we are necessarily connected to others because the formation of the “whole person” does not exist without other people. The Catholic liberal education that Assumption offers is a gift and a privilege, and it is not just for ourselves. We must continue to share the gift of our education through our witness well beyond graduation.

We are called to be witnesses to the truth in all that we do. Our education points toward the truth, and with each question we consider, we uncover more about the truth. This is not only true of our studies, it is also true that each person we encounter reveals something unique about the truth. The truth is one, unified whole, but its richness is inexhaustible. Each one of us here, in pursuing the truth,

is partaking in the same thing despite our diverse and varied approaches. These varied approaches are necessary because the truth is multi-faceted. By pursuing the truth as we live out our individual calling we shine light on one of these facets. The world needs each of our contributions because there is something unique that each person reveals about the truth that only he or she can reveal. Each person's existence is distinct and unrepeatable. Thus the deepest calling of our education is to pursue the truth and commit to living it. However, we cannot live out our individual calling on our own. The entire world is deeply interconnected, so each of us in the class of 2024 must work together as we strive to live out and fulfill the call of our Catholic liberal education to pursue the truth in the company of friends so that our lives may bear fruit.

Thank you and congratulations!