Good afternoon Cathedral community and the Class of 2020.

If you know me, you know I love telling stories, so here’s one last story for you to enjoy, it’s called “The class of 2020” and it’s written by the Cathedral School of St. John the Divine. Oh, and it’s dedicated to the families of the Class of 2020

Once upon a time in New York City, there was a school named The Cathedral School. It was on Amsterdam Avenue, and you reached the school by walking down a path that led off from the busy avenue.

As soon as you left the noisy city street and started making your way down the path, you just knew that this was a place unlike any other in the city. You’d notice the enormous Cathedral rising up on your left.

Then you would turn your head to the right and see a beautiful garden, with a towering pulpit in the center. As you made your way further into this green oasis, you would hear an unfamiliar sound.

Then your eyes would light upon a white peacock calling to you from the steps of a grand building adorned with columns, “Hi Phil!” you’d say. Two more peacocks would strut into view, these ones rainbow colored, Jim and Harry! Then just ahead of you, you’d see what could only be a very special place, nestled at the end of the driveway... The Cathedral School.

This is where the class of 2020 were lucky enough to attend school. Here they learned many important things, like reading, writing, and math. They also learned how to observe carefully, ask questions, and to think deeply and critically.

But there were other, more unusual things, that the Class of 2020 learned here too.

Starting in the Lower School, the Class of 2020 learned about identity. They delved into every aspect of their own complex, intersectional identities. Developing a sophisticated understanding of every facet and layer of themselves. Through this self-knowledge, they became comfortable with people of any and every identity, a crucial skill for anyone setting out in today’s world.

Then, as they progressed through the Lower School program, participating in affinity groups and identity time, they became experts in media literacy, being allies, recognizing bias and stereotypes, and so much more. Their teachers addressed bias and stereotypes throughout the school day, whenever students said, “Ouch!” there was an opportunity to educate!

As the Class of 2020 entered the Upper School, these skills were honed during Equity and Justice classes. Their teachers were amazed and proud at how every student used their sophisticated knowledge and vocabulary to approach complex issues of identity, socio-economic injustice, and bias.
We know that the Class of 2020 is well equipped to point out injustice and inequity and to do something about it, as they move beyond Cathedral and into high school. The Class of 2020 is not only well educated academically, but has the skills and insights to navigate a complex changing world with sensitivity and confidence and to make a difference.

*Look up from the book, as an aside:*  
(If only every person could experience identity time at the cathedral school... what a different world we would be living in!)

In the Upper School, the class of 2020 was inspired by Dr. John Vitale. If you’ve never seen Dr. Vitale with a bunch of teenagers, you have really missed out! Dr. Vitale’s expectations were always sky high. He really believed in you, and knew you could do anything you set your mind to. He reveled in introducing you to ancient texts which he somehow made come alive and seem relevant to a class of middle schoolers, downright amazing really! He never patronized you, and relished seeing you come to appreciate and love the things that he also loved. That’s what a great teacher does. They convey their passion and it becomes infectious, resistance is futile!

Throughout their time at The Cathedral School, the Class of 2020 attended weekly Chapels, always eagerly anticipated as a time to reflect and be together in our incredible Cathedral! They were led by our beloved Chaplain Patti Welch, with love, humor and compassion. During Chapel, the Class of 2020 learned about why we are here on this earth. They learned that spirituality informs them how to seek and express meaning and purpose. It is the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred. They know that spirituality is how we implement what we say we value or believe in, with what we actually do. The Class of 2020 doesn’t just talk the talk, they walk the walk too!

Then, of course, we cannot forget our Core Values. You, the Class of 2020, were steeped in these throughout your career at the cathedral school. Hold fast to these values as you leave us now, they will be invaluable in high school, college and beyond.

These students were also shaped by their wonderful families, who made the very wise decision to send their children to The Cathedral School! The conversation, back and forth between home and school, family and student, student and teachers have helped make you, the Class of 2020, special, confident and powerful young people, ready to begin a new and exciting part of your lives.

The final part of the story of the Class of 2020 at The Cathedral School, has been profoundly affected by the global pandemic. That is the reason we are not in our beautiful cathedral today. But you, the Class of 2020 have been well prepared to deal with times of adversity.

As members of The Cathedral School community, you are experts at creating and sustaining ties that will carry you through difficult times. You know each other intimately, so being physically apart in this time of stress and uncertainty cannot destroy the web of connections that exists as a result of the shared experience you all have because you are students at The Cathedral School.
Take these connections of love, compassion and understanding with you today, as you leave us. They will sustain you through the most difficult times, and reassure you that, no matter what, you have what it takes.

(close book)

To the Class of 2020, this is only the first part of your story, the second part has not been written yet, but we all know it’s going to be incredible!