

First of all, I would like to thank the Lay Marianist Affiliates and all members of the Gross Catholic Community for coming today to celebrate the feast day of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade with the student body.

Ever since I can remember I have had my whole life planned out. I went to a public grade school and middle school and I was going to go to Bryan High School. From there I would probably go on to UNO and then get a job here in Omaha. However, that all changed when my brother transferred to Gross Catholic his sophomore year and I was then given a choice to either go to Gross or Bryan High School.

I have no clue why I did it, I had never heard of Gross before and I didn't know a single person who went there, but for some reason I decided to start out my freshman year at Gross Catholic. I figured that if I didn't like it I could always transfer back. In fact, I was kind of hoping I wouldn't like it because I already missed my public school friends.

As I walked into Gross for the first day of school, I cannot even describe how scared I was. I had no clue who to sit by at Mass or in my classes. I remember one of the things that I was most scared of was theology class. I had taken CCD from first grade until my 8th grade confirmation, but theology class one day a week is a little different than five days a week. Everybody else had more prayers memorized than me and knew a lot more about the bible. I was afraid to be the dumb one in class.

It was a relief when we started to study our Marianist heritage because then I wasn't the only clueless one. I remember logging onto the Marianist website and seeing that there were Marianist schools in places such as Ireland, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Africa. This is when I realized that Gross wasn't just another Catholic school like I thought it was going to be, it was part of something bigger. I had never even heard of the word 'Marianist' and now I was a part of a Marianist community.

My sophomore year I joined the Marianist LIFE community. My brother had been bugging me to join it my freshman year but there was only one freshman who went to the meetings at the time so I was too scared to go. The next year I finally caved and went to my first meeting. I remember being really shy throughout the whole meeting. I don't think I said a word. Afterwards my

brother told me that if I didn't talk at meetings I had no chance of ever going on the summer LIFE retreat. So at the next meeting I tried to participate more.

As I started to talk more at the LIFE meetings, I naturally started to be more outgoing at school. I got to know my peers better and I was starting to understand what Gross was all about. I never knew that a school could be a solid community in the way Gross has been for me. The five characteristics of a Marianist Education weren't just words, but something we really believe. Especially the one that said, "To Educate in Family Spirit."

I sometimes thought about transferring back to Bryan because I still hung out with a lot of people there, but the family spirit of Gross Catholic kept drawing me back in and before I knew it I was registering for classes for my junior year.

On the first day back from summer vacation, I wasn't scared to walk in the doors anymore. I was a junior, I drove to school for the first time and I was officially an upper classman. I was heading into a great year. I had a good group of friends and my brother had finally left so I was out of his shadow. But junior year wasn't all that I planned it to be. We had a lot of fun times, but I also made a lot of mistakes. I was really down on myself and my self-esteem was low.

As junior year came to a close I applied for the summer LIFE retreat in Dayton, OH. I had gone to the LIFE meetings all year and really wanted to go because I had heard so many great things about the experience. I was so excited when I actually got chosen to go, but I was nervous because the other five kids that were going were not students that I was very close with. That changed quickly.

At LIFE, those five other people became my best friends and I learned things about myself that I never knew existed. I learned that I wasn't as tough as I thought and that I need people. Another thing that I learned was that people need me too. In short, I learned what the word 'community' really means.

Now as a senior I look back on my years at Gross and how it has changed me so much. I have no doubt in my mind that it has changed me for the better. Before I came here, I was going to graduate from Bryan, attend UNO, and live my life in Omaha, but Gross has given me the confidence to break out. For college I didn't apply anywhere in Nebraska and I can't wait to see where the

world will take me. I hope that wherever I end up I will exemplify what it means to be educated in the Marianist charisms.

In closing I would like all of us to prayer together the Marianist Doxology, and if you freshmen don't know it by now, you will by senior year.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

May the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit be glorified through the immaculate Virgin Mary. AMEN.

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AMEN.