

I Will Always Be a Viking

It has been over 50 years since we first heard coach Bill Gutbrod repeat the words of a dying Saint Joe's football player, "Coach, I will always be a Viking"!

A moment most of us will never forget.

Much has happened in our lives over the last 50 years. Yet, that feeling of Vikings Forever, was still prevalent and repeated by many in attendance at our 50th reunion and also expressed in writing by many who could not attend.

What does it mean to say, "I will always be a Viking", and how can we best express this emotion at this moment in our lives. How do we capture this passion for this institution and love for each other in a way that will cement this sentiment as our class legacy?

20 Classmate survey

We decided to send a survey to 20 classmates asking them to read a draft of a Class of '73 specific appeal letter and share with us their thoughts. In the letter we were suggesting a Class of '73 targeted fundraiser. A campaign that would earmark funds in ways that would provide support to the school and a lasting tribute to our class. A campaign with a result where all will know well into the future that the St. Joe's Class of '73 were loyal Vikings Forever.

We were looking for opinions. We were looking for consensus. We were hoping to find a willingness to engage in this campaign in a meaningful way. Nearly every classmate replied to our sample survey. The responses were thoughtful, extremely helpful and very encouraging. Even one of the two classmates whose reply was somewhat negative was helpful.

Is VASJ a worthy charity and should I care?

Simply put, one classmate stated:

"One, I am not nostalgic about my high school years. Two, the high school that I attended, in my view, no longer exists. Third, and most importantly, I have no idea whether the current high school is a worthy charity".

We decided this succinct apprehension to a class of 73 Vikings Forever campaign deserved a thoughtful reply. Because, if one person out of 20 expressed this sentiment, many others may also feel this way. We should not assume we all cherished our St. Joe's years the same or care equally about today's VASJ. But for those interested or willing to learn, most of us engaged with the school have been impressed with the school's character, viability, growth and academics.

Those attending the reunion witnessed a vibrant and growing school, now supported by a more active alumnus. An alumnus that recognizes, regardless of the past, each of us has an opportunity to help provide these kids a wonderful high school experience, while preparing them for the future in a way that remains unique to St. Joe's. There is new atrium entrance at the rear of the school, new windows, an upgraded HVAC system, a renovated gymnasium and cafeteria, a new music room, a better funded scholarship program and a hard to believe state of the art football field that showcases the beautiful lake that borders the school campus.

We met several students that greeted us at the door, signed us in, helped us run the reunion and made very touching remarks in short speeches to our class. We heard from Tom Carone, the president of VASJ, who spoke of a steadily increasing enrollment, a fiscally responsible budget, and a vision for the future that embraces the school's storied past. We hope this video makes you proud and helps overcome any apprehension:

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/cc8be8fb/H350QuGGJUusUuk3ziYggw?u=https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci-6IEgOSkg>

As you heard, the mission of the school and its core values are clear. The school remains connected to and guided by its past. It is *committed to the spiritual, academic, and personal growth of each student*. Its core values embrace its dual Ursuline and Marianist beginnings. In short, we found the school stands for the same things and the administration embraces the same values as it did during our years.

Here are some of the more favorable and encouraging comments that we received:

- Your letter motivated me to support the school and contribute to the campaign probably in an amount greater than I would normally contribute.
- YES, you got me. In spite of the fact that my income these days is less than my outgo, I'd be happy to participate
- I am inclined to participate but would like to see more info on the 3-prong effort, funding goals for each and the plan to further sustain the donations, especially for endowing the arts and class scholarship fund.
- It's impossible of course to know where everyone is now in terms of their ability to financially support this fund-raising effort. My opinion would be to keep it a little more open-ended so no matter what amount is contributed, it's not based on any preset notion or expectation.
- I believe that all of us love to support VASJ and most of us have supported the school since we graduated. Like many of my Viking brothers, we make several donations though out the year to VASJ, but this will be a special one for the Class of '73.
- This is a great idea and a worthy cause. The draft letter is well written and I'm sure will be well received. None of us is getting any younger and all of us should have an estate plan and a will. What greater legacy can there be than making a donation to St. Joe's (probably to a Class of '73 scholarship fund) as a part of your will?
- Good note, I will commit for 3 years. By the way, I was driving my dad on my visit for his 97th birthday and showed him the new stadium – it looks amazing!.
- Some guys may feel donating for bleachers is worth some donation but maybe not worthy of digging deeper in their pockets". I just donated \$2,500 to the school a few months ago with the understanding

this would help keep costs down for deserving students. So, I would like to know how a separate '73 scholarship fund would accomplish this goal.

- Yes, I would donate to the school even without the letter.
- Let me say I believe it is a very well intentioned and appropriate letter. Please do your best to make sure that even those that can't contribute feel included. I am willing to help the '73 fund.
- My wife and I are discussing the amount we will donate and how we would like our money allocated, but you can count on me.
- I like what you are trying to accomplish and will participate.

What is next?

We have been discussing the suggestions from the 20 classmates we surveyed. Some of their concerns are addressed in this letter. We also had their suggestions in mind, when we met with the school administration last week. The school provided us with a wish list of needs. In the next couple of weeks, we will narrow down the list to three specific projects that our class can get behind. We recognize some guys will be motivated to contributing to education, others to the arts and still other to something more permanent and visible like the St. Joe's class of '73 bleachers.

Our goals are:

1. Maximize the amount we raise by providing options that will motivate each classmate.
2. Present the campaign in a way that every classmate, regardless of their ability to participate, will feel included.
3. Pick projects of substantial and tangible value to the school, ones that create a clear emotional connection and will encourage class participation at this time.

One last thought.

- As freshman in the fall of 1969, our tuition was \$450 a year. One could hold a job making \$2 an hour and pay their own tuition by working just five hours a week.
- Tuition in the fall of 2024 will be \$10,700 a year. A student earning \$10 an hour would have to work 20 hours a week to pay their tuition.

Many people that we never met sacrificed to build St Joe's and make it the school we first experienced in the fall of 1969. This is our opportunity to pay it forward and create a lasting memorial to the St. Joe's Class of '73.