

## What is it like to graduate during a pandemic?

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By Savanna Kearney

Although every graduating class has its defining moment the class of 2020 is certainly unique. It is the only class of graduates in recent history to have their senior year disrupted by a global pandemic. Here are what the valedictorians from four Catholic high schools in the Diocese of St. Augustine had to say about their big day.



Abigail Wilson, valedictorian of Bishop Snyder High School

Abigail Wilson was named valedictorian of Bishop Snyder High School this year. She'll be attending the University of Florida, and she's planning on a double-major in biology and health science. She described then transition to online learning as stressful, although the end result wasn't as bad as she anticipated.

"It was weird not being able to see my classmates and go to school every day," she said. "But being at home and doing online school actually helped me to focus on my grades more. I probably ended up finishing the year less stressed out despite all the craziness."

But through it all, she's grateful to Bishop Snyder High School and the opportunities the school provided her. If I had gone to a larger school, I may not have had this amazing opportunity to be valedictorian.

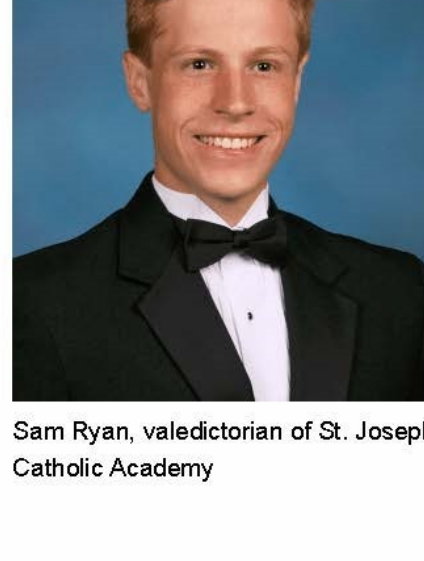


Katie Yarborough, valedictorian of Bishop Kenny High School

Katie Yarborough, valedictorian of Bishop Kenny High School, is also going to UF. She plans to major in public relations and hopefully attend law school. She described her senior year as "a new experience."

"It was difficult since we had to miss prom, grad bash, and I didn't get to finish my last season of level 10 gymnastics," she said. "But I think the way Bishop Kenny handled everything was the best we could have asked for."

Ultimately, she's honored that she was chosen valedictorian of her class and she said she owes it to the staff and administration of Bishop Kenny High School. Bishop Kenny was the best place I could have gone to high school. The teachers were amazing, and I learned so much there, not just educationally, but spiritually as well.



Sam Ryan, valedictorian of St. Joseph Catholic Academy

Ryan, who will attend the University of Florida and plans to major in biology with a pre-veterinary focus, shares the sentiment. He said he was disappointed in how his senior year ended, but he is grateful, nonetheless.

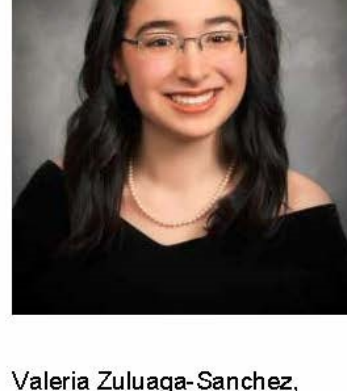
"It's interesting to think that we all had our last day of classes on campus and we didn't even know it," he said. "I'm thankful we got to have at least some kind of ceremony, and that our efforts were recognized."



Cassidy Graybosch, valedictorian of St. Joseph Catholic Academy

Graybosch, who will attend UF and major in biology with plans to go to medical school, said that this experience taught her a valuable lesson.

"This pandemic has helped me realize that we can't wait for things to happen. We have to do them when we have the chance. It really taught me to not take things for granted, and I'm excited to make up for lost time once everything goes back to normal."



Valeria Zuluaga-Sanchez, valedictorian of St. Francis Catholic Academy

Valeria Zuluaga-Sanchez, St. Francis Catholic Academy's valedictorian for the class of 2020, will attend Princeton in the fall, but she hasn't decided whether she'll major in neuroscience or molecular biology.

She said that this experience taught her to stay better connected with friends and family and to appreciate simple things she used to take for granted.

"In this very unique time, everything is so different. I hope we can one day go back to normal. Hopefully, we'll learn a lot from this pandemic, and I hope it goes down in history as an event that promoted a sense of community."



Morning Star High School Class of 2020

Morning Star School, the only special-needs Catholic school in the Diocese of St. Augustine, also had a distinctive graduation, and not just because of the pandemic. The class of 2020 is only the second graduating class of Morning Star high school, and this year nine students graduated. Below is a list of this year's graduates:

<b>Taylor Bailey</b>	<b>Luke Williams</b>
<b>Raphael Cenicerros</b>	<b>Meracle Smith</b>
<b>Lorenzo Hall</b>	<b>Danny Rogers</b>
<b>Simon Mankins</b>	<b>Elio El Hajj</b>
<b>Jodasea Peterson</b>	