

# **‘Choose to be Catholic and carry Jesus into the public square’: A Congressman’s advice to graduates**

2020 will be remembered by high school and college graduates not for what it was – the walk across the stage, the handshake from the dean or principal, the pictures with classmates and family members, the final presence in the hallowed halls of so many institutions for the last time. It will be remembered for what it wasn’t – no gathering in the auditorium, no baccalaureate Mass, no donning of caps and gowns for a procession. No times for goodbyes to beloved teachers, coaches and friends.

To help ease the pain of an experience cut short, a slew of celebrities, elected officials and notable personalities rose to the occasion and created virtual commencement addresses, giving graduates the opportunity to be inspired by the likes of former first lady Michelle Obama, actor Tom Hanks, Oprah Winfrey and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex. Perseverance and encouragement to make a difference were the prominent messages of the talks, and viewing graduates were entreated by speaker after speaker not to allow the current coronavirus pandemic, economic uncertainty and racial unrest to sidetrack their goals or keep them from thinking positively about their futures.

But one virtual address stood out from almost every other. It reminded graduates that their “first priority” was heaven and laid out a bold challenge: “If you really want to change the world, you must choose to be Catholic and carry Jesus into the public square.”

This address was also notable because it was from a somewhat surprising source, given the content and the message. It wasn't from a bishop or the head of a religious order. It was from Congressman Dan Lipinski, currently serving his eighth term in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he represents Illinois' 3rd Congressional District.

To look at Congressman Dan Lipinski's resume, you might have anticipated this highly trained engineer (he holds a Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering from Northwestern University and a Master's in Engineering-Economic Systems from Stanford, as well as a Ph.D. from Duke University in Political Science) to give a commencement address focusing on the importance of STEM education, or on the critical part that transportation and infrastructure play in the nation's economy (an area of special interest to him as a senior member of the U.S. House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee).

But Lipinski narrowly lost his March primary race against Marie Newman, an aggressively pro-abortion candidate who received millions of dollars in funding from abortion advocacy groups, including Planned Parenthood and NARAL. And not only did the abortion industry put an extraordinary amount of time and money into defeating Lipinski, but his own Democratic colleagues and even Chicago's Mayor Lori Lightfoot endorsed his opponent.

"I'm only one pro-life vote, but [even that was too much for the national Democratic Party](#) to stomach," Lipinski said in an interview with Our Sunday Visitor. "They wanted me, my vote, gone, for no other reason than my adamant pro-life stance – and to send a strong message to others that pro-lifers 'need not apply.'"

Lipinski's record shows him voting with his Democratic colleagues more than 90% of the time, while also being willing to work across the aisle with Republicans and Independents as part of the House's "Problem Solvers Caucus." Lipinski's

reputation as hard working, reasonable and open to hearing the opinions of others reflect his years of Catholic education and the values he learned attending St. Symphorosa School on Chicago's southwest side, then high school at Jesuit St. Ignatius College Prep.

"If my Catholic education taught me anything, it was that Jesus' parable of the talents meant I had to use my gifts in a way that serves others. Our high school motto at St. Ignatius was 'Men and Women for Others.' I've been blessed to be able to use my talents to serve students as a professor and then to serve my constituents and our nation as a representative. And I have always understood that wherever God places me, I must do my best and not squander what He has given me."

What's next for the Congressman when he leaves office this January?

"While I continue to serve for six more months in the House of Representatives, I wanted to let graduates know that, even when you lose an election, even when you suffer defeat for standing up for the most vulnerable, God still has a plan and a purpose for your life," Lipinski said. "I felt it was a good time for me to share that, because I am in a place where I need to trust God with my future. It was important for me to say to those heading out into the world, going off to college or into their first jobs, that it is critical to stay focused on God's truth, which you've learned as a Catholic, and don't get sidetracked by what the world is selling you. Listen to the Lord. He has something for you to do with the gifts and talents he has given to you. That's something I am doing right now, and I trust God will direct me where He wants me to serve him."

Lipinski's commencement address can be viewed on the website of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students at [focusoncampus.org/homefocus.org](http://focusoncampus.org/homefocus.org).

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