

Immanuel Christian High School

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

By Karen Pence

June 6, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Danish, for that kind introduction. What an honor to be here today as the inaugural commencement speaker for Immanuel Christian High School! Congratulations, Graduates! You are like Pioneers!! This is so exciting!! So many people today are excited for you! This is a culmination of so many years of prayers, not only for each of you, but for this institution. I'd like to thank the board of Immanuel Christian High School for following through with this vision and trusting God to provide.

The last high school commencement address I gave was at my own high school graduation. That was 47 years ago. But I still remember my theme. It was based on John Denver's song, "Poems, Prayers, and Promises." And those elements, poems, prayers, and promises, are still applicable to each of you right here... right now...today. The education you have received, the prayers that have accompanied you throughout your school career and the promises of a bright future.

Mark Batterson in his book, "Draw the Circle," says, "Prayer isn't about outlining our agenda to God; it's about getting into God's presence and getting God's agenda for us. Prayer is the difference between the favor of God and the luck of the draw. Prayer is the difference between closed doors and open doors. Prayer is the difference between possible and impossible. Prayer is the difference between the best we can do and the best God can do."

Over our family fireplace mantle for the past 22 years has hung the verse, Jeremiah 29:11. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future."

So what is God's plan for you? I encourage you to pray about it...ask Him for direction...think through the gifts and strengths He's given you. Make a list. What do you just love doing? What do you think God wants you to do with those gifts, those interests?

Bamlak, you have a passion for medicine. But you're not just a bookworm. You enjoy volleyball and basketball. You are a leader among your peers. And you understand that it's also important to give back by volunteering in your community.

Lizzy, you excel at running, so much so that you were recruited to VCU. You are considering a career in Financial Engineering. And you enjoy planning social events and you are a leader in student government.

Aleena, you have a heart for helping people. You are thinking of majoring in Sociology and possibly joining the FBI.

Now, graduates, a word of caution here...I'm not saying if you pray about your future that God is going to send you an email confirming your decisions about your plans. But prayer will change the way you **think** about those opportunities. And when you pray and God shuts a door, you at least have that reassurance that maybe the plans you had aren't in His will ...at least for now.

One of the best ways to prepare for what He does have for you, though, is to be available.

When Mike ran for congress the first two times, we lost. And it's actually a good thing. We were arrogant, ambitious, and we thought we would be God's gift to Washington, DC. God couldn't use us like that. Losing was a humbling experience. So when the opportunity presented itself again years later, we had a lot to think about. First of all, we had three kids now who were 4, 5, and 6. We had just built our dream house. Mike had his own radio show syndicated on 18 stations in Indiana. I had just started my watercolor business of painting house portraits for my clients. We would need to move just to run for congress.

A lot would have to be sacrificed. But one of our favorite verses from the very first campaign was Jonah 2:8. "Those that cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." Those that cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be

theirs. God was calling us to let go of the security and stability we had achieved to trust and follow Him to this unknown wilderness of Washington, DC.

So we had a lot to think about.

For Mike's 40th birthday, I surprised him with a gift of a trip to a dude ranch in Colorado because he loves to ride horses. One afternoon near the end of our stay at the ranch, Mike and I took a ride by ourselves up to the top of a bluff in the Teddy Roosevelt National Forest. The whole week, Mike had been struggling with the decision of whether or not to run for Congress again. We got off our horses and sat on a ledge on the side of the bluff. Mike said, "We've got to make a decision. Time is running out."

We had done everything you are supposed to do when making a big decision...weighed the pros and cons, asked for Christian counsel from our friends and family, discussed it at length and prayed extensively. But he was right. It was time.

What you probably don't know is that Mike Pence is a romantic at heart. As we were sitting on that ledge we looked out and saw two red tailed hawks. They were rising on the wind, letting the wind's current lift them higher and higher. Mike said, "See those two hawks? Those are like us."

And I said, "Well if those two hawks are like us, then I think we should run. But this time we should run like the hawks. We should step off this cliff and make ourselves available to God. And this time instead of ambition driving us, we should allow God to lift us up to wherever He wants to use us with No Flapping." And right then and there, we made the decision — and "No Flapping" has been our mantra ever since. Anyone who works for us has to hear that story to know how we operate.

Because of our willingness to let go and allow God to use us here in our nation's capital in the Congress, as Vice President and Second Lady and as governor and first lady of Indiana, I have had some amazing experiences and opportunities. As first lady of Indiana, I created the Indiana First Lady's Charitable Foundation. I held three fabulous high-end luncheons that raised over a million dollars. My foundation was able to give grants to charities in all 92 counties of Indiana. I wanted to make a difference.

I wanted to be a good steward of the leadership role in which God had placed me. As Second Lady of the United States, I elevated the causes near and dear to my heart, military families, art therapy, the prevention of veteran suicides, Special Olympics, and honeybees. Did you know, a worker bee in its short 6-8 week lifespan, will fly the equivalent distance of 1 ½ times the circumference of the earth? That little worker bee has a purpose, designed by our Creator God, and it does it well.

I'm writing a book right now that has the working title of, "When It's Your Turn." And as I recount so many of the stories and experiences of being first and second lady, my challenge to the reader and to you graduates today is, "Be ready when it's your turn." None of you knows where God will call you. It may come suddenly, like my being Second Lady. He may call you to somewhere you are preparing extensively for, like my 30-year career as a schoolteacher, 15 of those right here at Immanuel.

It may be somewhere behind the scenes where you don't receive much recognition. It may be as a leader in your home, your workplace, your community, your world. But wherever it is, wear the mantel. Accept the challenge. Be prepared. Be willing. Be available. Step off that cliff. Let go of the worthless idols. Let the Lord lift you up with no flapping.

Those words from the long ago song are still humming in the back of my mind. They go like this...poems, prayers and promises, things that we believe in. How sweet it is to love someone. How right it is to care. How long it's been since yesterday what about tomorrow. And what about our dreams and all the memories we share.

My prayer for you, Graduates, is that when you look back 47 years from this day that you will see God's hand in every twist and turn of your life, that you will know in your heart that you were prepared and willing, that you served Him and hopefully will still be serving Him well.

Bamlak, Lizzy, Aleena,

Congratulations!