

Immanuel Lutheran Church
and School

Our Graduates



May 19, 2020

2020 Graduates



Alacia Barbre



Kayla Bennett



Hunter Bowling



Joylynn Chase



Sydnee Cromer



Evan Hubbard



Taylor Lawson



Hannah Reynolds



Danielle Shepherd



Nolen Wagers

Graduate Essays

MEET THE CLASS - Kayla Bennett

Hello, everyone. My name's Kayla Bennett, and I've been a student at Immanuel since 1st grade. I remember coming in on the first day of school, not really sure what was set ahead of me. But throughout my years here I've met some really amazing people. The graduating 8th graders have been at this school for multiple years. We've become so tight-knit we're all like siblings (and we get on each other's nerves like siblings, too.) Our class hasn't really changed much, maybe a few people join, a few people go, but there have been some whose faces we saw every single year. When you're in a class with the same people for 8 years, or 4 years, it's almost impossible not to become friends. And I had the privilege to become friends with everyone. And today, I'll be telling you all about my friends.

The first 8th grader I'll speak on is Sydnee Cromer. Sydnee has been at Immanuel for ten years (eleven if you count childcare.) She's always been a bright student and has always strived to be the best person she can be. She's always there to listen if you need to talk, and she can help you out with school work if you're having trouble. She always takes care of people and makes sure that they're alright. And she also has a very sassy side to her, as well. If you do something she doesn't like she'll call you out on it, but in a gentle way that still gets her point across. She's overall a very loving person who you can count on and I admire her for that.

The next 8th grader I'll talk about is Hannah Reynolds. Hannah has been at Immanuel for twelve years. No matter what, she'll always make the day interesting, whether it's her messy locker distracting the class or her sense of humor. Sometimes her sense of humor got her in trouble, but she didn't mind and she just kept on dancing to Jellyfish Jam like a maniac. She's a very bright student, as well, and this year she has really grown in her academic prowess, and we're all very proud of her for that.

Next we have Alacia Barbre. Alacia has been with us at Immanuel for four years. She came in very shy and didn't talk much, but, over the years, she's come out of her shell and has blossomed into an amazing young lady. She's overcome multiple challenges over her time at Immanuel, but has always kept a positive attitude during every situation and I admire her for always staying so strong. She's very sweet and cares about all creatures and is willing to listen to what you have to say. She's also very helpful around the school and cleans the

lunch room after all of the lunch periods with Hannah. She's one of the sweetest people I've met, and if you haven't gotten to know her, you should.

Another graduate we have is Danielle Shepherd. Danielle has been at Immanuel for nine or ten years. She's generally a quiet person in class, but if you're friends with her she's not always so quiet (hehe). She has a unique personality and that's what I like about her. Also she's very bold and is willing to take chances, no matter what the outcome is. And even though she's gone through hardships, she still manages to be positive and not let her worries overrule her joy. She works hard at her academics and has grown quite a bit in her abilities. She's an amazing story writer and I think that if she keeps working at it she could become an author one day.

This 8th grade graduate is definitely a handful. His name is Evan Hubbard. Evan has been at Immanuel for four years, and throughout those years he's changed into a different person. In 5th grade, he used to not care about his school work, but now, as he heads to 9th grade, he's putting effort into his work and getting better grades. And his sense of humor...oh boy, his humor. Sometimes his goofiness can get him into trouble, but he still keeps cracking corny jokes left and right. And his obsession with photoshop is just... I don't know what to say about that. But we're all really proud of how mature he's become and we'll all miss him so much.

One of the next 8th graders I'll talk about is Hunter Bowling. He's been at Immanuel for eight years. He used to be so quiet in class, never wanting to answer questions and sometimes he'd fall asleep (oops). But over the past years he has come out of his shell and shown his true personality. His humor can send the whole room laughing on the floor, whether he's talking about a moose jumping off a cliff or talking about something so random it's hysterical. He's fun to be around and he brightens everyone's day.

The next person is Taylor Lawson. Taylor has been at Immanuel for three and a half years. She came in the middle of our 6th grade year, but fit right in. We had known her through Hannah and through Camp Lakeview retreats, so we were happy to hear that she was coming to join our class. She's a quiet gentle soul who means no harm to anyone, and if you need someone to talk to or hang out with, she's always there. She enjoys art and video games and will kick your butt at Call of Duty. And she's a bookworm. During class she would get in trouble for reading books because she enjoyed them so much! And when she struggled in a class she'd never be afraid to raise her hand and ask a question, and she'd usually catch on fairly quickly.

Nolen Wagers is the next graduate. Nolen has been at Immanuel for ten years. He's one of the most helpful people around the school. You'll see him going from class to class during study hall and helping out teachers. He's pretty

much the mayor of the school. He'll tell you where everything is, when something's going to happen, and so on and so forth. He makes the teachers jobs easier by helping them out, and that's something that I like about him. And he's very smart and will help you out when you need to figure out an answer to a problem. He's so sweet and I'm glad that I met him and spent hours on the bus laughing with him.

And the last eighth grader I'll speak about (besides myself) is Joylynn Chase. Joylynn has been at Immanuel for four years. When she first came to Immanuel, she was a bit shy and she didn't talk much, but in the past 2 years she's come out of her shell. She comes from a big family, so she has these caring aspects to her that make life easier whenever she's around. She's very generous and sweet. She's also very smart and gets very good grades and tries her best in everything. She's one of my best friends and I'm so happy to have the memories that we've created, even if she gets broken when visiting my house.

And now for the part I dread, I have to speak about myself. I've been at Immanuel for eight years. I'm known as the "class clown". I always make jokes, even if they get me in trouble. I'd bring my rubber chickens and rubber pigs in to try to be funny, and it eventually got annoying so I stopped. But the one thing I think I'll always be remembered for is my drawings of horses. Reginald the horse has been a part of our class for a year and I hope the legacy will be passed down to the younger grades. Even though I love to laugh, I try to take my work seriously and I've been striving to get better grades. The people at Immanuel have helped me find who I am and what I aspire to be, and without these lovely people I wouldn't know what to do.

Before I end, I just want to say thank you to all the amazing staff and students who have made our 8th grade year special. You've really helped us grow in finding ourselves and in our academic skills and without you, none of us would be the people we are today. Thank you.

COMMUNITY - Alacia Barbre

I have been at Immanuel for four years and it has been a very strong and loving community. They have done a lot for me and others in the class and for the community around us. Community means supporting each other; being aware of each others' needs and well being; sharing, and caring; Immanuel is all of that and more. I have made some of my closest friends at Immanuel and some of my longest and strongest relationships. The community we have is like one big family.

The community at Immanuel, I think, is set up to have amazing friendships and relationships with everyone. Everyone is so close because of all the stuff we do together. One example was Desmen, Mrs. Walton, and myself working the face painting, tattoos, and hair dye booth together at the fall festival. Another was how Trey and I would put up numbers every Wednesday for the chapel pews. Hannah, Nolen and I put up tables for the lunch ladies. Some of the students would ask to help a teacher during their study hall. We also have this thing called reading buddies which normally happened once a week on Fridays. My class would go and sit with the Kindergarteners and read books to them or with them. I still have amazing relationships with my past reading buddies. Speaking of relationships, some of my closest friends are at Immanuel or recent graduates. I have been friends with Trey and Desmen since 6th grade. I could tell all of them anything and everything. They both mean the world to me - *all* of my friends do. I became friends with Hannah in 5th grade. Hannah is one of the sweetest people that I have ever met. She can also be one of the goofiest.

Four years may not seem like a lot, especially compared to the so-called "lifers" who are graduating today, but after these four years, I feel like I know everyone in the school, especially the staff. I have been in Mr. Vogel's homeroom all the years I've been at Immanuel, so I, and others, have really built a bond with him. Pastor Jud has had so many sit down talks with me when he didn't have to. No one asked him to, he just does it because he cares about each of us, the school, and the community. Personally, I'm really close with the Verdon's. If you don't know Miss Verdon, she is the Kindergarten teacher for Immanuel. She has done so much for me - from taking me to and from practices so I could play a sport when my mom was doing some of the harder chemo's and was too sick to drive to smiling in the hallway to lift my spirits.

The people who influence the community aren't just the teachers and staff. The coaches at Immanuel have been helpful in improving athletic skills and my understanding of teamwork. I've worked with Mr. Bickel in basketball, Mrs. Bickel in volleyball, Coach Smith in basketball and track, Mr. Pirn in track, and Mr. Vogel in basketball. Coaching in such a small setting isn't about the money. So many of those people did it because they love sports and wanted to make sure that the kids had the same types of experiences on teams as they did. The time and examples that they provided to us was often unpaid or underpaid, but the memories and skills the players learned from these seasons were priceless.

The congregation is such an important part of the community, even if a lot of what they do happens behind the scenes. They are the reason we have that new addition to the school. They have helped me go to Immanuel and helped pay for my tuition through scholarships in the past. The congregation pays (through scholarships) for students who aren't eligible for Ohio's EdChoice program to go to ILS for free - they have made this mission possible for myself and others who didn't know that a Christian education was possible. While we may not have a one-on-one relationship with the congregation members, their generosity and focus on the success of the school has been an important factor in so many of us reaching this point.

A lot of things happen in that church, too. Every Wednesday we go to chapel and we sit with our chapel family. A chapel family is normally one child from each grade in a pew. It's a great way for the whole school to come together and bond once a week. The mentor role that the older kids fill during chapel is something that the younger kids can see, and it creates a cycle of respectful behavior within the sanctuary. Additionally, we have great lessons, songs that we get to know through weeks of practice, and, occasionally, visits from Camp Lakeview with a lot of fun dancing and singing. Whenever you get into 7th and 8th grade you get the privilege to serve as an acolyte. I remember my first time: I was so scared that I was going to mess up, but, once you do it a few times, you get the hang of it.

Immanuel isn't like a normal school. If they see something is up, they will ask you if you want to talk about it or if you need anything. I've had a few rough days with my mom's cancer situation or on days she's had a surgery. They have always been there for a shoulder to lean or cry on. Mr. Vogel, Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Walton and Pastor Jud are some big ones, but all of the staff members would be willing to have a sit down talk with you to see what is going on. The staff and school find ways to help beyond conversations, as well. The greatest example of this was what they did for me and my family. They had a volleyball game for my mom when she was fighting breast cancer. It showed how everyone can come together.

In the end Immanuel always comes together as a whole instead of being different parts. We love to reach out and support the people and community around us. Thank you for being there and giving me someone to talk to over these 4 years. Thank you for all that you have done for me and my family. We

are much more than a test score. We are Wildcats. We are children of God. We are a part of something much bigger. We are Immanuel.

MEMORIES - Hannah Reynolds

Our memories are what we are, what causes us to make the decisions we make, act as we act and love as we love. I've been at Immanuel for 12 years and I have many great memories. Some memories are more fun than others and some are more serious. Overall, memories are important, powerful things and I would like to share some of my favorites with you today.

One day during lunch I remember throwing cheese balls in Taylor's mouth across the lunch table and making like three out of 20 tries. We could have fun with just about anything you gave us. Another great memory was during recess. Most of the 8th graders would hang around Mr. Vogel and annoy him, including me. I would throw rocks in his pockets hoping he wouldn't notice but he always noticed immediately. I would also stare him down at lunch while he was eating waiting for him to notice. When he noticed we just awkwardly stared at each other until someone gave up. If that wasn't bad enough I would dance behind him and when he turned around I would act like I wasn't doing anything. Mr. Vogel quickly caught on to what I was doing but he just let me do it anyways because he's a real one.

I've been talking about Mr Vogel a lot but Mrs Vogel also taught me for three years. Whenever I rode the bus she would wave everybody goodbye but before I left I would make half a heart and she would make the other half. I also remember in 1st and 2nd grade she had morning meetings that always talked about what our schedule would look like. At the end of the meeting I would request the morning meeting song every single day. She didn't always sing it but when she did it made me extremely happy. I can now say the Vogels are not just teachers or just friends, they are now family.

Last year for history class Mrs. Pirn would give us a little bit of fake money everyday depending on what historical jobs were given at random. When you got enough money you could buy some tea and cookies and that was really cool. This year for History and Science class we had Mrs. Bolwerk. Whenever we did good in a class we would take a letter out of a cup and once we spelled out the whole thing we would get our prize. One of our prizes was pizza for lunch. She had gotten a lot of pizza and had a lot left over. I almost ate a whole pizza by myself. Also since my birthday is in the summer I never got to really celebrate it but Mrs. Bolwerk gave me a card and some candy and had the class sing me happy birthday for my half birthday and I thought that was really cool of her. In 3rd and 4th grade Mrs. Anderson would let us throw a little party for someone's birthday. We would eat cupcakes and drink some juice. The coolest part that

everyone looked forward to the most was sitting and getting spun in the chair. However old you were turning was how many times you got spun around.

In 2nd grade I had a phoenix class with Mrs. Lucke. That was always really cool. I also remember getting to do little plays with my class in front of another class. We got to dress up as our characters and get to have so much fun. In 5th grade I started helping Mrs lucke with the library by organizing the books. Towards the end of each year she would take me and other helpers to get flubs as a thank you for helping her out.

Immanuel also plans a lot of fun trips and retreats. I have been to many retreats and school trips. My favorite school trip was when I went to Washington D.C. I got to see so many cool things. I even brought my nintendo switch with me and played mario cart with some of my classmates. It was so much fun and I'm glad I had the opportunity to go. Trips aren't the only great things about immanuel. They have good sports teams, teachers, students, technology, and pancakes as well. I played many sports when I was at Immanuel. I did cheer, track, basketball, and volleyball. I was so scared to join those teams because I hadn't played before. Mrs Bickel is a very good coach and will work with you when you're having trouble with something. That's what Immamnuel is all about, families working together to help you to be the best you can be. This year's girl basketball coach was Mr Vogel. He is a great coach. He would help us understand something if we didn't get it. He would show us how we could improve our skills and most of all he was always there if you were concerned or had a question as a coach, teacher, or friend. Towards the end of the basketball and volleyball season we would go to a tournament. We would leave school early, drive a couple hours then go play some games. After we did all that we would just hang out and have fun with each other and become closer to one another. My favorite sports memory is when I was cheering for the boys basketball team and when Zavier made a shot or did something really good I would yell "go Jeremy!!" because that was his nickname and Mrs.Verdon heard me say 'Go Jeremy" and then she started cheering for "Jeremy" too. She later found out his name wasn't Jeremy and she said that she'll get me back. Speaking of nicknames, I have given many of my classmates special names. For example Kayla, I would call her Grandma. I would also call Alacia Alaska or Alaysha, Taylor as a Tater Tot, and Sydnee was also referred to as my wife. Looking back I have so many great memories with friends.

This has been an amazing 12 years. I will miss everyone and everything so much. All of my classmates are like a second family. We have had our ups and downs together, but I will still miss you all like crazy. I am Hannah Reynolds and I approve of this message.

RELATIONSHIPS - Nolen Wagers

Hello, my name is Nolen Wagers. In 2010, I walked into the basement of the school and had my first day at Immanuel Lutheran. From that point on, Immanuel has had an impact on how my relationships develop. My relationships with friends, staff and God have developed in many ways because of Immanuel Lutheran School.

Of the ten current 8th graders, three of us have been together since kindergarten. When you know people for that long, you tend to learn who they actually are. Your relationships with these individuals can really blossom because they know you and you know them. It is very important to have friends, because we couldn't do this life thing without other people. Each relationship with my classmates has been unique or special in its own way. Just a few of those classmates have things that I'll always remember: Sydnee challenged me academically while we maintained a love and hate brotherly/sisterly relationship. Kayla and I had some ups and downs, but we also shared thousands of laughs on our bus rides to and from school. Hannah and her unpredictable sense of humor always kept us on our toes. Even if you weren't mentioned, you've got a class superlative going through my mind, and I'll remember something about each of you. This time can help you learn who your true friends are because they are the ones that reach out to you and make sure you are doing well. I don't think that I could have made it through this pandemic or our many years of education together without my friends because I enjoy being with people, so having them at my fingertips and being together, even at a distance, has been really helpful.

Since I have been at Immanuel, I have had a total of 16 teachers. With only having 16 teachers, it has been relatively easy to develop a pretty personal relationship with each one of them. The average public school student has approximately 21 teachers up to the point of 8th grade. That can be hard to have a relationship with each one of them. Here at Immanuel, it's much easier to develop a complete relationship with the staff because of the smaller size. I have learned that at Immanuel you are more than just a number. The staff here really go above and beyond to make sure that you are ok, and comfortable with yourself and your performance. Mrs. Fleming was the first staff member that I truly developed a relationship with. The first day I was here, she made me know that it was going to be a fun ride through the years at Immanuel. She was, and is, the one who will always give you a hug when you were having a rough time, or she helped you to get a bandage when you fell outside or got a papercut.

In a public school, they don't have the religion classes that we have. At Immanuel, you can develop a relationship with God that is constantly thriving. Thanks to the religion classes, I have learned what a true relationship with God is

because it has been demonstrated by the teachers. There is not a day that goes by without some sort of religion class happening - even if it's in the middle of Language Arts, Math, or Science. With the religion classes, it has been rather easy to keep a steady relationship with God. My relationship with God has grown from my experiences at Immanuel, challenging me to better understand my own church doctrine and affording me an opportunity to learn what the bible actually says about various topics. While I may not be a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, the religion classes have helped me become a stronger member of Oxford Baptist Church.

In the fall, as I start my high school years at Talawanda, I look forward to developing new relationships with new friends and new teachers. I also look forward to continue building my relationship in Christ; however, I will always remember the relationships that I have developed here at Immanuel. I truly believe that the relationships that I have created here at Immanuel will continue to thrive. I think that moving on will just change the walls. I will always have a place in my heart for the friends, the teachers, the staff, and the lessons that this place has filled me with.

VALUES - Taylor Lawson

Good evening everyone and congrats to the class of -what is it 2020? Sorry, I think I've been in quarantine for too long. Anyway, we made it. Most of you through all 10/11 years, while others like myself only a few. So I guess that means we're freshman now. I still can't believe how quickly the time has passed, it's like, where did it all go? It seems like just yesterday we were counting down the minutes in class anticipating how much time we had left before we went to lunch.

But what can we say, we've grown over these last few years. We've gotten taller... well, the rest of the class has gotten taller anyway. We have matured... somewhat at least. And we've gained friendships that we will never forget. I remember the first day I came here. I was very shy, quiet, and rarely spoke. But spending a few years with these goofballs, it helped me more than you would think. They helped me stray from my comfort zone, and they helped me learn to feel more comfortable in speaking my mind. And soon enough, it got easier and easier to speak out loud and speak my opinion.

Speaking of my own opinions and experiences, I think that private schools vs. public schools are like Disney+ vs. Netflix, one seems to have a lot going for it and the other seems to be confusing and full of occasional moments of triumph. Example, Disney has a lot to offer: let's see, Pixar, Marvel, and even Star Wars. But what does Netflix have? Definitely not as much, but, every now and then,

you'll find a show or movie that makes you feel good about your subscription. But my point is, I've learned so much more here in 3 years than in the 6 years I spent at a public school. It was a big change switching over from one school to another. I will admit: I struggled a lot the first year. The reason is because at Immanuel they gave me the work to become greater, preparing a path for success. Before arriving at Immanuel, they hardly gave us any work at all. And the teachers here cared and helped me if I didn't understand something. And they really listened to what I had to say and that means a lot. They make you feel loved and wanted here.

And along the way, to infinity and beyond the academics, I found goofball friends who changed my life to make me who I am today. I've laughed at them, argued with them, got in trouble with them, shared secrets, made bets - it is insane dealing with all of us at once for long periods of time. So I want to thank our teachers for putting up with us for these past few years.

The relationships that we have built have allowed me, and others, to be more confident and comfortable in who we are. The relationships that are established over the years together help you value yourself as a person. I've become me because of the people around me, and, now, after all this, I can't seem to grasp that time has gone so fast and that we're leaving for high school. From first walking into those front doors, to now, three years later, graduating with enough confidence to give a speech - that's crazy to me.

I really did value my time here. I value my teachers for giving me help when I needed it. I value my academic opportunity here to prepare me for high school. I value the friends I've made for making my time here even more special. And I value the people who helped me and supported me along the way. Honestly, I will miss you all deeply. You just remember what your old pal said, you've got a friend in me.

FAITH - Hunter Bowling

Hello everyone, my name is Hunter Bowling. I began attending Immanuel in the first grade. Like many of my fellow classmates, I feel like I've grown up here. Immanuel has become like a second home to me and I consider myself lucky to have been surrounded by such wonderful teachers and classmates. For this ceremony, I have chosen to speak on faith. To prepare for this speech, I began by looking up it's definition. Faith, simply put, is having confidence or trust in a person or thing. However, when it is defined this way, faith loses something. It sounds very generic, very everyday. For example, I have faith that the sun will rise in the morning, I have faith that my sister will continue to find new ways to annoy me, and I even have faith that one day, just one day, these annoying

braces will come off of my teeth. I quickly realized that faith, when separated from God, loses its intensity, it loses its power. Faith as it should be defined and followed is the living, bold trust in God. Immanuel has taught me this. My teachers, Principal, and Pastor serve as examples of this. If not for this school, my faith in God would not be what it is today.

As far back as I can remember, Wednesday mornings have always been a time to gather in the chapel to listen and to learn from Pastor Jud. Some of my earliest memories here at Immanuel are from his lessons. Although I've never mentioned it before now, he is someone who I admire and he is someone who has helped me grow in my faith. This is something that I am sure is not just unique to me. He makes himself available to all of us. He is often the first face we see in the mornings when we get out of our cars and buses, and, many days, he is the last person waving us goodbye as we return home. He is more than a pastor or a teacher, he is essentially family. He laughs with us, he jokes with us, and he cheers with us. And on the days when life really seems hard, he hurts with us, he prays with us, and he always finds words to make us feel a little better. I would have a difficult time trying to summarize all of the memories I have of Pastor Jud but I will say this- he has always helped in guiding my thoughts in a better direction, and, in doing so, he has brought me closer to God.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge another teacher here at Immanuel who has been a huge influence in my life, Mr. Vogel. Mr. Vogel started out as this guy who would just show up every now and then, stay for a day or two, disappear, and then just randomly pop back up whenever he felt like it. Over time, he eventually made himself more of a permanent fixture here, and all joking aside, I am truly glad that he did. He is one of the greatest men I know. He is a mentor, a friend, and he is someone who I know will always have my back even when I leave Immanuel. He has been a part of some of my happiest memories here. In fact, he is the very reason that they are some of my happiest memories. There is not a doubt in my mind that I have met the greatest all time teacher with Mr. Vogel. He is truly one of a kind.

I wanted to take the time to mention these two men, Pastor Jud and Mr. Vogel, because they have both played a significant role in my life and they have both helped guide my faith. I have read that "teachers communicate a message of God's love through their actions," and I can honestly say that I have experienced that everyday here at Immanuel. From the first time I met Mrs. Fleming and Mrs. Vogel on the first day of first grade, all the way up through middle school and meeting the Pirns for the first time. There are special people here. People that

care about more than just our grades. We are fortunate enough to go to a school where the teachers and the principal care about us like family and want to make sure that we are well spiritually. They show this in their morning greetings, everyday discussions, late work hours, and afternoon prayer. We are lucky to have gone to Immanuel Lutheran. We have been taught by wonderful, hardworking, faith filled teachers who exemplify God's love and I personally want to thank each one of you. It is because of you that I know where I stand with God. I am a firm believer, and I will always stay that way.

FUTURE - Sydnee Cromer

If someone had asked you this time last year what you pictured for our 8th grade graduation ceremony, is this what you would have pictured? When we stood together as 7th graders on the stage being introduced as the new 8th graders, did you ever dream that this is how our 8th grade year would end? Did you ever think that March 13th, instead of May 19th, would be our last day in class together? I'm sure each of you, along with me, would never have pictured our final days at a place we've considered "home" for so long would end this way. This ending that we never saw coming is a perfect example of the uncertainty of the future.

In general, the future is a difficult topic. The future is unknown and we as humans tend to fear the unknown. Considering the scary climate we are currently in, it is definitely a time to be concerned about the future. Proverbs 3, verse 5 says "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not into your own understanding". This is what we need to keep reminding ourselves every single day, but especially as we enter high school and college. We will face a great deal of unknown challenges, and some of them may be scarier than anything we have ever faced before. During these times we might not have our teachers and parents to fall back on. Proverbs 3 verse 6 says "In all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight". Trusting in God is one thing we can control in our lives. Right now and in the future. By trusting in God and allowing Him to guide our decisions, we have no reason to fear what the future holds.

One of the things that is unknown is who is going to be in our future. I hope that we are able to keep this family that we have created here at Immanuel close to us as we grow and take big steps in our lives. I know that I will always come back to Immanuel for one reason or another. My mom will continue to be a constant here, plus my niece, Carlee, still has several more years here. We all have something or someone at Immanuel to come back for, especially the teachers and staff. Even as we grow and who we are as a person changes, we

will always have people at Immanuel by our sides. I know that this family that we have created over the years will be able to face any challenges that will come our way, even if we are miles apart from one another. I am excited to see what we all become as we grow older. I know that our plans for the future are not the same. Some of us, myself included, plan to attend Talawanda High School next year. Some of us are planning to attend Hamilton High.. A couple don't know where they are going just yet, and a couple plan on staying here to be in the first-ever 9th grade class in Immanuel's 124 year history.

Even though the majority of us know where we are going to attend high school, and some of us have even dreamed of the college we will go to, none of us know what events will occur in our lives. Each of us has a plan for ourselves. Some of us wish to become doctors, or a marine biologist, or a scientist. While we may be sad that our time at Immanuel is ending, there is so much for us to look forward to. In two or three years from now we will be learning to drive, which marks the beginning of our independence. We can then depend on ourselves for a needed task, instead of depending on our parents or older siblings to get us where we need to be. In four years we will be graduating high school and moving on to our college education. Ten years from now we may still be in school for our dream career, or have graduated college already and will be trying to find a job that maybe doesn't even exist right now. I know I want my career to be connected to science or math somehow, as those are the two subjects that I enjoy, besides language arts, but there isn't a job I have interest in within that field. In 25 years the majority of us will have a family and will have found our dream job, even if it isn't what we had planned. In 50 years we will have most likely retired and have said goodbye to a job that we loved. My hope is that even then, 50 years from now, we can look back on our time here and still be a constant in this community and family at Immanuel. We have the rest of our lives to look forward to, even though we don't know what will happen.

Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11 says ""for I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future""

So friends and family, I want you to know that even if each of our plans for the future end up not being what we are picturing today, much like our plans for the end of our eighth grade year were not what we pictured, know that God has a plan for our future. He knows exactly what to do and when to do it. I have faith in both Him and His plans, and I have no doubt our future will be bright.

OPENING PRAYER - Evan Hubbard

Heavenly Father, gracious Lord, thank you for this day, thank you for the opportunity to gather for our graduation even under these strange circumstances. We missed out on the last part of our school year, sharing in-person experiences, but we are thankful that Immanuel made a way for us to be connected.

I thank You for the time at home with our families and for helping us through this pandemic. Thank You, Lord, for keeping us safe during this time.

We come to You today at this graduation with humble and thankful hearts, excited that we made it this far. We thank You that You have watched over us throughout all this time and will continue to watch out over us as we move forward through our lives.

Thank You for the friends that we have made along the way. Thank You for the teachers. They had to deal with our tom-foolery and they really helped make the school days more tolerable. Thank You for the principal and the staff who served us every day and, most of all, thank You for Pastor Jud. He has been a coach for our hearts.

Thank You God for being so good to us throughout this school year, holding our hands though the whole first and second trimester, and being by our sides while we got through the state that the world is currently in.

Thank You for the upcoming eighth graders. We pray that they can prepare themselves and try to work hard on all of their studies. We pray that You, God, can walk with them through their next school year and all school years to come.

Finally Lord, we thank You for Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins, saving us from eternal damnation and loving us unconditionally; unconditionally meaning on our best and on our worst of days. We praise You with our full hearts and we are grateful for having the title of sons and daughters of Christ. Thank You, again, for this graduation ceremony and the innumerable blessings that You provide us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

(Thank you Joylynn for reminding me that I had to write this!)

PRAYER FOR CLASS OF 2021 - Joylynn Chase

Please pray with me

Dear Heavenly father, thank You for bringing everyone here tonight and thanks for the best four years of my life. You led my family to Immanuel and brought such great people into my life, and those people have always been there for me when I needed them most. But, now, I want to thank You for the new 8th graders, who have become some of my best friends and I would like to pray for their well being.

I hope that the new 8th graders grow rich, not in money but in love for You because, Lord, You're all they need. I pray that no matter what You have in store for them, that they'll always stay by Your side. I pray that they will always trust in You to give them the strength they need, and, Lord, even if they fail to trust You or fail to follow You and Your word, that You'll be by them through it all. I pray that all their hopes and dreams come true and that, no matter what they go through, they'll still be the same, wonderful people they are today. I pray that they get everything they want in life, and they grow even more selfless and giving.

I pray that You guide and protect them all through their lives, and You guide and protect all they love and care about for all their lives, as well. I pray that they do well in school and that they go to high school and, eventually, college - if that is Your will. I hope they find at least one person who is always there for them. I hope they find themselves along the way if they have not already. And, God, I hope they always know that You are always there for them if they ever feel alone.

Thank You so much for bringing such amazing young people into our lives. This group of young people are kind, loving, helpful, smart, supportive, and best of all, believers. They are people who will raise their hand to help before they even know what they are raising their hand to complete. They are people who sing at chapel every Wednesday to praise you, Lord. I wouldn't know where I would be without the new 8th graders, and that's thanks to You, God. Everything we know and have is thanks to You. If that wasn't enough, You gave Your one and only son for us, God, and all I can do is praise You. In Jesus's name, amen.

CLOSING PRAYER - Danielle Shepherd

Dear Heavenly Father,

The day has finally come to look back over all that has happened in our time spent here together in our classes, services, trips, events, and parties. We have had a wonderful time, and we want to thank You for the memories of joy and peace together. Thank You for granting us this day and helping us reach this moment in life.

We ask You to be with us as we depart from the only school some of us have ever known. We ask You to be with us this day and the many more to come. Be with us in any challenges we face in the future. Walk with us everywhere we go. Guide us in everything that we may do.

Keep us on the right path. Lead us to a life that keeps You in our hearts throughout this new phase in our lives.

Lord, I ask You to give these graduates the strength and confidence they will need to move forward. Help us to keep Your Word in our hearts. Let Your Word take root and make blessings and beautiful things in our lives.

As we close this gathering today and go back to our homes, we ask You to watch over us as we leave, to guide us to our destination safely. I ask You to keep everyone safe and healthy in these hard times. Bless each of us and keep us safe until we are able to gather together again.

I end this year with a simple prayer for my classmates.

Now go into the world with confidence, trusting that Christ is walking with you and holds each of us steady, and may His Holy spirit be an ever-present help in times of trouble and comfort in times of difficulty.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Let's rejoice and be glad in this graduate Sunday that the Lord has made. Let's ponder, and make known, the blessing of yet another school year brought to a successful close. Let's celebrate the efforts of these fine graduates, and the people that afforded them the opportunity.

Family and friends, thank you for providing these graduates with the much-needed support system. Thank you for partnering with our dedicated staff who daily invests much into your child's learning and success. Pastor, thank you for being an unwavering advocate of the school, and being intentional about forming meaningful relationships with the students and their families. Thank you, church members, for putting your money where your heart is. It is clear that this arm of Immanuel's ministry is important and dear to you. Evidence of this would be the furnishing of a Board of Christian Education that encourages and uplifts while successfully casts vision and ensures quality.

Even though all these people have a hand in Immanuel's success, there is only one group that walks around like they own the place. The 8th graders. You know what? I wouldn't have it any other way. It is invaluable when you have a class that buys-in. Whether it's setting up for an event, mentoring their chapel families, or any of the other ways they willingly volunteer, is it evident that they love and care for Immanuel as it is their own. Graduates, we consider it an honor to be the object of your pride.

Likewise we are proud of you! You've done it! You're walking away with a diploma. I beg you to never forget what is written on it. No, not your name, I'd hope you'd remember that. Not my name either. Please remember the word Immanuel. Surely in your time as students here you've learned what it means. It means, God with us. If you have learned nothing else here, let it be that God goes with you, and for you, now, as you enter high school, and certainly until the end of the age.

Cling to the things you can trust as you navigate this new stage in life. Trust that your value is found in Christ's perfect love for you and not in what others think of you. Trust that God created you to be with him and no matter how rough things may get, He will never remove the gift given to you in baptism and faith. Trust that the Word of God is superior to the wisdom of man.

Now, as you leave this place, may the living Lord go with you. May he go behind you; to encourage you, beside you; to befriend you, above you; to watch over you, beneath you; to lift you from your sorrows, within you; to give you the gifts of faith, hope, and love, and always before you; to show you the way.

Mr. Bickel