

# [***Why the speech by Kansas City Chiefs kicker was embraced at Benedictine College's commencement***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C22-K4M1-DYMD-62VB-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

May 17, 2024 Friday 12:37 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** SPORTS NEWS; DOMESTIC NEWS; STATE AND REGIONAL

**Length:** 1054 words

**Byline:** PETER SMITH and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, Associated Press

**Body**

Kansas City Chiefs kicker Harrison Butker may have stirred controversy in some quarters for his proclamations of conservative ***politics*** and Catholicism on Saturday, but he received a standing ovation from graduates and other attendees of the [*May 11 commencement ceremony*](https://apnews.com/article/kansas-city-chiefs-harrison-butker-e00f6ee45955c99ef1e809ec447239e0) at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas.

The fast-growing college is part of a constellation of conservative Catholic colleges that tout their adherence to church teachings and practice — part of a larger [*conservative movement*](https://apnews.com/article/catholic-church-shift-orthodoxy-tradition-7638fa2013a593f8cb07483ffc8ed487) in parts of the U.S. Catholic Church.

Butker's 20-minute speech hit several cultural flashpoints.

Butker, a conservative Catholic himself, dismissed Pride month as consisting of the “deadly sin sort of pride" while denouncing abortion and President Joe Biden's handling of the pandemic. He said women are told “diabolical lies” about career ambition when “one of the most important titles of all” is that of homemaker. He said this is not time for “the church of nice” and in particular blasted Catholics who support abortion rights and “dangerous gender ideologies.”

**WHAT IS BENEDICTINE COLLEGE?**

Benedictine College is a Catholic college in Atchison, Kansas, that traces its roots to 1858. It is located about 60 miles north of Kansas City., and has an enrollment of about 2,200.

**LOTS OF COLLEGES ARE CATHOLIC. WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?**

In some ways, Benedictine College sounds like a typical Catholic college. Its “mission as a Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts, residential college is the education of men and women within a community of faith and scholarship,” according to its website.

But its home to more traditional expressions of Catholicism, such as the Latin Mass, all-night prayer vigils and a strict code of conduct. Its mission statement further cites its commitment to "those specific matters of faith of the Roman Catholic tradition, as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and handed down in the teachings of the Church.”

The school gets a high ranking from the Cardinal Newman Society, a group that touts nearly two-dozen conservative colleges that exhibit what it calls “faithful Catholic education." That includes upholding church teachings and Catholic identity while providing ample Masses and other devotional activities in shaping their students.

The society seeks to differentiate schools that “refuse to compromise their Catholic mission” from those that have become “battlegrounds for today’s culture wars.” Others praised by the society include Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Ave Maria University in Florida and Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio.

The society's ranking says Benedictine benefits from having monks in residence, multiple Masses and prayer groups, spiritually focused organizations and theology programs with professors with a “mandatum" of approval from the local bishop.

**HOW HAS THAT RESONATED WITH STUDENTS?**

Benedictine's enrollment has doubled in the past 20 years. Some 85% of its students are Catholic, according to the Cardinal Newman Society.

Students told The Associated Press in interviews they embrace the college's emphasis on Catholic teaching and practice.

“It’s a renewal of, like, some really, really good things that we might have lost,” one student told the AP in its [*recent article*](https://apnews.com/article/catholic-church-shift-orthodoxy-tradition-7638fa2013a593f8cb07483ffc8ed487) on the revival of conservative Catholicism.

**OTHER FACTS**

Annual tuition for full-time undergraduates is $35,350, but Benedictine says 100% of its students receive some form of financial aid.

Benedictine’s sports teams, called the Ravens, compete in National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. Its athletics department says it is committed to ”setting the highest standards for academic success, athletic competition, ethical behavior, fiscal responsibility, and spiritual development.”

**HOW DID GRADUATES REACT TO BUTKER’S SPEECH?**

Video of the commencement shows virtually all the graduates and spectators rising to a standing ovation, but student interviews showed a more mixed reaction.

ValerieAnne Volpe, 20, who graduated with an art degree, lauded Butker for saying things that “people are scared to say.”

“I was thinking about my dad, who was also here, and how he’s probably clapping and so happy to see what he would say is a real man (reflecting) family values, good religious upbringing and representation of Christ to people,” she said. “You can just hear that he loves his wife. You can hear that he loves his family.”

Kassidy Neuner, 22, said the speech felt “a little degrading” and gave the impression that only women can be a homemaker.

“I think that men have that option as well,” said Neuner, who will be spending a gap year teaching before going to law school. “And to point this out specifically that that’s what we’re looking forward to in life seems like our four years of hard work wasn’t really important.”

Elle Wilbers, 22, who is heading to medical school in the fall, said the Catholic faith focuses on mothers, so that portion of the speech wasn’t surprising. She was more shocked by his criticism of priests and bishops “misleading their flocks” and a quip comparing LGBTQ+ Pride month to one of the seven deadly sins.

“We should have compassion for the people who have been told all their life that the person they love is like, it’s not okay to love that person,” Wilbers said. “It was sort of just a shock. I was like, ‘Is he really saying this right now?’”

**WHAT DID BENEDICTINE'S NUNS SAY?**

The Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica, one of the founding sponsors of Benedictine College, issued a statement Thursday criticizing Buter’s speech, contending it did not properly represent the college's values.

“Instead of promoting unity in our church, our nation, and the world, his comments seem to have fostered division,” the statement said.

“One of our concerns was the assertion that being a homemaker is the highest calling for a woman,” it added. “We sisters have dedicated our lives to God and God’s people, including the many women whom we have taught. ... These women have made a tremendous difference in the world in their roles as wives and mothers and through their God-given gifts in leadership, scholarship, and their careers.”

\_\_\_

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP’s [*collaboration*](https://bit.ly/ap-twir) with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

**Load-Date:** May 17, 2024

**End of Document**