

2015 Graduate Profile: St. Frances Academy's Niyonah of all trades ready for next step



By Kyle Taylor

Special to the Review

There is not much that Niyonah Washington hasn't done at St. Frances Academy.

As a senior, Washington found time to serve on a number of committees, play different sports and volunteer in various community service programs.

Most impressively, she juggled those responsibilities while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Washington was involved with athletics every year she attended the school. She played tennis and was the captain of the volleyball team, and was also a manager for the varsity basketball team. She served as secretary for the Student Government Association, and was a member of the Mother Lange Chapter of the National Honor Society.

"It was extremely difficult because I had to learn how to manage my time," Washington said. "I had to continue to get good grades, be the volleyball captain, and make sure that I did my community service hours every day."

Washington did more than manage, as she was the valedictorian for the class of 2015. It was an honor she's grateful for, but seemingly did not see coming.

"I really wasn't expecting it, but it happened," she said. "I'm excited that I get to write a speech for graduation (June 7) and get a chance to talk to my class."

Washington may have been the only one surprised by the honor.

“It just speaks to her humility, because that’s the type of person she is,” Deacon B. Curtis Turner, principal of the school, said of her reaction to being valedictorian. “She’s an absolute leader. She’s the type of kid who has little tolerance for foolishness around her. She’s incredibly humble. That’s just a sign of her humility.”

Turner said he’s watched Washington grow from a shy and introverted freshman to a senior who does not mind showing and exercising leadership, regardless of the situation.

“When I think of Niyonah,” he said, “I think of a quote from Mother Lange, ‘Our sole wish is to do the will of God.’ She’s one of the most Christ-centered students I’ve ever met, and she totally embraces that quote.”

Washington lives up to that quote by volunteering her services at Southern Baptist Church in East Baltimore. As helping children is one of her passions, she also volunteers at the Brighter, Stronger Foundation, working with and entertaining children with autism. She also tutored elementary school students at the after-school program at St. Frances Community Center.

Washington will attend Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Va., in the fall on an academic scholarship. She plans on studying pre-dentistry, something that she was attracted to as a child.

“I always had a passion for it when I was younger – I used to like going to the dentist,” she said. “I was always curious about it, and that hasn’t changed.”

This is the first of several profiles of 2015 graduates of Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. More will follow in the days to come.

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