

Headmaster's Opening Address  
Tad Roach  
September 6, 2001

This afternoon, I want to talk to you about St. Andrew's as a school, as a community, as a culture. I ask you to listen carefully and thoughtfully to me both because we need to understand who we are and what we are meant to become and because all of us – faculty, staff and students – have a unique responsibility and opportunity. The responsibility is to one another and to those who came before us; the opportunity is to enhance and develop the distinctive virtues of this place.

In 1929, the School's Founder, A. Felix duPont wrote:

*The purpose of St. Andrew's School is to provide secondary education of a definitely Christian character at a minimum cost consistent with modern equipment and highest standards.*

Today, some 70 years later, we return to that original vision as a touchstone, as a foundation for our work.

Schools, like human beings, have hearts and souls. They send subtle but powerful messages to those who teach, study and work in their hallways and dormitories. St. Andrew's has always been a school of opportunity, a private boarding school completely different in design and intention than those in New England that were founded long before 1929. St. Andrew's is a school open all, regardless of means – a school that from its first day welcomed any person who wanted the gift of a great liberal arts education, who was willing to join and contribute to a community founded on Christian ethical principles and beliefs. It was a school designed to welcome those less wealthy, less privileged, less fortunate. And it sought to build a community that was warm, inclusive and accepting. It was a school named for a man, Andrew, who gave up his life to follow Christ, to become a man of God.

We work to share responsibility for life in a community founded on Christian ethical principles and beliefs, and we strive to do so without the self-righteous, arrogant certainty that characterizes the religious impulse gone astray.

We welcome all to this School, we accept all to this School; and we celebrate and affirm our community humanity.

We strive to be caring, compassionate, responsible, empathetic brothers and sisters to one another.

We celebrate our identity as a coeducational boarding school of boys and girls, men and women living together in an atmosphere of collaboration and respect.

We believe that living together in a diverse community, working with, learning with, playing with others who have a different background and world view and perspective will make us more educated, more interesting, more complete human beings.

We reflect the spirit of the community by the way we treat one another. We deplore words and acts of intolerance, harassment and violence directed towards any member of the community. We do not accept hazing, bullying or intimidation as a part of a high school's inevitable culture. In fact, we measure the spirit of the community by protecting and affirming those who may be weak, insecure and sensitive. You may have wonderful gifts as a student and intellectual; you may be a distinguished actress, musician or performer; you may be a college-level athlete. You may be beautiful, attractive and handsome; you may be rich, affluent and popular; you may be cool; but you are not a St. Andrian until you live and demonstrate the habits of compassion, empathy, humility, sensitivity, maturity and responsibility.

In Mark Twain's great American novel, his character Huck Finn watches in amazement as people young and old demonstrate a remarkable ability to inflict cruelty and suffering upon one another. At one point Huck writes: "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race."

As human beings, we have a lot to be ashamed of – our egos, our greed, our desire to be Number One, our love of excluding others, hurting others, mocking others.

Even as we strive to create a healthy, counter-cultural community, we have to confront some complex issues. Over many decades, high schools and colleges have been dealing with acts of violence and aggression on their campuses. The good news is that hazing rituals once applauded and recognized as good, clean fun in the 1950s, '60s and '70s are now recognized for what they were- violations of the humanity of all involved.

There are less obvious, more subtle forms of harassment that also violate our community's expectation; excluding a student from a group, speaking sarcastically or cruelly to a student, mocking or demeaning a student for his/her appearance, gender, race, religion, intelligence, athleticism, sexual orientation, ethnic background, socioeconomic status – these, too, are violations of the spirit of St. Andrew's.

I asked last year if we could endure a day without making a harsh judgement, gossiping, talking behind another person's back, hurting the feelings of a member of our community. Try it. Get into the habit of swallowing our human tendency to be so catty, so nasty, so judgmental.

I mentioned yesterday that St. Andrew's prohibits the use of alcohol and drugs. Our rules appear in your student handbook.

Why do we prohibit the use of drugs and alcohol? The use and possession of these substances are against the law; the use of these substances leads to a vast and painful gulf of trust between students, between students and faculty. The use of such substances interferes with your ability to learn, to grow at perhaps the most important time for your bodies. And finally, the use of these substances makes you ill-prepared to deal with the challenges of your life as a student, athlete and artist.

It's not cool, at least at St. Andrew's, to be a person who parties, who breaks the rules. It hurts you, your friends, your teachers, your parents, your extended family.

St. Andrew's honor code specifically warns against the violations of academic dishonesty, stealing, lying and deceiving. The St. Andrew's academic program is an unusual one in many respects. It will ask you to think like a scientist, mathematician and historian; it will ask you to develop your own particular approach to a number of important and complex questions. What we care about is helping you to become a curious, creative, passionate scholar. We can only teach you well by assessing your progress in an authentic way. Please observe the honor expectations withing your classroom carefully. Always ask for clarification, especially on take-home assignments. Never sacrifice your integrity because you are behind in a class or because you are afraid of failure.

St. Andrew's was created in 1929 as a different kind of boarding school, one that was accessible to all, regardless of money. Too many private school, prep school kids feel ma sense of superiority, a sense of arrogance, a sense of entitlement. Too many private school kids are spoiled. They see their schools and teachers and staff members as servants designed to meet their every desire and expectation. Too many private school kids are soft, unable to confront adversity, stress and personal challenges. St. Andrew's is a different kind of prep school. I know you are a different kind of student body, well aware of the opportunities around us, committed to becoming a part of the Middletown and Delaware community, dedicated to community service and to creating a culture of respect on campus, respect for people, respect for our campus, respect for the history of the School. Treat these buildings with respect and a sense of appreciation. They are ours only for now; they are built and designed for the use of future generations of students and teachers. Treat them as you would treat your home.

I wish you a year full of exciting challenges and new responsibilities. I thank you for all you will do to serve each other and your School.