

I Am Supposed To Be Here  
Lamar Duncan '20  
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Hello, everyone. My name is Lamar Duncan, and I'm a member of the Class of 2020 here at St. Andrew's. I just recently turned 23 years old—which still feels weird to say—and I received my degree from Boston College this past May. I will start this chapel talk using some words I said into the same microphone as a sophomore here in 2018 in Mr. Mufuka's religion course.

I quote, "I used to believe every boy needed some sort of male figure or role model in his life to be a man, but I didn't have one. I only had my mom. My mom is my dad. Sometimes without her I wonder where I would be right now. Where I'm from—Chester, Pennsylvania—opportunities like St. Andrew's are not even thought of. My experience at St. Andrew's right now would have been unimaginable to me back in middle school. As of right now, I have literally beat the odds in the perspective of a boy from Chester."

Let me remind you guys. I am 16 years old here saying I had beaten the odds. Crazy.

In this chapel talk, I said, "I pray where I am today in my journey can someday show that a boy from Chester can break those societal norms." I wanted to define the word change, becoming a first generation college student and my biggest co-op in college is to get back to my community. Now, I stand here today as a first generation college student and look where I am now, giving back to my community who helped get me here.

Now, a lot has happened since this chapter talk. Let's go back a bit.

At St. Andrew's, one of my biggest accomplishments was a leadership role I held in my senior year. As a senior, I was a captain of the basketball and the football teams, which meant a lot to me. I was a residential leader on freshman dorm. Shout out to Fleming. I was the head of Guys Group and I was the co-head of Onyx.

Having these goals taught me what it took to be a leader and what it meant to have the younger guys looking up to me. I remember coming and saying to you as a freshman that I was so confused. Mr. Mastrocola—who you may not know—told me, "Hey, freshman boys, put your phones outside of your dorm." And I was like, "What? You're taking our phones?"

It was these times where it was the older guys I looked up to for assistance—whether it was getting shocked up in the morning or telling me to go see academic support when my grades weren't the best. It was those moments of uncertainty and not feeling ready or prepared that other Onyx members gave me reassurance. It was Onyx who brought barbers on campus so we could get haircuts that reminded us of home.

In my common app essay for college I wrote, "The end of August starts my transition. My new home. St. Andrew's School is my outlet, my second home. At St. Andrew's, I learned there's more to life. There's more than the small city I grew up in. St. Andrew's has shown me what proximity looks like and has given me a community that cares about me and my wellbeing unconditionally."

Getting accepted into St. Andrew's back in eighth grade was like a miracle. My middle school posted on Facebook, "Lamar Duncan in eighth grade at Chester Community Charter School was recently accepted to St. Andrew's School in Delaware. Lamar received full tuition assistance totaling \$57,000 per year." This wasn't normal. This was like some type of supernatural aid.

In comparing Chester, my hometown, to St. Andrew's, already two different homes, both home, one place where your single mom is all you've got. Be safe are the last words every time you leave your house. Another place that the only sounds you hear are laughter on dorm and applause after performances on Arts Weekend. Home is one place for nine months, then another place for the remainder. And as different as they are, they reflect me and I reflect both.

From this young kid from Chester who had never seen the world before, St. Andrew's has helped change the trajectory of my life. Before St. Andrew's and creating the bonds I made here, I might have never seen the world the way I've seen it today. Just two years ago, I went on Christmas vacation with my brother Jack Lauer, who's here today, and his family to New Zealand. I've never flew out of the country before and that was my first time. Nearly 20 hours of travel.

Last summer, I lived rent free in Stanford, Connecticut, for three months, working at Synchrony Financial in their business leadership program—my first time living outside of Chester and not at St. Andrew's. Last winter, I was awarded the Benjamin Gilman Scholarship to study in Amsterdam for six months, while also being able to travel with Belgium, Paris, and Denmark, and seeing all the complexities and diversities of life abroad. These experiences would not have been possible without my experience here at St. Andrew's.

You can ask me, who is Lamar Duncan? Whether it's at work, or it's in college, or it's on the street, and I can't even answer that question without mentioning St. Andrew's. Whether it is me using the school filming *Dead Poet Society* as my fun fact for icebreakers. Or if it's me convincing my friends that we would've won the state tournament in 2020 if Covid had never happened—we would have! I'm a firm believer of things happening for a reason, and in a singular moment, changing your life. And for me, that is stepping on campus here at St. Andrew's.

At [work] today, I sometimes pull up my desk like this, press the button, and I look around. And I see no one who looks like me, no one my age, no Black guys. And I sometimes question, am I supposed to be here? Still, as I look around, I'm reminded that my life, the place that I work, the network that I have built professionally, personally, and all of the friends that I have made so far would not be possible without the values and opportunities St. Andrew's has given me.