



Ten Years: Ten Talks from Tad

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St. Andrew's SCHOOL
Middletown, Delaware

Celebrating Daniel T. Roach, Jr.

10th Anniversary as Headmaster of St. Andrew's School

As we celebrate Tad Roach's 10th anniversary as headmaster of St. Andrew's School, perhaps the most appropriate acknowledgement of his legacy is to read his chapel talks.

The chapel talk is a St. Andrew's art form. Faculty and staff who give great talks on Wednesdays are held in the highest esteem. The great chapel talk is based on serious reflection leavened with wit, humor and storytelling.

In his years as headmaster, Tad Roach has become a master of this peculiar art form. His talks speak to the essence of the School, and reflect a vision and passion for what education, what young people, what a great school, can be. While we could have chosen 20 talks, or 30, or more, these 10 form a corpus which, when taken as a whole, reflect what is most enduring about St. Andrew's School.

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On Competition

Arts Weekend, May 2006

For a few minutes this morning, I want to talk about a subject that has been much on my mind over the past few months: the effect of competition on our lives as adults, parents and students. Perhaps, it was the experience of watching colleges deal with new levels of competition in their admission offices this year and higher expectations for student achievement in the classroom, or the SAT and in athletics and the arts—a college admission officer seemed strangely satisfied to say that in his college, only those with 1500 SAT scores and GPAs over 93 could gain a hearing much less an acceptance from his college. Perhaps, it is because schools, colleges, businesses, law firms, corporations say that they must stay up with the competition or beat the competition to succeed and continue to grow. Perhaps, it is because we say that the United States and its citizens must compete successfully in a global marketplace and global world.

Whatever the reason, the word and concept of competition are ubiquitous in 21st-century life. The word dominates our language, our media, our conversations and our approaches to life and to work. To put the matter simply, competition can either make us better, more creative, alert, engaged and collaborative, or it can make us destroy the most sacred and important values we hold. I think it is time to make competition work for all that is good and noble in humanity rather than allowing its force and power to push us to embrace all that is petty, mean, destructive and cruel in our nature. If we have learned anything from the competitive and bloody history of the 20th century, if we have learned from the assault we have made on our natural world in the past century, it is that cooperation, collaboration and unity can

redeem the forces that threaten to destroy our civilization.

At its worst, competition teaches us to win by any means necessary. It is a force that can make us remarkably petty, selfish and egotistical, and it is a force that when unleashed at full potential can teach us to get bigger, stronger and faster in order to dominate and destroy those who would stand before us. Competition at its worst destroys the fabric of what we would call the common good, the promise of a democracy that seeks to promote equality of opportunity for all people.

At its best, competition leads to innovation, creativity and a pursuit of excellence. It is the presence of the strong competitor that drives us to work, to practice, to persevere, to compete with all our heart and soul. It is the presence and power of competition that creates benchmarks and standards of excellence that push us out of our own provincial methods and approaches.

If we run away from the challenge of competition, we risk becoming soft, complacent and passive. And, if we run away from competition, we cede the field to the unethical barrage of those who compete ruthlessly, without conscience.

This year, when I asked our trustees, visiting speakers, past and present parents to identify the most important contributions St. Andrew's could make to the development and education of our student body, the response was remarkably unified: teach the students, they suggested, that the only way to live, compete, succeed in the 21st-century world is to live, compete and succeed ethically. The reflections on this recommendation were striking—one trustee said that our students needed to know from the outset that they will be surrounded and at times engulfed by those who seek success through deceit, through short cuts and through violations of the ethical life and standards of a profession. They need, therefore, to learn from the outset that the ethical life and an authentic commitment to the ethical life will, in all likelihood, lead them to a larger, more arduous path to success. In a world full of unethical conduct and practices, it makes

sense to understand that the ethical life may at first lead to failure and to impediments to success and happiness. The temptation to cheat, to cross ethical and professional lines, will be severe in the 21st-century world. And, therefore, our promise to ourselves to live with more courage, fortitude and strength must never be higher.

Let me explore a few ways we can work as adults to confirm in our students the moral foundation they will need to handle the phenomenon of competition in their lives.

First, students need to hear more about men and women who courageously assert their ethical values even at the cost of prestige, honor and acclaim. Even as we highlight the failures we have witnessed in the religious, corporate, and political worlds, we need to affirm and honor those who work by the highest forms of ethical conduct and rules, those who compete and in so doing celebrate the most important principles of what it means to be a scholar, priest, businesswoman, CEO, lawyer, or doctor. Next year at St. Andrew's, I plan to hold a series of meetings in which members of our alumni and parent body will have the chance to talk about the ethical approach to their lives as professionals. Our students need to learn about the costs and rewards of ethical conduct.

This spring, the School welcomed Dr. Paul Farmer whose life and commitment to service stands as a magnificent example of the path and potential of a life of ethical service. As the founder of Partners in Health, Farmer has dedicated his life towards the good of providing quality medical care to those in poverty throughout the world. The grace, humility and power of the Farmer vision inspired our students in remarkable ways.

Secondly, we need in our schools to teach students in large and small ways what it means to compete honestly, ethically and responsibly. We need to realize that one of the results of our current anxious and frenzied competitive culture will be a temptation for students to cheat as a way of surviving or flourishing in a school

or college system. We need to explain consistently why cheating is wrong, why cheating violates the fundamental form of trust and communication between a student and a teacher. Ultimately, a teacher needs to know exactly what his or her students do not understand, so that he or she can develop different lesson plans, revisit material and test again.

We also know that certain circumstances and situations encourage student cheating. We know that students who fall behind in their work and, therefore, race to meet deadlines are prone to violations of plagiarism. We know that students in academic difficulty may fear failure more than the sacrifice of their integrity. We know that some students become so anxious about grades and GPAs that they lose perspective on both the opportunity of education and the responsibilities of honesty. Schools need to reject testing that rewards rote and mechanical memorization and the ability to fill in bubbles with a #2 pencil. We need testing and assessment that measures a student's ability to think, to analyze, to synthesize, to debate, to argue, to answer complex and authentic questions.

If it is true that cheating provides an opportunity for students in middle school, high school, college and professional life to get ahead, to win at all costs, we need to explain to our students that the only way to respond to those who cheat and cut corners is to work harder, and to do so with ethical conviction and determination. A commitment to hard work, genuine commitment to scholarship is ultimately one of the most important habits we can introduce to our students. In a recent column in *The New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof discussed Asian Americans' success in school. He writes that American students typically say in polls that the students who succeed in school are "the brains"—in other words, American students assume success in school is a byproduct of pure intelligence, not determination and resilient work. In contrast, young Asians assert that "A" students "are those who work hard." Those of us who have taught in schools and colleges know that determination, diligence and tenacity will take students to new levels

of academic success. We have to realize all the factors that undermine our students' ability to concentrate, work hard and persevere in their work—television, the computer, video games, etc.—and defeat them.

As an Episcopal school, St. Andrew's articulates a spiritual journey and commitment that is distinctly countercultural and opposed to a worship of unethical success and ruthless competition. In the church's eyes, the ways of the world have always been marked by greed, selfishness, violence and hypocrisy. If the god of success and materialism teaches us to acquire, dominate and destroy the opposition by any means necessary, Jesus teaches us to find meaning in our lives through generosity, compassion, service and collaboration. If the god of competition teaches us to cheat, steal and violate our ethical principles for the pursuit of success, Jesus teaches us to live with humility, integrity and honesty. For St. Andrew's students, our religious foundation and teachings should inspire us towards a more mature and sophisticated approach to our competitive world.

Ultimately, we must teach our children and our students that the concept of competition can lead us to an embrace of vital skills of discipline, tenacity, resilience, dedication, courage and endurance. Competition can help us honor, celebrate and respect those who work, play and live with great skill, integrity and brilliance, and competition can help us grow, develop, improve and emulate those who have achieved a level of excellence we admire. At its best, competition affirms and inspires us to live with more intention, inspiration and passion. But when competition tempts us to subvert the rules of the game by cheating, stealing, demonizing or insulting the opponent, we must all collectively intercede and bring our students back to a moral and ethical foundation.

The challenge for all of us is clear. Those who will cheat and distort the value and principles of fair and ethical competition will succeed and undermine the very stability and foundation of American society unless a group of young people graduate from schools and colleges determined to restore an ethical and human perspective on

our lives as citizens. It is St. Andrew's responsibility to provide and inspire young leaders who will change the face of competition in our modern world.

On Meaningful Relationships

January 2006

I heard from one of our teachers that a few students were wondering why I, a 49-year-old Headmaster, talked about sex a couple of weeks ago in our opening meeting of the spring. I think the subtext to that comment may have been, “he should really mind his own business; our sex lives are no concern of his.”

Well, I do want to talk again about this subject, and I guess I should begin with an explanation of why I feel I must talk about this issue, at least one more time this year.

I would sound trite, I guess, to say that I want to talk to you about this subject for the same reason your parents want to talk to you about it. As a Head of School, I may not be able to love you as your parents do, but I care deeply about each and every one of you, and I feel that I have an obligation and responsibility to ask for your attention on this topic. I also have served as an advisor, counselor, friend to students in my career who have made decisions they regret during high school and college.

At the very heart of the matter, despite what television, the Internet and movies may say, human sexuality is a human rights issue, one that cuts to the very essence of how we view and interpret crucial emotions like love, friendship, empathy, compassion, sensitivity and respect, cornerstones of our identity as a school and human community. One of the most important and enduring lessons St. Andrew’s can offer to you is a spiritual, moral, ethical, intelligent, mature and responsible approach to sexuality. If you learn and embrace and live out an ethic of care, concern, respect in your sexual life, you

will find fulfillment, joy, peace and love. If you fail in this endeavor, you risk spiritual, moral, ethical and legal chaos and confusion. The stakes are literally that high.

I know the first letter from Corinthians was read at Chapel last week, but I want to read an excerpt again.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Unlike any other passage I could recommend or cite to you, these lines capture the essence of a countercultural approach to love and sexuality that is distinctly moral, beautiful and affirming. This is a reading most often chosen for weddings when two people pledge their love and commitment to one another for a lifetime. This passage is rarely chosen and read in middle schools, high schools or colleges as an entry point for conversations about relationships, sex and commitment. I see little that is patient and kind, humble and selfless about our culture's infatuation with sex. In our new century, sex and the allure of sex dominate the mass media, a media never before so powerful, pervasive and accessible. The cultural message seems clear—sex needs little or no introduction; sex requires no clear or coherent relationship or commitment. Sex for sex's sake is far more exciting and preferable to sex as an expression of love, commitment, faith and trust.

I mentioned a month or two ago that both recent studies of high school and college sexuality confirm that a hook-up culture now competes against the healthiest and most ideal relationships, relationships which take place in a context of friendship, trust and mutual respect. I think it is easy to exaggerate the power and culture of the hooking-up culture, but I think it is fair to say that the notion of having sex without commitment, having sex without a relationship, having sex simply for the goal of immediate gratification has become

culturally more acceptable and permissible today than at any other time in our country's history. It is also, I think, accurate to say that sexual activity or the pressure to engage in sexual activity like oral sex has increased in middle schools, high schools and colleges over the last five to ten years.

Statistics imply that it is not that more teens are having intercourse; it is that more students are having sexual encounters outside the realm of relationships and that oral sex is viewed increasingly as a form of sexuality that is safe, that is permissible and that is, in the words of one student quoted in *The New York Times*, “no big deal.” At its most bizarre and preposterous stages, the culture of the hook-up can include the brief, random, sexual encounters of young men and women who meet in Internet chat rooms, arrange a meeting, hook up and then retreat back to their computer screens with no desire or interest to pursue anything resembling a relationship with that person. Others develop what *New York Times* writer Benoit Denizet Lewis calls a “friends with benefits program”—two acquaintances meet regularly to hook up—nothing more, nothing less:

Melissa and the boy used to meet up about once a week. ‘To be honest, we don’t even really like hanging out together,’ she told me. They met only to have sex. ‘I go to his house, we sit there and talk for two minutes, then we go at it. Then we sit and talk for ten minutes, and I go home.’

In her recently published novel, *Prep*, Curtis Satterfield depicts a classic example of the hooking up culture as her main character, Lee Fiona, engages in a purely physical relationship with a boy named Cross Sugerman. Although Lee worships Cross and wishes for a relationship that would be one full of communication, friendship and respect, she decides to accept the relationship purely on the terms Cross negotiates. He will appear at her door and in her room for sex, when he feels like it. They will essentially ignore one another at all other times. By the end of the novel, Lee discovers that not only has she been used and exploited, hurt and scarred by Cross' treatment;

she has also been part of Cross and other senior boys' plan to sexually exploit as many girls as possible in her class.

What is wrong in American middle schools, high schools and colleges today is that at a time when we work diligently to develop a sense of responsibility for issues affirming the dignity of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and social class, students have learned or have been taught to use other human beings as objects, instruments for their own gratification, amusement, abuse and exploitation. Some act as if another human being, male or female, is as worthless, disposable and dispensable as a used condom wrapper.

How has this culture of indifference and exploitation come about? What would make young people develop or imagine behavioral norms that replace kissing and holding hands (old-fashioned, I know) with oral sex, replace love with the pursuit of a momentary flash of physical gratification?

Young men and women develop values, ethics, standards, guidelines for their lives from their parents, grandparents, guardians and extended families, from their religious and spiritual beliefs and traditions, from their schools, from their friends and peer group, and from the world of mass media. If our families, religions, schools and peer groups abdicate their responsibility to address the ethics of sexuality, the media, the culture and the worst of the peer culture will hold sway and influence over understanding of behavioral norms. The world of popular culture and the mass media are actually not trying to change the sexual behavior and mores of the American people—they are simply trying to sell and market what consumers will watch and buy. There is not a moral or spiritual exchange; it is purely one based on making money and raising profit margins. The media has come to recognize the enormous approach of presenting a world, a portrait of society where sexual ethics are eclipsed by the individual's need and appetite for sexual gratification.

We must, as a school, continue to study the cultural phenomenon

and influence of the mass media on our approaches to and attitudes toward sexuality. We all must become thoughtful and intelligent in identifying the distinctions and assumptions such media present and affirm.

We must look to understand how issues of sexuality can morph into areas that are offensive to the dignity, privacy and rights of others. Once one takes on the assumption that boys or girls are here for one's own exploitation, ridicule and gratification, one opens oneself up to behavior and conduct that is morally and legally and spiritually wrong. We need to be much more aware of the ways posters, DVDs and language undermine the dignity and respect of others. Sex is not a competitive sport; it is not about winning, or scoring, or exploiting, or using or pushing, forcing or insisting; it is about human rights, human relationships, human love, human care and concern. You as young men and women need to learn how to communicate clearly and specifically as you make decisions regarding sexuality. You have to learn how to say no, to recognize when you are feeling pressured, pushed, hurried and forced to become more involved than you want to be. You have to learn how to hear, understand and comply with the word no. You have to be able to understand legally, morally and spiritually what consent is, what consent means and what constitutes consent. You, as a peer group, need to honor a friend's desire to say no, a fellow student's desire to say no.

Of course, the great assumption of the hooking up culture, the great promise of the hooking up culture is that by devaluing the meaning of sex, you succeed in making sex merely a physical transaction, an encounter designed to prevent hurt feelings, commitment and responsibility. But that, of course, is and always will be a myth. In the lives of human beings, there are and there must be deep, emotional and psychological consequences to sexual behavior. Sex, like any relationship, can either affirm love or respect or it can make us feel used, discarded and violated.

If you return to what your parents, grandparents, teachers,

religions and trusted mentors teach you or have taught you about sex, you will inevitably find these voices calling you to slow down, to wait, to postpone your engagement in a world and culture of sexuality. And so tonight I join that litany of voices asking you to think of sexuality as a moral, ethical, religious and human rights decision.

One of my responsibilities as your Headmaster is to provide a sanctuary here at St. Andrew's from the chaos and confusion of the world outside our gates. We provide this sanctuary so that, free from alcohol and drugs, harassment and exploitation, pressure and fear, you may pursue an education that will enable you to grow in confidence, maturity and leadership. I cannot accept either a peer culture or alcohol/drug culture or sex culture that demeans the dignity of individuals, that hurts and maims men and women, that leads to regret, remorse and pain.

Thanks for listening to me. No subject is more difficult for me to address or explore, yet it is important for you to know that there is a better, more moral, ethical and responsible approach to sex than the one being sold to you in our culture today.

On Faith and Learning

Reunion Weekend, June 2005

Before my remarks to you this morning, I wanted to pay tribute to three great St. Andrew's teachers who passed away over the past couple of years. Together, George Broadbent, Dave Washburn and DyAnn Miller touched every alumnus in this Chapel as teachers, advisors, coaches, role models and mentors. It is their generosity and humanity that define the heart of the St. Andrew's experience. It is their spirit that lives on in our lives and in our School. Our prayers are with them and their families now and always.

This spring, the Rev. Canon Lloyd Casson of Wilmington visited St. Andrew's, and in his opening words to the student body told them that he very much liked the vibes he felt and heard about the School. Perhaps Canon Casson referred to our student body's engagement and participation in community service work in Wilmington—our strong attendance at the Delaware AIDS Walk, our work at the homeless shelter named Andrew's Place, our deep support for the Primo Lecture Series, a program designed each year to explore issues of diversity within the state, country and world. Or perhaps Canon Casson referred to the way St. Andrew's students welcomed visitors to the School each day, expressed hospitality and generosity to all who visited the campus. In any event, I appreciated his compliment, his recognition that there is a spirit of goodness, a spirit of engagement, a spirit of inquiry, a spirit of humanity that pervades the culture and ethic of our School.

As we gathered to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of St. Andrew's, we find meaning, hope and creativity in affirming the moments when the spirit of humanity and good fellowship visited our

hearts and minds on the campus of the School. Make no mistake about it, we love St. Andrew's as a place, partly because of its sheer physical beauty and astonishing campus. But we work, live and celebrate St. Andrew's because it has always sought to be a place of creativity, hope, reconciliation and inspiration.

I measure the quality and excellence of each school year, each student body, faculty and staff by the vibes Canon Casson identified—by the way we live together, study together, create together, question together, embrace complexity and ambiguity together. This, to a great degree, defines the human drama of this boarding school culture.

As I have thought about the history of the School over the past year, I have, of course, returned again and again to one of our Founder's primary statements about the mission and culture of the School: "The purpose of St. Andrew's School," Mr. duPont wrote in 1929, "is to provide secondary education of a definitely Christian character." Like all great political or educational mission statements, Mr. duPont's words merit consideration, review and refinement in light of history, cultural and educational innovations and developments, and in our evolving understanding of our relationship and interpretation of God's will.

We know Christian schools exist throughout America, and they all refer explicitly to their religious and spiritual mission as central to their identity and goals. Some Christian schools and some specific Episcopal Church schools, are now only Christian in name; their primary purpose is to educate students for success in an increasingly secular society, and that form of success and fulfillment is defined not through the prism of Christian qualities of concern for others, empathy, service and humility, but through an ethic of individualistic success and achievement. Other Christian schools embrace a form of Christianity that is intolerant, discriminatory and exclusive. Christian schools of this genre may be places where the very purpose of Christian identity is to judge, condemn or exclude others. Christian schools can ironically be places that reject American principles of integration and diversity.

Christian schools can be places where students and families flee from those who differ from them in terms of race, social class, ethnicity and religion. The Christian school in other words becomes a friend to homogeneity and an enemy to diversity.

As an Episcopal Church school, St. Andrew's, since 1929, has linked its identity to being a school dedicated to learning, to questioning, to research, to study—hence our School motto carved on the doors of Pell Hall: “Faith and Learning.”

This pairing, this juxtaposition, this blending of faith and learning is important if we want to understand who St. Andrew's is and what St. Andrew's wants to be working on as a school. Faith without learning becomes rigid, inflexible, stubborn, dogmatic and ultimately blind to the questions, complexities, insights and discoveries that help define the human journey on earth. Such rigid, dogmatic approaches to faith may lead us to become the very opposite of what Jesus Christ intended for those who walked forth in his name. We become arrogantly certain, mean spirited, condescending and self-righteous, and we intervene in situations where we have no part or judge people we have no right to judge.

Learning without faith, without a deep appreciation of metaphysical and spiritual questions can lead to a blind, arrogant worship of the power and certainty of the human mind. It can become completely disconnected and hostile to the questions that help humanity grow in understanding, love, compassion and responsibility.

What troubles me most about our culture in America today is the dual emergence and triumph of a secular, individualized culture that celebrates an ethic of success, self-aggrandizement and self-gratification and a religious culture that is narrow, rude, exclusionary, arrogant and discriminatory. As an Episcopal Church school, St. Andrew's rejects both forces and undercurrents in American society.

What do I mean by the ethic and ethos of our secular culture? I mean, of course, the power and the bombardment of our culture on

the moral, spiritual, human and intellectual sensibilities of our children and young people. This is a culture that unabashedly believes that an ethic of success and self-gratification define the purpose and meaning of life. Under the rules of this powerful paradigm, the individual sees the world as an opportunity for conquest, control and plunder; to the winner go the spoils of victory—the good life, a good college, good job, good cars, good home, good lifestyle. Under this paradigm of education and young adulthood, the aim, the goal, the mission is to get ahead, to succeed—and if that route towards success means an embrace of a life that is artificial, contrived and empty, that is the price for the ultimate accomplishment of the goal. Under this set of assumptions, education becomes merely an instrument, a consumer item, a step towards a larger, more compelling goal of individualistic success. And yes, the secular culture does more than convince young men and women to believe in an empty ethic of individualistic success—it also teaches them that the immediate gratification of every physical and emotional want and desire is permissible and achievable in our culture. This is the era when young men and women take pills to feel better, to concentrate, to stay awake, to fall asleep, to manage anxiety, grief, disappointment, depression. This is an era when the culture teaches young men and women that it is better to hook up than to have, heaven forbid, a relationship, that decisions made when intoxicated are better than those made sober.

At the other end of the cultural scale stands a religious fundamentalist movement that increasingly attempts to assert itself into our national conversations. What undermines the certainty, arrogance and presumption of the religious right is their sense of self-righteousness and absolutism, their refusal to explore moral and spiritual matters with any kind of acceptance of the academic take of logic, learning and intelligence. From this posture of certainty and self-righteousness, the world becomes simplified, and with this simplification comes an assumption that modern day dilemmas will disappear if we return to a Christian fundamentalism that will protect

us from the modern world. Yet the Christian right disqualifies itself from legitimacy both by its refusal to ground itself in faith and learning and by its violation of God's most inspiring commandment: loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Guthrie Speers, retired minister from New Canaan, Connecticut, made this comment in November 2004:

The moment we begin to think we are not like other people, not as much in need of God's mercy as they, that moment we cease being a part of a classless Christianity that claims we are all alike, all in need, all sinners equally dependent on the boundless mercy of God we know in Christ.

We have no business setting ourselves up over against others. It's not for us to be exclusive. It's for us, in Christ's name, to be ultimately inclusive.

Speers eloquently suggests that Christian self-righteousness leads to a dangerous sense of elitism, an egotistical belief that some human beings embody the divine and some do not. Once that belief takes hold, once human beings start believing they speak for God, violations of the human spirit inevitably follow.

So how does St. Andrew's, as an Episcopal school, live in pursuit of our mission in a secular world, in a world of strident Christian certainty? We seek as a school to remember the radical and transforming vision Jesus shared in his teachings and in his life, and to work for an understanding of humanity that is inclusive, compassionate and empathetic. We seek to inspire in our students an idealism, a sense of hope, inspiration and responsibility that will enable them to engage in the work of peace, humanity and reconciliation in their families, communities and the world. Such an approach means spending more time opening our doors and less time judging and sentencing others to hell and damnation.

It means embracing change and diversity in the face of Christianity's historical embrace of causes and movements that turned

out to be based contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ: movements that were religiously intolerant, racist, sexist or homophobic.

What St. Andrew's seeks to cultivate in all members of its community is an acceptance and celebration of the diversity that makes up the world of today. We believe in the dignity of all human beings. We seek to cultivate and celebrate the human attributes and emotions that define us as moral and responsible people—the ability to love; the ability to demonstrate compassion, humility, empathy and sensitivity; the ability to think, analyze, pursue the truth; the ability to create beauty and coherence out of confusion; the human ability to create peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. That's what we mean at St. Andrew's when we talk about morality and righteousness.

And to the lure of the secular world, we can only encourage our students to understand that the pursuit of individualistic success and self-gratification leads inevitably to emptiness, despair and, ironically, isolation. If we can inspire not consumers of popular culture but critics of popular culture, if we can encourage students to seek out love and relationships rather than sex and fragmentation, if we can encourage our students to cultivate an engagement and responsibility for the world rather than the lure of alcohol and drug amnesia, we will be fulfilling our mission of 1929 here in the 21st century.

My hope each year is that by attending an Episcopal School our students will actually begin to act, think and feel with a generosity of spirit, a sense of compassion, empathy and acceptance of all men and women. Jon Walton addressed this point in a recent sermon when he wrote:

Will church people ever act like Christians? Well, at the risk of sounding like a former President, let me say that it depends on who your definition of a Christian is. If you think of Christians as being perfect, the very image and embodiment of Christ, the answer is no, not from what I can tell. Most of us are never and always that Christian.

But if you are suggesting that Christians are those so loved by God, sinners in the hands of a loving God, fallen but helped to stand again, and even then still unsteady on their feet, who all too often fall short of the glory of God, and yet who sometimes shine with the glory of God like a diamond held to the light... then I would say, yes, there is hope that church people will act like Christians and sometimes they do. Especially as the love of Christ shines through them like a diamond to the light.

How do we shine with the glory of God? By establishing a sense of religious intolerance and superiority? By creating divisions between those who are saved and those who are damned? By deciding that one is worthy and another is not? Or do we shine when we express our common humanity and look for compromise, cooperation and connection?

Yesterday in a wonderful class, I suggested that Tolstoy rejects a paradigm that finds worldly obsessions important. Rather, he suggests, we find we are most powerfully alive when we strip ourselves of the forces that make us dumb, insensitive to the beauty and potential of life.

Our Founders created a school with a simple mission statement 75 years ago. It called upon St. Andreans to become men (and ultimately women) of good character, generosity, compassion and empathy. May we live with this challenge, this charge, this goal firmly in mind.

The Prank

Commencement, May 2005

A phone call at 1:30 a.m. from the Delaware State Police during the last week of school could not be good news, so I braced myself last Wednesday night as Elizabeth handed the receiver to me. The message, of course, was simple: Sam Baroody, Dexter Walcott had been caught, held, involved in an undesignated incident on Noxontown Road.

Now, days later, I have come up with different scenarios, better responses than the ones I gave that night. Perhaps I could have said, “Baroody and Walcott—I’m sorry officer; you must be mistaken. I know no students by those names.” Or, perhaps this: “Baroody and Walcott? No. That’s all right; I will see them in the morning.”

But instead, sleepy, naïve, numb—I only asked for details: “What did they do?” I queried.

“Mr. Roach, please just come to the station,” the policeman said.

So I drove to Odessa, bleary-eyed, thinking the thoughts of the harried, exasperated headmaster.

- What were Walcott and Baroody thinking?
- How and when would I call Arkansas, Philadelphia?
- What had they—Walcott and Baroody—done exactly?
- Would they graduate?
- What would their conviction, arrest, imprisonment do to graduation day?
- What kind of job is this anyway—the responsibility, for God’s sake, for 275 adolescents in a mad world of cultural depravity?

I arrived, stumbled towards the door and peered in at the window.

There they sat—Baroody and Walcott—heads down, guilty. Were they handcuffed?

The parent-headmaster paradox assaulted me. Should I race to their rescue? After all, these were good kids, my kids, arrested on, of all places, Noxontown Road. Or should I express by my frigid glare my absolute disgust at their mistake—whatever it was. I went with the icy glare—the forbidding exterior. One problem—I kept trying to open the door, and only after five tries did I realize that I had to be buzzed into the office.

I shook hands respectfully with the sergeant. “Tad Roach, headmaster,” I intoned. He and several others greeted me solemnly and asked me to go outside to identify a vehicle.

Finally a clue. They stole a car, a van, a Suburban? As I walked through the door, I saw huddled against a wall Allison Prevatt and J. J. Geewax. Perhaps they, too, had been arrested? Perhaps it was worse than just Baroody and Walcott?

Suddenly the air filled with cameras, screams and laughter. Seventy of this class emerged from the darkness at 2:00 a.m. to present me with this plaque that reads:

*Presented to Daniel T. Roach
from the Jail Bird Class of 2005.
Thank you for putting up with our shenanigans,
pranks and impulsive decisions.
We appreciate all that you have done for us.
We are forever engrained with the St. Andrew's ethos.*

The brilliance of the prank rested on the gift of relief I experienced when I grabbed Sam and slowly realized that we were not going to court, we were not going to call home. The gleeful faces on the veranda of the police station assured me that the Class of 2005 somehow understood and celebrated St. Andrew's love, care and attention. You needn't worry, they seemed to say. You worry too much, they suggested.

I stood dumbfounded as the yellow bus pulled up and brought the seniors back to School. I felt oddly alone. Shouldn't we go out to breakfast to celebrate?

Even before this evening of terror, relief and laughter all rolled into one, this was an unforgettable class. It is a class of scholars, artists, athletes and humanitarians. It is a class that occasionally swerves dramatically in several directions at once, but ultimately it is a class that survives, endures and stands for values and virtues we all applaud and share.

What I can say to them today as they graduate is that St. Andrew's—the School and our faculty—have offered you a way to live, flourish and mature in your life. We have urged you to be thoughtful, creative, engaged, passionate and discerning. And ultimately as we wish you goodbye, we remind you that the meaning of life is not found in the superficial aspects of life: the petty, distracted, social world, the world of individualistic success and materialism. Ultimately we find that we are most alive, most engaged, most inspired when we reject superficiality and concentrate on the simple, essential aspects of life: family, friends, nature, love, conversations and connections.

We wish you peace; we wish you well as you leave this School and community.

On Books

February 2005

I may have surprised my students in my English and philosophy sections recently by asking them if the books they were reading in their literature classes at the School changed their lives, influenced the ways they reflected upon the world in which they lived and the world they sought to create in their lifetime. Perhaps such a question strikes you as odd as well. Are books anything more than academic tools designed to introduce us and familiarize us with an author, a literary genre, an historical or philosophical literary movement, theory or perspective? Are schools and academic classes designed or supposed to actually affect, influence and inspire us to change, to awaken us from our accepted ways of thinking, believing and even acting? Are schools capable of making us commit to action, commit to transforming the world in inspiring and important ways?

Now what brought this question to mind were books recommended to me by John Austin and two articles that appeared recently in *The Atlantic* magazine. In a book entitled *Why Read?*, University of Virginia Professor Mark Edmundson defines the meaning and purpose of a liberal arts education (precisely the education you are pursuing here at St. Andrew's). He writes:

I think the purpose of a liberal arts education is to give people an enhanced opportunity to decide how they should live their lives.

Later in the book, Edmundson quotes writer Allen Bloom's observations about education. Bloom writes:

True liberal education requires that the student's whole life

be radically changed by it, that what he learns may affect his actions, tastes, choices, that no previous attachment be immune to examination and hence re-examination. Liberal education puts everything at risk and requires students who are willing to risk everything.

Both quotations may surprise us in an era in which education is increasingly narrowly viewed as vocational, as a specific means to a practical end, as an investment in the path towards success. Edmundson and Bloom suggest education is ultimately about transformation, freedom, reflection and inspiration. At its best, education disturbs us, causes us to view the world with a new and vibrant vision. A great education helps us to understand how to think, how to analyze, how to develop new approaches, perspectives, theories about the meaning of our lives. A liberal education frees us from the limits of provincialism, prejudice and passivity.

If you doubt the particular and revolutionary power of education to inspire change and transformation, consider why repressive regimes have been so careful to control the educational systems in their societies. You may remember the immense power and sense of freedom and independence that Frederick Douglass experienced as a slave on an American plantation when he learned how to read in defiance of his master and our country's system of slavery. He writes:

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she kindly commenced to teach me the A,B,Cs. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point, Mr. Auld found out what was going on and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful as well as unsafe to teach a slave to read. To use his own words further, he said, ... "A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master, to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach the nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him.

It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable and of no use to his master.”

Thanks to Slavemaster Auld’s denigrating and unapologetic racism, we see an eloquent expression: education is about freedom, about a revolution from the status quo, a freeing of the individual to develop his mind, his heart, his humanity. Douglass never forgot those words, and his passion to learn, to read, to write, burned within him. He writes:

I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master ... I set out with high hope and a fixed purpose at whatever cost of trouble to learn how to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good to be diligently sought. And the argument which he so warmly urged against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to read.

Douglass comes to value the act and gift of reading as the key to his entire life, entire identity. He risks torture and death to grasp at the opportunity of an education.

Despite this dynamic example before us, I think it is safe to assume that many students in high schools and colleges across the nation miss out on the essential drama and opportunity implicit in the gift of a great education. An article in this month’s *Atlantic* contains this portrait of Harvard by Ross Douthat who recalls his years in Cambridge in the 1990s.

Most of my classmates were creatively lazy, gifted at working smarter rather than harder. Most of my classmates were studious primarily in our avoidance of academic work, and brilliant largely in our maneuverings to achieve a maximal GPA in return for a minimal effort.

It was easy to see the classroom as another resume padding

opportunity, a place to collect the grade (and recommendation) necessary to get to the next station in life. If that grade could be obtained while reading a tenth of the books on the syllabus, so much the better.

Notice that the writer's classmates work carefully to set up the veneer, the appearance of engagement and curiosity. They master the art of taking shortcuts, cheating themselves and their classmates out of an authentic exploration of ideas. The classroom becomes not a place for epiphany, revolution and awakening, but merely a way station on the road to an ultimate goal of success.

Why don't college and high school students see their education as a gift, an opportunity that will open doors towards a deeper sense of self, of commitment to the community and the world? Why have schools and colleges sacrificed their noble, idealistic and spiritual missions for a practical, cynical, indifferent alternative? Let me offer a couple of thoughts on these questions.

First, particularly in independent schools, we take educational opportunity for granted, and therefore we quickly become accustomed to, entitled to and blind to the opportunity that lies before us. We lose the edge, the creative tension, the dynamic striving for learning that should characterize education in its purest form. Teachers do not ask the questions, set up authentic, challenging assessments that promote engagement and real learning. Students view the business of school as something to be managed, dealt with, an unfortunate distraction from their social lives, video games and DVDs. The notion of reading as an essential part of daily life has been attacked and nearly destroyed.

Secondly, schools and teachers often do a miserable job of articulating the radical, exciting and transforming potential of education. From an administrative and public relations level, schools and colleges rarely articulate their mission of changing, inspiring, disturbing and transforming their students. Rather, schools talk about their facilities, their college and graduate school acceptances, their

athletic successes. From the teaching point of view, professors and instructors easily fall into a routine of teaching that rewards students who are what Ken Bain describes as “strategic,” students who have learned how to play the game of school by discovering how to please their teachers by parroting and imitating their ideas and approaches to learning. Teachers and professors neglect to study how students learn, how students become inspired, transformed and engaged by their classes. Teachers and professors accept a paralyzing passivity from their students. They allow students to be invisible, to be disengaged. They create tests and exams that assess mere retention, nothing more. They reward mediocre work to avoid the hard work of real learning and real teaching. Where no inspiration and transformation is expected, schooling becomes passive, boring, seemingly pointless.

Thirdly, schools and colleges either enable or accept a student peer culture that is anti-intellectual in its nature and quality. The peer group suggests that the purpose of high school and college is to find ways to avoid idealism, commitment, engagement and dedicated work. Rather, education becomes a game played by strategic students and dull-witted and distracted teachers and professors. Think of that phrase from Douthat: “Most of my classmates were creatively lazy.” In other words, students use their creativity to develop skills of avoidance, distraction and disruption of the academic mission of their teachers. They denigrate the relationships between teacher and student. The result is an educational system that fails in its mission to promote creative and responsible leadership within our democracy.

Fourth, schools, colleges and students have bought into a powerful and persuasive model of success and competition that rewards an obsession with materialistic and superficial success. Because of economic uncertainty and pressure, schools and colleges feel suddenly that they are essentially the gatekeepers of the nation’s routes towards prosperity and success. Students assume that school and college are merely conduits towards the next level of attainment and commitment. They focus on a materialistic goal and learn to exploit and manipulate

an academic system that will lead them where they want to go. Underneath their mad pursuit is a spirit of emptiness. Consider this reflection from Walter Kirn, writing in *The Atlantic* about his academic career at Princeton:

I wanted to ride the train to the last station. As a natural born child of the meritocracy, I'd been amassing momentum my whole life, entering spelling bees, vying for forensics medals, running my mouth in mock United Nations meetings and model state governments and student congresses, and I knew only one direction: forward, onward. I lived for prizes, praise, distinctions, and I gave no thought to any goal higher or broader than the next report card. Learning was secondary; promotion was primary. No one had ever told me what the point was, except to keep on accumulating points, and this struck me as sufficient. What else was there?

Kirn admits that his education was a pretense, a mad pursuit of medals and accomplishments with no meaning, no substance in the pursuit.

My greatest worry is that we might fail to grasp the opportunity for growth, learning, transformation and inspiration that each class might provide. My worry is that you as individuals and as a school might settle for strategic learning and thinking instead of a true immersion in the life of the mind. My worry is that you might treat your life, your relationships, your morality, your values, your principles as ones that are superficial, modest and unambitious. I worry that you will fail to be exceptional because you fear that kind of effort, that kind of commitment, that kind of passion.

St. Andrew's is a learning and teaching academy, a school that has no qualms in asserting that your education is designed to inspire you to be active, moral agents in this country and the world. You are surrounded by teachers, scholars, a magnificent and accessible library, classes and sections designed to engage you, pull you from the

culture's passivity and mindlessness. Will you do the reading, thinking, questioning, analyzing, exploring that such an education requires and demands? Or will you succumb to the forces that pull you away from engagement, that make you a passive, even manipulative student? Will you encourage the engagement and intellectual commitment of your peers or join students in a conspiracy of indifference, apathy and pretense?

Your very life depends on the way you answer that question. Or, to put it more precisely, the kind of person you become, the kind of citizen you become, the kind of leader you become depends on your willingness to open your mind and immerse yourselves in the gift and glory of an education.

On “The Organization Kid”

Parents Weekend, October 2002

Slowly, right before their eyes, our young people have watched the world change over the past 13 months. They witnessed the attacks of September 11, 2001; they see the seemingly hopeless and endless struggle in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine; they have read about corporate scandals that have damaged America’s sense of trust in major financial institutions and businesses; they have seen a deep crisis of confidence emerge in the Catholic church; they hear Congressional testimony regarding the threats of biological, chemical and nuclear terrorism; they hear the President talk about the need for military action against Iraq. And now a sniper guns down innocent men, women and children on the Washington beltway.

We as adults have always known that civilization and life itself are remarkably precarious, but even we have been shaken by the onslaught of crises affecting our nation and the world.

As we adjust to the new realities of this century, we as parents and teachers need to reflect on how these changes will affect us, how these challenges will affect our young people, how we as adults can help our students react intelligently and maturely to these new challenges.

At St. Andrew’s and in your homes, students must find men and women who can help them interpret the historical moments affecting our lives. They must find adults who have a deep interest and understanding of history, religion and science, of politics, of

morality; they must find adults willing to read, to discuss, to study questions from a wide variety of perspectives. At St. Andrew's and at home, our young people need to see adults who teach them by word and example how faith in God, faith in humanity can redeem us from fear and anxiety. They must find and experience community, a group of men and women strong enough to comprehend, understand and redeem the world. They must see adults who refuse to be afraid, who defy the terrorism that seeks to make us cower in fear in our houses. I think we are all up to the challenge.

We can provide center and foundation for this generation of students, even in a perilous time, if we remember and believe and affirm that the purpose of secondary and college education is to inspire students to live intelligent, meaningful lives in the world, to help them understand the mystery and complexity of human affairs and to make the world a more reasonable place.

A reassertion of the broad mission of schools and colleges will rescue our young people from a paradigm of success, of individuality, of competition that has distorted the opportunity of a liberal arts education. Before students take the SAT, develop their GPA and apply to college, they need to develop a sound and resilient sense of their values, their character. Families, parents, schools and teachers establish this foundation, not in a mechanical process but through a creative dynamic of human connection and engagement.

In 1996, Toni Morrison, the great American novelist, received the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. In her remarks following her acceptance of this award, Morrison told two intriguing stories that I would like to reflect on with you this morning. Both stories depict the essential challenges and opportunities we share as parents and educators at this extraordinary time in history.

Morrison first describes a young man working at a university on his Ph.D. As the product of a powerful and inspiring educational

system, the man was surprised to discover that he has a disability—despite his hard work, dedication and intellect, he discovered one day that he could not sit in a room by himself and read independently for a sustained period of time. Without a syllabus, without an assignment, without a paper deadline, without a formal schedule, the young man was quite simply lost, overwhelmed and disconnected.

Although it is hard to feel sorry for this young man victimized by the best American education has to offer, I think we would agree that he is a product of a culture and environment familiar to many of us. Morrison writes:

He had grown up in an affluent community with very concerned and loving parents. He said that his whole life had been filled with carefully selected activities: educational, cultural, athletic. Every waking hour was filled with events to enhance his life. Can you see him? Captain of his team. Member off the Theatre Club. A Latin prize winner. Going on vacations designed for pleasure and meaningfulness; or fascinating and educational trips and tours; attending excellent camps along with equally motivated peers.

But ironically enough, the sheer richness of the opportunities surrounding the young man left him unable to create an intellectual life of his own. Ultimately, his schools, colleges and universities, his teachers and professors had failed to inspire the most important skill of all.

In April 2001, several months before September 11, *The Atlantic* published a much discussed article by David Brooks called “The Organization Kid.” Brooks interviewed undergraduates at Princeton and developed a surprising view of these bright, accomplished and successful young men and women. He praised them for their dedication, earnest commitment to one another and to their school, but he suggested that lives spent within families and schools had essentially robbed them of their opportunity to be independent, critical

thinkers. He writes:

This is a group whose members have spent the bulk of their lives in structured, adult organized activities. They are the most honed and supervised generation in human history. If they are group oriented, deferential to authority and achievement obsessed, it is because we achievement besotted adults have trained them to be. We have devoted our prodigious energies to imposing a sort of order and responsibility on our kids' lives that we never experienced ourselves.

The result, Brooks argues, is that our current generation of students is too concerned with making their way through what he calls the “continual stairway of achievement.” They do not, he argues, seem to experience schools and colleges that care a lot about building character, about instilling an ethic of service, stewardship and responsibility in the world. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that schools and parents apparently have inspired a \$3.6 billion industry that focuses on helping students to become more organized, more efficient professional learners. Brooks argues that we have become achievement-besotted adults, preoccupied with training, packaging and marketing our kids.

At the time Morrison and Brooks wrote their speech and articles, America was a different place than it is now. Now, suddenly, our students confront a world of terrorism, confusion and panic. They have lived most of their lives preparing for success in a stable world. How will they and we adjust as students, parents and schools?

Let me turn to Morrison’s second story as a way of answering this disturbing question. Her second narration is very different. She describes a moment from her own life that took place in Strasbourg, where she met with “a group called the Parliament of Writers.” A woman approached Morrison following a discussion and asked her if she was familiar with the issues going on with writers in her native

land. The woman was a writer, and she told Morrison that women writers in her country were being shot to death in the street.

'You have to help us, she said.' 'You have to help us.'

'What can I do,' I asked her. She said, 'I don't know, but you have to try. There isn't anybody else.'

I would like to suggest that the events since September 11, 2001, effectively should call an end to the phenomenon of the organization kid, the organization school, the organization college. We seemed, some of us, to have believed that we no longer lived in a world full of tragedy, complexity and despair even though that world was there to be seen if we had chosen to open our eyes. We watched as parents, schools and children bought into a system of achievement that was in many ways empty—full of meetings, appointments and assignments, but bereft of connection to the larger questions and challenges facing our world.

St. Andrew's has always remembered that the educational process here is an end unto itself. We have always celebrated community, collaboration and stewardship, even in the face of an increasingly competitive, materialistic and superficial emphasis on individual achievement. We are now trying to help our students to learn to live with complexity, danger and tragedy. We are trying to teach them that the answers to the questions facing America and the world are complex, difficult. But in the words of the beleaguered writer, "we have to try. There isn't anybody else."

This is inspiring and amazing work, and I ask you as parents to join us in this enterprise. Our answer to the new world we have inherited is to stand with passion, conviction and courage for what we know is right, for what we know is the most responsible way to prepare students for meaningful lives.

First, we will continue to emphasize community and make sure that students always realize that their first priority is living with and among men and women from different classes, races, religions and

backgrounds. We will try to help students develop habits of empathy, sensitivity and courage—for these values are not only eternal, they are the skills and habits they will need as citizens.

Second, we will emphasize leadership—service to others, to the world as a moral imperative. Our students need to learn that they must respond actively, creatively, responsibly to a world in need of new ideas, new approaches. They have a crucial role to play in the formation and development of this democracy. Our community service programs must be strong and dedicated to inspiring leadership, activism and commitment.

Third, we will continue to help them to see that the skills and habits of mind learned in our classrooms will prepare them to make significant contributions to the world. We want to graduate men and women with the habit of reading, reflection, creativity and thoughtfulness—not because these qualities can be measured and packaged, and sold, but because these qualities are desperately needed in the world today. Our curriculum seeks to inspire students to become lifelong readers, learners and writers.

At an important conference at St. Paul's School last June, speakers, teachers, chaplains and headmasters spoke eloquently about a deep spiritual emptiness among some young people today. Despite living in a world of comfort and privilege, some students spend their time aiming, working only for individual achievement—for better grades, better board scores, better resumes—only to find that the pursuit and even the accomplishment leaves them empty, unfulfilled and lonely. What is missing from this pursuit and their own, their parents' and their schools' obsession is any real, authentic connection to the world in which they live. What is missing from their lives is an understanding of their real responsibility for transforming and redeeming the world.

So we will do all we can at St. Andrew's to inspire your sons and daughters to be brave, courageous, resilient and energetic. And may we succeed in reaching towards the goals described so well by Czech

Republic President Vaclav Havel in this passage:

Genuine politics—politics worthy of the name, and the only politics I am willing to devote myself to—is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility, expressed through action, to and for the whole ... If there is to be any chance at all of success for decency, reason, responsibility, sincerity, civility and tolerance, it will be achieved decently, reasonably, responsibly, sincerely, civilly and tolerantly.

On Empathy

October 2002

I would like to talk with you tonight about a particular skill or habit of the heart that I would like you to develop intentionally during your career at St. Andrew's. I will venture to say that the development of this habit, this approach, may be the most important thing you do in boarding school or in life, for that matter.

Simply put, the skill is developing an empathetic approach to the people you know and meet during your lifetime. If you learn this skill, you will never make the mistake of treating other people with disdain and cruelty. You will learn to respect those who are weak, lonely and discriminated against. You will learn to fight for those left behind in our schools and society. I am not talking about an empathy that is condescending, confident, arrogant and presumptuous. No one wants a friend, mentor or teacher who treats him or her with a kind of cloying and artificial attention. No one wants someone to solve his or her problems, simplify his or her emotions and move on with a kind of smug satisfaction. No one wants a friend or companion who quite literally feeds on opportunities for vicarious empathy—a person who revels in the access he or she has gained to the anguish of a human heart. No one wants pity—an empathy that robs others of their self-respect and dignity. What we want from our friends, mentors, mothers and fathers is attention and respect and dignity.

The empathy I am talking about is developing an awareness and appreciation of the essential complexity, mystery and spirit of those who surround us. This is difficult and challenging work, for we never have the time to know others as we know ourselves. But even if we

merely slow down and remember with respect and understanding that every human being deserves ultimate respect, we have made some progress.

The problem, quite simply, lies in our own love for and obsession with ourselves. Our lives, our careers, our choices, our problems seem so very important that people in our lives (even those we love) seem to exist only for our own convenience and support. And worse still, those who do not appear to be important to us can be ignored, discarded or forgotten.

This past summer I did a good deal of thinking about the concept of community service, for St. Andrew's quite intentionally defines service as one of the essential skills and habits we seek to inspire in each and every one of you. For years, I have watched students in schools perform service to their communities, and I have read hundreds of essays describing how much students learn from these opportunities, both within the school year and in the summer. But last June I had an important conversation with Dr. David Hornbeck, the former superintendent of schools in Philadelphia. He challenged the independent schools' vision of service, and he quite deliberately provoked and disturbed me.

The process began as I sat with Dr. Hornbeck in a small group at a conference at St. Paul's. The subject was community service, and many members of my group were telling self-congratulatory stories about the mandatory community service programs in their schools. One Chaplain reported that she had led a group from the school to a section of the United States devastated by a hurricane. Dr. Hornbeck asked the Chaplain if the students, as part of their community service experience, had studied the causes of the people's helplessness in the wake of the storm. Did the students learn about the limits of federal disaster relief? Did the students follow up their service experience with any action? Did they write senators, congressmen or the President? The Chaplain quietly admitted that no, there had been no study, no follow-up.

Dr. Hornbeck explained that community service can be distorted by well meaning people. At our worst, independent school students seek out community service opportunities to develop and package their college resumes. They serve, not out of empathy, but exploit the opportunity posed by those less fortunate. Others act in a spirit of noblesse oblige. The secure, well-positioned private school student shares his time with those who lie below him or her. We serve because we are superior, powerful, privileged. We give our time and retreat back into our communities. Nothing changes, but we feel better about ourselves.

Hornbeck challenged me to think of service in a different way. Service is not an expression of selfishness on the part of the volunteer. It is not an expression of condescension, superiority and elitism. Rather, it is a recognition that systems and elements of our society deliberately create situations that lead to suffering, despair and hopelessness. A great community service program ultimately becomes a service-learning program, a curriculum that inspires students to take action: to serve, to advocate, to become active citizens in a democracy.

As an example, Hornbeck pointed to the following statistics regarding poverty in America today. We hear lists of statistics all the time, I know, and we become numb to the implications behind the numbers. But listen and think with an empathetic mind to this list:

- In America, every nine seconds, a young person drops out of high school.
- In America, every 11 seconds, a child is neglected or abused.
- In America, every 37 seconds, a girl who has not completed high school has a baby.
- In America, every 43 seconds, a baby is born into poverty.
- In America, every 60 seconds, a baby is born without health insurance.
- In America, every 19 minutes, a baby dies in childbirth, a rate in some cities higher than that in developing countries.

- In America, every three hours, a child is killed by a firearm.
- In America, every five hours, a child or teen commits suicide.

These statistics are real, they are true reflections of the practices and priorities of our nation. But a search for a sniper gains more media attention, more political commentary than the devastation of generations of American children. We could change the above statistics, but we are either through apathy or intention accepting and confirming this situation.

It comes back to a tougher, more authentic form of empathy. We serve, we volunteer, we study; we advocate change; we participate in a democracy because we know that life can be cruel, tragic and unfair. And we are ultimately responsible for the lives and welfare of all who live beside us on this earth.

So I ask each one of you to volunteer and serve with an empathy that communicates ultimate respect for those with whom you work. And as you work with the homeless, the public school system or the elderly, ask yourselves what political and community policies have created these conditions and circumstances. Ask the teachers at Silver Lake about funding for public school education; ask the Director of Andrew's Place about the source and meaning of homelessness in Delaware. Follow up by studying the issues they outline. Get involved; be actively political.

I hope these words from the American playwright, Tony Kushner, inspire you. They represent a challenge and a warning:

I am here to organize. I am here to be political. I am here to be a citizen in a pluralist democracy. I am here to be effective, to have agency, to make a claim on power, to spread it around, to rearrange it, to democratize it, to legislate it into justice. Why you? Because the world will end if you don't act. You are the citizen of a flawed but actual democracy. Citizens are not actually capable of not acting. It is not given to a citizen that she doesn't act; this is the price you pay for

being a citizen of a democracy. Your life is married to the political beyond the possibility of divorce.

You are always an agent. When you don't act, you act. When you don't vote, you vote.

Let us pray:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit.

In humility, count others better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to your own interests,

But also to the interests of others.

On Stories

Parents Weekend, October 2000

Virtually every evening when I am home, I put my six-year-old son, Zachary, to sleep with stories. Our ritual is pretty well established by now. All he wants to hear are my childhood stories, preferably two or three of them, and certainly ones that are very long. Because Zachary is my third child, and because his two older siblings shared a love for my childhood narratives, I know these stories pretty well by now. As an English teacher I have, of course, exposed these stories to analysis, especially now that I am narrating them for the third time. I would like to share two of these stories with you and suggest a link between the stories and the way we parent our children in this particular generation.

The first story is the shortest one in my collection; it is the one Zachary permits me to tell only as a final extra story or a quick preamble to the longer one. It goes something like this:

A long time ago when I was very little, I lived in Buffalo, New York, in the house you now know as Grandma's house. One day I was playing out on the sidewalk with some friends, and my grandmother and grandfather came by in their new, convertible car. My sister and I jumped in, and we drove to a doughnut store far outside of the city. We ate delicious warm jelly doughnuts in the car on the way back to my house.

My children know this story as the jelly doughnut story, a narrative their father insists on telling and repeating for some unknown reason.

They groan when they hear it once again. It has no plot line, no

conflict, no mystery, no complexity, and seemingly no point.

My second story:

Once when I was a little boy, I lived in Buffalo, New York in the house you now know as your grandmother and grandfather's house. I did not live in a neighborhood or place like St. Andrew's. I did not have a large front lawn, nor did I have beautiful fields and gyms and tennis courts lying just outside my front door. My friends and I played our games in the street: touch football, four square, street hockey were our favorites, and when we played kick the can or hide-and-go-seek, we would use the lawns and the back yards of all the neighbors on the street.

We particularly enjoyed going to the Saunders' house, a large house with an enormous chestnut tree in the back yard. We walked through a narrow sidewalk into a back yard that, to us, seemed very large. The tree towered over the yard, leaving the atmosphere rather dark and secretive. We picked up chestnuts that had fallen from the tree, gathered them in our baseball caps or placed them in boxes. I still remember how beautiful they were—so brown and smooth to the touch. Once we had gathered the chestnuts on the ground, we climbed an old fence and made our way out onto the top of the garage that emerged in the next house's back yard. From that roof, we could gather more chestnuts, enjoy the view of the yard from a height of four to six feet, and pretend that we were building a fort or a fortress of some kind.

We went to the Saunders' back yard all the time, even though they did not have any children of their own. We could see them through the large glass window that looked over the yard. They waved, never seeming to mind our intrusion or our climbing on the neighbor's garage.

One afternoon we decided to scale a new fence—not the one near the garage on the side, but instead the one that rose up in the rear of the Saunders' yard. This fence was wooden and green.

It seemed very stable and secure, and for some reason I was the first to try it. I began to climb, and suddenly, before I knew it, the fence had collapsed into the neighboring yard. All of us stared quietly at the broken fence, and soon we quietly walked back to our houses. My sister and I walked into our house, and before too long, I told my mother that I had broken the fence at the back of the Saunders' yard. I do not remember who at first volunteered this information—my big sister or me.

My mother listened to my account of the story, stood up, took the telephone and said she would call Dr. Marcy, the owner of the fence and the owner of the back yard where the fence now lay collapsed. I said that I did not think that that call was necessary...

My mother and I walked over to Dr. Marcy's house a few minutes later. We walked up Highland Avenue, took a right on Delaware and then walked up six houses on Lexington Avenue until we arrived at a very big house with a very big door.

Dr. Marcy answered the door and invited us into his den. After we all sat down, my mother asked me to tell Dr. Marcy what had happened to his fence. I told Dr. Marcy the story: I was hunting for chestnuts with my friends, and I was trying to reach a couple of chestnuts high up in the Saunders' tree. I began to climb, but the fence broke.

Dr. Marcy thanked me for coming over to his house. He thanked me for letting him know about the fence. He was an older man, with gray hair and a white shirt and a tie. He offered my mother and me cookies and milk. We had a very nice visit with him. He said that he hoped I would visit him again. And that is the end of the story.

After these stories, Zachary is usually ready to sleep—apart from the enormous satisfaction he gathers from hearing these tales, why are these stories part of my memory, important enough to repeat and narrate? So with the eye of the analytical English teacher, please let

me explore these memories a bit.

First of all, the memories are clearly associated with a notion of family, a notion of a neighborhood, the notion of a young and older generation working naturally and collaboratively together. The jelly doughnut story begins with my playing with my sister and an entire neighborhood of friends in front of our houses. Because we did not have large lawns either in the front or back, we played on the sidewalk, in the street. We walked from yard to yard, garage to garage, with perfect freedom, with the permission and acquiescence of an adult world that was present—in our houses, on our porches or seen through windows. My grandparents lived close enough, two blocks away, to pick my sister and me up for excursions like doughnut runs. The process of going, the memory of sitting in the back seat of a convertible car, watching my grandfather drive (it was one of his passions) and my grandmother sitting in the front seat—all of those moments were as or more important than the doughnuts made in a small bakery in the suburbs of the city.

The jelly doughnut story is simple. It describes a world of connection, family and love. It describes a world that is intimate, balanced and full of small, daily miracles.

The story of the chestnut tree and the trip to Dr. Marcy's house is also a story about connection. Here, my mother and Dr. Marcy collaborate to teach me about the values of honesty and integrity. They teach me to take responsibility for my actions, whatever my motivations. They teach me about forgiveness; they teach me that adults expect me to learn, allow me space to learn, take the time to talk to me and help me to grow. Dr. Marcy teaches me, welcomes me into his house, expresses patience and understanding towards me. He collaborates beautifully with my mother.

This month I have been reading a wonderful book about education; it is entitled *The Men They Will Become*. The author is Eli H. Newberger, a doctor who teaches at Harvard Medical School,

a man who founded the Child Protection Team and the Family Development Program at Boston Children's Hospital. Early in his book, Dr. Newberger quotes the observations of a principal named Bob Weintraub. Mr. Weintraub makes the following observations about raising children in this generation:

Three things: Point number one was not to underestimate the power of popular culture in our kids' heads. They have a whole language that circulates through music and television and noises they listen to and watch. The language of their media pays about equal attention to sex and to disrespect for adults. I like to say that once upon a time Ozzie Nelson was the role model for Dad, and now Homer Simpson is.

The second factor Bob cited is the diminished adult presence in many kids' homes.

Whether it's because both parents are working or because there's only one parent in the household, there's not a lot of nights when dinner is cooked and everyone sits down at the table together to eat and talk. There's a loss of adult influence in boys' lives. That's huge. It's not because parents are bad people; it's just what's happening. It's reality.

And then going along with that is the nature of the adolescent boy. He's searching for his identity. He's trying to figure out what's okay and what's not okay. Right now I strongly believe that peer influence is much stronger than adult influence. The adults aren't there for a variety of reasons that cut across class lines, cut across everything.

Parents want to raise thoughtful, successful, respectful kids, right? I don't think anybody wants not to do that. And teachers want to do the same thing: raise thoughtful, successful, respectful kids. I don't know if it's simplistic or not, but in the face of things I mentioned—popular culture and the demands and reality of adult life today—there's just not a strong and unified voice. There's a

great line from James Carmer, a psychiatrist at Yale. He said:

When I grew up there was a conspiracy of adults to make me a responsible person. And there's not this conspiracy today, or at least it is weakened. So kids' decisions are based on the influences of popular culture and peer influences more than they are on the adult voice.

In light of Weintraub's remarks, it is interesting that my childhood memories describe a peer and adult culture, living side by side one another. We played in the streets, in the back yards, on the garages together. But our parents were present, our neighbors were present, to wave at us through the glass window or to meet with me when I made a mistake. My mother spontaneously could call Dr. Marcy to help her create a brilliant parenting moment. My grandparents interrupted our play and spent meaningful time with my sister and me.

Why have adults lost their ability to collaborate as educators? Why do we turn our heads when we see young people behave poorly and say words that are inappropriate or obscene? Perhaps we are too busy.

Perhaps we believe that it is none of our business to teach and parent others' children. Perhaps we ourselves would react harshly to another adult reprimanding our child. After all, what right do they have to speak to, or to scold or to discipline our child?

Perhaps, ultimately, we do not respect other adults or even schools to make parenting decisions that used to be automatic ones. One theme I hear repeatedly these days from schools across the country is that many parents have lost their ability to collaborate with the schools their children attend. Parents challenge disciplinary rulings; they attack the integrity and intentions of the teachers entrusted to their children's care. During my sabbatical year away from St. Andrew's five years ago, I watched in perfect amazement when a parent at a parent-teacher conference lunged across the table and grabbed the teacher's grade book. He held it triumphantly in the air, threatening to take it and

copy all of his child's grades for the year that he said always reflected a 75 score.

St. Andrew's parent body has always been one that supports the School's mission, its values, its regulations. I am deeply grateful for the collaborative work we do together each year.

Ultimately, parenting is about the gift of time, the gift of attention, the spirit of teaching. In a recent essay on the crisis within the American family, Marilynne Robinson writes that we have simply squandered, relinquished our ability to lead balanced family lives by our obsession with work, by our inability to carve out even one day a week, when the culture stops, when families gather, when stores and restaurants close. "Work can always demand more of our time, and our families can claim always less of it."

So perhaps when our children get in trouble or struggle in school, we race to their sides, reject their teacher or school's perspective and fight to the death for our child. Rather than parent well, we react blindly, carelessly, thoughtlessly as if to make up for our lost time, those months and years when we were not carefully parenting our children.

Many years ago, long before the madness and pace of the 21st century developed, the English novelist and writer D. H. Lawrence wrote a disturbing short story entitled "The Rocking Horse Winner." Some of you may have read the story in high school or college. It, too, has the elements of a childhood story; but true to Lawrence's vision, it is a story warning us against the dangers adults can be to their children. In the story, written in 1933, Lawrence depicts a family of three children and two parents. Early in the story he writes: "There was a boy and two girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighborhood."

But a deep anxiety broods over the house. There was never enough money for the family to feel confident that they would be able to maintain their social standing. You see, the father and mother never

engage in any significant interaction with their children. They only want the trappings of a successful life; they leave their children alone, deserted and empty.

And so they have come to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: "There must be more money! There must be more money!" The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining, modern rocking horse, behind the smart doll's house, a voice would start whispering, "There must be more money; there must be more money."

The son in the family hears this persistent refrain, and he searches valiantly for a way to silence the voices. He is determined to become lucky, to free his parents from their anxious and empty despair. He turns to his rocking horse for an answer:

... he would sit on his big rocking horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly, the horse careened; the waving dark hair of the boy tossed; his eyes had a strange glaze in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

Soon, as a result of his frenzied rides, the boy begins to make enormous sums of money, for as he rides, he suddenly screams out the names of the winning horses at the racetrack. His Uncle Oscar eagerly joins with the boy and together they amass a remarkable sum. Despite his success, the voices in the house do not lessen:

Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was really going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: "There must be more money—oh-h-h, there must be more money. Oh,

now, now-w-now-w-w—there must be more money—more than ever—more than ever!

In his desperation to silence the voices once and for all, Paul seeks to learn the name of the winning horse for the upcoming derby. His parents return home at 1:00 a.m. from a party; his mother hears a faint noise outside Paul's room as she goes to check on him. She enters the room. Lawrence's narration:

Then suddenly she switched on the light and saw her son, in green pajamas, madly surging on his rocking horse... It's Malabar, he screamed in a powerful, strange voice. It's Malabar.

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

After several days, Paul dies of brain fever.

Lawrence powerfully teaches us of the ways our culture, our obsessions, our anxieties can distort the lives of our children. In a period of unparalleled economic prosperity, Americans still feel anxious, unsettled, uprooted and insecure. Our jobs pull us from our families and from our children; in an era of information, we can feel overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the data flooding in upon our telephones, computers and faxes.

We have lost the ability to connect. We worship the goddess of success. And our children, anxious to please us, try to earn our attention by working harder, and, in some cases, rebelling, turning to behavior that is self-defeating and self-destructing. Our children sometimes ride the Lawrentian rocking horse to serve the goal of succeeding in the eyes of their parents. We must protect our kids from those obsessions and free them to be young, creative, balanced and joyful about the gifts of life. Do we love our children because they are smart, artistic, athletic or successful? Of course not. We love our children for who they are.

St. Andrew's stands as a school determined to keep its focus balanced on the education of young people—the moral, spiritual, intellectual education of children.

We seek to create a community of adults who love your children, who challenge your children to step up to high expectations—academic, yes—but most importantly in the area of human relationships. We seek to provide a neighborhood, a peer culture, an adult culture that believes in the same eternal human truths:

- empathy, compassion and service
- honesty, integrity and friendship
- respect for the human family.

I hope you will get a sense this weekend of the quality and enthusiasm of this St. Andrew's family, this St. Andrew's community. I invite you to join in a conspiracy of adults to make young people more responsible. Challenge them to strive for excellence. Encourage them to be kind, thoughtful stewards of each other and of our environment. Help them reject materialism, racism, sexism and all forms of hatred and intolerance. Teach them what it means to be a human being, to be given the opportunity to serve others. Collaborate with other parents and adults and teachers to create a culture of high expectations for our young people.

Enjoy your time with your children; embrace them, love them, celebrate your time with them.

On Being Spoiled

January 2000

As St. Andrew's students and faculty heard Bishop Tutu's speech either live in Wilmington or on tape via television, we were invariably inspired by his wisdom, his courage and his ability to approach sensitive subjects and issues with graceful candor and directness. At one point in the evening, when asked what his reaction was to the fact that fewer than half of eligible Americans bother to vote, Tutu shook his head and said that perhaps Americans should experience suffering and oppression—perhaps then we might appreciate the miracle and privilege of living in a democracy.

Tutu's words were another way of saying that we, as Americans, are spoiled. We do not recognize or cherish what is ours; we take our freedom, our material well-being for granted. I represent a generation that was spared the experience of active involvement in national service—no war, no national emergency interrupted our emergence into adulthood. Our paths towards adulthood have been smooth, perhaps too smooth, for we may have lost the tangible experiences that taught our elders how to sacrifice, how to honor the legacy of our country.

The phrase “being spoiled” is one we usually associate with children. Spoiled children expect that every desire they express will be greeted with immediate gratification. Each gift, each privilege only inspires the child to want and demand more. And despite all the gifts and privileges, when the spoiled child finally does not get what he wants, his reaction is usually one of outrage and fury. All of us have heard our parents admonish us and describe us as spoiled. And,

probably at one time or another, our parents were right.

But adolescents and adults can be just as spoiled as children. We can easily develop the habit of seeing the world and its inhabitants only to feed our own personal desires. We can become impatient and irrational when our routines, our normal schedules and assumptions are disrupted by weather, by delays or by human error. We can fall into the habit of expecting schools, colleges and other institutions to anticipate, plan on and satisfy our every desire.

Ironically enough, it is when we confront adversity, challenges or even tragedy that we most fully come alive. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky once said that “suffering is the sole origin of consciousness.” It is when we suffer, when we are hurt, when we are vulnerable that we are most fully alive.

One of the remarkable developments in the world of boarding schools over the last 20 years has been the dramatic rise of convenience and comfort items in dorms and on campuses. Some schools now provide single rooms, private telephones, Internet access, televisions and VCRs for their students. The idea, I assume, is to recreate all the features of home even when one is away at school.

This development strikes me as odd and even a bit dangerous. Technology does not always answer a particular problem; rather, it can become a way of cutting us off from the world and the people with whom we live. Why leave your dorm room at all if everything you need, except fellow human beings, is at your convenience with the push of a button? Perhaps, too, as we become more accustomed to modern day conveniences, our own definition of what is essential to us is becoming warped and presumptuous.

In one of his several excellent books on the effects of technology, Neil Postman writes these words:

There are those in high places and with easy access to our collective ear who in speaking of the information highway, stress that it will make possible 500 or 1,000 TV stations. Are we not then obliged

to ask: Is this a problem that most of us yearn to have solved, indeed, need to have solved? Do we believe that having access to 40 or 50 stations, as we do now, is inadequate, that they are not sufficient to provide the information and amusement we require?

When, Postman asks, did we develop the need for 500-1,000 television stations? When, he implies, will our desire for more simply overwhelm us and leave us empty?

Last summer I had a remarkable conversation with a former student of mine at St. Andrew's. In fact, it may well have been the most significant communication I have ever had with a member of our alumni body. My friend was a wonderful young person when she attended St. Andrew's. She was courageous, resilient, enthusiastic and vibrant. She worked hard in her classes, excelled in theater and athletics and left to attend a good college. Her path through life seemed set—St. Andrew's, college, potentially graduate school or a career in business, law or education. During college, she became pregnant. She left school, moved back home and had her baby. To help support her child, she began to work, putting her dreams aside for the reality of raising a family, caring for her child. Several years passed, and my friend married. She had other children and found joy in her husband and children. When her youngest child was just a baby, her husband told her that he had fathered a child with another woman.

My friend had arrived at a crossroad. Should she leave her husband who had been unfaithful? Should she raise her family alone? Should she forgive him and take the family back into her arms? What could possibly prepare my friend to make such a decision: faith in God, faith in her family, faith in her friends, teachers, role models throughout her life. Her love for her husband, her family, her belief in forgiveness enabled her to embrace her husband and move on.

On the night she forgave her husband, she asked him to bring the baby to the house and explain the situation to her older children. My friend's oldest child left the room in tears after hearing the father's story.

At that fragile moment, my friend went to her child's room, holding the baby that was not hers. This baby, she said to her child, is God's child. This baby has no role in your father's guilt. We must love and embrace them all. Together, they held the child and welcomed the baby into their family.

This is a story about forgiveness, compassion, courage and empathy. It is a story about reality, about the pain and opportunity of being alive and being human.

Could you leave college or graduate school and support a family by your own work and commitment? Could you forgive and express love and compassion in the way my friend did? Of course you could. You are only now dimly aware of the courage and fortitude that lie within you.

We are lucky to live amidst such beauty and comfort every day at St. Andrew's. But it is also good to know or to remember what it is to be cold, lonely, frightened, hungry. It is our human lot. When we lose touch with our essential human condition, we lose ourselves forever. Live like my friend does every day: Up at 5:40, at work by 6:15, at work until 4:00, with her kids by 5:00, at home putting them to bed at 9:00 after cooking dinner, in her kitchen studying for her educational degree at 10:00 p.m. She is my heroine, my inspiration, and I hope she becomes yours, too. She is a living embodiment of courage, faith, forgiveness, love and resilience.

On Teaching

Installation as Headmaster, December 1996

I want to thank Kitten Gahagan, Chair of the St. Andrew's Board of Trustees, and Henry Herndon, former President of the Board, for their presence and their support this evening. Both have led St. Andrew's with great care, creativity and wisdom over the years. I look forward to their counsel and advice in the coming years. I deeply appreciate other members of the Board who are here in this Chapel tonight....

I thank, too, my predecessors Dr. Pell, Bob Moss and particularly my mentor Jon O'Brien for their faithful stewardship of this school. It was two years ago tonight that Jon O'Brien announced his retirement and the Board of Trustees announced their selection of me as the School's fourth Headmaster. I will always appreciate Jon O'Brien's willingness to generously share a night with me that was rightly his.

Finally, I thank Professor Maddox for being here tonight with us. Few American educators are busier or more committed to their work than Jim. As professor of English at George Washington University and as director of the Bread Loaf School of English, he has made enormous contributions to the world of university and graduate school teaching.

During his tenure as Bread Loaf's director, he has assembled an outstanding and increasingly diverse faculty, created valuable programs that bring rural American teachers to Bread Loaf each summer, developed a world class theater program, expanded the school to campuses at Santa Fe and Alaska, and worked tirelessly to develop scholarship opportunities for Bread Loaf students. But most

importantly, I invited Jim here tonight because he is, quite simply, the very best teacher I have ever had.

I sat down the other day to count the number of teachers I had in my life who were truly excellent, who made me want to learn, who made me a better thinker, a better writer, who by the power of their wisdom, optimism and example made me become a better person. I counted four in my Buffalo public school #30: Mrs. Schinster in kindergarten, Mrs. Neafach in first grade, Mrs. Keller in second, Mrs. Hugget in fourth; I counted one in middle school, Mr. Ohlor in eighth-grade English; one in high school, my soccer coach and college advisor, Mr. Zeller, and four at Williams College—Professors Stocking, Graver, Knopp and Torgovnick. Three at Bread Loaf: Professors Kernan, Maddox, Bednaroska. That adds up to 13 teachers in 21 years of schooling.

Certainly the majority of my teachers were competent and dedicated to their task, and certainly I must have completely missed recognizing a teacher's brilliance because my mind was directed to other things. This probably happened more than I now care to admit. But my point is that great teaching is an unusual gift, in some ways a miraculous phenomenon. It is my deepest hope that St. Andrew's will continue to strive to be a place that celebrates excellence and inspiration in teaching.

Some 15 years ago, Mr. Speers was enrolled in Professor Maddox's course studying Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. I eagerly audited the class, for in college my most influential professor, Fred Stocking, had taught me *Ulysses* with incredible passion and brilliance. In fact, it was Stocking's course on Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce that convinced me that I wanted to be an English teacher or professor. For as we studied the works of these 20th-century writers, Stocking inspired us to ask and to answer fundamental questions about the meaning of life, questions that seemed to have particular resonance during a time when the nuclear menace of the Cold War was omnipresent in our minds. Stocking was a most

dignified and romantic man of 60 when I had him—he wore a glistening black cape with red lining as he strode gallantly through the streets of the College. As he taught, he read from his texts with remarkable sensitivity and clarity. He cared passionately about the works he taught to us. During my senior year, I was so inspired by Stocking’s teaching of *Ulysses* that I sat in the Williams physics library over a rainy spring weekend and read that book cover to cover, again and again, as I prepared for my exam.

Maddox’s class was different, yet even more dynamic, for he literally became the voice of Joyce’s Daedalus or Bloom as he lectured and analyzed on the text. One memorable week, Jim taught a good class covering Joyce’s initial presentation of Leopold Bloom as a character in the novel. But the next day, Jim began the class impatiently, muttering that he had not yesterday done justice to the vitality, the majesty, the humanity, the essence of Bloom. His teaching, he said, had not been worthy. So he taught the class again—he reintroduced the great literary character Leopold Bloom to us—with new energy, vitality and style. Fifty minutes later, my arm hanging down by my side as if I had pitched nine innings, I realized that the second effort, the second attempt, had been worthy of Joyce’s creation.

My other great teacher at Bread Loaf was Alvin Kernan, one of the great literary critics of our day, and a former teacher of Jim Maddox. He taught me an absolutely unbelievable class on Shakespearean tragedy—a short, middle-aged man in 1980, Kernan walked slowly into his classroom each day, casually opened up his battered leather briefcase, opened a simple binder and began to talk slowly, quietly—with great assurance and eloquence. We had virtually no discussions in this class. Once each week, I think it was Friday, Kernan would try a discussion section, but his heart and ours were not into it.

The power and brilliance of this class lay on the pages of those notebooks. His greatest lecture came as he worked through Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. His subject was Act IV, when Shakespeare seems to retreat from the remorseless descent into blood, violence and

despair of the first three acts of the play. Kernan analyzed the two remarkable moments of hope and regeneration at that point in the play: Edgar convincing, however awkwardly, his blinded father to live on and believe that his very life was a miracle; Cordelia bringing her father back to life by the power of love and forgiveness. Kernan developed his interpretation of these scenes with beautifully chosen quotations from his text. All 20 students sat silently that day, as Kernan closed his notebook, placed it in his old leather bag and began to move towards the door. For those 50 minutes, Kernan captured the mystery of the play and defined the essential qualities that make us human and that make us at our best heroic. No videotape, no multi-media devices were necessary. The play danced before our eyes as the professor lectured.

I awkwardly approached Kernan the next day to tell him that his lecture on Act IV of *Lear* had been outstanding, brilliant and remarkable. I had never spoken to Professor Kernan before that moment, nor did I ever speak to him again, though I continued to earnestly write papers for him. After my compliment and words of thanks, Kernan, seated comfortably in a chair in the Bread Loaf barn, looked up kindly and said simply: “It is a great play.”

The examples of Professors Stocking, Maddox and Kernan inspired me to be a teacher and today help me see quite clearly the mission, the calling I have in my new role as Headmaster. The task of the teacher, the administrator, is to develop and uncover the brilliance, the awesome majesty of our disciplines, our students, our schools. You see, St. Andrew’s, like *Lear*, is a great play. It is a work of art conceived over 65 years ago as a school dedicated to excellence in Christian education, as a school dedicated to being distinctively open for all to attend, regardless of financial means. My job now is the one best described by Maddox and Kernan—that is, to capture the School’s brilliance and potential, to interpret and read its inspiration, its humanity, its heroism, its design.

Of course, like a great work of art, St. Andrew’s will continue to

change, to develop, to speak distinctively to the needs of an American society that is changing with incredible rapidity. My reading of her potential, her responsibility, her greatness will, I hope, be original, creative and distinctive as well as wise and true to the mission of its Founder.

I have been at St. Andrew's now for 19 years—I literally never want to leave here—I like pretending I am the lead character in the novel *To Serve Them All His Days*. I believe that the students who attend this School are the greatest young people in the country. But one day I will leave. My only hope is that when I leave, St. Andrew's will remain a great work of art, a school that stands for the best in American education.

ST. ANDREW'S SCHOOL
Middletown, Delaware