

Chapel Talk  
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### Kirkin of the Tartan

Good evening. Tonight, we celebrate the Feast of St. Andrew with a special service known as the Blessing of the Tartan or the Kirkin' o' the Tartan. More on that in a minute. We also celebrate St. Andrew's Founders Day. When I was asked to speak tonight I said to Mrs. Brownlee that I thought I was an unusual choice as the speaker. I think what I said was that on Founders Day "We usually ask a grey haired alumnus to speak." She looked at me, waiting for me to get the joke."Uh, hon, you are a grey haired alum!" For those who don't know my story, my father attended St. Andrew's in the 1940s and I was a student here in the 1970s...back when all of this was in black and white...before we had color photos. When I come into this chapel I can remember vividly my own days as a student and it seems impossible that nearly four decades have passed.

As I prepared for this talk I was reminded of a conversation I had with Mr. Roach shortly after I returned to St. Andrew's to begin work, about six years ago. He told me the story of when his son, Matthew, was a III Former. About the third week of school, Matthew came home and said, "Dad, is there any form of life on this campus lower than a III Form boy?" Mr. Roach considered his answer carefully then looked at his son and said, "No, Matthew, I don't believe there is." Well, I am here to say that once there was a life form even lower than a III Form boy and that was a II Form boy. I arrived at St. Andrew's in the fall of 1970, not yet 13 years old, and scared out of my wits. I remember my parents bringing me to school, my mother dutifully putting away my clothes - every single article of which had my nametag sown into it...every shirt, jacket, pair of underwear, even my socks! She made my bed in my tiny little 6' x 8' cell...I mean alcove, in the East Dorm (now Fleming) and then with a quick kiss and a hug they were gone. We didn't have a cookout and square dance in those days. Dinner that first night was family style, in full classroom dress, and after dinner we marched down to this chapel. I remember vividly

sitting right about there, staring up at the austere Mr. Moss, our headmaster, who fixed us with a baleful glare and intoned something about turning boys into men. I really don't remember much of what he said as I was trying my best not to cry. Sometimes our first experience of "place" can form permanent associations, and it is a wonder that I didn't develop some permanent aversion to this chapel after that first evening. But quite the opposite happened...I found in this chapel a place of solace and comfort, and place to escape the pressure and pace of life at St. Andrew's, a place to sit peacefully with my own thoughts. I still feel this way every time I enter this chapel. This connection between place and our emotions can be very powerful...and ties into what I want to talk to you about this evening.

Tonight, on this Founders Day, as we celebrate the Blessing of the Tartan, I want to speak to you about the importance of tradition and heritage. We have just returned from Thanksgiving break, and I hope you all celebrated this time together with family and friends with your own traditions drawn from your family heritage. We gather tonight to celebrate our common heritage as members of the St. Andrew's family. Tonight we honor the Founders of this great School...almost 80 years to the day since the laying of the cornerstone located outside the main door leading to Mr. Roach's office. Tonight we want to celebrate the great teachers and headmasters who followed in the Founders' footsteps, faithful to the School's motto - Faith and Learning - while doing their best to guide the School to a true and authentic expression of its founding mission. Few of us knew any of those original leaders, but we all know their names: Pell, Fleming, Hillier, Baum, Sherwood, Schmolze, Cameron; these are far more than names on boys' dorms or gymnasiums. They were the teachers (masters we used to call them) who helped to raise generations of young men into adulthood. Bull Cameron, whose portrait hangs upstairs in the dining room above Mr. Brown's table, and who died during my II Form year, is for many alumni The Towering Figure of their years at St. Andrew's. Gruff, unflinching, steely-eyed, Mr. Cameron's bark "Boy!" could freeze you in your tracks and make you weak-kneed with fear. His love of literature and language accepted no compromise, but in his heart Mr. Cameron loved this School, loved his boys, and gave his entire adult life to St. Andrew's. One of my personal favorites was Mr. Schmolze, who came to teach at

St. Andrew's in 1931, in the second year of our existence as a school. He taught my father math in the 1940s and was still teaching when I came along in 1970. A bit long in the tooth by then, he was for me a direct connection to the earliest days of the School. With his trademark bow tie, and his bowl of sourballs sitting on his desk that he used to reward a particularly thorough and correct answer, Mr. Schmolze defined "old school". But he was dedicated to the moral and intellectual growth of every one of his students. He was a direct link to the beginning of the School and when he retired in 1975 the entire student body gathered at his house (today the home of Mr. and Mrs. DeSalvo) and we planted a tree in his honor. Today that tree is over 40 feet tall.

When I arrived, we also had a new generation of teachers who were already making their lasting mark on the legacy and heritage of St. Andrew's. Bill Amos, Bob Colburn and Dave Washburn joined the long line of distinguished masters and are honored today for their contributions in science and math as well as their legendary coaching on the athletic fields and the Pond.

We all know that St. Andrew's was originally conceived as a school "open to all regardless of means." In fact, in 1929 it was widely accepted that this meant open to "all white males regardless of means". It was not until 1969 that St. Andrew's welcomed its first African American student, David Grant. Just two years later, another African American student - Tom Hooper, a member of the class of 1971 and our board of trustees, was elected by his classmates to serve as president of the School. Many of you know Tom and the incredible work he is doing with Stacey Duprey and Treava Milton to connect alumni of color with their school, helping deepen our understanding of the School's diverse heritage. Three years after Tom graduated, during my junior year, St. Andrew's accepted its first female students, including Annie Imbrie Moore's mother, Alec Hills's mother and our own Mrs. Zendt. These amazing women pioneered a new era in the School's history, adding their own mark to the legacy and heritage of the School. Their great mentor was none other than Nan Mein, the first female member of the faculty who could stand toe to toe with any of the great masters I've already mentioned. Nan Mein single handily transformed the language of St. Andrew's. Before

Mrs. Mein, teachers were “masters” – with all the aloofness and austerity that the term conjures. From Nan onwards they became “teachers”, signifying a more collaborative and sympathetic approach. She was joined a few short years later by yet another new generation of teachers who began the transition of St. Andrew’s from a very good regional boarding school into a great national boarding school. Jon and Joannie O’Brien, Tad and Elizabeth Roach, Will Speers, and then Eric Kemer, Lindsay Brown, and Dave DeSalvo – the list keeps growing. Each of these men and women has carried the tradition and heritage of this School in their hearts, and through their craft and their passion for teaching have again transformed the relationship between student and teacher. Consider this: the Roaches and Mr. Speers have taught, coached and advised more than half of all alumni of St. Andrew’s School.

Today we continue to build the heritage and legacy of the School. Great schools like St. Andrew’s cannot, indeed must not, remain static. Each new class and each new member of the faculty make their own footprint on the pathway of St. Andrew’s. Indeed it is when members of our community take the risk to offer an insight into a culture different than the majority that we grow as a community. One of my favorite chapel services this year was the celebration of Diwali, led by Karishma, Chaitanya, Irene and Aisha. What a special gift it was to witness this extraordinary celebration of Hindu tradition and to have these students lead us in the spiritual music and prayers of their religion and culture.

So how does all this tie in to the Kirkin’ O’ the Tartan? This ceremony is part of the great Scottish tradition, and because St. Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland it is traditionally celebrated on St. Andrew’s Day, which is also when we celebrate Founders Day. While the tradition of the Kirkin’ O’ the Tartan is actually a 20<sup>th</sup> century celebration, it commemorates events that date back over 250 years.

If you know your history, you know that the English and the Scottish have been at times mortal foes and other times partners in peace. The Kirkin’ tradition goes back to a time when the English had the distinct upper hand and had thoroughly defeated the Scottish Army at the Battle of Culloden in April 1746, ending the Jacobite uprising of 1745 led by

Charles Edward Stuart, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie. Following the Battle of Culloden, the British Parliament passed the Act of Proscription, which outlawed the wearing of the tartan and playing of the bagpipe as symbols of Highland treachery against the crown. Not to be outdone, the wily Scots began a tradition of secretly bringing bits of tartan cloth into church on St. Andrew's Day, where the sympathetic minister would offer a blessing of the tartan and by extension their Highland independence.

In a moment, I will play on the bagpipe the Skye Boat Song, which tells the mournful tale of Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat at Culloden and his ignominious flight across the Sound of Sleat to the Isle of Skye in a rowboat, dressed as a maid, so as not to be detected by the English dragoons.

Each clan had their own unique tartan. Tonight I am wearing the kilt of the MacKay Clan in honor of my own heritage. My great grandmother, Maggie MacKay, emigrated from Scotland in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Clan badge on my kilt pin and on the hat I wear bears the crest of the MacKay Clan with its motto "Manu Forti" – "With a Strong Hand" My socks were knitted by my mother nearly 15 years ago, a labor of love since her hands were already showing signs of the crippling arthritis that would claim her life just three years later. I am proud of my heritage and chose to pick up the bagpipe as a tribute to my family lineage.

Tonight, we bless the St. Andrew's School Tartan. When I formed the Pipes & Drums four years ago, we discussed what kilt we might wear. Through Mrs. Zendt, we were put in touch with a Scottish weaver in North Carolina who said he would create a tartan unique to St. Andrew's School. The students in the band helped to design this pattern that you see on the altar before you and on the kilts worn by our pipers this evening. This tartan bears the School colors– the red and white of the cross of St. Andrew. Tonight, we bless this tartan as a symbol of the great tradition and heritage of our School. The weave of the tartan reflects the weaving of our lives together here in this School, this year. It also reflects the weaving together of our lives with every student and teacher who has come before us.

Nearly 80 years ago, a small group of 35 boys and 9 faculty and staff gathered in the old chapel, located approximately where the school store sits today and asked God to bless their new school, committing themselves to become a community of scholars, athletes, artists and to help them to serve their community. Tonight, let us renew that prayer and recommit ourselves to a life of service to this community and to the world.

I would like to close with a quote from Bull Cameron, speaking about our Founder, Alexis Felix duPont. Mr. Cameron was speaking to the students in 1961, but his words hold true and dear for us today:

“I hope you can see a man in the world, who knew the world and hoped to see it a better one. I hope you can see a man whose love was large, whose sense of Christian charity and Christian commitment were great and personal things. I hope you can see a man who saw in a Christian school the light and hope of the world. For that was the man, that was his hope, and we are his hope and his School.”