

# Faculty Address

Parents, staff, friends, and fellow alumni, welcome to the convocation of the class of 2018. This is not only a day when we recognize those graduating, but also those who have been dedicated servants of the school. Over a century of teaching experience is leaving the school, including one of my former teachers, and their examples serve as better inspiration than anything I can say here today.

Before I begin, I'd just like to point out that, although I heard from MacKenzie that I'd be speaking almost a month ago, the seniors only officially asked me a few days ago. Seniors, I commend your dedication to senioritis in all aspects of your final year, and appreciate that you found one last opportunity to procrastinate. That's what "best efforts" is all about.

This is it, seniors, only hours to go until you join the community of alumni who have passed through this school. You will be part of a laudable group that includes dedicated doctors, brilliant Ph.Ds, tenured college professors, tech world moguls, published authors, successful CEOs, tireless UN officials, and high school teachers. I am confident that each and every one of you will add much to this community.

Just a couple of years ago, 17 to be exact, I found myself sitting on the Graduation Lawn looking back at a long and checkered career at Saint George's, while waiting for the kind words and my diploma. Admittedly, I don't remember too much from the day. I remember a graduation speech punctuated by the loud declaration of each senior's name, echoing through this valley. I remember a great piece of advice that I'll pass on to you: stay in school as long as you can, and travel on your parent's dime as much as possible.

Mostly what I recall from that day, was a sense of elation at the prospect of leaving this place behind, which perhaps some of you are experiencing right now. I was mentally packing my bags, thinking about college and all it offered, in and out of class. I had grand

David Holte '02 addresses the Graduation audience



plans. I was going to go to college, amaze my professors, go to graduate school, and change the world!

And, just shy of ten years after leaving, I was back, applying to teach in a room where I had once taken classes. When I left Saint George's, I certainly didn't imagine myself back here, but, now that I'm here, it's difficult to imagine wanting to do anything else. What now seems like a linear, clear route back to Saint George's, was in fact a crooked path of missed opportunities, timely assistance from friends and family, and good fortune. So, follow your grand plans and see where they take you, but be prepared to change course, encounter setbacks, and try something new. I am confident in your ability to succeed and make sense of it all in the end.

And, while you are pursuing your degrees and your careers, don't forget about the larger communities of Saint George's, Spokane, and beyond. Think about yourself, your education, and your career, but not to the detriment of a community.

As part of a community, you have a responsibility to be nice. Yes, I know this is advice that you've received from your parents, your coaches, and from every teacher you've ever had. You might ask yourselves why you keep getting this advice year after year after year.... In all seriousness though, you are among the kindest, most gracious

classes that have come through the school. Kindness is important, as it fosters and exemplifies the respect that each member of the community deserves, and it reinforces the mutual dependence that makes a community successful.

There are times, however, that you need to be a little rebellious. I hesitate about offering this piece of advice, as some of you are already experts in this particular field, but, now that you're about to be someone else's problem, I want you encourage you to cause some trouble. And, I'm not only speaking of the trivial kind of trouble that you often witness around our school, for things like, hiding a banana in Hayes's room, placing a rooster in the courtyard, or taking a teacher's paper mache pig hostage to get a better grade. Instead, disagree, respectfully, with your professors, engage in protest, and demand more from those around you. Most of all, avoid sacrificing what is right for harmony.

I also encourage you to find ways to humble yourselves—ego and self-aggrandizement have no place in a community. Humility endows us with respect for the world and people around us. It enables us to learn, and be empathetic. It gives us perspective. I don't have to look far to find ways to humble myself—studying history provides ample opportunity to reflect on how little I've accomplished compared to others.

Finding humility is one of the reasons I appreciate spending time in the outdoors—and encourage all of you to do the same. Nothing fills you with more awe for the world around you than seeking shelter in a lightning storm, or being unceremoniously tossed from a packraft in front of students while floating down a Montana river—the outdoors might not tell us who we are, but at least they show us our true size.

Lastly, teaching all of you has continually reminded me that there are plenty of people

who are already much smarter than I am, and that I have plenty to learn from those around me.

And that, I hope, is a lesson you will take with you. You have intellectual curiosity, but do you have curiosity about those around you? One of my heroes, civil rights activist Ella Baker, believed in the idea of the organic intellectual—the idea that everyone has value and is capable of contributing. By accepting that, Baker believed that she could learn from everyone, from the philosopher with a Ph.D. to the sharecropper working a field in rural Mississippi. You won't learn the same thing from each person, but, they are both experts in their own way and they both have value.

She believed, as I do, that the most significant change begins at the personal level. Change begins with a personal connection between a recent college graduate and an old, uneducated store-owner, as they did for the Freedom Summer. Or, it begins with a small group of formerly anonymous women in Montgomery, who laid the foundation for a bus boycott.

I realize, that in these polarized times, it can be difficult and grueling to find value in others, but I ask that you try. Make connections with people, ask them questions about themselves, treat them with respect, learn what you can from them, give them comfort, and be conscientious. In doing so, you will foster a community that helps you thrive, and you will help people in ways you will never fully realize.

Seniors, it's been a pleasure to help you on your way at Saint George's. I expect much from each and every one of you and have no doubt that each of you will find your own success out there. Congratulations and best of luck. Now, get to work, stay out of trouble, and have a good one. Thanks.

— David Holte '02,

*Upper School History Teacher*

**The Class of 2018 on  
Graduation Bridge  
before the start of the  
ceremony on May 20.**

