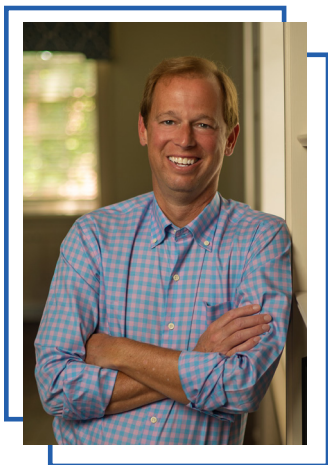




## A McCallie Family Meeting: Diversity, Inclusion and Brotherhood



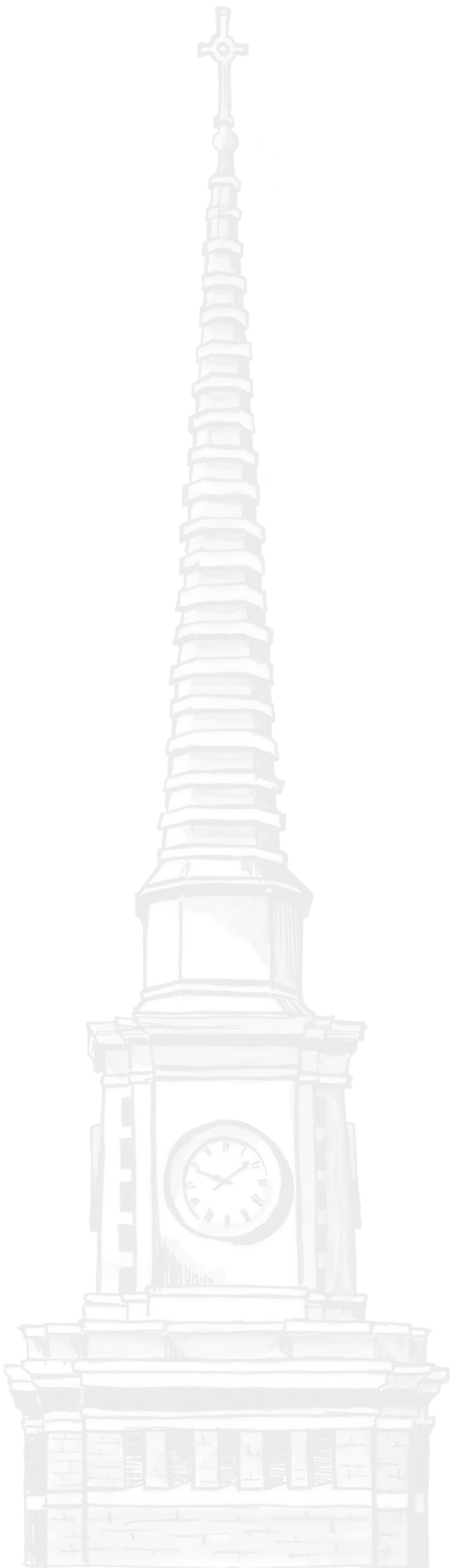
*from the Head of School*

I asked us to assemble this morning in the heart of this campus to see connections—connections between our founding and history as a school and our present and future; connections between the Christian foundation and principles of McCallie and how we can faithfully give expression to them in 2020; connections between faith and action; connections between failings of the past and lessons for now, between discomfort and growth; connections between strength and diversity, between love and inclusion; between who you are and who God is.

I ask us to assemble today in the spirit of a family meeting—a McCallie family meeting that has grown out of a previous McCallie family meeting.

115 years ago, in the spring of 1905, the McCallie family—the Reverend T Hook McCallie and his wife and many of their 18 children—gathered just a few feet from where you now sit to contemplate the idea of transforming their family farm into a school, dedicated to the glory of God in Christ, to serve boys from Chattanooga and beyond. The aim of the school would not simply be outstanding academic preparation for excellent colleges around the country, but it would expand boys’ visions of who they are and what they might do with their lives; it would imbue them with a sense of duty, a finely textured character rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and a calling to lead lives of glorifying and enjoying God.

You and I also sit or stand this morning on the site of an 1863 battlefield where young men, many of them approximately the age of you upper school students, spilled their blood to fight for a cause that the United States might more fully live out the ideals of its founding and of its noble principles of equality, freedom and justice that found expression in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.



Though the Civil War and the founding of McCallie were generations ago, we can and should still hear their echoes as we walk the same land our forefathers did, as we journey on paths they cleared for us...and on paths they then entrusted to us to maintain, to steward, to continue to clear, not just for us, but for our younger brothers and sons of the upcoming generations.

The McCallie School today is not simply an institution of 2020, but we are intertwined with our past and future. As William Faulkner wrote in *Requiem For A Nun*, “The past is never dead, it’s not even past.” And your experience at McCallie not only flows from our past, but it shapes the future of McCallie as well. McCallie is bigger than and transcends any one moment in time.

But this is an especially important time in the long and storied history of our great school, and it is about this moment that I want to speak with you this morning. You and I are blessed to attend or serve at one of the finest schools in America. The quality of faculty who teach, mentor, coach and advise you, and of the staff who directly or indirectly serve students and faculty here, is remarkable. They are committed not simply to your intellectual growth and academic preparation, but to your development as a person; to your well-being, your spiritual formation and character, your social and emotional and physical growth. You have a team of wise adult mentors who are here to walk alongside you as trusted guides, to inspire you, to cheer you on, and to love you during the often challenging and confusing teenage years. And they and we as a school are here for you throughout your lives, well after your graduation.

You and I are blessed to attend or serve at a school with remarkable resources. These resources give us not only the tools and spaces for wonderful opportunities for learning and growth, but they enable us, with a spirit of courage and adventure, to dream boldly and pursue vigorously the type of school we might envision and design.

You and I are blessed to attend or serve at a school that is clear about who we are and what our mission is. We have been and remain a school committed to a Christian foundation and principles and our Judeo-Christian heritage and tradition while also welcoming and respecting boys of other faith traditions. That means, among other things, that we look to the Old and New Testaments to see what God teaches us about Himself, ourselves and life and how He calls us to order our lives, including to love others and be sacrificial and grace-filled consistent with the life and teachings of His Son Jesus.

And you and I are blessed to attend or serve at a school not just with a culture of excellence, but with a powerful sense of brotherhood. We are not simply a school or a community, but we are a family. We are the McCallie family, and we strive to live as a family, as brothers.

And yet at this particular moment in the history of McCallie, we must pause and recognize, with sadness and regret, that some McCallie boys, both in our history and even today, have not felt or experienced the fullness and best of McCallie. They have been left behind or left out...or felt less than. Some have experienced great pain and shame; some have felt deeply lonely and the need to hide; others have experienced distress, even crisis.

I am speaking in particular and primarily about McCallie alumni and students who are black or brown and those who are gay or bisexual.



It has pained me very deeply to read or hear from some alumni, and from some of you, about these experiences. While very difficult for me to read or hear, I am grateful for the willingness and courage of those who shared them. **And while our intent of course has been and is to love well every McCallie boy, we have fallen short, and I am sorry for that to those of you and others for whom we have not expressed or expressed well the love, respect and support that would be ideal and that is generally emblematic of McCallie.**

Each one of you, and every human being, is created in the image of God and thus worthy of dignity, respect and love. God made us all as His children, and He calls us to love one another as He first loved us. We honor Him by respecting and loving one another.

Though we are all made by God in His image, we have some differences, but those differences, that diversity, may point us to or reveal the fullness of who God is and His love for all of us.

If you are from Chattanooga or China, you are, with fullness and equality, McCallie. No matter your religion or ethnicity, you are, with fullness and equality, McCallie. If your skin is black or brown or white, you are, with fullness and equality, McCallie. If you are gay or straight, no matter what your sexual attraction may be, you are, with fullness and equality, McCallie. Every one of you should be seen, valued and heard...and treated with respect, dignity, love and equality.

**There's not a right or better way to be a McCallie man. You are all McCallie. We are all McCallie...who we are and how we are.**

As humans, though, we are often most comfortable with those who are most like us. We can naturally gravitate toward individuals who look the most like us, have similar hobbies or interests or backgrounds or beliefs, and tend to view the world in the same ways that we do.

While that may be more comfortable, it's also a more narrow and smaller way to live. It's a practice that limits your learning and growth and leaning into the fullness and richness of who you are and the life you can lead. It can also limit your view of who God is and the majesty of His image and creation.

It's also different from how Jesus led His life and what He teaches us to do. Jesus sought out those from cultures and backgrounds different from his own. He invited a hated Roman tax collector to dine with him. He blessed the poor. He challenged and encouraged the rich young ruler. He restored His broken disciples who both ministered with and deserted Him. He loved the poor and the powerful, the marginalized and the misunderstood, the unseen and the

unheard. His love was unconditional, far-reaching and radical, breaking through barriers and biases, meeting each person in his or her particular brokenness and place of need. Through his life and death, He reconciled all humans to God and to one another.

**Throughout the Scriptures, God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to seek justice and mercy, to pursue the peace and prosperity of our cities, for the powerful and privileged to advocate for the downtrodden and disadvantaged.** Jesus Himself washed the dirty feet of His disciples. And we are instructed to be gentle with one another, patient, and of a unified spirit flowing from love, the preeminent ethic of the Christian faith.

We don't have to look far or for long to see that we as a society today fail sometimes, even frequently, as we try to find our way in a fallen world. Those failings and shortcomings have especially been on display and in focus on how Americans who are black or brown or gay or bisexual have been treated. African-Americans have fewer high caliber educational opportunities, earn less money for the same jobs, and are treated more harshly by our law enforcement and justice system. Individuals, including teenagers, who are gay or bisexual have significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide. There are certainly other forms of discrimination and disadvantage that such individuals and others face, as well as words and actions, whether inadvertent or intentional, that cause pain and hurt... and righteous anger with urgent demands for change.

It's easy for us to sit here today and agree that, yes, individuals who are black or gay or are part of other minority groups face these disadvantages and discrimination in our society, but then say I believe in fairness for them all, and I personally treat them well, and I have friends of other races or orientations, so it's not my problem, or not a problem here, or it's a problem rooted in or primarily of the past and not a present responsibility...certainly not a condition for which I'm to blame or a problem for me to bare and solve.

That's a logical argument on the surface, I think, but it's also a flawed one that fails to recognize blindspots and biases we may have. Moreover, it falls short of Biblical teachings for how we as individuals are to act to our neighbors and the disadvantaged and the sort of just society God prescribes for us. It doesn't account for the sense of duty we have to others. It fails to fully honor others. It's comfortable but not courageous, especially for us at a school with the ideals that guide us and whose graduates will help lead and shape our world.

But what does that mean for McCallie today, for this school year, for us as individuals and a community, for us as a family? It means we are going to be more intentional about making sure that those of you who are black or brown or of different nationalities, and those of you who are gay or bisexual, are

heard, seen, valued and loved. It means we are going to make sure that every boy here is treated with respect, dignity, equality and love. It means I'm asking you to speak to me directly if you don't feel that you are treated in accordance with this high standard.

**We have begun work on this with initial meetings with students and faculty training, and six task forces as part of a comprehensive initiative called “Moving Forward Together as Brothers,” and there will be some new and different things we will do in the coming weeks and months and certainly by the end of the school year.**

There is a lot of listening and learning we are doing and need to do — both for students and faculty and staff. And we will do so intently, even as we acknowledge that some of this may be uncomfortable. Our work will include, among other things, considerations of curriculum, teaching and training; diversity among students, as well as faculty and staff; spaces and ways to best support students; and certain policies and practices. We will do this in a comprehensive and methodical way, consistent with our institutional beliefs and identity, and as quickly as we can while not rushing it. This is too important to rush. And it's also too important to delay or move slowly.

In the meanwhile, I reiterate what was said at Convocation and what is clearly stated in the Blue Book. There is no place at McCallie for bullying or harassment based on a person's race,

religion, culture, country of origin, sexual identity or orientation or expression or any other identity, and violations of that may include suspension or expulsion.

Sometimes, members of our school have been hurt by the words of others who did not realize the pain and power of what they said or did. Our words and actions can have a different impact on the hearer than the intent of the speaker. Jokes about race and sexual identity or orientation or expression are not funny and have no place here. The n-word is never appropriate to be said—no exceptions, no passes. It's wrong to say gay as an insult or slur. The word fag or faggot also does not belong here and will not be tolerated.

These are our standards, our rules, for the privilege of being here, but what's even more important is what you are going to do in your conversations with your friends and classmates. Will your words and your posts online demonstrate a commitment to the dignity of others and to respectful dialogue? Will you speak up or be silent when someone crosses a boundary? Will you be courageous in correcting a classmate or comment? Will you be a leader?

Will you spend more time with people who are different from you? Will you listen more to other people? Will you expand your circle of friends? Will you be humble, believing that you can learn from others, that you may be wrong about some things,



that there are a lot of things you don't know or could change your mind about? Will you see the shallowness and smallness of stereotypes? Will you be quick to say I'm sorry? Will you be willing to forgive? Will you be willing to extend grace, to give second chances, to assume the best from others?

I hope you will be good listeners and critical thinkers, humble and open-minded. Those mature skills of social-emotional intelligence will serve you well in your relationships, communities and leadership roles throughout your lives. You can practice those habits while also holding to your beliefs and ideas...and even advocating for them.

In a school our size, or a school any size really, there are things about which people will disagree, and that's fine, even desirable and healthy. It brings intellectual vitality and a richness to the community. But we can and must agree that we will respect each other and have discussions in civil ways, without trying to shame or embarrass one another, without attacking or vilifying someone, publicly or privately, in person or on a social media platform. And if you're really interested in influencing someone to your beliefs or faith or way of seeing the world, the best way to do that is to show them you care about them, to treat them really well. Your actions will speak louder than your words. A demonstration of love to them is far more effective than a denunciation of them or judging them or debating them. But at the end of the day, love isn't agreeing with someone or affirming what some of their ideas or practices may be; it's acting with kindness, compassion and respect to them, especially to those with whom we may disagree. Jesus tells us even to love our enemies, to forgive and pray for them. If we are to treat enemies that way, how much better ought we to treat individuals with whom we simply hold different beliefs or practices within a community? God does not call us necessarily to agree with each other, but to love one another.

These are hard things to do, and things the adults in our country are largely failing at. We live in divisive times of polarization and political rancor, but my sole focus is on this: what is best for you as students at McCallie, and how we can best give expression to who we are as a school? I'm convinced that we can maintain this focus and that we can do hard things at McCallie, pulling together when society is pulling apart. We need not aspire to look like society, but inspire society to look to us.

**We can and should be a school where we support each other, where we meet each other where we are and how we are.** And as teenagers, you face a multitude of challenges and opportunities to wrestle with who you are and what you believe—in short, starting to develop your identity, which is arguably the most important task of adolescence. Developing your identity is neither easy nor fast, and you may find it to be fluid, but it's essential that you do so, and we are here to help, guide, counsel and support you, whoever you are, wherever you are on that journey.

But whatever your emerging identity may be now and in the future, I encourage you to see it holistically, with a big picture in mind, with wonder at who this God of the Bible is. You are more than the grades you make, the games or instruments you play, the school you attend or the job you may seek or hold. You are more than the color of your skin or your country or culture or community. You are more than the sexual attractions you feel, your romantic interests or relationships. You are more than what your parents want from you and more than the expectations of others. You are more than your desires and choices. You are more than your mind or your body. You are more than your successes. You are more than your failures.

I hope each of you will feel known, nurtured and loved here as a foretaste of the far more powerful ways that God knows you intimately and loves you unconditionally as His child. And may the certainty and security of that give you the confidence to live with boldness and joy, faith and trust, optimism and gratitude.

I'm optimistic about you and us and grateful to be here with you at McCallie, at this hard but historic moment when we can link arms together as brothers, McCallie brothers, to give each other—every single one of you—the best of McCallie, the best of ourselves, so that we can each be our best self. May God bless each of you and this school, now and always.

I invite you to stand for our prayer, led by Dean Sholl, and remain standing as we sing the alma mater.

This talk was delivered on October 27, 2020, to Upper School students and faculty by Head of School Lee Burns '87.

Additional information about McCallie's Diversity, Inclusion, and Brotherhood initiative can be found at [www.mccallie.org/about/diversity-inclusion-and-brotherhood](http://www.mccallie.org/about/diversity-inclusion-and-brotherhood)