

McCALLIE

— HONOR TRUTH DUTY —



Opening Convocation 2022

Remarks by Head of School Lee Burns '87
Convocation, Wednesday, August 17, 2022

Welcome to Convocation 2022. The word 'convocation' comes from the Latin word *convocare* which means "to call together; to assemble." We are *called together* this morning to ceremonially mark the 118th start of a McCallie School year.

We gather as a community of 979 students, the largest enrollment in school history. Students, you come from 28 different states and 16 countries around the world. Sixth graders join us from 32 different elementary schools. We welcome 14 faculty and staff members. They hail from places far and near, bringing a variety of interests and expertise to McCallie. This moment begins the journey of this school year. I welcome each of you. You are here for a reason. And you belong here.

We enter this new year full of excitement, newness, and hope. For many, you start the year with a sense of comfort, routine, and familiarity because you are returning. For the other 247 of you who are new students or new faculty, there, understandably, may be trepidation and nervousness because you are entering a new place with lots of new people. But, more than that, you are joining a new community, and you are wondering if, and how, you will belong. Community and belonging are central to our health, wellness, performance, and overall success as individuals and as a school. Community and belonging are essential in order for us to thrive. So, I want to make a few important points about community and belonging at McCallie.

Community

'Community' is so easy to say. It is one of those words people throw around without much thought. But the meaning of community and the role it plays in people's lives is complex. Understanding

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community in a deeper way will help us tend to our well-being and will help us deliberately extend McCallie's sense of community and belonging to everyone at our school.

First and foremost, community is not a place, a building, an institution, or a campus. Having a lot of people in one place does not mean they are a community. Community is about people – what they hold in common, how they interact, and how they care for one another. A community has common core values, a common purpose, a common bond. Members of a community have a sense of trust, safety, and caring for each other. The feeling of community comes in part from shared experiences and a sense of a shared history.

McCallie is a community woven together by our shared values and experiences. Our motto – man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever – inspire us. It reminds us that we are a part of a story bigger than ourselves, that we have duties and responsibilities to God and to others, and that there is joy, peace, and purpose in loving God and one another. Honor, Truth, and Duty are both a foundation and a way of life for students, faculty, staff, and graduates. These ideals remind us to do the right and honorable thing, to be trustworthy and truthful, to seek the Truth—about God, about the world, about ourselves. Our common purpose is not simply or primarily to be smart or successful, but to develop men of character, faith and intellect, men who will serve and make a positive difference in the world.

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As a community, we share values of hard work and high expectations, of kindness and compassion, of accountability and grace, of excellence and humility. We value wellness and balance and play and laughter. Additionally, McCallie's shared history is passed down through each generation, giving students a sense of connection with those who came before them. You are part of a long blue line of approximately 15,000 boys who have gone before you, who studied, sweated, played, and prayed right here, who shaped the culture, reputation, and opportunities you enjoy today. You stand on their shoulders; you walk in their paths,

passing over their footsteps and fingerprints. You join in a deep blue brotherhood with them. In a few minutes, we will link arms around each other's shoulders as we sing the alma mater, as has been done for almost a century. It's a visible marker of the brotherhood on this Ridge, which is a brotherhood you will carry with you the rest of your lives. The brotherhood at McCallie is powerful and palpable. It is a source of strength. It cuts across age and generation, across race and religion, across ethnicity, sexual orientation, country, geography, demography. Each of you is McCallie. We are all McCallie. We are brothers.

A strong and healthy community cares about what they have in common, starting with the fact that all of us are children created in the image of God and thus worthy of dignity and respect. This does not mean that we all have to be exactly alike, but that we are united by the values, purpose, history, and experiences that we share. Our commitment to what we have in common allows us to care and respect each other. To be loyal to one another. To be truthful with one another. To be open, transparent, and genuine. To see and honor differences but to value our commonality

more. We build each other up with our words and actions. We never use a word that is a slur based on a person's identity, background or characteristic. There are no passes or exceptions. We never demean or disrespect anyone. We stand up for each other. We take a stand for what is right. We are a band of brothers.

To foster a strong, healthy, and close community, we need to interact regularly. You can share something in common that you care about, and you can care about each other, but if you do not frequently interact

with each other, you are not in community. We have close to 250 new students, faculty, and staff on our campus this year. How can we help each of them become members of our community who feel connected, passionate, and that they belong? One way to start is to invite interaction. Seek out students you don't know. Introduce yourself. Ask them about their life, their history, their interests. Listen for what you hold in common. Learn from that which is different. Only when each of us cares about the community as a whole and takes responsibility for making it strong and healthy, can we nurture positive relationships between ourselves and other members of the community. As a community, we acknowledge our interdependence and we work to incorporate new members.

Belonging

Being surrounded by other people in a community doesn't guarantee a sense of belonging. Belonging is that feeling of connectedness to a group or community. It is the sense that you're part of something. You feel attached, close and thoroughly accepted. You feel seen, heard, and understood. You feel that among your group or community you can be authentically who you are. You feel that the group matters to you, and you matter to the group. A sense of belonging is more about the quality of interpersonal relationships than the quantity of such relationships. Having positive interactions, getting to know who people are below the surface level, and being emotionally sensitive to their needs is the way to develop their sense of belonging to the community. At McCallie I often talk about our being a family. What I mean by this is that we are a community that has strong, close relationships with each other, that we care about each other, care and pray for the well-being of others. We love each other, like family.

Belonging is a necessary ingredient for our performance—individually, on teams and for McCallie as a whole. If you feel like you belong, you can more effectively engage and bring out your best selves. Belonging is good for our individual physical, mental and emotional health, and it's critical to the health of our community. Since belonging is so important, we must be intentional about creating it with and among others. These are some tangible ways we can create belonging:



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Join groups. There are so many clubs, activities, teams, orchestras, and small groups. Joining a group allows you to be part of something with a manageable number of people. Joining 3 or 4 groups means you are developing a sense of being known and valued with 3 or 4 different sets of people. Get involved. And try something new. Take a chance. McCallie is a safe place for exploring, being adventurous, and making mistakes.

Be authentic. Trust is built when you are authentic. Let others get to know you. Interact and engage. Listen to others, too. You can create the conditions for belonging when you are open and vulnerable as well as when you are empathetic toward others. McCallie is a safe place to explore who you are and to be who you are.

Extend acceptance. Hospitality is the welcoming of strangers, and generosity is an offer with no expectation of return. We can offer generous hospitality to the newest members of our community, inviting them to join in, be a part, and share their stories. We want to affirm that they have come to McCallie – the right place for the right reasons – and our kindness reassures them of that. Taking responsibility for our community means that we each ensure that the people around us feel safe and welcome. We do this by asking questions, listening, and demonstrating focused attention, by being present. Everyone at McCallie should feel like they belong, that they are seen, heard, respected, and valued. It is up to us to make sure this happens for each member, old and new, of our community.

McCallie is a special place. It is a special place because of our community. School spirit, positive interactions, and lifelong relationships permeate this place. Let's make sure this is true for everyone. Keep an eye out for those among us who are new and away from home, and let's help them see and feel McCallie as home and family – a place of support where we learn from each other and grow together as a tightly knit community of big blue brotherhood.

Let's make it a great year.

