

McCALLIE

— HONOR TRUTH DUTY —



“A Battlefield. A Farm. A Home. A Ridge.”

Convocation Remarks
by Head of School Lee Burns '87
Wednesday, August 16, 2023

For the 119th time, McCallie boys, faculty, and staff assemble to begin a new school year. I extend a warm welcome to each of you, and especially to the many of you who are new this year to our family. We gather as 977 students from 23 states and 18 countries, and from 32 different elementary schools for our new 6th graders.

As you sit here this morning, it is natural and expected to feel a range of emotions – excited, anxious, perhaps scared. I think you will soon realize that McCallie is a warm and welcoming school, that you are here for a reason, that you belong, that you will be known, loved and valued, and that you will thrive here.

I hope you come to understand that you are part of the larger history and story of McCallie, that you can draw strength and inspiration from it, and that it places on you a call and duties that will challenge and stretch you, sharpen your character, deepen your faith, and bring out your best.

We gather on the site of a Civil War battlefield where, in the 1860's, the destiny of our country was shaped...a place where battles were waged and won for freedom and equality, for respect and dignity. About 20 years later, in 1882, this battlefield became a farm and home for a pastor and his family. The Reverend Thomas Hooke McCallie and his wife, Ellen, had 16 children, and they moved from downtown Chattanooga to the countryside – here on Missionary Ridge – after his retirement at First Presbyterian Church. When the McCallie family moved from the city to their new farm, they built a two-story home. As the family grew, they later built a three-story Victorian home near Founders Dorm behind you. In these homes, they laughed and loved, read and wrote, prayed and played. They placed a high value on education and sent their children to some of the country's leading colleges.



In the spring of 1905, 26-year-old Park McCallie, who had earned his PhD in astronomy and also participated in graduate studies in theology at the University of Virginia, contacted his 30-year-old brother, Spencer McCallie, at the University of Chicago to float the idea of their starting a school in Chattanooga. They wanted boys from around the southeast to have the same educational opportunities with which they had been blessed. So, they wrote to their parents about the idea. They hoped to use the family's land and home for their new school, and they needed financial resources as well.



On June 1, 1905, their father wrote back to them to express support for the idea and offered them the family's land and resources. He said, "The glory of God in Christ could be and should be your aim in your school. You would expect to make it a Christian school, and exercise a good, wholesome Christian influence on your pupils."

Over the next 99 days, these two relatively young brothers renovated a house into classrooms, converted the McCallie home into a dormitory, built a gym, developed curriculum and programs, hired a faculty, and recruited both day and boarding students. On September 21, 1905, miraculously, providentially, McCallie School opened with 64 boys.

Two of McCallie's most formative pillars were soon thereafter established: the Honor Code and our motto, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We stand today as a school built on this foundation, and upon the service and sacrifices of men and women who have taught, coached, advised, led, mentored, challenged, loved, and guided boys with remarkable faithfulness and loyalty throughout the decades. Faculty and staff today are equally committed, dedicated and talented, and they will be powerful guides and companions who will help shape – and even transform you – as they walk alongside you on your journey to manhood.

As you look around this morning and contemplate this story and this place, you should see and sense that we are situated on the side of a steep ridge steeped in history. Our history and our geography are both symbolic and instructive in defining who we are and how we should think about this year in front of us.



Battlefields are places of sacrifice and valor. Boys and young men, many of them not much older than you, fought for ideals and values in striving to shape the course of their country in the 1860's. They had a big picture, a noble goal, and a sense of purpose. They displayed courage in the midst of challenge and fear. They were resilient amidst struggles

and setbacks. McCallie is a school that asks you to devote yourselves, sacrificially, to noble ideals and values which can guide you. These values begin with glorifying and enjoying God. They include the ideals of Honor, Truth and Duty. They challenge us to do the right and noble thing – not the easy and convenient thing – and to seek and speak the truth. Our values call us to treat each other, including and especially those with different backgrounds

and beliefs, with respect, dignity, and compassion. These ideals guide and animate us. They rally and unite us, like battle cries. They inspire us. Our values, though, are counter-cultural in today's world and not easy to live out. In many ways, they are under attack. You will encounter struggles and setbacks. You will need to display courage and commit to them; you will need to stand up and stand strong.



Farms are places of growth and sustenance. Ellen and the Reverend Thomas Hooke McCallie, with their 16 children, planted and worked the fields. They tended carefully to their livestock. The fruits of the farm nourished their family and others. McCallie, like a farm, is a place of nourishment and sustenance. Your teachers, coaches, and advisors are here to encourage and support you. They are wise and trusted guides and mentors. They, like farmers and gardeners, tend carefully to your growth and to cultivating an environment designed to help you flourish, even through moments and seasons of struggle, through droughts and storms as well as on warm and sunny days. McCallie is a home, and we are a family. Homes and families are built on relationships; on knowing and caring for one another; on seeing and meeting the needs of others; on extending helping hands of friendship and warm welcome. Homes and families are safe places for taking chances and for being vulnerable. They are built on trust. They are fortified by bonds of brotherhood. We are a band of brothers.

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McCallie is a community. While we are from many different backgrounds with different beliefs, experiences, and identities, we share common values about how we treat one another, about how we do life together here. In your advisor groups or home bases in the upcoming days, you will read, discuss, and sign the following document that delineates the key foundational principles of the McCallie community. I will read that to you now.

Foundational Principles of Our Community

Being a student at McCallie is a privilege that comes with duties and responsibilities to live up to the standards that help make McCallie the special school that we are. A significant part of those duties and responsibilities center on how we treat each other. How students interact with one another shapes our school culture and community. McCallie is a community, not simply a collection of individuals, and as a community, we hold certain principles. Additionally, individual actions represent and reflect on our community and on fellow students in a broad, even public way.

These principles are not optional or always easy, but they are essential and required to be a McCallie student. They apply in all settings, both on campus and off, and each day of the entire 365-day year, not just on school days.

These principles are based on key Biblical teachings that anchor our school. These particularly include the belief that all human beings are created by God in His image and thus have inherent value, worth, and dignity. Additionally, God calls us to love one another, serve each other, and have a spirit of kindness, compassion, peace, and grace with others, including and especially those who are different.

McCallie students agree to the following:

I understand the importance of the principles of the McCallie community and commit myself to them.

I recognize that the Honor Code at McCallie is foundational to how we operate as a community, and I will understand, embody, and strive to live out its principles in my interactions with others as well as in all my endeavors, academic, extra-curricular, social, and otherwise.

I understand that every McCallie student should be entitled to feel welcome; enjoy emotional, psychological, and physical well-being; and be free from words and actions that are demeaning, discriminatory, or mean-spirited.

I will treat my fellow students with respect and dignity, including and especially those students whose backgrounds and beliefs may be different from my own.

I will promote the peace and unity of the school community, including and especially with my words and actions. I will endeavor to be fully present and engaged.

I will be open to listening to, being challenged by, and learning from my fellow students, and, when I may disagree with them, I will do so with civility.

I understand that my words, both spoken and written, are powerful and can either build up or tear down, and I take responsibility for them and for using them in ways that are consistent with our community principles.

I understand that any videos, images, sounds, etc., which I produce or share, are powerful and can either build up or tear down, and I take responsibility for them and for using them in ways that are consistent with our community principles.

I will be open to forgiveness, grace, and repair – both in giving it and receiving it for myself and others.

I understand that my failure to adhere to school community principles may lead to my dismissal from McCallie.

We are one McCallie, and each one of you has duties and responsibilities to the school and to each other. Playing particular leadership roles in helping to educate and promote these principles are two groups: the Senate and the Council for Community and Brotherhood. These groups are seated behind me. The Senate leads our commitments to honesty and truthfulness. It is increasingly common and not a big deal to lie in our society. Not at McCallie. Your words matter here. We expect them to be truthful. With a variety of technological tools and platforms in our society, it is easier and more common to cheat than ever before. Cheating has no place at McCallie. We do not take shortcuts here, and we do not take what is not ours. These principles of honesty and integrity enable us to have a community of trust upon which relationships can be built and deepened.



The Council on Community and Brotherhood helps to foster a school community in which we learn about and live up to the ideals of how we treat and respect each other and the broader community, including how we extend grace, forgiveness, and repair.

McCallie is a journey. The path is upward and sometimes steep, like this ridge. Ridges are places of both sweat and sweeping vistas. Steep terrains are not easy to navigate. Legs and lungs can grow weary and tight with the ups and downs. Going from one spot to another on a ridge requires a commitment. Yet when one reaches the top of a ridge, he or she is treated to a spectacular view: in our case, a panorama of mountains and a city, stars and sunsets. Nothing meaningful in life comes easily or without effort. At McCallie you will be asked to work hard and to sweat, not just physically, but mentally as well. Stay on the path, though, for it leads, atop the ridge, to a beautiful vista: a vision of purpose, where you get a sense of who you are and what God may have in store for you, where you love and serve others, where you make a positive difference in this world.

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Jesus took his followers up a hill, a ridge, overlooking the Sea of Galilee and there gave one of his most famous talks called the Sermon on the Mount. His disciples were very focused on rules, laws, and performing well. Jesus, though, called their attention to issues of the heart. He encouraged them to examine their hearts, to fill them with love, joy, gratitude, and forgiveness, and to not just try to conform to external rules and standards. He gave them a more grand and glorious vision of themselves and their lives.

I encourage you this year to pay attention to and nurture your hearts. What are its habits, what are and should be

its character and desires? How should you order the desires of your hearts? I encourage you to journey to explore your hearts, to journey to explore a noble purpose for your life, to journey onward and upward when it gets difficult, and to journey often without phones and airpods that distract and limit us from something better and more beautiful.

A battlefield. A farm. A home. A ridge.

Ideals. Sustenance. Brotherhood. Journey.

I hope and pray that your journey this year is an exciting one. May the Lord bless each of you and our school. In the Old Testament, God declares to Jeremiah, "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future." May we take comfort in that commitment.

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