



Come Here Because You Are A Pioneer

Opening Remarks, MDS Weekend
by Head of School Lee Burns '87
Friday, February 23, 2024

What a happy, important, and exciting evening and weekend in which we have gathered as Michaels-Dickson finalists and families and as MDS alumni and their families to celebrate years of a remarkable program that has brought to McCallie an outstanding collection of some of the country's most talented scholars and young men.

To you young men who are finalists, congratulations on your accomplishments, character, and leadership. And to your parents, we salute you also for the many ways you have guided, shaped, and supported your sons. We are honored that you are with us.

Surrounding you tonight and this weekend are those who once sat where you do—as excited yet nervous finalists wondering what the weekend would entail and, more importantly, what it would be like to attend McCallie. As you meet them and learn about their McCallie careers and lives, I think you will see their remarkable and varied accomplishments as scholars, professionals, and leaders. But more than that, you will see they are men of character, purpose, and authenticity. You will sense and see depth, poise, and a desire to serve. You will feel an ambition to make a difference in our world but with personal humility. I think you will see an adventurous and fun spirit in them. I hope you will see your future selves in them.

To our Michaels-Dickson alumni, we celebrate and salute you for the men you are and for embodying our ideals of honor, truth, and duty. And to your parents, we salute and thank you for having the vision and courage to share your sons with us for their high school years. We know it is neither natural nor easy to allow your sons to leave home earlier than you expected; we are grateful that we were the beneficiaries of your sacrifices and love to entrust them to us in partnership with you.

And to the family of the late Ed Michaels, who are with us this weekend, especially daughter Katie and son Ned and their spouses and children, we remember and honor Ed and his vision for this program. We are grateful for his philanthropy and fundraising efforts to establish the program, along with his

good friend the late Alan Dickson, who also enabled the creation and expansion of the program. We will talk more about Ed and Alan tomorrow night at the 25-year reunion dinner and celebration.

Ed and Alan would be delighted by the turnout this weekend and thrilled with the caliber of the finalists. As a managing partner at McKinsey Consulting, Ed probed organizations and individuals with many strategic questions and pushed us to reflect and think deeply. His questions could often best be summarized with one word: why?

In that spirit, I want to tell you 15 finalists why I think you should come to McCallie.

But first, let me tell you why you don't need to come to McCallie. You don't need to come here to make good grades. You are already doing that. You can stay at your current school or a hometown school and take most of the classes you would take here. Your high schools have math and history classes and probably pretty good teachers. You will have extracurricular activities at your school. The easiest, most comfortable, most predictable thing to do is to stay in your same school or hometown next year. Most people default to the easy, the same, the comfortable.

Come to McCallie if, somewhere deep down, in a way you may not be able to articulate, you sense there is something more you crave than the simple and easy. Do you have an adventurous spirit, even if you haven't yet acted on it? Do you like challenges? Do you want to grow? We grow through challenges, doing things that are new and uncomfortable, and I assure you that coming to McCallie will challenge and grow you in ways that remaining in a day school at home never will.

Come to McCallie if you have high standards for yourself, if you want to be in a culture of excellence. It's cool at McCallie to be smart, do well, and do the right thing. It's also cool at McCallie to be who you are. Come here if you value independence and authenticity.

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Do you crave not just a few friends and friendships, but genuine brotherhood? A depth of relationships that you've never experienced before? When you have a roommate and hallmates, when you live with your friends and you share late night conversations and meals and trips, you develop a depth of friendships that rarely take root in day schools. Come to McCallie because you want to develop the closest friends of your life and because those friendships and that McCallie brotherhood will last your whole life.

Come to McCallie also if you want teachers and coaches who will know you really well, who will be mentors and guides, who will laugh and cry with you, who will come to feel like parents and friends. Come to McCallie if you want teachers who are far more than just teachers. They become guides and companions for life.





Given your talents, you can develop good academic resumes and results at most any school. Come to McCallie, though, if you want the best relationships of your life.

I enjoy and appreciate the story of Lewis and Clark and their journey from St. Louis in 1805 to find a passageway to the Pacific Ocean through the largely uncharted west of whispering woods, unspoiled streams, and majestic mountains. In Montana, they reach a fork in the Missouri River and have a crucial decision. Do they follow the river to the north or the south? The wrong decision would alter and could even doom their journey.

Like Lewis and Clark, you are in the early stages of a great journey, and you face a choice for high school. You are at a fork in the river. The McCallie river is the less known river for you, but I would suggest it has far more promise and potential.

Norman McLean published a book in 1976 called *A River Runs Through It*, and Robert Redford later made it into a movie. It is the story of two teenage boys growing up running along the riverbanks and trails of Montana under the tutelage of their father who pushed them to contemplate their purpose in life and to glorify and enjoy God as they together fished the streams and rivers amidst the natural beauty surrounding them. On one such trip, Paul tells his brother, who, standing on the shore, was not catching any fish, “The fish are out further. Cast your line in the currents.”

I believe that the adventure, beauty, purpose, and fulfillment in life are found away from the shore. You have to venture out from the safe and predictable shoreline and go out into the water. Jesus says, “Go deep and cast your nets.”

Come to McCallie because you want to be changed. Transformed. Because you want to experience a deeper, more fulfilling, more adventurous life.

Come to McCallie because you want to explore deeply not just the world around you, but the world beyond you, and even the world within you. Come here because we will give you encouragement to explore who you are, who you want to become. Come here to become a man of purpose, of honor, truth, and duty—a leader.

Come here because you are a pioneer.

Come to McCallie because you want to explore deeply not just the world around you, but the world beyond you, and even the world within you.

And come here because school can be, should be, and is at McCallie, an adventure, even the best and most fun time of your life.

We want each of you at McCallie. We want you to join the long blue line of McCallie men, including the Michaels-Dickson alumni you see here tonight. We want you parents to join the McCallie family as well.

Coming here, sending your son here, may be the hardest decision you will ever make, but also the best decision you ever make. I've heard that countless times from boys, alumni, and parents. I think the alumni and their parents will attest to that. Ask them.

And finally, Ed Michaels, in addition to asking why, would ask what's next. Tomorrow, during a Saturday morning session, we will talk about our new strategic plan and then, more specifically, the future of the Michaels-Dickson Program that afternoon and at the 25 year gala dinner. It is a very big and very blue future.

I am so excited about this wonderful program and the opportunity for all of us to gather this weekend. We are grateful that you are all here.

