
Unwrapping THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

The end of the academic year is a uniquely active and energizing time in the life of St. Stephen's. In addition to our routine campus activities, our school calendar is full of campus celebrations and traditions. Dating back several decades, senior offerings are among the most special of these traditions, as graduating Spartans share their ideas and creative talents with our community during daily Chapel services.



During senior offerings students often reflect on the experiences and relationships that have impacted them most profoundly. While the offerings are deeply personal expressions, they also give voice to what many students feel as they approach the end of their time on The Hill. It is a privilege to witness these messages and appropriate that they are shared during a daily Chapel program that has called them to define, affirm and build community throughout their St. Stephen's experience.

I marvel at the courage of seniors who choose to share offerings. I am proud of the authentic and powerful voices they have developed, as well as their ability to construct mature, poignant stories. But I am most impressed by their willingness to be vulnerable. They are, after all, young adults speaking before a community of 500 others in honest, heartfelt, personal ways. This willingness to share a glimpse into one's most intimate thoughts and emotions is something that occurs only when a foundation of trust has been laid. It arises from a place where we feel emotionally, psychologically, intellectually and spiritually safe ... when we "feel at home" with those around us.

This spring, I was particularly struck by a comment Brooke Silverstein '19 made during her senior offering. In reflecting back on what St. Stephen's meant to her, she said, "St. Stephen's has given me an incredible education, but it has also given me something better: my people."

In that simple yet profound assertion, Silverstein gets to the heart of the learning that occurs and the relationships that fostered that learning. Her comment speaks to what many of us—students and adults alike—experience at St. Stephen's. We learn and grow, but more importantly we experience the precious gift of belonging to a place and to a people who are bound by shared values and a common commitment to live meaningful lives that enrich the world around us. Simply put, we feel at home.

As Spartans, we have the privilege of living and learning together in a sacred community—one that prepares our students to graduate from The Hill inspired to live lives of meaning and make a difference in the world.

— CHRISTOPHER L. GUNNIN, HEAD OF SCHOOL