Good morning. I hope by now that each of you has found your way through your first days on campus this year, that you're becoming more familiar with your schedules, that you're developing healthy routines, that you are enjoying new classes, clubs, sports and fine arts offerings and that you are making new friendships and strengthening old ones.

Certainly, by now, you've heard that this is St. Stephen's 75th anniversary, and that we will be honoring and celebrating this milestone throughout the year. I want to talk this morning about what meaning we might find in this.

When we are at our best as individuals and as a community, every year and every day is special. First, let me acknowledge that. I'm a deep believer in the notion that every day is important, that every day has extraordinary opportunity if we live well. But since we have this rare opportunity to think about our school's 75 year history, since we are part of this historic moment, I want to make sure we consider that.

My message this morning is simple. At St. Stephen's we are all part of something bigger than ourselves. To me, that is inspiring. That is a source of pride. And that belief gives me a stronger sense of belonging and a greater sense of purpose. As Spartans, we are all part of something bigger than ourselves.

No doubt, you have heard the founding story of the school. The Rev. William Brewster, Bishop Hines and a group of visionary Episcopal leaders in Austin, following the horrors of two world wars and in the midst of a racially segregated America, dreamed of a better world in which peace and justice were more prevalent. And these leaders believed that a school community of students from every walk of life, founded on the Christian belief of loving your neighbor, was an essential ingredient to that vision. They believed that a new school in the rugged hill country of Texas was

essential for the recovery as humans. As Spartans, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. 75 years later, we are our founder’s dreams still coming true.

Since 1950, faculty who are true experts in their fields and true experts in inspiring a lasting love of learning have come to this campus to elevate learning, to help students develop sharp minds, compassionate hearts, and fierce spirits. They have built a culture where it's cool to be smart, it's cool to fully engage in school and community life, and where good enough is never good enough. We are the beneficiaries of their wisdom and tireless efforts. Our curriculum, policies, practices, beliefs about what makes a great school were not invented overnight; they have been shaped and intentionally refined for 75 years by caring, committed, and wise teachers. Their legacies resonate and live on in the work that is done and in the lives that we live today. As Spartans, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We stand on the shoulders of giants who came before us.

Students, you are all a part of a long red and purple line of Spartan students who walked these halls, played on these fields, lived in our dorms, traversed this hill, studied in these classrooms read and researched in our library and gathered for worship in this chapel. More than 7,000 alumni have used their experience at St. Stephen’s as a launching pad for living lives of purpose and meaning after graduating from St. Stephen's. They have become leaders in their fields and in their communities. They have modeled for us, the Spartan way. They have assured that St. Stephen's is a place second to none, and they have helped build a reputation and recognition that a St. Stephen's education is world class. As Spartans, you are part of something bigger than yourself; you are a part of a group of 7000 other Spartans, with whom you share common traditions, experiences and commitments.

This summer I learned some exciting news that you should know. There is an educational consulting agency called Carfax Education that is headquartered in Oxford and they have offices worldwide in Hong Kong, Dubai, London, Abu Dhabi, and Moscow. Their mission is to imagine that geography is no barrier for learning and to help students find and enroll in the best schools in the world. Each year, they create lists for different regions around the worlds, and for the first time ever in 2025, St. Stephen's was listed as one of the top 20 schools in North America. We are recognized globally as one of the best schools in the world. As Spartans, we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

To be clear, I do not share this so that we can be self congratulatory. I do not share this so that we will boast or brag. This is great news, and it comes, I think, with a great responsibility. We have inherited this legacy, and we have a responsibility to those who came before us and to those who will follow, to be good stewards of this community, our resources, our core values, our mission and our reputation. We have a responsibility to take full advantage of this moment, this year, and the opportunities before us every day. And we have a responsibility to continue to build on our predecessor’s work and to leave St. Stephen’s better for those who follow us in the school’s next 75 years.

We are currently in a campaign for the school to raise money so that we can serve you and future students even better. Being great requires resources. Excellence doesn't happen by accident. And while every student pays tuition to attend, an interesting reality that you may not know is that tuition does not cover the full cost of your education. Tuition dollars have never paid for the land that our campus rests on, it never paid for the buildings we work and play and live in, and tuition doesn't cover the full cost of operating our school each year. Instead, we are funded by literally

thousands of donors who believe in this school, who believe in our faculty and staff and who believe in you. All of us are the dreams coming true of the donors who support St. Stephen's. In your time here as students, I look forward to announcing gifts to the school that will provide new spaces for us to enjoy, new resources for financial assistance, new resources for faculty and staff, and new resources for our programs. I hope that you will take pride in the generosity of donors who believe in you and in your school. As Spartans, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. You are supported and believed in by thousands of generous donors that you will never know. They believe in this school, and by extension they believe in you. Raising money can be an awkward or uncomfortable to think and talk about, but I want you to know about this aspect of our school life, because we couldn't be here without the literal thousands of people who give to the school because they believe in you.

I look forward to the year together, and I hope that you know that I am proud of each one of you. I know that you could select any number of schools where you could work half as hard and more readily get better grades. But you've chosen St. Stephen's, which means that you don't shy away from hard work. Being here means that you believe in the inherent dignity of all people and that you see yourself as an agent for peace and justice in this world. It means that you accept the responsibility of living up to a high standard of excellence in all that you do. And it means that you are part of something bigger than yourself.

We have an exciting opportunity this year, to look back and remember who came before, where we came from and why we exist as a school. And, we have the responsibility to continue strengthening this community and to serve and lead the communities beyond our gates today and in the years ahead.

I am grateful for each one of you. I am grateful for this moment and the opportunities we have together every day. And I hope that you all find meaning, purpose and a deep sense of belonging in the knowledge that as Spartans you are part of something much bigger than yourself.

Let's have a great year. Happy 75th. Go Spartans!