

ST. ANDREW'S

MAGAZINE | VOL. 48 / 3

FAITH IN FOUNDERS





FAITH I FOUND



PLANNING FOR THE NEXT CENTURY OF FOUNDERS HALL – BY LIZ TORREY

Is there any building with more purposes contained under one roof than Founders Hall?

It's a school, it's a church, it's a restaurant; it's an office building; it's a theater, it's a library; it's a dormitory; it's a laundromat; it's a store; it's an apartment building. Most importantly, many of its spaces are the central communal gathering areas for all Saints.

It's also nostalgically beautiful. *Architectural Digest* didn't name St. Andrew's one of the nine most beautiful boarding schools in the world for nothing. "When people pull up and see Founders Hall for the first time, they are blown away," says Chief Financial and Operating Officer Bill McClements '81, P'12. "It's a stunning building that truly encapsulates the spirit of the school because of how intentionally the community spaces are designed and connected. Its footprint bridges all aspects of school life."

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Founders Hall begins to emerge before our doors opened in 1930.

Although she currently occupies House 1, Head of School Joy McGrath '92 was once a Founders resident. "There are few people who have lived in Founders as long as I did," says McGrath, who moved into the Schmolze apartment in July 2001 and served as a dorm parent for six years. "The building is a physical manifestation of St. Andrew's mission to bring people together, to learn and embrace lives of meaning and purpose. It is a building that is full of stories, and it speaks volumes about this community and what we value—face-to-face engagement, time outdoors, quiet reflection, and boisterous interaction."

The building is the heart of campus—a space that defines the center of a village devoted to faith and learning. It also defines the journey of a St. Andrew's student. It's the first building prospective students enter on their visit; it's the last place students leave after receiving their diploma on the Founders Garth.

There's just one challenge.

Founders is approaching its 100th birthday. And after 100 years of holding the relentlessly exuberant life, spirit, and pounding feet of 300 adolescents, not to mention faculty and their families, the building is tired.

"When the du Pont family constructed Founders, they used the best materials of that time," says Director of Facilities Dave McKelvey. "We've been very fortunate that that investment, and that infrastructure, has lasted for almost 100 years. But when something gets to this age, it needs some love."

The oldest portion of Founders, designed by architect Arthur Brockie and constructed in 1929, is comprised of the "small L" that faces the Main Drive, plus a truncated version of the Dining Hall; this version of Founders welcomed the school's first students in 1930. The "middle wing" was added from 1936 to 1937, and brought to campus the Chapel, an expanded Dining Hall, and a further hallway of classrooms downstairs and two floors of dorms and faculty apartments upstairs. In 1938, Irene Sophie du Pont, sister of the school's founder, A. Felix du Pont, gifted St. Andrew's its beloved N.C. Wyeth Dining Hall mural.

Finally, from 1954 to 1956, the "New Wing" of Founders was built, bringing the building to its present U-shaped form around the Front Lawn. The New Wing is comprised of the school's bell tower, Forbes Theater, the Garth, and the Irene du Pont Library, plus a third hallway of classrooms and two floors of dorms.

Around the turn of the century, Founders underwent numerous smaller renovations: of its basement floor in 1998–1999, adding windows, office space, and the school store; a third expansion of the Dining Hall in 1999–2000 that removed half the existing servery and shrank the kitchen and moved it underground; and finally, in 2005, Founders' electrical, HVAC, and fire detection and suppression systems were updated. Repairs to the building's roof and exterior were also made.



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The next chapter in the life of Founders Hall will honor that history, repair and replace systems that have reached the end of their lifespan, and take on a new challenge for the building's second century—reducing its carbon footprint.

“Our vision *must* include setting a course toward zero carbon,” says McGrath. The school is developing a long-term plan to restore and sustain facilities that begins with addressing the more than \$35 million in pressing renovation needs that were identified in a recent feasibility study.

“Founders Hall alone requires over \$17 million in systems and restoration work, not including major and urgent changes needed for dining and kitchen spaces,” McGrath notes. “In making these needed improvements, we must find ways to use less and take care of what we have.”

Although the number of students has bloomed over the decades, the footprint of critical communal spaces has remained the same.



The work must also be mission-aligned, according to McGrath. “We know we’ll have to do an astonishing amount of work in Founders in the near future, which has us questioning, beyond upgrading equipment, what other problems we can solve that would allow us to further execute our mission, serve students better, and meet the Episcopal Church’s principle to care for creation,” she says.

While the school has remained intentionally small, the student body has grown throughout the decades, creating an issue of capacity. Two hundred forty-three students in the 1984–1985 school year bloomed to 272 students in fall of 2005, to 320 students in the fall of 2025, while the footprint of Founders has remained essentially untouched. (The school is committed to an admissions target of 310, allowing for up to 320 students when enrollment efforts are exceptionally successful.)

“The overall footprint of the Dining Hall is exactly the same as it was then,” McClements says. “The footprint of the Chapel is the same. The footprint of the dorms is the same. The school community is thriving, but we should always be asking, ‘What can we do better?’”

The problem at hand is one that feels uniquely St. Andrean: “Everybody wants to be *together* in Founders,” says McClements, laughing. “But that is more people than actually fit comfortably.”

The Chapel, one of the school’s most sacred spaces, is one example where creative strategy is required: III Formers sit in the chancel, extra chairs line the aisles, and employees and students perch on the stairs on Wednesday evenings.

And although you wouldn’t know it from the spirited sound of its residents, the high energy that proximity inspires is challenged by limited space in Founders dorms.

On Voorhees, for example, 24 students live, says Dean of Student Affairs Greg Guldin. “But the dorm common room can’t hold all 24 at the same time,” he says. The capacity is closer to 10.

To fit more students into Founders over the past few decades, some students live in triples and even quads. “We are committed to ensuring that all students have effectively the same residential experience,” Guldin says. “Right now there’s a gap to close between [living in] Founders and [elsewhere]. School leadership is dedicated to addressing the spaces in Founders because the health and future success of our residential life program is paramount.”

According to Senior Residential Leader Drew Merriman ’26, the heart of residential life beats strongly in Founders. Merriman, who lives in a Baum double, has been a Founders journeyman: he’s lived in a triple and a quad.

Although Merriman thinks it would be beneficial for the school to eliminate quads and triples, he believes the true value of Founders transcends square footage. “My room is so warm and homey, and, sure, it’s got vintage vibes, but I love how ‘lived in’ it feels,” Merriman says. “There’s nothing like opening that big wooden door and seeing my buddies sitting there. That’s what I’ll remember 20 years from now.”

There’s also the matter of faculty housing in Founders. Dorm parents do everything from supervise the adults and VI Formers who work on the dorm to provide an emergency bowl of cereal at 10 p.m. About half the apartments on Founders have just one bedroom.

The problem at hand is one that feels uniquely St. Andrean: Everybody wants to be in Founders together.

“Faculty housing is an important issue for us to address, both within Founders and more broadly,” McClements says. “We don’t have as many houses as we need, and the faculty apartments on Founders are not the most desirable homes on campus. Yet we want our best faculty to *want* to live on dorm for a long time—so the quality of the apartments needs to be better.”



Thanks to the radical hospitality that is part and parcel of the school’s Episcopal identity, students are welcomed as family. The same goes for faculty, whose partners, spouses, children—even pets—join the family, too.

“We need multiple-bedroom, multiple-bath residences with exterior entrances, so we can fit not only single people and couples, but also families with children so that the students living on Founders are surrounded by family units,” Guldin says. “The students then become that much more connected with each other, with their dorm parents, and with the life of the school.”

History Instructor Jonah-Kai Baker, his partner, Essy, and their two cats, Crab Rangoon and Merryweather, live on Schmolze. “As a smaller dorm, and thanks to our isolation on the third floor, Schmolze is often a place of calm and quiet within the chaos of Founders,” he says. “We really push the juniors to build autonomy and responsibility over dorm living to prepare them to be strong senior leaders. The space we have to work with is a big part of that process.”



Baker appreciates living in Founders. “The convenience to live where you work is incredible,” he says. The facilities could be updated, though, he notes.

Science Department Chair Will Rehrig ’11 is currently the longest-tenured Founders dorm parent. “One of my favorite things to do is think about the history that has occurred in this building,” he says. “Students and faculty have moved through and lived in this building for the near century it has existed. Across generations and major world events, people have been here building community. That’s special.”

The biggest issue for most of the apartments is the size, he says. “The layout, and the number of bathrooms for example,” Rehrig says. “There are simply limitations that come with being in a dorm apartment, so even when faculty love dorm life, they ultimately make a choice to leave because they [need features] that the current apartments don’t provide.”

Beyond Founders, the school has been working with architectural and facilities-planning firms to understand what St. Andrew’s has, and what it needs. The school is already tackling some of the \$35 million in deferred maintenance identified in the campus-wide assessment, starting with a proposed project to renovate and repair the Founder’s Garth, built in 1955, in an effort to mitigate significant water damage in the Garth, Front Lawn, and the Chapel.

The Garth, the school’s beautiful stone outdoor gathering space, is a critical component of the St. Andrew’s program, which requires physical spaces that empower the community to develop authentic human relationships, shared values, and connection to nature and other humans in a world that prioritizes technology and the individual.

McClements keeps a chunk of limestone that crumbled off the Garth on his desk as a reminder of the importance of the work. “The Garth faces critical structural issues that have arisen from time and challenges with managing water flow from the heavy rains of the evolving climate,” he says. “After heavy rain, we get water in the stairwells that lead to the Chapel, as well as water leaching through the walls.”

But the most pressing need is the Dining Hall. The servery is about one-third the size of a typical servery in a school serving 400 meals three times per day, and the kitchen has been split between two floors since 1999 when a fraction of the space that was removed to expand the Dining Hall was relocated to the basement.

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“Our food service company, SAGE, performs a miracle in producing five family-style seated meals a week in the space they’ve got to work with,” McClements says. “The Dining Hall is beautiful, and essential to daily connection, but it’s crowded and incredibly noisy during meals, and the flow [of foot traffic] could be better structured.”

On both a macro and micro level, the interior of Founders needs investment. The HVAC system needs to be replaced, and McKelvey notes that the school’s team of mechanics, technicians, and plumbers spends a disproportionate amount of time chasing down and repairing broken valves, rusted pipes, and other aging systems and infrastructure.

To reimagine Founders for its next 100 years will take more work than can be accomplished in a single summer. McKelvey suggests the building needs to be gut-renovated. “It’s got a phenomenal shell, and it’s structurally sound, but everything that serves the building on the interior needs to be redone,” he says. “If you want to drive a Model T in 2025, you’re going to have to strip it down to the bolts first.” (It’s worth noting that Model Ts were likely driven to the Founders opening ceremony in 1930.)

“‘Modest and modern’ is the language that describes the school’s facilities in our founding documents,” McGrath says. “Our goal is to bring the school in alignment with what that means today. We want to preserve the character and meaning of Founders, which is central to St. Andrew’s identity, while making the building more comfortable, functional, and sustainable, in ways that best inspire our students, faculty, and mission.”

The school is currently exploring a variety of options for how to relocate the functions and residents of Founders for the duration of any longer-term renovation. The project will most likely require the construction of a new building on campus, work McClements thinks could kick off as early as 2027, if that's the plan the school implements based on studies, and if fundraising can be completed.

"If we don't build something new, we're going to spend a fortune on temporary solutions to the housing problem," McClements says. "We're thinking about this very carefully. We don't add new buildings here very often." (The last entirely new building added was the O'Brien Arts Center in 2004.)

The school needs to be brought into its second century as powerfully as it was launched for its first, McGrath says.

"That's going to take creativity and thoughtfulness, as well as significant financial resources," she says. "For those of us who have benefitted from the St. Andrew's experience, we must do our part to make the next century of Founders, and of St. Andrew's, as exceptional as its first."

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