



## Founders' Day Assembly – Rector's Address

**Christine Leighton**

**Friday 8 March 2024**



Welcome to you all on this 107th Founders' Day for St Andrew's College. 107 years ago our school's humble beginnings began in the St Andrew's Presbyterian Manse at Hospital Corner, Hagley Park and then moved to this present site at Strowan a year later in 1918. What happened in the following years until now is a remarkable story.

Welcome to invited guests, whānau and those attending their 60 Years On reunion – Old Collegians who were in their third Form year (Year 9) in 1964. Gerald Wilson, a member of this year group who was the 1st XI Cricket Captain in his final year, 1968, will be presenting the cricket caps to our 1st XI later in the assembly.

It is special to welcome back our Old Collegians on this occasion in our Centennial Chapel, a very different space to the Memorial Chapel, built in 1955, where you gathered regularly as students. This building may be much larger and more modern, but the purpose, values and traditions of the St Andrew's College you experienced remain strong. I hope you enjoy your weekend back at St Andrew's and especially the reconnections made with those in your year group.

Founders' Day is a day when we take the opportunity to reminisce, reflect upon our school in days gone by, remember some of our history and give thanks for what we enjoy today.

Other special guests with us this morning are Board Chair, Mrs Felicity Odlin; Board members Alan Merry, Stephanie Bain, Peter Nelson and Jamie-Lee Tuuta; Mr Greg Reynolds is here representing the St Andrew's Old Collegian's Association.

I also warmly welcome Juliette Newman, Head Girl of 2019 who has joined us this morning as guest speaker.

The observant amongst you may have realised that we are celebrating Founders' Day a week earlier this year.

Our Pipe Band, which has been such a part of St Andrew's for 105 years since 1919, will be competing at the Pipe Band Nationals in Auckland next weekend, thus necessitating our earlier Founders' Day celebration. We just simply couldn't have a Founders' Day without a Pipe Band! Thank you to the Band for your display outside the Chapel this morning.

Like our guests, I am feeling somewhat nostalgic about my time at St Andrew's College. Over 17 years at St Andrew's College I have come to value the traditions and understand the importance of stories.

Pondering why StAC gets under your skin and has remained relevant to over 13,000 students over almost 11 decades, I again think of the Māori whakatauki: *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua* (I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past).

Over the last century at St Andrew's College, successive Boards, Rectors, leaders and staff have responded to the changing world, both here in Aotearoa and globally, weathering destructive and heartbreaking conflicts and wars, devastating pandemics, recessions and disasters. Each Chapel Service, students are reminded of the sacrifice made by Old Collegians in WWII in order to understand the impact of conflict and war on everyday lives.

But despite these challenging events, our College has grown from 19 boys on that first day to 1607 students today. There has been exponential change in technology, facilities, family structures, rules and expectations, societal norms and what a school can offer to students by way of opportunities, learning and personal growth.

With education of young people firmly the focus of their commitment, teachers at St Andrew's have kept an eye on tradition and structure, while at the same time recognising the inevitable change and progress which demands a new way of doing things.

Balancing tradition and innovation is at the heart of progress. Our current vision statement at the centre of our St Andrew's Strategic Plan states our commitment to providing students with "The roots and wings to flourish in an ever-changing world".

It is a delicate dance we must master to honour the roots that ground us while at the same time we reach for the stars which guide us forward.

In this interplay between what has been and what could be, we find the essence of successful evolution where the wisdom of the past meets the possibilities of the future.

Founders' Day is when we come together as a community to celebrate the vision of our Founders – those traditions and values that were laid down in the early years and have stood the test of time.

I know 60 years seems an impossibly long time for anyone under 30, but you might be interested to know that some of the traditions the students of 1964–1968 enjoyed were: camps at the Castle Hill Mountain Lodge; Duke of Edinburgh excursions; College productions – it was *The Crucible* in 1968 when our reunion guests were in their final year; basketball was a popular and competitive sport with the senior team winning their grade; and a St Andrew's eight rowed for the first time at a Maadi Cup Regatta in Wanganui.



These St Andrew's traditions are but some that have remained strong. Alongside them a responsive, generous and creative spirit has ensured St Andrew's remains a relevant and progressive school for the youth of today and tomorrow.

Our St Andrew's College traditions give us roots to keep us centred and strong as a school, a connection to something greater than ourselves. This is reflected in our campus and Strowan House, at the centre of the College since 1918. Sitting under the shade of our majestic trees or looking up at the Saltire flag of Scotland, or glancing at the Roll of Honour in the Memorial Enclave as we enter the Centennial Chapel, we are reminded of those who have gone before us. We also keep traditions alive by singing the school song and knowing who Regulus was, watching the Pipe Band parade at the Christchurch show and on Athletic Sports Day, dressing up in House colours and belting out the chants, living by our Founding Values and Mātauranga Māori principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga and honouring our College haka. These time-honoured traditions are what binds us together as a community. Like those who have gone before us, we play for the Thistle, we value the opportunities we have here, we are loyal to each other and our school, but demonstrate humility and inclusivity and celebrate our differences.

Our traditions remind us of who we are, they are the guardians of our heritage, the threads that like our tartan weave together our St Andrew's cultural identity.

However, as we navigate the ever-changing landscape of the 21st century, we need to remember that tradition without innovation is stagnation, a relic of the past clinging desperately to a world that no longer exists. You, the students of 2024 are called to dream, imagine and create. Innovation ignites the flames of progress, pushing the boundaries of what we thought possible. If you have the resilience, courage and the skills to be curious you can challenge the status quo and influence your positive future.

And so, just like in any community, we need each other. Your job as the young generation, is to use what innovation offers us. Use your wings to guide us forward remembering it is the fusion of old and new that will provide the compass that points us in the right direction.

Innovation without tradition is chaos, tradition without innovation is stagnation. I believe at St Andrew's we are showing what we can do when we balance these two forces.

So, keep listening to or playing the pipes and drums, sing the School Song as you mean it, feel your House spirit, be proud and humble at the same time, play sport for the Thistle, enjoy the orchestra, the jazz and rock bands and use technology to do better things for the good of all.

As the world keeps changing, you want to be someone whose influence ensures our shared compass steers us all in the right direction.

***"Together, building better people for life".***