St Andrew's College

Leavers' Assembly 2026 – Rector's Address

Mark Wilson
Thursday 4 November



Nau mai haere mai

e nga hau e wha

e nga iwi, e tau nei

tena koutou katoa

(Welcome to all people from all directions and places, all are welcome)

A very warm welcome to our St Andrew's College Leavers' Assembly for 2026, and everyone who has gathered here.

I am delighted that we are able to have our Board Chair, Mr Nick Letham, here at this special assembly. Our thanks for your time here, and ongoing support of the College, including assisting with some presentations within this assembly.

To you our Leavers… I trust you enjoyed the celebration breakfast earlier this morning prepared by Catering Manager, Russell Gray, and his wonderful team, and a beautiful and reflective Leavers' Chapel held last Sunday night.

Last Sunday evening we also had a special function for our Year 13 Leavers who have completed their entire years of schooling at St Andrew's College and are now part of a very special set we refer to as the "13 Years On" group. This morning, it was wonderful to see you honoured and celebrated by our Preparatory School students standing in a line of honour you walked through, and then rousing haka from the Middle School, as you processed into this, your final assembly.

This special assembly is to honour our Year 12 and 13 Leavers of 2026.

At the end of this assembly, Principal of Secondary School, Mr Evert Van Florenstein, will also acknowledge staff who are leaving at the end of this year and honouring the contribution they have made to the learning and positive environment here at St Andrew's College.

A special welcome to parents and whānau who have joined us this morning, as we pay tribute to our leavers. Thank you, as family and whānau, for journeying with your young people through their schooling here at St Andrew's.

There are certain milestones in life that are important to celebrate; amongst these: your first day at school, your first day at secondary school, special birthdays, your first test or examination, first game in a sports team, or your first performance on the stage, and now leaving school.

Behind you are all your College memories: of friendships, learnings, tough challenges, successful moments, relationships and experiences. These school years are foundational for your life, not just providing you with your academic qualifications, but also the values that will guide your future. So, this Leavers' service is very symbolic, as it concludes a very important season in your lives.

As a former History teacher, I must point out that the ancient Romans understood the importance of symbolism in our lives. In Roman mythology, there was a deity, or god, called Janus. Janus was the god of gates, doors, and of beginnings and endings. Our first month, January, takes its name from him – the month that signals both the finish and start of a new year.

In the famous Roman Forum, there was an archway with gates at either end known as the Janus gates. The Roman legions would march through these gates when they went out to war. The Janus Gates remained open until the armies returned and stayed closed during times of peace.

My wife Judi and I were fortunate to have visited Rome a few years ago, and to see the Janus Gates for ourselves, which is in a more remote area of the Forum and largely ignored or missed by the hordes of tourists.

Janus was frequently used to symbolise change and transitions in life, such as the progression of past to future and the growing up of young people. Old Roman coins of Janus showed two faces – one looking forward and the other looking back. Janus reminds us that as we grow and move forward in life, we also need to reflect and look back at our past.

Our Leavers of 2026, as you pass through our school gates to begin the new opportunities of your wonderful lives ahead, embrace the change, and remember to look back to your family, friends, school and wider community who have helped shape and support you to become the person you are.

You now face forward with excitement, and probably a few nerves, about future opportunities and possibilities.

As I reflect on our Year 13 group, I thank the prefects and Head students for your excellent leadership over this year. It has been a real pleasure working with you all, including you including me in a few cameo roles for special assemblies.

To conclude; thank you for the courage you have shown in your journey throughout St Andrew's College, for embracing the opportunities on offer, and thank you for the encouragement you have given others.

StAC will always be here, your home to return to.

And, in the words of Bilbo Baggins from the novel The Hobbit, just before the start of his adventure…

"Home is behind. The world is ahead. And there are many paths to tread".

God bless you all, and may you tread many exciting and fulfilling paths ahead.