

From the desk of **Shane Kidwell**



Ladies, gentlemen and New Boys of 2023, welcome to St Alban's College. You join St Alban's, which was established in 1963, in its Diamond Jubilee year. We will be celebrating 60 years of excellence and preparing young men for the future, and we are excited that your son joins us in this historic and significant year for us and, ultimately for them, as they now weave themselves into the history of the College.

You move into this new phase at an uncertain time in the world and our young democracy. There is a cost-of-living crises right here at home, in Europe and the United Kingdom, a war in the Ukraine, a widening Gini-co-efficient in South Africa, and an energy crisis which is affecting every household and business in the country and is fast becoming the cause of rampant cynicism and negativity with is seeping into our collective souls. I have recently read Jacque Pauw's book: *Our Poisoned Land*, and it is filled with horrific stories of greed, selfishness, bullying and corruption and one can feel an air of despair and significant frustration and pessimism which pervades our collective conversations and our mindset.

The Class of 2027 joins us at a time which is filled with difficulty and challenge and it will be up to them as individuals but, more importantly, up to us as adults to ensure that we provide an environment which is filled with optimism and hope and I am proud to say, at the start of our 60th year, that optimism and hope are ingrained in our collective DNA at St Alban's.

We should remind ourselves of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13:13, where he says: Three things will last forever, faith, hope and love.

If we have lost hope it is important for us to remind ourselves that it is wholly unfair to plant the cancerous roots of hopelessness in our children. We have to be very careful not to destroy the souls of our own blood. Hope extends, reaches and beckons us into the future. As we partner together in raising healthy ¹boys, remember this and let's remind each other of it! I can assure you that we are filled with hope here. We are filled with the hope of a better tomorrow. We are filled with the hope that our boys are prepared for life beyond these boundaries. We are filled with hope when we see excellence all around us. We are filled with hope when many of our graduates are accepted at international universities. We are filled with hope when a boy who struggled at school finds his confidence and aces his degree at university. We are filled with hope when a young man stands bravely in front of his peers and speaks his mind. We are filled with hope when our alumni take to heart making a difference in the world, like Prof Grant McLaren who was knighted recently for his service at St John's Eye Hospital, at Chris Hani Baragwanath – he was awarded the Order of St John which dates back 900 years and recognises service to humanity.

We are filled with hope when we see the young men of the Class of 2027, your sons, because we know that you have chosen St Alban's College, not because we have a strong balance sheet or because we are

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56774127-the-hill-we-climb>



an established boys' school, but because you honestly believe that these young men will be prepared for life beyond these walls. You honestly believe that the values instilled in them here, which resonate with your own principles and values, will carry them through a tough period in history and will provide them with the resilience and determination which will see them thrive in a world filled with opportunity.

Amanda Gorman said:

When day comes, we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it

I am filled with hope because your sons will develop the wherewithal to be brave and have the courage to stand up for truth and build the resilience, not to play the victim, or dabble in the polarisation of identity politics, but to stare down the societal ills we are facing and solve them with focus and a passion to help humanity, just like Prof McLaren.

The positive culture which has long been established at the College continues to thrive and grow and develop. This culture has its roots in creating a space which encourages and invites ALL boys to feel like they belong. To feel like they can make mistakes, be vulnerable and develop a sense of trust and understanding with each other. This culture fosters seeing around differences, whether the differences be race, gender, academic ability or sporting prowess. This culture thrives on lively debate in a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, and learning to agree to disagree. This culture encourages authenticity and the ability to allow yourself to have vulnerable and complex conversations. This culture is rooted in our Christian values.

I am sure that you feel it a little surreal that you are finally sitting here on the St Alban's campus contemplating this next phase of your sons' journey. Time continues to march on and after speaking to many of you during 2022, I know that you were keen to put your preparatory careers behind you and move on to the final phase of your school career. The problem with this is that not too long from now you will most probably be in the same situation as our Matrics from last year, who are considering the next phase of their journeys. It all rushes by very quickly, so savour the moments!

So, as you contemplate the year ahead, I would encourage you to:

Take time to connect with others.

Don't limit yourself to those you know from prep school. We have boys from over 40 different schools this year and you should broaden your horizons, make new friends and connections and take time to learn from others.

Create opportunities for growth.

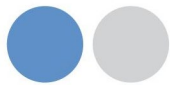
Try things you have never tried before. Stretch yourself and allow yourself to explore and learn. It will allow you to find a rhythm to all you do here.

Be grateful and practice gratitude.

Take responsibility for every moment. Be grateful for the opportunities afforded to you and allow yourself to be open to new things.

Lastly, accept and understand that your arrival today is the beginning of a journey and part of your greater journey through life; a journey of discovery of yourself and your abilities, your dreams and aspirations and the exploration of the fact that you have within you far more potential than you could ever imagine.

Moms and Dads, your son is growing up, don't fight it, support it, live it with him and allow him to fly. Your expectations of him are high and so they should be. But remember, sometimes he will scale the icy peaks of your expectation and sometimes he will disappoint. You will have one fleeting moment to show your



emotion and reaction in situations like these. The image of that reaction can last a lifetime. There are seconds to tune in. Your first words will go straight to your son's heart.

He will trip and fall and although it is a modern scourge to find blame when this happens, I would encourage you to be supportive and encouraging of him as he faces the fact that we all make mistakes. In doing so, you are empowering him and believing in him and his ability to deal with difficulty. He has to trip himself up to learn, he has to fall to grow, he has to fail to succeed.

I want to, once again, assure you that we are in this together as we seek to guide, support, discipline and encourage your son as he travels this road to manhood. College careers are slightly different to prep school careers – a young man is emerging and all the energy and love you have invested will now start to pay dividends as he steps out to become more independent and focused on his journey to adulthood.

We do not take for granted the significance of the decision you have taken to send your son to this particular school. Thank you for entrusting St Alban's to partner with you on this important journey.

We sit huddled in family groups today because we believe in family and the importance of family values and we understand that, as parents, you have hopes and dreams, for your young man who joins us. These dreams are founded in love and are rich in hope and we treasure this, and as we meander through the next few years, we pledge to walk alongside you in the good times and in the difficult times as we continue to plant the seed of hope deep inside his soul. Mother Theresa said: We will teach them to fly, but they will not fly our flight. We will teach them to dream but they will not dream our dreams. We will teach them to live but they will not live our lives. Nevertheless, in every flight, in every life, in every dream, the print of the way we have taught them will remain.

In complex and diverse ways, this vibrant, innovative, forward-looking school continues to influence young men to make a sincere, real and authentic difference in South Africa and the world at large. St Alban's is a place which generates a genuine urge to help others and, in doing so, make the world a more equal place. Three things will last forever: faith, hope and love, and we are filled with hope that your sons' dreams will become a reality for him as he matures. Welcome to the St Alban's family and God bless!