

From the desk of **Shane Kidwell**



Ladies and gentlemen and new boys of 2025 welcome to St Alban's College.

I am reminded this morning that time marches on and waits for no man. In the audience this morning there is a dad who matriculated here in 1995, when I was in my third year of teaching at St Alban's, and today his young son, Matthew starts his journey with us. Matthew will matriculate with the class of 2029, 34 years after his dad – it makes me feel old, but Matthew's journey, like yours, starts today and I have no doubt that it will be an exciting one. There are also other Old boys, like Barry Garven, class of 1985 who are sending their sons to St Alban's this year and there is nothing more affirming for a school to know that our alumni trust us to educate their sons. It is a stamp of approval.

The metaphor of the Journey is an important one at St Alban's. In Form 3 you will be involved in the St Alban's Journey and each year as our groups depart, I say this to them: If you are feeling a little anxious that is good. If you are feeling supremely confident this morning, I pray that you will find courage when the days are tough, and you feel down. If you don't quite know how you feel, I hope that you will surprise yourself with your clarity of thought and action as the days pass.

The same applies to you, young men as you start this new exciting and purposeful high school journey. If you are feeling a little anxious this morning – that is a good thing, you may not know it now, but it will give you the impetus not to take things for granted. If you are feeling supremely confident, you are going to have to make sure that you do not stumble and fall without realising it. You will need to reign yourself in a little and encourage yourself not to get ahead of yourself – because that is a dangerous place to be. And if you are not quite sure how you are feeling I would encourage you to put yourself out there, to force yourself to engage and interact when everything inside you is saying that you would like to isolate yourself.

Boys at St Alban's ring the bell four times in their career at the College and each time they do this, is a reminder of their journey from boyhood to manhood. We do not often have time to reflect in the modern world and these four short but significant pauses under the bell tower, in our bell quad are a reminder to take the time to realise that time is fleeting and that our journey through life needs to be intentional and purposeful.



Our Form 1's ring the bell today as a rite-of-passage and a symbol of their welcome to our broader Albanian community. The action of ringing is infused with meaning and connection and relationship and purpose and this action connects them (and you) to a network of people over 6 decades. The sound of the bell is like a promise or covenant made by us to nurture and collaborate with you as parents, as we guide and mentor him, throughout his career. Boys ring the bell for the second time when they depart on our 23 day Journey in Form 3. They are older, wiser and less naive about what awaits them in the world of adulthood. Nevertheless, they know it is their destiny to step into this space and when they return to ring the bell for the third time on their return from this experience, it symbolises coming of age and preparing for the last two important years of the College career.

In the last moments of their career at the College, at our final assembly in their Matric year they will ring the bell for the final time. It is not uncommon for a young man to stare at the gong for more than a moment, tears streaming down his face, knowing that this is his final act as a schoolboy as he steps into the world at large. That sound reverberates around our campus through the beautiful landscapes of our country and around the world as boys become men who are duty bound to make a difference for good in a world which is desperate for empathetic, compassionate, courageous and strong men. These moments are treasured and so they should be.

So, as we start our journey together today, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight three important issues which will encourage us on this significant path to adulthood.

The first is that we are most grateful that you have chosen St Alban's to partner with you on your journey in the next five years. Thank you for trusting us and I want to assure you that we do not take this trust for granted. What will be important is to continue to trust us as we progress. There will be good times, and it is easy to trust when things are going well but there will also be times which are challenging, for whatever reason and it is in these moments that you are going to have to lean into this trust that you have placed in us today. Without sounding arrogant – we are experts at what we do, and we have refined and defined our processes over many years and are nimble enough to learn from best practice around the world as we endeavour to raise healthy and engaged young men. Our staff have been specifically selected and chosen for what they do at the College and our House Directors are men and women of courage and compassion who are excellent at what they do. I would encourage you to engage with them, to collaborate with them and to participate in robust debate with them when you are concerned. For the majority, your sons will find the traction that they need but there will be times when we are going to have to put our collective heads together to ensure that he remains on track. Life is not linear it is organic, and we will have to remain flexible enough to adapt when we need to surround him with love and support. The author, Jonathan Haidt talks about anti-fragility, and it is important that we (you and us) allow your young man to understand that like muscles and the immune system, children get stronger from a range of adversity. Because children are antifragile, it is essential that childhood presents them with experiences that involve some fear, conflict, and exclusion (though not too much). Children who are #overprotected, experiencing life under a form of constant adult supervision that attempts to prevent negative experiences and feelings, will be at

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heightened risk for anxiety and mood disorders, especially when they encounter threats, conflict, or exclusion later in life, as they inevitably will.

If we want children to have a healthy pathway through puberty, we must take them off experience blockers (like smartphones and parental overprotection) so that they can accumulate the wide range of experiences they need, including the real-world stressors their antifragile minds require to wire properly.

Secondly, please support us. St Alban's is an incredibly busy and purposeful place and there will be many opportunities to support your son at a teacher-parent engagement, on the sports field or on the music or drama stage. We rely on parent interaction and involvement on these occasions. If for some reason your son says that he does not want you to come to an event or function or that he does not want you to participate in watching him play sport, he does not really mean it! He is inevitably saying that he really does want you there and there is a lot of research to prove that your presence is an important enabler as he explores the opportunities provided to him here and delves into the depth of his talents. Our first community function will be our annual inter-house swimming gala, which in itself is a spectacular affair, but their real event is really the street party where you can get introduced to other parents in your House environment. Please join us for this wonderfully affirming event.

Thirdly, we would appreciate you communicating with us as much as you feel is necessary. There will be times when you are unsure of things, or you need more information – please do not hesitate to contact your sons' tutor or House Director on these occasions. Our tutors and House Directors, who are at this event are also quietly hoping, as I say this, that you will also not over-communicate, or heaven forbid communicate in a bullying or abusive way when things do not go your way. Our House system is set up to ensure that you have a smaller more intimate community to engage with and we would encourage you to reach out should you need help with something.

Many of us here today are parents and most parents want their children to grow up to have stable careers and be financially comfortable. But when parents are surveyed about their most important goals for their kids, their top priority is not any form of worldly success. In survey after survey according to Jessica Stillman, over 90 percent of parents say that raising kind, caring kids is what matters most to them. Stillman has long been on the lookout for credible scientific information on how to do just that. Over the years, she's uncovered studies recommending everything from taking your kids to more art museums (awe is linked with empathy) to modeling vulnerability and helping them name their emotions. Stillman says that, according to a new 25-year-long study, the real secret to raising emotionally intelligent kids is both simpler and more profound. Researchers followed a group of 184 teens for 25 years, watching first how they interacted with their parents and friends and then how they behaved when they became parents themselves. The results of all this careful observation were recently published. What did the researchers find? In short, that empathy is contagious across the generations. The kids whose parents were engaged, sympathetic, and understanding when they were struggling with problems as teens were more likely to be helpful and kind to friends who were going through

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their own struggles as young adults. Later, when these teens became parents themselves, they were also more likely to be empathetic and open with their children. As authors Jessica Stern and Joseph Allen point out in a writeup of their findings, “this implies that what you do as a parent matters a lot more than what you say. The ability to empathize with other people in adolescence is a critical skill for maintaining good relationships, resolving conflict, having good communication skills and more satisfying relationships as an adult” Stern and Allen stress.

Young men, you will matriculate in 2029, on the cusp of a new decade and you will hopefully be enthused to continue your journey of self-discovery. Parents, 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 starts to become an empathetic, independent and focused individual on his journey to adulthood. We look forward to partnering with you in the next five years. God bless!

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