

2015 Convocation Speech

Bill Christ, Head of School
Wednesday, August 26, 2015

The Convocation Procession we've just taken part in is one of my favorite HB traditions, bagpiper and all. For those who may be participating in the procession for the first time, a convocation is a ceremony that marks the beginning of a new academic year, usually in a college or university, and has its roots in the Middle Ages. The word "convocation" derives from the Latin meaning "to call together," and in our case, to be called together for the very special purpose of "Learning not for school but for life." I especially love the ceremony because it makes such a strong statement about the strength and warmth of the HB community, which so many students and teachers over the years have thought of as their second family. We move together as one body from our starting point in the courtyard into the heart of the School, clapped in to the auditorium with celebratory fervor by the faculty. Come June, at Commencement, the journey is reversed, with the seniors moving from the heart of the School into the courtyard, and then out into the world, prepared to do great and good things, once again to the tune of faculty applause and affection. There's such a deep and meaningful symmetry to it all.

Another important Opening Day tradition at HB is the unveiling of the School Theme for the year – and this year, the theme is "Lighting the Way, Leaving Your Legacy."

I think this is a very powerful, inspiring, and relevant theme for us at this moment in the life of HB, and it reminds us of our revolutionary beginnings and our noble mission. You know our founding story: the five audacious young women in 1875 who could not find a school in Cleveland that would prepare them for the future of intellectual freedom and the right to use their talents to create a better world. So since no such school actually existed in Cleveland at that time, they helped to invent one, Hathaway Brown, whose roots go back to 1876, and we have been lighting the way ever since. And it's important to note that their bold and creative act wasn't just about them: they carved out a path that other aspirational girls and young women in Cleveland could follow so that they too could cultivate their abilities and put them to use in serving society and enriching the lives of others. Today, we are the fortunate beneficiaries of their legacy, the gift they gave to the future, and, as the Biblical injunction goes, "To those to whom much is given, much is expected," so we have the obligation to pay it forward, to put this education to work to make a difference in people's lives.

I know that, in your young lives, you are already, and most impressively, embracing that ethic – that is just how you roll, and how we roll, here at the Hath. That outlook is part of our core values, what we were put on earth to make happen, and it is vibrantly alive in our mission

statement. So at the start of a new year, I thought it was worth reading that mission statement aloud – just as a reminder of the enterprise of which we are all a part.

Hathaway Brown is a dynamic and compassionate community dedicated to excellence in the education of girls.

For us, educational excellence includes, but reaches well beyond, superb preparation for college. The true mission of the School, as reflected in our motto, “*Non scholae sed vitae discimus,*” is preparation for life. We strive to foster in the minds of our students an abiding passion for learning and in their hearts a constant devotion to strong character and public service.

At this moment in history, there is great need for women of vision and courage who are empowered for leadership in a multicultural and globalized society. We seek to answer that need by inspiring our students to achieve their utmost potential, and to rise boldly to the challenges of their times.

While transforming the lives of the girls in our care is our primary calling, Hathaway Brown embraces broader aspirations as well: to help shape a future of unbounded possibility for women; to stand among the country’s leading schools in educational innovation; and to be such a force for the common good beyond our campus that we are respected as a civic treasure.

So when we were choosing the words for this year’s theme, we thought of “Lighting the Way” to capture our history of innovative leadership, the lamp of learning which is our time-honored school symbol, and the whole idea of being a “Blazer.” And we purposely said “Leaving your legacy,” rather than “Leaving a legacy” because we recognize and appreciate the fact that there are so many different ways of making a contribution, being an agent of change, and that you carry within you such a variety of abilities, interests and passions, that we wanted the act of legacy-making to be true to who you are – there are lots of ways, big and small, to make a difference for the better in your class, team, the school, the city of Cleveland, the world – all meaningful and valuable. What fits best for you? How would you like to be remembered? The other day I saw Mrs. Seals, HB Class of 2001, Director of our Aspire Program, and Director of our Center for Multicultural Affairs, installing a bulletin board that said, “Be the light you want to see in the world” – a good way to think about legacy-building. Something we’re planning to do in the next few days is to give everyone an opportunity to write or draw what they think of as their legacy on big sheets of paper in the atrium and then hang them in the Upper School hallway where those visions can shine forth and inspire us all.

Yesterday, one of our veteran HB students was taking a few new students on a tour, and I overheard her say, “You guys picked a great time to come to HB!” I couldn’t agree more – it’s always, of course, a wonderful time to come to HB, but we are particularly flush with amazing people and incredible opportunities at this moment. And I am really thrilled with the three new construction projects underway this fall, all of which are real game-changers: the world-class synthetic turf playing field which is going to be such a breakthrough for our athletic and physical education programs, school-wide; the updating of our library into a 21st century

Learning Commons, complete with its own coffee and juice bar run as a small business by student entrepreneurs; and the IDEA Lab, a digital fabrication laboratory featuring 3-D printers, laser cutters, a shop bot – a hub of creativity and invention and a reflection of the HB mantra, “if you can dream it you can do it.” Those are all new vehicles for lighting your way, leaving your legacy, given by generous parents, trustees, alumnae, and friends in appreciation for the impact the School has had on their lives and because they believe so deeply in our students and faculty today and what they are bringing to the future.

It is such a privilege to be embarking on the adventure of the new year with all of you, a year that is aglow with such promise. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything you do for Hathaway Brown, and may it be your best year ever!