
Welcome faculty and staff colleagues. Westminster School was founded in 1888. We are at the start of our 132nd school year.

To begin, in this chapel setting, let’s take a moment to pause and reflect at once — on the amazing capacity for human achievement, this summer highlighted by the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, and the awful capacity for human depravity, highlighted by domestic and international terrorism, whether on the occasion of tomorrow’s anniversary of September 11, 2001, or in the recent shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio.

Let us, also, reflect on those whose lives, homes, and well-being were struck by Hurricane Dorian.

A moment of silence please.

Joining together to sing hymns has long been a powerful expression of community. For our first chapel, let’s join together, enthusiastically, in singing our school hymn, arranged by H. Allen Dingwall, a Westminster parent, whose son was in the Class of 1938. Please stand and open your hymnal supplement, titled Song & Spirit, to page 5.

Westminster School Hymn

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

New school years are a time for introductions, and I hope that over the next few days and even weeks all of you will reach out on a regular basis to introduce yourselves so that we all get to know each other better.

To begin this process, I am the Headmaster. Mrs. Philip lives with me in Pratt House, which is the yellow home behind this chapel.

I joined the faculty at Westminster in 1983, and Mrs. Philip joined me here on Williams Hill in 1985. We brought up our two daughters in this campus community. Kate graduated with the Class of 2006 and Alie with the Class of 2009. They are now both happily married and living in New York City.

During my time on the faculty, I taught history for twenty-five years, coached swimming, lacrosse, and baseball, served as a corridor supervisor, and served as an advisor for hundreds of students. At
various times, I also served as Director of College Counseling and Director of Studies, in addition to other roles.

**MISSION, CORE VALUES, MOTTO, and MASCOT**

At the start of each new school year, it is important to review our school’s mission.

All schools have mission statements, but, candidly, very few school people remember what is in their school’s mission statement.

At Westminster, we have distilled our mission statement into four core values, which are much easier to remember — community, character, balance, and involvement.

We also embrace a motto — Grit & Grace — and a mascot — the martlet — which define and embody our values.

Simply put, at Westminster School, the associations of our mission, core values, motto, and mascot complement each other, while underscoring our defining ethos and the lessons we value most.

Our mission and core values are our foundation, our touchstone against which we must measure everything we do at Westminster School. Always, we should reflect upon how well we are living up to our mission and core values, both individually and as a community.

**CORE VALUES**

Our core values are community, character, balance, and involvement.

We are first and foremost a community where we appreciate and respect each other.

**Character** matters here. Who we are and how we treat each other makes all the difference in successful communities.

**Balance** in our activities, interests, and passions matters as well. If we are going to grow, we must be open to new experiences and not overly focused on one particular interest or passion.

Finally, **involvement** is critical. This community succeeds, and we thrive individually only if we involve ourselves fully across the community.

You will learn many excellent lessons in our classrooms, but at Westminster, your lessons will extend well beyond the classroom, as we seek to prepare you to flourish, not just as students, but for a lifetime.

**COMMUNITY SPACES (CHAPEL)**
Adjoining both the Sixth Form Lawn and Commencement Lawn, this spiritual space of Andrews Memorial Chapel resonates for alumni of Westminster School as a symbolic representation of our school’s inspiring ethos and distinguishing values.

In fact, the chapel you are sitting in is the third chapel in this location. Hay Memorial Chapel was first dedicated in 1902 and burnt down in 1904. The Hay family then made another gift to rebuild the chapel in 1905.

As our school grew in size, from around 100 to as many as 160 in the mid-1950s, Hay Memorial Chapel could no longer accommodate students and faculty, so in 1962 it was replaced by Andrews Memorial Chapel, which today comfortably accommodates our 400 students and 90 faculty.

Fundamentally, we cultivate, nourish, and celebrate our community here. I ask that you always respect this special space, where generations of our students and faculty have gathered as a community, and I hope that you will cherish it, too.

In this spiritual space, we are invited to reflect beyond our own personal concerns, to think of others and their sacrifices, to be compassionate, sensitive, inclusive, empathetic, and aware.

While in this chapel, I hope we will learn many lessons about the values at the foundation of a successful community, lessons that will help us to make a difference in our endeavors at Westminster and also in the world beyond Williams Hill, the world that we are reminded of every day as we gaze out from our campus on Williams Hill to the beautiful view of the Farmington River Valley.

THE HEART of the SCHOOL

Andrews Memorial Chapel joins Cushing Hall, Keyes House, Brockelman Student Center, and Armstrong Dining Hall to circle the Sixth Form Lawn. These community spaces are at the heart of our school.

Over Commencement Weekend, the Class of 2019 invited today’s Sixth Formers onto the Sixth Form Lawn. In the process, the Class of 2020 accepted its leadership role for this school year.

Last Saturday morning, we celebrated the pin ceremony on the Sixth Form Lawn; following, here in Andrews Memorial Chapel, new students signed the book signifying their joining this school community.
Whereas we learn academic lessons in Armour Academic Center, and lessons about the visual and performing arts in Hamilton Art Studios or Werner Centennial Center, and lessons about teamwork in our gyms, in Jackson Rink, in Sherwin Health and Athletic Center, or on our many fields, we embrace lessons about community in these spaces surrounding the Sixth Form Lawn.

**GRIT and GRACE**

Our school’s motto is *Virtute et Numine*, or as we put it today “Grit and Grace.”

“Grit” challenges us to work hard in learning all the lessons we are taught here, and in the process to improve ourselves.

“Grace” reminds us of our humanity, of our moral priority to care for others, and not just ourselves.

We are at our best when we are selfless, not selfish, when we seek to improve the circumstances of others, not just ourselves, when we are aware and sensitive.

Together, Grit, which focuses on personal improvement, and Grace, which focuses on caring for others, is a motto to inspire a fulfilling and meaningful lifetime.

**THE MARTLET**

Similarly, the martlet is an inspiring school mascot, its legend complementing our motto of Grit & Grace.

By legend, the martlet is a footless bird, always in flight, except in the chapel, which is the one place it rests. In fact, our school’s shield — attributed to an English King named Edward the Confessor — features five martlets, all without feet.

However, over the north entrance to Andrews Memorial Chapel, you will notice that the martlet is represented with feet, because, according to legend, it is here in Andrews Memorial Chapel that the martlet can rest and reflect, just as we do at our twice-weekly chapel services.

On its own, this element of the martlet’s story inspires, considering the centrality of our chapel program to Westminster School’s history and ethos and the enduring importance of time for reflection and spirituality in the midst of our tumultuous world.

Even more, though, the mythology accompanying the martlet, emphasizes the importance of *earning* your place in the world and not relying on advantage or privilege.
This interpretation of the tireless, footless martlet, with a home in the chapel, that seeks to earn its place in the world complements nicely our motto of Grit & Grace.

EARNING RESPECT

Today, in our modern, interconnected world, we must prepare ourselves to earn respect based upon our abilities and talents, not because of some expectation of family privilege or hierarchy.

OPPORTUNITIES

This school offers students remarkable opportunities. You will learn from devoted teachers; you will meet peers from around the country and world who are from different circumstances, experiences, and traditions; you will discover new personal talents and interests; but you will fully realize these opportunities only if you earn them — by demonstrating grit through hard work and grace through an inclusive, accepting, respectful spirit.

MARTLETS FLY TOGETHER

In this regard, the phrase — Martlets Fly Together, is very popular, because it is such a wonderful expression of community! The phrase underscores that we draw strength from each other and enrich each other.

As Headmaster, I attend many school events at far flung venues where alumni, parents, and friends of Westminster gather to express their affinity for this school — for instance, here in Simsbury or Boston, New York, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, London, Hong Kong, Beijing, or Seoul. These events are always so affirming, as alumni share stories about the extraordinary difference that this school made in their lives.

Extending the expression that martlets fly together, you will notice around campus school emblems which depict the soaring, overlapping wings of two martlets. This pair of martlet wings is shaped into a W, and suggests that Martlets Soar Together. Along with the shield with five martlets, the emblem with the overlapping wings is another symbol for Westminster.

INTENTIONALITY
Considered together, our core values, motto, and mascot all intentionally emphasize the shared opportunity offered to us in this school community.

Also, intentionally, our core values, motto, and mascot emphasize that we must not take this opportunity for granted, that we must commit ourselves to work together to earn the full benefit of this opportunity.

By engaging with each other, we enrich our experience, but this engagement requires a sustained commitment, and at Westminster School that commitment intentionally begins here at the heart of our school — in the spaces surrounding the Sixth Form Lawn.

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

For many reasons, successful communities are challenging enterprises. Obviously, everyone doesn’t get along with each other all the time. At times, in ways large and small, in ways intentional and unintentional, each of us can be selfish, self-absorbed, and insensitive.

SELFLESS AWARENESS

By pausing in our busy daily routines to talk with each other, to listen to each other, and to attend to daily courtesies such as greeting each other in a friendly manner, holding the door, taking our hats off when inside, and being polite, respectful, and humble, we affirm that we are aware and care for other people.

By setting aside time in our busy schedules for weekly chapel services, family-style meals, and community gatherings, by engaging with each other meaningfully, by taking off our headphones and putting away our devices, we express our interest in, sensitivity to, and concern for other people.

Importantly, this commitment is not just selfless. All of us learn so many lessons from each other. In fact, it is these lessons which truly distinguish the Westminster School experience.

CONCLUSION

So, as we head into a new school year, let’s commit to a community ethos that embraces our respect for other people, where we reflect beyond our personal concerns and priorities, where we seek to dignify other people, where we strive to make someone else’s day a bit better, where we are kind and courteous.
On a daily basis, let’s seek to learn lessons from each other, whether in classrooms, in studios, on stage, on teams, in residences, or at family-style lunch; let’s learn to share, to listen, to appreciate, to cooperate, and to compromise.

Our world would be a better place, a more stable place, a more accepting place, and a more enriching place if more people embraced a community ethos.

As captured in our school’s motto and by the symbolism accompanying martlets flying together and then soaring together, a perspective of that sort is filled with grit and grace.

Let’s join in reciting Prayer 16 on page 33 in Song & Spirit.

O Lord, bless our schools, and colleges, and universities, and especially Westminster School, that they may be lively centers for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom. Grant that those who teach and those who learn may find their truth in thee and stand as witnesses to that truth before the world. Amen.

Before we recess, please rise and join together in singing Westminster’s Recessional on page 4 in Song & Spirit.