



HEATHWOOD HALL

Head of School Chris Hinchey's Commencement Remarks

Good morning! I am honored to welcome you to Heathwood Hall's 46th Upper School Commencement Ceremony.

My name is Chris Hinchey, Heathwood Hall's Head of School, and on behalf of the faculty, staff, and administration, we are excited to celebrate the members of the Class of 2022 and recognize their graduation from Heathwood Hall Episcopal School at this beautiful Commencement ceremony.

This morning, I am both a proud father and a school leader, and I am feeling great joy as I look out at the familiar faces that have been with me and my wife Heather on this journey for almost a decade.

Today's gathering marks a significant transition in the lives of our seniors, and it is overwhelming to consider all of the moments, events, and occasions that preceded this commencement ceremony, bringing us to this celebration.

Inviting this many people to join together requires the diligent, selfless, and creative work of many, so please take a moment to appreciate the startling beauty of our venue and recognize the efforts of a small army of people who helped design and construct this beautiful and an incredible memory. I am especially grateful to Jenny Holder.

We are also guests of the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, and I want to thank the Dean, the Right Reverend Dane Boston, and his staff for hosting us this morning. Further, I want to welcome the recently installed Bishop and member of Heathwood Hall's Board of Trustees, the Most Reverend Daniel Richards. I am honored that they could join us this morning.

I also want to thank the Reverend Jill Williams for her tireless efforts in planning both the Baccalaureate and Commencement services for the Class of 2022, and George Scouten and Elise Hagstette for masterfully writing and sharing with us the comprehensive Class History.

Later this morning, we'll hear from our commencement speaker, the Honorable J. Michelle Childs, and our student commencement speaker, Robert Golden, and recognize a few adult members of the community for their service to others and contributions to Heathwood Hall.

While we will be recognizing all departing faculty next week during In-service, today also marks the last Heathwood Hall Commencement ceremony for two long-serving members of the Heathwood faculty.

At this time, I would like to recognize kindergarten teacher Sandra Hall and 2nd grade teacher Kellie McElveen. Please join me in giving them a round of applause for their exemplary service to the School.

The members of the Class of 2022 have experienced a high school journey like few in this cathedral. Three of their four high school years were far from normal, and it is difficult for most of us to put ourselves in their shoes and fully grasp all that they experienced.

As educators, parents, and adults, there was no playbook to follow during a pandemic, and while our lifetime experiences and infrequent flashes of wisdom provided some guidance, it rarely illuminated a clear and easy path forward.

Over the course of the last two years, I have been asked about Heathwood's success during the pandemic. My answers are always the same, as there were four components to our success.

First, we prioritized students when making decisions, and second, our parents were supportive, understanding, appreciative, and incredibly engaged. From casseroles for faculty to Maria's cowbell brigade, our parents have engaged in selfless giving and brought the energy to our campus. Thank you!

Third, the faculty and staff at Heathwood - through their work with students and families during the last years - all played a vital role in the growth and development of the students, and they nurtured a culture that prioritized student development, engagement, and growth.

I work with amazing teachers and administrators, and they rose to the challenge during the pandemic. For 70 years the teachers, educators and administrators of Heathwood have built it into a school with a national profile, but the educators I work with have not only set the course for Heathwood's future, but they have also impacted the lives of the students seated in front of me.

To you, the seniors... The educators at Heathwood were invested in you because they cared. Building snack walls in advisory, fine-tuning your senior exhibition presentations, meeting for extra help to prepare for a test, and writing college recommendation letters were just some of the ways they supported your journey.

Traveling with you during Winterim, flying down a zip-line, coaching you on a Saturday morning, and debating current events in the opening and closing moments of class likely happened at some point during your journey. Maybe Turkey Trot, Create a

Country, the Roots project or the Highlander games are the memories you have of the adults educators at Heathwood.

Teachers share a part of themselves with their students, and they take joy when those same students leave campus to make their mark in the world.

And that brings me to the fourth point. The students....specifically the students in this senior class - they have played an enormous role in the success of Heathwood during the pandemic. The investment, engagement and involvement of the students sitting in these front pews have left the School a healthier and stronger institution than it was just a few years ago.

While the academic, athletic, artistic, and extracurricular accomplishments of this group are many, it was the spirit, the energy, and the excitement they shared with the school community that is their legacy. As our school and the world adjusted to the pandemic, these students gave back to the school through their participation, creativity, and support of their classmates. The unexpected, the unprecedented, and the unlikely left us all weary, and the energy of this class buoyed us all.

This past year, Trey Popp '93 - a Heathwood alum - wrote *Highlanders: A History of Heathwood Hall* to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the School's founding. When Trey Popp was asked at a gathering what he learned during his research and writing, among other things he commented on the fact that the "life amongst the students" is what drives a school.

As you prepare to leave, do not underestimate your ability to change the culture of the communities you join. You have had a positive and lasting impact on the School, and you have changed the culture of the school for future generations, and that is your legacy.

You have earned our respect, we are grateful for your contributions to the School, and appreciative of the gifts you have left us with. We are excited for the next leg of your journey, we are going to miss your regular presence on our campus, and we cannot wait for you to come back and visit us soon.