



Honor Convocation – Welcome
John P. Pittman II '20, Student Court Chairman
August 22, 2019

Welcome to Hampden-Sydney. I trust that by now, either through the admissions process or through various conversations that you have had or even through the process of moving in itself, you have garnered some appreciation for our school and are starting to realize that it is a special place.

The Honor System and the Code of Conduct that we have here are the foundation for a certain way of life. This certain way of life you will not only come to practice but also come to appreciate. The Honor Code, of course, is that a Hampden-Sydney student will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will he tolerate those who do. The Code of Conduct is equally as simple. A Hampden-Sydney student will behave as a gentleman at all times and in all places.

Despite what you might be thinking now or what you will be thinking at the end of orientation, we do not have a lot of rules here. Be honorable and be a gentleman. In being honorable, you exhibit trust in your classmates and in your professors and in the community at large. In being a gentleman, which is to say being chivalrous, courteous, and empathetic, you show the people around you that they have worth and that you are aware of it. One is not a gentleman because he is descended from landed gentry on James River nor is he one because he attended a haughty boarding school nor is he one because he wears Vineyard Vines shirts and Collard Greens bowties. Being a gentleman is an idea more than anything—a school of thought, if you will. Tommy Shomo, author of *To Manner Born, To Manners Bred*, and Hampden-Sydney class of 1969, maintains that Cardinal John Henry Newman's description of a gentleman is the most apt: One who never inflicts pain. That is to say, literally, a gentle man.

The responsibility is yours. For over two hundred years, our Honor System has helped produce good men and good citizens. Everyone who has ever been a student here has been in your shoes. Tonight, signing the Honor Code is the single-most important thing you will do here. No matter what classes you take, what clubs or fraternities you join, what paths you set out for yourself, the Honor Code and the Code of Conduct make it all possible and give us all something in common. We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, making the Hampden-Sydney diploma, the Hampden-Sydney experience, and the Hampden-Sydney man so rare and so invaluable. It is on us to help maintain and help progress that reputation.

You know who we are and what we do here, but if you are going to join us, there are a couple things I want you to know. The tribulations of a wicked society stop at the gates. There is no place in the world like this College, where we take each other at each other's word, where we are all our brother's keeper, where we can be idealists. Some of us are here tonight because we thought that Hampden-Sydney would be fun, which it is. Some of us are here tonight because our fathers went here, and we value tradition, which is commendable. Many of us are here because we believe in lauded things long forgotten and long forsaken by the world, and we saw coming here as the right thing to do.

I'd like you all to look to the young man on your left. And now to the young man on your right. In previous speeches, this is where the Honor Court Chairman would say that one of those people will not be graduating with you. Previous chairmen were not trying to scare you or make this place seem unwelcoming but rather trying to convey the weight of the next four years and the tests—both academic and otherwise—that lay ahead.

To be sure, you will be tested—academically and morally and existentially—but with the help of the classmates beside you and by helping your classmates beside you, all of you can and will graduate and grasp that lauded diploma, and join the ranks of a brotherhood of good men and good citizens that knows no bounds in loyalty.

However, it is not with the stroke of a pen and the shake of a hand that you become a Hampden-Sydney man. Rather, it's a process. Think of tonight as the beginning of that process. By signing the Honor Code tonight and in so doing agreeing to the rules by which we live, you are deciding to change yourself and deciding to change the way you live. You are deciding that when you see a wallet on the ground, you will return it to its owner instead of looking at the contents. You are deciding that when you are acting outside of the rules of this College and are questioned about it, you'll own up to your mistake. You are deciding that when you're given a take-home exam, you'll obey the instructions to the letter, without even thinking about cheating. You are deciding that when you see a young lady at a party who has been overserved, you will help her rather than take advantage of her.

This College is the last, best hope for character, for chivalry, for humanity. Where else is character valued as much if not more so than academics? Cowards, shirkers, and liars are long gone and don't last here. We call on you—we charge you—the 244th freshman class of Hampden-Sydney, to commit to being good men, to commit to being good citizens, to commit to being gentlemen.