



Formal Meal - Fall 2023

Remarks by President William Lahey

Some of you may be aware of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, and more specifically, with the book and movie based on the book called *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I once had a King's student tell me that stepping into the Lodge from the hallway outside the back door was like stepping through the wardrobe in that story.

Some of the other books of C.S. Lewis were favourites of mine when I was your age, and like you are now, studying for my first degree. Here is a quote from him I recently came across in the *New York Times*, which I think is very applicable to King's and especially for those of you now battling your way through FYP:

Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not have to create). Friendship has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.

In my way of thinking, an undergraduate degree is about friendship as much as it is about taking courses, writing papers and exams, and learning in classrooms. And friendship, like education, is a kind of love.

Last week, some people took to the streets of Halifax and to the streets of other Canadian cities to promote an anti-2SLGBTQIA+ agenda, one that portrays transgender as a kind of indoctrination and as an unnatural ideology. Here tonight, as we gather together as a community of love that includes many members of the Queer community, I want to repeat what I said last Thursday in our statement on these protests:

Every day our small campus defies this narrow vision with our ever-expanding list of events, societies, support staff and support groups intended to embrace and celebrate 2SLGBTQIA+ life.

Our statement went on to say, “we are advancing the culture of love, kindness and evidence-based research that we and so many others believe in.”

Tonight, I want to focus on the theme that here at King’s “we are advancing the culture of love” and suggest that whatever formal meal may have meant in the past, today it is a manifestation of that culture. For those of you who identify as Trans, Queer and as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, your very presence here shows that King’s is changing even as we continue to honour our traditions of ancient lineage. In the process, you are changing those traditions and King’s by making them more inclusive for everyone and by teaching us all about love. So let me say this – we love you.

Yet another recent event in the life of our community brought love to the forefront in my thinking of what kind of university King’s is called to be. This story starts long ago, when Gordon Earle of Halifax became, in the late 1950’s, the first winner of the university’s Prince Scholarship – the first scholarship for Black students in Nova Scotia and possibly in Canada.

That scholarship was originally named in honour of Rev. Dr. Samuel Prince, the same King’s professor of divinity and sociology that this dining hall is named after. After winning the scholarship, Gordon Earle went on to have a very distinguished and consequential career, writing Nova Scotia’s first human rights act, serving as Manitoba’s Ombudsman for a decade, coming home to Nova Scotia to be a deputy minister of housing and other portfolios and then getting elected to Parliament as a member of the NDP. In 2022, King’s made Mr. Earle into Dr. Earle by giving him an honorary degree to recognize his accomplishments and contributions, all achieved by overcoming and confronting Anti-Black racism. In accepting his degree, he told the graduates of 2022 three stories exemplifying the difference that love can make in the world.

More recently, we honoured Dr. Earle by renaming the scholarship he was the first to win in his honour. The Prince Scholarship is now the Gordon Earle Scholarship,

which keeps the name in the family of royal titles. In addition to honouring Dr. Earle, we did this to make the point that a scholarship for African Nova Scotians should be named after an African Nova Scotian.

This is what Dr. Earle had to say about the renaming:

While the intent of the scholarship is to assist Nova Scotians of Black heritage achieve their educational goals, I would respectfully suggest that it goes much deeper than simply supporting the financial needs of the student and extends to providing a sense of caring and support for the student as a whole. This scholarship will signal to its recipients that we care for you, we love you, and we will work together with you, as we build a better world—a world where no one is left behind.”

Among the many things I have come to admire about Gordon Earle is the sincerity and directness with which he encourages us to make love our guiding star in education and life.

When we gather together for formal meal, or for other university ceremonies such as the Matriculation we just celebrated, I feel like I am surrounded by a loving community – or perhaps, it is more accurate and honest to say, a community that is aspiring to be a loving community as it undergoes the complex process of changing to become more truly itself.

As an academic community, we are here to have disagreements, and strong ones. In our different roles in the university, we have responsibilities toward each other and our mission that may not seem very loving when they are happening. Receiving a C on a paper comes to mind as does the occasions when the university cannot do all that we would like to do for you and for those who work at King’s. But I believe these are, when properly understood, examples of how our love for each other sometimes calls on us to be truthful with each other even when it hurts, to think of longer-term benefit and not just immediate ones, or to balance our commitments to individual with collective well-being. At the very least, they are circumstances that demonstrate how important it is to be loving in all circumstances.

In saying all this, I am very aware of my own failures to live up to this aspiration, and of those of our university. I firmly believe however that we are not defined by our failures to be what we aspire to be but by the way our aspirations abide despite our failures. That fundamental hopefulness is the very foundation on which the value of a university education depends. My hope for all of you, and for everyone at King's, is that you feel loved here and that you contribute, as I know it is your heart's truest desire, to making King's a more loving community.