



Dr. Timothy Vine's speech on the occasion of his installation as President and Vice-Chancellor

Delivered October 7, 2026

Thank you so much for coming and participating in this special day in the long life of our college—also, of course, a very special day for me personally. What an honour to be invited into this unique and exceptional community.

I'd like to start by thanking those who have supported me as I take on this new role as the 26th President of King's, namely Chancellor Debra Deane Little, Chair Stephanie McGrath and the entire Board of Governors.

Faculty, staff, alumni, students, donors, and members of the community at large have all been generous with their thoughts and enthusiastic in their praise for King's. It has been an incredible experience to meet you, and I have quickly grown to feel at home—It's very moving to see so many of you here today.

I've not only felt welcomed, I've been immersed! Since arriving in July, I have been engaged in a near constant conversation about King's and how to best understand such a wonderful, and wonderfully weird, place.

I do not pretend, however, after less than three months, to have King's entirely figured out. I suspect that would be a dangerous claim after three decades! But I have begun to form a view of what is most important about this place, what we have inherited, what is changing around us, and what we ought to carry forward, together. I'd like to share a little about what I've learned so far.

In a place as established as King's, it is easy to suppose that what we have inherited is continuity. But our history tells a more interesting story. The re-founding at Windsor in 1789; the fire that destroyed the campus in 1920; the move to Halifax in 1929 that began our close and ever-evolving association with Dalhousie; the loss of the Divinity School in 1971 and the advent of the Foundation Year Program soon after; the creation of the Bachelor of Journalism in 1977; the launch of the MFA program in 2013; these are not the landmarks of an institution that has remained unchanged. But one that evolves.

Continuity at King's does not mean keeping everything unchanged. It means building carefully on a very solid foundation.

The books, buildings, ceremonies, and traditions curated and carried forward by people before us link us to a past, certainly, but their greater value is that they give us something with which to face the future.

And in all of that, something recognizably King's has endured. A devotion to the life of the mind. A conviction that an education should be more than the accumulation of credits or the acquisition of a credential. A willingness to read difficult things slowly, to argue about them, to write carefully, and to take ideas seriously. Because ideas shape how we understand ourselves and the world around us.

We have also inherited a particular way of doing those things, namely, in meaningful conversation. King's is not simply a collection of courses. It is a community in which education happens among people who come to know one another. It's where the discussion begun in a classroom continues over coffee in the Wardroom or at a Formal Meal. It's where somebody walking a dog through the Quad becomes so immersed in a discussion that they quickly become late for some other important conversation. Okay, that last one is obviously about me.

Some of our most urgent conversations are about what we've inherited that may not deserve to be preserved. I spoke at Formal Meal about the more difficult parts of our history and about the danger of confusing age with virtue. We have inherited obligations as well as assets: obligations to explore our history honestly, obligations to the Mi'kmaw communities on whose unceded territory we live and work, obligations to African Nova Scotian communities whose often overlooked contributions have been so integral to this province, and obligations to so many others who have not always experienced old institutions like ours as places that belonged to them.

Our inheritance is not a museum collection. It becomes ours only when we decide what it asks of us now. And the circumstances in which we make those decisions are changing quickly.

Universities have always changed, although those of us who work in them occasionally behave as though the arrangements we inherited were handed down on stone tablets. The model of higher education that took shape in Canada over the second half of the twentieth century rested on a number of assumptions: expanding participation, growing public investment, relatively predictable demographics, and a broad social confidence that more education was, almost by definition, a public good.

We should not assume that all of those conditions will continue.

The financial pressures facing universities are real. So are demographic changes, intense competition for students, changing expectations about employment, and a public that is quite reasonably asking what it receives in return for the significant investment made in higher education.

Technology continues to alter the landscape—and at an increasing pace. Information that once required a trip to a library, or at least an expert guide to obtain, is available almost instantly. Generative artificial intelligence, still in its infancy, has made this all the more apparent. Machines can now summarize a book, explain a concept, draft an essay, produce code and answer questions at extraordinary speed.

It presents universities with practical problems, to be sure. But, more importantly, it presents us with an essential intellectual question: if access to information is no longer scarce, what exactly is a university for?

That question may make some institutions uneasy, but not this one. If anything, we at King's can be even more confident in our role here. Because, at King's, our emphasis has never just been on the transfer of information from one person to another. It is more about what happens *after* the information is shared.

What will you do with it? Can you understand it? Can you test it? Can you distinguish a strong argument from an attractive one? Can you recognize what is missing? Can you change your mind without simply surrendering your convictions? Can you get comfortable with contradictions and ambiguity? Can you make a judgment when the evidence is incomplete, as it almost always is when the question really matters?

In this complex, and quickly changing world, these capacities are not becoming obsolete. They are becoming more important. As the world around King's changes, it not only requires us to adapt, but it also helps us see why a place like this matters, possibly more than ever.

So, is this what King's is for?

I have found myself returning to that question often in these first months. Not because King's lacks answers. Quite the opposite, I've discovered. There are answers everywhere here, embedded in our programs, our habits, our traditions, and in the stories alumni tell about being transformed by their experience here. What I have been trying to do is understand what those answers have in common.

I think King's is, among other things, a school for developing sound judgment.

By judgment I do not mean simply having opinions. The world suffers no shortage of those. I mean the capacity to encounter something unfamiliar, to seek to understand it before dismissing it, to weigh evidence, to recognize competing goods, to see the limits of one's own knowledge, and eventually to decide what one thinks, and more importantly what one ought to do.

That is difficult work. It cannot be reduced to a formula, and it is not the possession of any one discipline.

We see how this happens in the Foundation Year Program. Students encounter arguments made across centuries by people who disagree profoundly about what is true, what is beautiful, what justice requires, what human beings are, and how we ought to live together. The point is not simply to learn what Plato or St. Augustine or Wollstonecraft or Marx said. It is to engage in the argument. To ask why an intelligent person might have believed this. To notice what follows from it. To decide what remains useful, what has become indefensible, and what questions we have still not managed to answer.

We see this in our upper-year humanities programs, where students take ideas that have shaped the modern world and expose them to sustained scrutiny, to decide what parts of our history to carry forward, and what we must change.

We see this in our Writing and Publishing programs that ask students to think seriously about language itself: how ideas take form, how voice and structure shape meaning, and what it means to write for a specific audience. They explore how stories can help us make sense of the world and shape our identities. Journalists are tasked with seeking out the truth, often in ways that are at odds with power. They must ask, what's true enough to publish, what evidence can sustain a claim, whose account has been omitted? They learn to distill complex ideas quickly to educate the public so they can make informed decisions, sometimes inciting change where needed.

Across the college, at our best, students learn not merely to know more, but to think better about what they know, and to give their ideas form in the world.

That distinction matters enormously now. In a time, when we have new facts, new ideas flowing in at an unprecedented pace, what matters most of all is our ability to process them meaningfully, to develop our judgment.

And that requires exposure to as many perspectives as possible. Enough to make easy certainties somewhat harder. Enough to make us capable of recognizing a good argument even from somebody with whom we disagree, and more suspicious of a bad argument that flatters something we already believe. Enough to give us the confidence to speak when something important needs to be said, and enough humility to recognize when we may be wrong.

That is why belonging matters academically. We become better at the work of education when more people can participate in it, bringing different histories, experiences and questions to the conversation. Inclusion is not achieved by pretending our differences do not matter. It requires enough confidence in the institution to let those differences affect it and enrich it.

This is also why conversation matters so much here. I've said that conversation, at its best, requires a willingness to be changed by the experience. It is not a call for endless agreement. Some disagreements are

real and should remain so. But argument becomes educational only when we allow for the possibility that the other person may know something we do not.

It demands that we learn to live in community with people we don't always agree with—and learn to respect our differences, because homogeneity does not foster development. In a world where it's easy to dismiss someone with the click of a button, living in a close community like this one requires that we must remain engaged, even if it isn't always easy.

There's a wonderful paradox in the scale of King's. Being small creates genuine vulnerabilities—we do not have the resources to be all things to all people, and we should not pretend otherwise. But our size also permits something increasingly rare, an education conducted at human scale. Faculty know students. Students encounter one another repeatedly. Programs can speak to each other. Ideas can travel across disciplinary boundaries because the people involved actually meet and grow to know each other. In this way, small is our strength.

Community, then, is not ancillary to the academic project at King's. It is part of the method. King's is a space to become closer in real time and real life—another thing we need more of these days—opportunities to come together, rather than hide behind screens.

You cannot learn judgment entirely alone. You need teachers who are immersed in a topic you have just been introduced to, friends who notice things you have missed, people whose experiences and perspectives are unlike your own, and occasionally somebody who irritates you enough to force you to sharpen your argument or perhaps even consider an alternative. You need the experience of being taken seriously and the discipline of listening and of taking others seriously in return.

None of this is an argument against practical education, careers, or professional preparation. Our students should leave King's able to find meaningful ways to help make the world work and their communities better. But the most useful tools we give them should far surpass the requirements of a first job. Careers change. Technologies change. Whole professions change. The capacity to *adapt* is cultivated by reading carefully, thinking independently, writing clearly, being open to learning something new, making sound judgments and living with other people—that travels rather well, we find. That's something we see and hear all the time from our alumni.

That, I think, is what's at the heart of King's. We are not here primarily to protect old forms, although some old forms are worth protecting. We are not here merely to transmit information, and we are certainly not here simply to issue credentials. We are here to cultivate people capable of thinking meaningfully about difficult things, in the company of others, and of carrying that into the lives they build beyond this place.

There are many ways to run a university. This is ours.

So, if that is what King's is for, then it has consequences for how we make choices.

We cannot preserve everything simply because it is familiar. Nor should we chase every new idea because it is new. The work of stewardship—work that is core to my role as President—is to know the difference between what is essential and what is merely habitual. And the methodology is exactly the judgement we seek to instill in our students.

For faculty, that means protecting the integrity of the educational experience even as disciplines, technologies, and student needs change. It means continuing to ask difficult things of students, and giving them the support, care and attention necessary to rise to those expectations.

For students, it means treating education as something in which you actively participate. You have responsibilities here: to prepare, to ask questions, to listen, to risk being wrong, and to contribute something of yourself to the community from which you expect so much.

For those of us in administration, it means remembering that although our structures, budgets, systems and policies are necessary, they are the means rather than the ends. In a small institution particularly, every dollar and every hour directed toward one thing is unavailable for another. Financial stewardship is therefore not separate from the academic mission. It is the work of making sure that the institution can continue to do what matters most—educate our students.

And for me, as President, it informs how I will characterize my time here.

As part of my pledge to you all today, I promise to remain candid, including when circumstances are difficult.

I will work toward decisions that begin with a clear understanding of what we are trying to preserve or achieve, rather than with the comforting assumption that the way we have always done something must be the way we continue to do it.

I will strive to help us to measure what we can, learn from what we try, and change course when the evidence tells us that something is not working.

And of the things that make King's, King's, I will defend what should be protected precisely because it is becoming increasingly rare and valuable: sustained attention, rigorous teaching, intellectual independence, communities small enough that people are known, and the expectation that education exists in an effort to help transform the person being educated.

There will be choices ahead. Some may be difficult. We won't avoid them but will make them with a reasonably clear account of what we are trying to hand on.

That brings me back to inheritance. It's my honour to be President, it is also humbling.

Looking out at all of you today—family, colleagues, students, and the expansive community that continues to show such support for King's, I feel such gratitude. Today, the weight of my commitments is balanced by a devotion to King's that is held by so many. Together, we have inherited something remarkable.

We are each here for a time, and we shape it together. And if we commit ourselves to this College and all it has to offer, as I intend to do, we, have the opportunity to be forever changed by the experience.

Thank you.