

Chapel Words (September 24, 2011) — Rev. Jim Holland

Next Saturday, we will have our first House chapel presentation, and Tuesday night I went into that House to give a little pep talk and share some basic information with the students there. As I was walking home afterward, I was feeling really good about the meeting. The reason, I later realized, was because of the reception I got in that house. When I walked into the common room, the students stood up, they welcomed me warmly, they listened attentively, and they even gave me a friendly round of applause when I finished. In other words, they lived up to their motto: *Acta non Verba*.

So, what House was it? Right... Ripley's, and what does *Acta non Verba* mean? Right again. *Actions not Words*. Or, as we say, Actions speak louder than words.

The night I visited them, the Ripley's gentlemen exhibited with their actions something that we devote a great deal of words to around here. The Headmaster made reference to it again earlier this week; that the lynchpin of our life together, what makes Shawnigan work, and what makes Shawnigan different, is the respect with which we treat one another.

At this time of year, as we settle back into life at Shawnigan, and as so many new students make the transition to the Shawnigan way of life, it is perhaps worth pausing to remind ourselves about what respect actually looks like at Shawnigan.

I am certainly not the main judge of what it means to show respect to one another. I know when I feel respected. I certainly felt respected Tuesday night at Ripley's House. And I know when I am being respectful and when I am falling short. Many of you know as well as I do what constitutes Shawnigan's special emphasis on respect; perhaps better than I do. So as I make a few suggestions, I imagine that you will be able to remind yourselves of what is important when it comes to showing respect.

First and most important, while respect has a lot to do with how we present ourselves, it isn't primarily about appearance. It isn't about being stuffy or prissy. It is about the way we value one another. It is about the way students value the knowledge and dedication and experience of their teachers, coaches and other staff members. And it is about the way the staff values the efforts and commitment of the students. Respect is about recognizing and calling forth the best in one another. And, at Shawnigan, that recognition takes specific forms. It can be seen in the way we address one another and in the way we dress, in the way we greet one another and in the way we treat one another. There are many ways that we show respect. It doesn't always look exactly the same. One of the things you may notice is that when I approach the altar I bow. I don't suggest that you do the same, but it is a way for me to show respect to God, to this place and to

the role that I have as a clergyman. It is a kind of physical prayer. Some of you come from places where it is a tradition to bow to one another as a sign of respect. That, too, is a physical expression of an inward attitude.

The outward signs of respect are not always going to look the same, but there are some traditional ways of showing respect that we share with one another and with generations of Shawnigan students that have come before us.

When the Headmaster enters the chapel we stand. There are other occasions when students stand when a staff member enters the room. This is not because the staff person is better than the students. It is an acknowledgement and a sign of respect for the roles played by the adults in our lives. Another way that we respect one another is to wait in line, in the dining hall for instance, going for breakfast or for a salad. We don't walk in front of other students as if our time is more valuable than theirs. We wait along with everyone else.

It hardly seems necessary to mention the basic courtesies of saying please and thank you. You are generally all very good about this. But it is easy to forget sometimes.

As I have said before from this podium, respect has mostly to do with making others feel comfortable, and even more with making them feel acknowledged and cared for. A respectful attitude is like any virtue, it is the road to happiness for ourselves and others. And respect isn't something we reserve for people we think are important. Dave Barry says, "The person who is polite to you, but rude to the waiter is not a nice person."

Respect is what makes us different. It is one of the things that holds us together. It is what makes us Shawnigan. It is not a given however, it takes some effort on the part of each of us. If you aren't sure what is considered respectful behavior and what isn't, ask. Ask the Prefects, they may be the best judges of all, and it is their job to set the tone for the student body in general.

But the place to start, of course, is to respect ourselves, because when we do we begin to expect respect from others and to act respectfully toward those around us. Self-respect is the cornerstone of a successful and satisfying life. There is nothing gained from disrespecting ourselves or others. I once read a quote from the writer Kurt Vonnegut who said that rudeness is the unpardonable sin. It has no justification; it serves no good purpose. There is no excuse for it. It is simply the act of spreading unhappiness. On the other hand, the little effort it takes to be respectful can make all the difference in the world. I encourage each one of us to make a commitment this morning to strive to live up to the legacy left to us by thousands of students and staff throughout the history of Shawnigan, to be people characterized by the respect that we show to one another. And to whoever comes through the front gates.