

Press Release

Contact: Jennifer Faeth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 7, 2017

AMELIA ACADEMY SENIOR DANIEL E. DELIVERS CHAPEL TALK

As seniors look forward to the next steps in their lives, some have clear plans and goals while others are more uncertain. Daniel E. is among the former as he detailed in his Chapel Talk, delivered on Nov. 1 before a gathering of students, faculty, and family. Daniel has found his vocation and will be pursuing a degree in elementary education at Longwood University.

Daniel dedicated his speech to his aunt Linda Duncan, a long-time educator and counselor at the Academy who died in 2015 and his grandmother Martha Easter, who passed away this fall. He expressed his gratitude for the lessons they taught him and the influence they had in his life.

The process of finding his career objective began two summers ago when Daniel took part in a two-week teen leadership program at the Swift Creek YMCA. Since his mother had signed him up for the position, Daniel said that he was nonetheless "surprisingly open to the idea."

The program involved learning about different leadership styles and working with children attending the YMCA summer camp. Since his supervisor was new to the position, Daniel spent more time with the children. "I was going to be learning by doing instead of talking about [leadership]," he said.

The next summer, Daniel worked as a volunteer at the camp several days a week. "That meant I got to build a stronger connection with the campers than I did the previous summer," he said. One young camper named Marcella had a particularly strong impact on this experience. "She was the only child diagnosed with autism at camp that year," he said. "At the time, I knew nothing about autism except the stereotypes that would be proven wrong."

Needless to say, Daniel's first moments with Marcella proved difficult. "As soon as her counselor introduced me," he said, "Marcella screamed the loudest scream I have ever heard." She continued this pattern for several weeks until the Tuesday of week five. That's when "something clicked," Daniel said. "During lunch, Marcella decided to come over and read me a book." It was amazing to him that as a kindergartner, Marcella had memorized the book and was reading.

Daniel realized that having autism "did not mean that their brains worked slower or worse, they just worked differently." Marcella grew to trust Daniel for the rest of the summer. He knew that he wanted to work at the camp again.

The next summer, Daniel was pleased to see Marcella at the YMCA camp again. As his work with the campers began, he decided to "focus

on how the kids reacted to each other so I could learn even more." As he observed the relationships developing between the children, he noticed that "they treated Marcella like she was any other camper." As the summer went on, he realized that the children didn't focus on the differences between them. "All they cared about was how they could make another friend."

Inspired by the example set by the campers he worked with at the YMCA, Daniel said that they "displayed a kind of love for each other that is missing in much of the world today." Daniel encouraged his audience to start setting the same example when they encounter a person different from them.

Quoting Luke 10:27, Daniel said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. "Your neighbor is not just the person who lives next to you, the person who lives on your street . . . or in your country. Your neighbor is any other human being."

While a student at the Academy since pre-school, Daniel has been active in many areas of student life. He is a member of the National Honor Society and the Beta Club. He has served on the Academy's Scholastic Bowl team. Daniel has also been a member of the cross country team and played varsity basketball.

This year, Daniel is taking an independent study course with a focus on elementary education. He works in the kindergarten classroom with students and prepares lesson plans and activities.

Attending his chapel talk were his parents, Diane and Roy Easter; his grandparents, Carol and Bob Newcomb; his uncle, Justin Gozzi; and his aunt and uncle, Patsy and Wyatt Moorefield. Other

special guests included Jason Morris, a member of the Academy faculty, and fellow classmates Elizabeth Jarvis and Aeron Marriott.

Following the chapel talk program, members of the senior class and guests attended a reception.