

# A LEGACY OF LEADERS

By Scott Butterworth

## Kathy Jamieson Helped a Generation of Educators Find Their Own Path Up

Until the moment Archer Harman whispered the idea into her ear, Kathleen O'Neill Jamieson had never imagined becoming the head of a school.

A teacher, absolutely. An administrator, certainly. She had already done both in her young career—teaching English at three schools and serving as director of the annual fund and then director of admissions at Princeton Day School in New Jersey. But headship?

Twenty-five years later, Jamieson is sitting in her Head of School office in Hearst Hall as she recounts this story with relish. Harman, she says, was the interim head of Princeton Day School when he asked Jamieson to address an influential audience of former trustees. The presentation was so impressive that he leaned in afterward to tell her, “You should be a head of school.”

Dean of Student Life Jessica Clark, Director of Diversity and Multicultural Education Rachael Flores, and Director of Athletics and Physical Education Heather Dent meet with Jamieson in her Hearst Hall office.



Jamieson at NCS's 2010 Commencement ceremony in the Cathedral.

Jamieson with, from left, family members Nate Heavers, Molly Jamieson, Katie Jamieson, Daniel Jamieson, and Annie Applegate at the 2003 service installing her as Head of National Cathedral School.



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he comment stuck with Jamieson, she said, because she really admired Harman's work as a head. "He enjoyed what he was doing, and he was good and kind to people," she said.

In 16 years as Head of NCS, Jamieson has done much to advance the school's already considerable reputation as a national leader in education. NCS has expanded its curricular offerings in STEAM disciplines; completed the long-planned renovations to Woodley North; improved its financial model; developed an updated mission statement and, for the first time, clearly stated core values; and enhanced coordination with St. Albans School.

Along the way, Jamieson has lived out qualities that she saw in Harman: She takes pleasure in her work, even when the hours are long. She prioritizes what best serves the students in her charge. And she has made a point of identifying and inspiring a generation of educational leaders: Ten administrators and department chairs have gone from NCS directly to take the reins at schools around the country, while many more faculty, staff, and administrators have held key positions in independent-school organizations.

"One of Kathy's greatest gifts to education is that she has gotten a whole lot of women to see themselves as leaders who wouldn't necessarily have done that," says Sarah

Pelmas, who led the NCS Upper School from 2010 to 2016 and now heads the Winsor School in Boston. "I have to tell you that, until the last year I was at NCS, it never would have crossed my mind to be a head."

Jamieson has been known to give a nudge when she thinks a colleague is looking past a great opportunity. More commonly, though, her style is to show, not tell. Past and present NCS administrators especially credit her flair at making the role of head look like fun in helping them to see their own path to leadership.

"I was getting to watch and experience a seasoned school leader who had so many gifts and talents but also to truly be mentored and supported by someone who I felt wanted to bring out the best in my leadership as well," says Langley School Head Elinor Scully, who held senior administrative roles at NCS from 2005 to 2013. "I think it's important, if you aspire to be a head of school, to be in the company of people who are really good at the job and who love it."

"Kathy takes genuine delight in the success of others, be it students or staff, and she's a joyful person. That joy is contagious," recalls Mary Jane McKinven, who was NCS communications director from 2009 to 2015. "And she would see potential where we just might see a wall. She would say, 'No, you can go through it.'"

“She really does trust that people will do a good job,” Pelmas says, “and I think it’s her sense that that’s the best way to help them do a good job is to say, ‘Give it a shot and we’ll see how it goes. I’m here if you need me, but I don’t think you do.’”

Jamieson replies to such comments by joking that being a head is easy: Select the right people, then step back and let them work.

But she reflects that, with seven children in the O’Neill house, “the most brilliant thing our parents ever did was convince us that we were responsible for each other’s success. My mother used to call it sibling revelry.”

At the same time, Jamieson has played a quiet but central role on numerous important projects for the school, first by identifying them and then keeping them on track.

One vivid example was the NCS mission statement, which Jamieson wanted to update as part of a strategic planning process in 2011–2012. “That was a hallmark of how Kathy likes to work, in the way she pulls things together,” Scully says. “There was a real sense that everybody’s ideas mattered.”

The final result, “We believe in the power of young women and educate them to embrace our core values of excellence, service, courage, and conscience,” distilled NCS’s identity in



Assistant Crew Coach Chris Bennett, Freshman Crew Coach Rachel Gabbay, and Senior Chaplain Rev. Eva Calaveri join Jamieson in applauding staff member Edward Magoba after the NCS crew program named a boat in his honor in 2016.

“I learned early that each of us had a different kind of role and that we all needed to work together to make anything work particularly well,” Jamieson says.

Perhaps, she adds, that is why “I’ve always been comfortable with multiple types of leadership. You need to have adults who not only don’t all look the same but also have different perspectives and ways of operating.”

a way that students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and Governing Board members would quickly embrace.

Getting to that point, though, took months, and in the end, it required the administrative team to refine the ideas of faculty and staff into one sentence. Jamieson kept urging her colleagues to keep at it, that they were making good progress on their way to something significant and lasting.



Associate Head of School/Head of the Upper School Denise Brown Allen, Jamieson, staff member Susan Huetteman, and faculty members Chris Snipe and Tamara Riquelme-Manzoni march around the Close during NCS’s inaugural International Women’s Day celebration in 2017.

“By the end, we were finishing each other’s sentences and phrases,” Jamieson says. “People would go away at night and come back with an idea in the morning.”

Years later, what the administrators remember about the project is less the labor and more the fun they had.

Scully credits Jamieson for recognizing the need “to toggle up to the right altitude to keep a sense of humor and perspective, to be able to reiterate in a way that feels creative and energizing.”

The mission statement also revealed another facet of Jamieson’s character: her conviction that pushing a little harder, giving just a little more when a project feels not quite done or right, will pay off in the end.

“I just like getting things the way they’re supposed to be,” she says.

That combination of optimism and tenacity has played out often at NCS: during the years-long, multi-phase work on Woodley North; the creation of the Teaching and Learning Center and the Center for Ethical Leadership and Service; the adoption of a new block schedule for the Upper School, in coordination with St. Albans; and, most recently, the Upper School’s move beyond Advanced Placement courses.

“Can we stretch? Can we think larger? When you’re caught up in the day-to-day, sometimes such requests feel beyond your grasp, but that is how a leader leads,” McKinven says.

“It was intense. It was fast-paced,” Scully says of her time at NCS. “But, as hard as we worked, we laughed. It was very joyful work.”

Virtually everyone who has worked with Jamieson notes the pleasure she takes from her role, whether it is from engaging with students on the sidelines of a field hockey game or cheering on a teacher’s well-deserved recognition off the Close.

The irony is that, back in 2003, Jamieson declined the invitation to join NCS. She said no, thank you. Twice.

She was leading the Purnell School in Pottersville, N.J., where over five years she had “really helped establish and deepen that school’s national reputation,” says Maret Head of School Marjo Talbott, who has known Jamieson for decades.

“My family was happy,” Jamieson said, “and I was doing interesting work up there.”



Jamieson shares a laugh with former Upper School head Elinor Scully and then-Upper School head Sarah Pelmas in 2015. Scully now leads the Langley School, and Pelmas is head of the Winsor School.

When members of the NCS search committee met personally with Jamieson, they told her, Imagine the model you could create at NCS, with support from generations of proud and devoted alumnae; an iconic location in the nation's capital; and a unique educational relationship with both Washington National Cathedral and St. Albans School.

They persuaded Jamieson to reconsider, and she started at NCS the following July. In October, she brought her vision of the educational model to the entire school community in her installation service, calling it "the most worthy challenge of all."

In hindsight, it is remarkable how consistently Jamieson has held to principles first defined in 2003: Begin with respect for our students. Focus on their personal development, including social/emotional learning, alongside their intellectual development. Set aside regular time for reflection. Surround the child with adult role models who take care of each other and exemplify the vibrant possibilities available through learning.

If Jamieson's first address to NCS served as a declaration of principles, the homilies that followed have been opportunities to discuss what drives her as an educator and a leader: Commit to making a difference in the world. Hang onto your summer self. Balance ambition with patience and humility. Be kind. Trust in others. Have faith.

"I have always found with Kathy that she's someone you want to learn from and share with and trust," says Talbott.

"So much of the work that you do as a Head is invisible," Jamieson says, "but it's important to speak to the community."

Jamieson believes deeply in the power of language, and a writing assignment tends to grab her attention like little else. It's a passion that first took hold of her in the 9th grade while she was being punished.

Her English teacher assigned her to write an essay, "Life Inside a Ping-Pong Ball," for laughing uncontrollably long after others had settled down. The result delighted the teacher, Bob Leslie, and he encouraged her to continue with her writing. "He made me feel that I had some real talent," Jamieson recalled. "I've never forgotten it."

She became a teacher herself after graduating from college, and at NCS, she returned often to the classroom: She was an Upper School homeroom adviser from 2003 through 2010, and she taught a science-writing elective for several years.

"I very much admired her for teaching science writing," McKinven says. "The demands with being head of school don't allow for this, but that class was a labor of love."

"In a lot of ways, my proudest designation is as a teacher," Jamieson says. Eventually, though, she would step back from teaching to focus on the duties of being the Head.

"One of the hallmarks of Kathy's tenure is that she worried much more about doing the right thing than anything else," Pelmas says, "not what's the most expedient thing or the politically appropriate thing or any of that."



Kathi Loughlin, Jamieson, Alexa Perlmutter '17, Catherine Paul '17, Gigi Grigorian '17, Murphy Shorb '17, and former Governing Board member Frank Gordon take part in the ribbon-cutting of the new and improved Woodley North in 2016.

In the close of her tenure at NCS, Jamieson has been thinking more about “how we can stand as a model of what family, church, and school can do together. Because, if you look around this community, the volunteers, the service, the philanthropy, the love that’s expressed in worship services, there’s a lot of goodness.”

Her own model of family, church, and school today touches each institution on the Cathedral Close. Jamieson also serves as a canon of the Washington National Cathedral and sits on the management committee of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation; her husband of 45 years, Dan, is the associate headmaster for development at St. Albans; her oldest daughter, Katie, teaches 2nd grade at Beauvoir; and two of her seven grandchildren attend NCS and Beauvoir.

Kathy and Dan have not yet decided what lies ahead for them. More time with their grandchildren is high on the wish list, but with the little ones in three different cities, that gets complicated. The Jamiesons still own the

Princeton, N.J., house they lived in before coming to Washington, and they have a family getaway in northern Michigan; each has its own attraction. The idea of writing a book has long appealed to her, and now she would have the time to focus on that. And she says she doesn’t feel ready yet to retire from education.

In a 2011 homily, Jamieson told the school that she has been blessed to experience epiphanies “when I am quiet—when I am in the world, but not the center of it. I believe such moments were created by God to capture our imaginations and wills and to inspire us to great commitments of love and compassion on behalf of those who need us.”

Eight years later, in her office, Jamieson said she still is “susceptible to epiphanies, these little moments that are guiding. Bob Leslie was one of those. Archer Harman was one of those.”

So as she thinks about the future, Kathy Jamieson is taking care these days to keep her mind, and her ears, open.



Members of the NCS community applaud Jamieson at a May Cathedral service honoring her 16 years as head of school.



# A FOCUS ON STUDENTS

# WHAT SERVES NCS STUDENTS BEST?

This question drove Kathleen O'Neill Jamieson as head over 16 years. Those interacting with her saw every day how committed Jamieson was to fulfilling the mission of National Cathedral School and her unwavering dedication to improve the lives of students. From the monumental—building innovative new spaces for them to learn—to the intimate—lending a listening ear—Jamieson made a lasting impression on NCS students, parents, alumnae, faculty, and staff. In the following pages, former and current NCS community members share their stories about her love for and consideration of students.



**“She made clear that NCS’s commitment to the power of young women wouldn’t mean much if we could not find the way to build and refine our students’ experience.”**  
—Alice Hill '74

## AN INTREPID LEADER

*Governing Board Chair Alice Hill '74 recalls that Jamieson always kept the power of young women front of mind.*

The list of job duties for the Head of any school runs long, very long. The Head is responsible for building the school’s curricula, recruiting faculty and staff, ensuring the highest level of academic achievement, fundraising, balancing the budget, attracting new students, attending athletic events and dramatic productions, mentoring employees, engaging parents, connecting with alumnae, delivering inspiring talks, and being an ambassador of the school every single day. Anyone who knows NCS knows that Kathleen Jamieson excels at all of these duties. But Kathy excels at something else, something that goes to the very essence of a lasting National Cathedral School.

It was during a Governing Board meeting that I realized Kathy’s role went far beyond the typical Head’s laundry list of duties. Seated around

the long conference room in Hearst Hall’s Alumnae Parlor, with portraits of Kathy’s predecessors looming above, the Board began its review of the school’s proposed budget for the upcoming year. As Board members peppered her with questions, Kathy patiently unpacked the numbers in the documents, clarifying how the recommended amounts could accelerate progress toward meeting fundamental goals. At that moment, I saw with clarity that, for Kathy, the budgeting process was not an accounting exercise. Choices made in the budget would allow NCS to offer the education promised in its mission statement. As she sorted through the figures, she revealed the complexities behind honoring what the school had set out to provide to every student and the passion and drive that it takes to turn these aspirations into reality.

It was evident that Kathy wanted every dollar in the budget traceable to how it would achieve NCS’s bold mission. She made clear that NCS’s commitment to the power of young women wouldn’t mean much if we could not find the way to build and refine our students’ experience.

In that moment, I understood plainly that Kathy’s most important role was as the heart of NCS. And as I look back on Kathy’s 16 remarkable years of leadership, her role as the heart of the school is evident in every corner, every academic lesson, and every school activity. Thanks to her exceptional performance in all of her roles, she will leave us with a remarkable gift: an enduring National Cathedral School that delivers every day on its promise to honor the power of young women.



## HER SECRET SUPERPOWER

*To students such as Kylie Gemmell '09, Jamieson was more than an authority figure; she was a confidant.*

My first day at NCS, as a new 7th grader, was also Kathy Jamieson’s first day as Head of School, so I’ve always liked to think that our paths at the school were cosmically intertwined. Fate similarly intervened in Upper School, when I was assigned to her homeroom.

I recall gathering with my fellow advisees outside Kathy’s office on our first day of classes, petrified to cross the threshold. As if high school wasn’t daunting enough, imagine being assigned to the Head of School for homeroom! However, our fears of being in such close proximity to the ultimate authority figure, of being under the

**Her students were her true north—we saw that, and we loved her for it.”**

—Kylie Gemmell '09

microscope, quickly evaporated. Kathy’s office became our sanctuary, where girls from all facets of NCS’s social fabric gathered a few times a week to support each other under Kathy’s wing.

While the particulars of those homeroom conversations have faded over the years, what is unforgettable is Kathy’s superpower: listening. She asked many questions, not only about our academic lives but also about our home lives, our friendships, and our extracurricular



activities, always showing her care and concern for the “whole girl.” She also trusted us as a sounding board on NCS issues, genuinely soliciting our feedback about whatever policies or cultural matters were occupying her mind at the time. She listened

to understand our perspective, to understand us, and she insisted that we speak freely.

Kathy’s practice of listening was not confined to our homeroom. The deep relationships she built with students

guided the way she ran the school and set her apart as a Head. Her students were her true north—we saw that, and we loved her for it. That love has lingered for so many alumnae despite years and miles of distance from the Close.

#### FULL STEAM AHEAD

*Jamieson made STEAM education a priority at NCS during her tenure, for which Science Department Chair Deborah Virtue is grateful.*

One thing anyone learns quickly about Kathy Jamieson is how much personal relationships matter to her. Through her time at NCS, she has always made a point of being available to the faculty and staff, and she prioritizes getting to know each person at the school as an individual. As Kathy supports teachers in achieving success in the classroom, she also wants to learn about their interests and commitments beyond the Close. Even a moment passing

“Her vision of what STEAM instruction could look like in the near future was full of passion and enthusiasm.”  
—Deborah Virtue

in a hallway, regardless of how busy she might be in leading NCS, would provide an opportunity to strengthen that personal connection.

Kathy’s fundamental belief in community is there for all to see and something I cherish about working with her. Eventually, I also came to see how that belief guides her in achieving larger goals.

Early on, Kathy established “office hours,” a set time when any faculty or staff member could drop in to talk with her, whether about personal issues or professional goals. During one such conversation, she and

I started talking about STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) disciplines and the role of science education. Her vision of what STEAM instruction could look like in the near future was full of passion and enthusiasm. Kathy fully committed to improving the students’ opportunity, as well as the quality of science education and the experiences offered through NCS.

To implement that vision, she called on the faculty. A vast array of professional development opportunities received funding, through which teachers could

What began in an impromptu one-on-one chat ignited programmatic work that drew in dozens of faculty and staff. STEAM has become more visible at NCS under Kathy’s leadership, and the lessons we teach here have inspired hundreds of students and graduates to pursue new interests and career paths.

All of this and more—a passion for mentoring faculty, for advocating for professional growth and teacher development, for identifying and pursuing common goals—testifies to the sort of leader Kathy Jamieson



develop a curriculum that instills students with scientific knowledge, a conceptual framework, and, most of all, skill in problem-solving so that they are prepared to leap into action in almost any situation.

is. That they can all be traced to her authentic interest in getting to know and understand her colleagues says much about the sort of person she is.



We were deeply impressed by her combination of empathy, clear reasoning, humor, grounding in research, and—always—a sharp-eyed focus on what’s best for our students.”

—Elise Rabekoff



#### HEAD AND HEART

*Jamieson’s approachable leadership style put families at ease. Elise Rabekoff, mother of Katie Gladstone ’09 and chair of the NCS Governing Board from 2015–2017, speaks from experience.*

Kathleen O’Neill Jamieson has put her stamp on NCS in so many ways. The most visible is the transformation of our campus, made possible by Kathy’s ability to convince our community that belief in an NCS education required investment in the NCS physical plant. As a result, for the first time in decades, our facilities don’t hold back our ability to realize our educational vision. That Kathy could accomplish this without burdening the school with additional long-term debt is true testament to the power of her vision and her ability to communicate it.

While the importance of Kathy’s leadership in our successful capital campaigns and building projects

can’t be understated, it would be a mistake to see her legacy as just one of better bricks and mortar. It can also be seen in so many signature initiatives, including the Center for Ethical Leadership and Service, the Teaching and Learning Center, increased resources for financial aid and faculty support, and curricular innovations that equip NCS alumnae to excel in college and beyond.

Still, to me, the best part of Kathy’s legacy is what her leadership has meant for NCS students. I first encountered Kathy when I was a Lower School parent in the audience, very early in Kathy’s time at NCS. We were full of questions, about everything from curriculum to stress to inclusion to uniforms. It won’t surprise you to hear that we were a challenging group. And it shouldn’t surprise you to learn that Kathy quickly won us over. We were deeply impressed by her combination of empathy, clear reasoning, humor, grounding in research, and—always—a sharp-eyed

focus on what’s best for our students.

In the 15 years that have followed, I have seen those same qualities over and over again. As a parent of one of her advisees, I saw how much it meant to 9th-grade girls to have “Mr. Jamieson’s famous chili” at chili-and-movie nights at the Head’s house, where Mrs. Jamieson knew that her role was to help students new to the Upper School de-stress and bond with each other. As Governing Board chair, I saw Kathy avoid snap judgments and instead listen carefully, gather the facts, think all of the implications through, and make a decision—and then have the courage to revisit and recalibrate that decision if it turned out to be less than exactly right.

Kathy’s focus was never on what was easiest for her. It was always on the students in her care, on what was best for them and how best to help them, and on what was best for NCS as an institution educating women for the world.

#### NUTS AND BOLTS

*Director of Buildings and Grounds Pedro Martinez admired how Jamieson would go deep into the details on major projects.*

I remember vividly the first time I met Kathleen O’Neill Jamieson. She had come to NCS to interview for the Head of School position, and in our meeting, we spoke about challenges that the Facilities

Department, in a school like ours, juggles with daily. Our conversation turned to specific projects at NCS, and she described to me, in detail, what is involved in a window replacement. Kathy smiled at my visible surprise and told me that she had helped her father to install windows in her parents’ house. She also spoke movingly about the importance for a school like ours to preserve and constantly improve



From Day One, Kathy made very clear that her primary concern in these renovations was always to give students, faculty, and staff facilities that would help them achieve the great things they want and need to pursue.”

—Pedro Martinez







the condition of its facilities. This was, of course, music to my ears, and I quickly realized that her commitment to excellence would present great opportunities—ones that I would want to be a part of in the years to come.

Even so, I could not have imagined all the wonderful things that Kathy's arrival would bring to NCS and, if I may be allowed a little bias, to the Facilities Department. True to her word in that first meeting, NCS under Kathy's leadership has not only preserved but improved our school's wonderful buildings in countless ways. While the most important, impressive, and largest building renovation was undoubtedly that of the Woodley North campus, the Athletic Center, the Carriage House, and Hearst and Whitby halls have also seen significant improvements.

From Day One, Kathy made very clear that her primary concern in these renovations was always to give students, faculty, and staff facilities that would help them achieve the great things they want and need to pursue.

In the same way, Kathy's leadership and her unwavering commitment to excellence have enabled every part of our school to accomplish great things, enduring things. The result is an education for our students that stands with the best in the nation.

Thank you, Kathy, for your friendship, your leadership, your unwavering support, and the time you have devoted to our beloved NCS. You have without a doubt raised the bar and taken NCS to new heights.

**I've watched her command board rooms, execute strategic plans, engage in spirited debate, and care for students and their families.**

—The Right Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde



**STRENGTH THROUGH GRACE**

*Serving her school meant doing what was right, even when it was challenging. The Right Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, Bishop of Washington, praises Jamieson's sense of conviction.*

Working alongside Kathleen O'Neill Jamieson for the past eight years has been like taking a master class in executive leadership.

Every two weeks, I am privileged to sit with Kathy, the other school heads, and the dean of the Cathedral to work through management issues on the Cathedral Close, and I've marveled at Kathy's ability to steward the loftiest visions while carefully tending to the countless decisions that need making. I've heard her address the NCS community from the Canterbury Pulpit on matters of faith and moral courage, and warmly congratulate every NCS graduate by name at

Commencement. I've watched her command board rooms, execute strategic plans, engage in spirited debate, and care for students and their families.

Kathy is not afraid to challenge her colleagues when something important is at stake, yet she cares deeply for our collaborative relationships and has always offered her support and creative engagement. And she has always held true to her foundational belief in the power of young women to change the world for the better.

How I will miss her on the Cathedral Close. Yet she leaves NCS poised for strength and further growth as she pursues new adventures and opportunities to serve. I give thanks to God for all that Kathy has taught me about what it means to lead with strength and grace.