



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

Rector's Address to St Stithians Staff Chapel Service Start of Term 2 (6 May 2014)

Welcome back to the middle term of 2014. It is great to see you all again. I loved my first Easter Sports Festival, a truly wonderful community event – thank you and congratulations to all who were involved.

This address has both a devotional aspect, reflecting on the Road to Emmaus story and Jesus appearing to his disciples after the Resurrection, as expressed in Luke's Gospel, and an outline of two significant initiatives which are important for St Stithians College as a whole.

'Reservoirs of hope' is the overarching theme of this address.

Reservoirs of Hope

'May St Stithians be a Valley of Dreams, a School of Hope' (Bishop Zipho Siwa, speaking in the St Stithians Chapel, January 2014)

Bible Reading: Luke 24 – The walk to Emmaus: vs 13-35, and Jesus appears to his disciples: 36, 44-48

For Christians, Easter's Resurrection celebrates the triumph of hope, the lasting love of God for humanity. The stone is rolled away from the tomb, so that the risen Lord may be among us. Hope is not cheap, and cannot be bought. Hope co-exists with the cross of Good Friday – the experience of suffering and desolation. The power of the message of Easter is the co-existence of hopelessness and hope in our world; and the choices we make to embrace hope.

The account of the Road to Emmaus and Jesus appearing amongst the disciples inspires and challenges us to recognise the presence of the risen Christ amongst us, in our fellow travellers on this journey of life, and in the personal relationship we can develop with God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Echoing the Road to Emmaus, we have many opportunities to experience the presence of Jesus through Scripture, the liturgy of worship, and through the breaking of bread in Eucharistic prayer. Our hopefulness is rooted in the Resurrection and this flows into living our daily lives in witness to the love of God.

Our colleague's traumatic death last term confronted us all with the tragedy of hopelessness. During the holidays the sudden death, due to a stroke, of a young Saints mother of triplets – a girl and two boys in Grade 3 – confronted us with the unpredictability of life. We live with uncertainty in our world today; crisis is not far below the surface of many societies in the world, including South Africa. As many commentators have noted, South Africans tend to swing from despair to hope; we live through contrasting emotions in this land of Ubuntu and goodwill, of violence, inequality and corruption. This is the week of our 5th national election since the advent of democracy. The faultlines of our society are exposed. Be sure to cast your vote, and not to stay away.

Given the context of Easter, the tragic deaths of those close to us in our community, and the national elections, I feel moved to talk about Hope today.

Complementing the message of Easter, I draw on a presentation I listened to recently by Roger Cameron, Headmaster of St John's College, based on a book by Alan Flinham, *Reservoirs of Hope* (2010). With particular reference to the roles of school leaders, Flinham explores three intersecting circles entitled 'Reservoirs of Hope', 'Foundations of Spirituality', and 'Labours of Love'. The following questions flow: How do we live our

lives as reservoirs of hope? How do our beliefs, our values, give us a foundation for being people of hope? How does our daily work and how do our daily relationships reflect purpose and meaning?

At the heart of these three circles – as they intersect and reinforce each other – is our authentic self as a teacher or members of the administration and support staff, living out our mission to

- Educate citizens who Honour God, Honour Others, Honour Self
- Be a South African School Making a World of Difference

Before we proceed further, I define a reservoir: A source of sustenance; a pool of water, symbolic of life; a store of energy; a stock of goodness; a keeper; a reserve.

Teaching is a giving profession, a pouring out of love, care and knowledge, a source of inspiration and nurture, an investment in the future. Where do we draw our strength and energy from? How do we replenish our reservoirs? How do we, as individuals, replenish other people's reservoirs so that they have the capacity to give life to our School?

Answers to these questions are to be found variously and in combination, as follows:

1. We are reservoirs of hope through the quality of our relationships, and the extent to which these are purposeful, connected, meaningful, and authentic. Our collective challenge is to advance this College as a place where we belong to a community of care and purpose.
2. To live lives of hope is reflected in our ability to be our authentic selves, and to work in a place where we are endorsed by others; where we are built up not broken down, where we speak the language of encouragement and positive possibility, rather than

the language of sarcasm, ridicule, or stripping down.

3. Hope is generated through our work and being in a place of gratitude where we cherish the gift of life – where in giving we can receive, in receiving we can give. Let St Stithians be a place where a spirit of generosity reigns strong.
4. Our ability to be reservoirs of hope draws on the depth of our spirituality (using religious language) or of our value system (using secular language), and clearly the two overlap. If our well of spirituality – our connection with our values and our soul as humans – is deep then we can be a team which gives, which shares with others. We can have the ability to replenish our sense of plenty, our store of giving. We can be role models who make a difference. We can make decisions based on wise discernment.
5. We are people of hope if we live our lives embracing opportunities to move forwards, to reinvent ourselves, to be on a meaningful journey, and to have a collective purpose.
6. Our physical and emotional wellness nurtures our hope. And so we need to take care of ourselves; exercising, respecting and replenishing our body, mind and spirit; connecting with the worlds of nature, and with friends and family.
7. Amidst the busy-ness of our daily school life, let us take time to laugh (yes, Alleluia to those amongst us who bring the lightness and relief of laughter) and take time to be still – to draw on the restitutive power of quietness and calmness. Let this College be a Christian school of prayerfulness and contemplation. Let us be brave as an institution and grow

our capacity both to laugh and to be still.

Let us have good antennae out for detecting signs of hopelessness, and for helping to fill one another's reservoirs of hope.

Alongside, and reinforcing, these emphases on reservoirs of hope, I move on to speak about two important developments of the last term, both of which have great significance for us.

Statement on Spirituality

The Church Committee of Council has crafted a Statement on Spirituality, reflecting on our ethos as a Methodist School and the living out of that ethos. The members of the Committee include Church and parent representatives, the chaplains, the rector and heads of school. Creating this statement has been a good exercise of affirming our beliefs and practices as a Christian school, a framework for our spiritual life. The challenge is to make this Statement an integral part of our living and learning at Saints, an inspiration to be reservoirs of hope.

The College Exco is reviewing the Statement and once this process is concluded the document will be circulated and available for our growth as a spiritual community.

Campus 2053

I wrote at some length on this matter in my letter to staff at the end of last term, and so I will not repeat the details here. I encourage you to read the letter carefully and thoughtfully and, more importantly, participate in the discussions which will take place in varying forums during the course of the year. I love new ideas and fresh thinking as we advance the mission of St Stithians, and I welcome your contributions.

It is one of the responsibilities of a leader to look to the future, to take his or her community from the 'known' towards the 'unknown'. To engage with the future is to

encourage possibility, direction and hope. As the Rector, I need to inhabit the future and to link it to the present. With the support of the Chair of Council, Carel Nolte, I have initiated a strategic conversation called *Campus 2053* – in other words, looking ahead to our 100th birthday.

We live and work in a school of significance. We are stewards of a great treasure, our legacy and our campus. As such we have a collective responsibility, jointly to embrace the future. I look forward to working with you as we advance this College as a Valley of Dreams, A School of Hope.

Our College motto, *One and all*, provides us with the inspiration for being a place of synergy: of energy flows, of possibilities of interaction that make us more than the sum of our parts. A decision has been made by the College Exco and the Strat Planning Group to replace the word 'co-ordinate' with the word 'synergy' as the rationale for our unique schooling proposition. I believe that there will be many positive outworkings of this shift.

Looking to our centenary, the *Campus 2053* framework document poses 14 questions. These are included in the End of Term letter, and I urge you to read them and ponder them. I believe that Good Questions generate Good Answers, and so the energy that we put into the framing of our questions is critical. As we address these 14 questions, our way ahead – our sense of purpose over the next 10, 20, 30 and 40 years – will become clearer and influence the decisions we make.

Concluding prayers

I conclude with two prayers which are expressions of hope in action, so that we might live the beautiful lives that God calls us to.

As we meditate on these prayers, and live them out, may we grow in wisdom and courage as we: Honour God, Honour Others, and Honour Self.

Prayer of St Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your Name
your kingdom come
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours
now and for ever.
Amen



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