

Saturday, 8 February 2020

## Our schools need to reflect the diversity of society - Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

*Installation of Mrs Heather Goedeke as Head of Herschel Girls School, Claremont, Cape Town, on 6 February 2020*

*Readings: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 and Hebrews 11:32-12:2*

May I speak in the name of God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, dear people of God, the heads of schools present here, the Chairperson and members of Council, educators, Mrs Goedeke and your family, friends, parents and learners: it is a great joy to be with you today to share in this important milestone in the life of this school.

Let me extend a warm welcome to you all. Thank you for inviting me and most importantly, many thanks to all who have prepared this welcome for the Goedeke family. Thank you to the chaplain, the Revd Lorna Larvello-Smith, for preparing this service and the service booklet. And a special welcome to the parents and guardians of new learners at the school.

Let us look at the readings that were read today. In our first lesson (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11), King Solomon writes at a time when his life is largely behind him and he is able to take stock of the world as he has experienced it over the years. He shows that we are subject to times and changes over which we have little or no control, and contrasts this with God's eternity and sovereignty, reminding us that God predetermines all of life's activities.

The Letter to the Hebrews (11:32-12:2) defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for and the certainty of things not seen. The writer relates the faith journey of a number of Old Testament Prophets who served as God's agents and achieved much through the power of God. They led Israel to victories over kingdoms and called her to righteousness, thus obtaining the promise of God's blessings.

The Old Testament reading reminds us that we need to put God first, and that whatever choices we make must flow from that. And the Letter to the Hebrews constitutes a call on us to follow the example of the prophets in interpreting the times we live in.

For us as human beings, every moment or period of time comes charged with its own particular challenge and opportunity; and the wisdom of life is to interpret the time, the Kairos, the decisive moment, the moment on which the accent of eternity falls. Ms Goedeke, this is such a moment for you, and for the whole school.

When I was preaching here some years ago, I said that the task of the school is the development of a girl child – intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually – through instilling ethical and moral values, self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of worth; and also by helping her develop creativity and flair, as well as the capacity to think independently and critically, enabling her to lead when facing the challenges of today. I also expressed the wish that each Herschel girl will become a contributing member of society – an effective citizen of the world who can be part of life's solutions at every level of her personal and professional life.

That said, how do we prepare our girls to become contributing members of society? The Anglican Church's vision and mission requires us to be involved in education and nurturing the young in order to be transformed ourselves and to transform the society around us.

In the gradual hymn, we are called to be those who seek to serve, and to understand the context of despair, darkness and sadness in which many of our people live. Your school prayer, based on a passage in Philippians (4:8) lays down your task in broad strokes: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things”.

The church's vision and mission, as well as your prayer, require that in order to become contributing members of society, you should focus not on your own personal interests but rather on working for the common good of all humanity. As teachers, learners and parents, whatever choices you have, whatever challenges you face, choose whatever it is that advances the common good.

What do I mean by the term, ‘the common good’? The concept of the common good is one which is rooted in God's desire that humans may flourish, that, in the words of John's Gospel, that all may have life, and have life abundantly, each in accordance with their own particular circumstances and free choices. Working for the common good means ensuring that everyone has a liveable standard of material well-being – enough food, clean water, housing, clothing, health-care and the like; it means that all who are vulnerable should enjoy special protection, that all should have the sort of education which gives access to jobs. In its widest sense, a society organised for the common good is one which is stable, safe and just, a society which accords everyone respect materially, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually.

But if we are to transform our country in accordance with the common good, we need our schools to reflect the diversity of the society in which we live. For how can those of us who live and study in suburbs like Claremont and Bishopscourt know intuitively and at a gut level what the common good entails for others, and to share it with one another so we have a comprehensive overview of what is needed? That is why the Anglican Board of Education, headed by the former headmaster of St John's College in Johannesburg, is committed to fostering Anglican schools that are fully inclusive and reflect our wider society, and that is why I urge you as well as all Anglican schools to redouble your efforts to achieve this.

To adapt Shakespeare's words, “There is a tide in the affairs of men and women, which – taken at the flood – leads on to fortune.” If that tide, that Kairos moment, is not recognised, it represents an opportunity lost.

Heather, you are leading a school that has achieved a 100% pass in matric in 2019 and you are to build from there. Like an athlete in Hebrews, you – together with your team – are to run with perseverance in attaining the desired goals for Herschel. It is my prayer that you don't run alone but run alongside God and others, and God will lead to where Herschel should be during your time. I hope you will also learn from those who walked before you. We are delighted that you are now part of Herschel's life. Together we can build on our tradition and experience, and also also, by the grace of God, create new initiatives.

Once again, congratulations on your appointment at Herschel and may you enjoy your time

here.

To all those present: God loves you and so do I. Amen

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