

## Issue 41

2 August 2022

A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure, may turn to glorious success.” – Elbert Hubbard.

Have you ever dreamed of something and pondered about how you wanted to achieve this dream? I think we all have. The problem is that sometimes we just don't start. It may be the size of task ahead of us, we may not have enough time, we may not have enough money, we may not have enough energy, we may simply be afraid to get going etc. Ironically, one thing we always have enough of is excuses. A couple of years back, Neil Eddy a good friend of mine shared a concept “Ready, Fire, Aim”. In essence, sometimes we just need to get started, and make plans after we had started. What is always key to achieving a dream is Persistence. Persistence is one of the core values we try and instil into boys at St Andrew's. We hope to create men of action and men who understand what it means to be persistent. A St Andrew's boy always sees a commitment though.

Have you ever started a project and at times wondered how on earth am I going to make a success of this? Have you ever been daunted by continued obstacles when nothing seems to go right, despite how charitable and good your intentions. Well, I have. I want to share a story of success that came with challenges – too many to elaborate on, so instead I will focus on what we achieved.

In November 2018, a couple of ordinary guys decided to start a project called In My Shoes <https://www.facebook.com/InMyShoesAppeal> Ciarán McHugh (Irishman) & Kevin Grant (London based Bloem boy) visited Khayelitsha, the largest township in Cape Town, South Africa. They were there to support the efforts of the Gary Kirsten Foundation, their companies' charitable cause in South Africa. Ciarán and Kevin, were amazed by the scale of the township settlements and were equally taken aback by the poverty. Both had the same thoughts.

Firstly, that most of the children they saw playing had no shoes on and secondly, they could both visualise boxes in their attic back home in the UK, full of shoes which their kids had outgrown but still in good condition. On the flight home from the visit to Cape Town, an idea took hold. Could they collect 500 pairs of pre-loved sports shoes back home and would it be possible to ship these donated shoes on to deserving kids of Khayelitsha and South Africa?

At that time I was based in Cape Town, as a teacher and soccer coach. I had been involved in soccer my entire life, my father headed up soccer in Bloemfontein for many years, and I was now fulfilling part of my dream to change lives through soccer. Having played against bare foot kids from the location as a child and having seen children playing football next to the highways in Grassy Park and Lavender Hill in Cape Town, I made the choice to act and started doing regular trips with my wife into Khayelitsha, Phillipi, Nyanga, Hangberg, the Cape Flats and the poorer communities, to donate soccer balls and shirts from the various partners and sponsors involved in the soccer program I was heading up at Wynberg. I relied on my connections through the various schools and clubs I had interacted with to assist in making the logistics possible for larger scale deliveries, and on other occasions, would just take a leisurely cruise and pull up to the kids playing in an open field or next to the highway. For me it was critical to involve more people and I targeted the soccer boys at Wynberg, to use their position to make an impact and give back to the less privileged communities. I felt, like Kevin and Ciarán that using the school community would be the best way to make an impact, and similarly like the vision of the Gary Kirsten Foundation, we felt sport was an important vehicle to reach the hearts of people.

As fate would have it, we all came together at the right time. Kevin and I got talking one day about opportunities for talented South African soccer players overseas, and at the same time were reminiscing about our days playing soccer for my father in Bloemfontein. Kevin introduced me to Ciarán and in December 2018, leaflets were printed and packs were sent to 40 national schools in Co. Sligo, Ireland. A van was hired to pick up the donations of children in Ireland who were donating their shoes to children in South Africa. It is only once the donations started pouring in that we came to understand what we had started. We were blown away with the response from the Irish community, as the schools in the area got involved in the project. Sometimes a fairly simple idea can strike a cord. Mandela said “You can start changing our world for the better daily, no matter how small the action.”

In 2019, after completing their 14,117 km journey, the delivery of over 2000 pairs of shoes arrived in Cape Town. The shoes were distributed by both myself using the Wynberg community and the Gary Kirsten Foundation. At the same time in November 2019, the second In My Shoes campaign commenced in Ireland. Thanks to the support of UPS owned ParcelMotel we were now able to accept donations from all over Ireland. 600 individuals, schools & groups got involved and 12,000 pairs of shoes were received. It took 24 volunteers to sort and pack them for over a week. It took 39 pallets in two 40 foot containers to ship. The shipment of the 12 000 pairs of shoes received in our second campaign was initially stalled by the impact of Covid 19, in both Ireland and South Africa.

However, in March 2022 the shipment left from Dublin for South Africa and arrived just over a week ago in Cape Town. I spent two days in Cape Town where the shipment was shared between the community of Cape Town, to be distributed by my friends at Wynberg Boys' High School, and Bloemfontein and Lesotho to be distributed by St Andrew's School. The boys from both schools have been working tirelessly to unpack and arrange the shoes by sizes for distribution to underprivileged schools and sports men and women.

If you have shoes you no longer use, you are encouraged to come and drop off your pre-loved shoes to St Andrew's School in Bloemfontein. Whilst at it, why not bring a sandwich along, which will also be given to the recipient of your pre-loved shoes. You can also include a message of love and hope from you to this deserving individual. What is needed:

- Runners, trainers & sport shoes for both boys and girls (any sizes).
- The shoes need to be in good condition.
- Each pair of shoes need to be securely attached to each other, ideally by a cable tie (essential for shoes without laces).
- A message can be included with the shoes for the recipient.
- A sandwich or meal for the recipient of the shoes (where possible).

Many children have to travel great distances to schools which pose a barrier to these children. These children wake early, and risk arriving late or physically exhausted. 67% of South African learners walk to school. Shoes are a requirement as part of school uniform and also allow learners safety and a sense of self-esteem. Shoes are often the most difficult item to get in materially poor communities. A pair of shoes is often the difference between a hopeful or bleak future.

It is my hope that the St Andrew's and the Bloemfontein community will get involved and support the efforts of our friends in Ireland, by adding to this amazing shipment. It is our aim to collect 50 000 pairs of shoes when we launch the next campaign by rolling out this campaign to England, Wales and Scotland as well.

By getting involved in this project, you will giving dignity to a deserving child by making a difference to their life and will be doing as the Prophet Micah requires of us "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God".

“Sometimes we need reassurance. No matter how miniscule, silly or obvious things may seem, you never know what your confirmation can do for someone else” – Alex Elle.

Over the last couple months at St Andrew’s, my emphasis with the boys and staff has been on relationships and looking after and looking out for one another. Every day in Chapel I tell the boys to look out for their brothers. At my morning meetings with the staff I always finish off with Jerry Springer’s quote “Look after yourselves and each other”.

There are undoubtedly good times and tough times – in anything we do in life. It is in those tough times that I have experienced staff coming up to me and putting a hand on my shoulder, bringing me a cup of coffee, checking in on me and checking in on my family. Some of the most meaningful words of support have been: “Don’t try do this alone. Are you ok? Can I help? I see you. You can rely on me. I care for you. Thank you for what you are doing. Look after yourself.” I have similarly experienced the boys popping in and checking in on me. It is a wonderful feeling to experience a young boy in grade 3 popping into my office simply to ask: “How are you doing sir? Are you having a good day?” The parents have been equally supportive. Just last week I was surprised by a parent popping in and spoiling my family with a wonderful meal – something I have missed from Cape Town. I have also personally received encouraging messages from parents on email and WhatsApp. It makes such a difference when you feel you have people looking out for you.

We all need to know that there are people looking out for us and we all need to feel that we belong – it makes such a difference. At St Andrew’s, I want the boys to know that their brothers and the staff are always looking out for them and that they are part of the family. They need to know that when things get tough, there is always someone on the lookout for them and always someone they can talk to. We place emphasis on this sense of belonging and relationships/brotherhood in our Chapel and in our House meetings. The family groups in the Houses give the boys and teachers the opportunity to connect with each other in a deeper and more meaningful way and really get to know one another. The House Heads, as heads of the family groups, are also available to the boys should they need to connect with another teacher. In this way we create multiple layers of pastoral support and care for the boys at St Andrew’s.

At St Andrew’s, we encourage people to connect with one another. We want every member of the community to experience a genuine sense of belonging to the “Bianco-Blu” (White

and Blue) family. It is through this connection to the family, that when things get tough, we know that we are not alone. We are always looking out for one another, always looking for an opportunity to reassure a friend and a brother. At St Andrew's, people don't walk alone. The support of the St Andrew's community has carried me through the tough times and has made the good times so much more rewarding. I am thankful to every member of this wonderful community. What a pleasure to be part of this wonderful family. It is my hope that every boy and staff member gets to experience this sense of belonging and support.

"If you want to know who your family is, look at the side-lines, the audience, the people clapping, the ones telling you how much faith they have in you, that's what (The Saints) family is all about" – unknown.

Every day I finish my message in chapel with the words of the Prophet Micah: "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God". I do this because when a boy leaves St Andrew's, it is my hope that this becomes something he will remember and strive to do daily in all that he does.

## Issue 43

22 August 2022

On Saturday morning I woke before sunrise to go for a walk and get a cup of joe. I like the meaning of a cup of joe. Coffee is considered "a common man" drink and Joe is considered "a common man" name. Aptly suited for me. I usually take a walk around the campus in the mornings, when it is quiet, to prepare for the day ahead – usually with my dogs. Whilst walking back to St Andrew's this time, swamped with the many thoughts running through my mind and the weight of responsibility bearing down, the words "look up" came to me. There before me stood Medi-Clinic illuminating the morning air. It's all a matter of perspective. One so easily takes for granted the very basics that we all have to be thankful for. Just a couple yards away was someone inevitably giving their last breath, and here I was walking down the street, coffee in hand and breathing the fresh air. In this day and age, it is so easy to lose perspective around what really matters.

On Friday we were privileged to welcome Jo Black to St Andrew's. He shared a special message with the school: "Be That Guy" and be an everyday hero. Jo shared stories of his life with the school and called on each of us to make the choice to "Be That Guy". He called on each of us to celebrate and use our gifts to uplift and make a difference every day in the lives of those around us, so that together we can change the world. Jo spoke to the boys about his upbringing, and shared the fact that he was given away by his mother to his

grandmother, because they were four children, and his mother could not look after him financially. His grandmother then died when Jo was seven. Together his mother and father were remarried seven times. He suffered a broken jaw and cracked ribs from the situation at home, and there were days he did not want to go home because of what was happening there and how it made him feel. There were also days he did not want to go to school, because of how people at school made him feel. As Jo says, he grew up the “opposite of rich”. He was “dirt poor” and did not have cool clothes - there was certainly no money for this and he referred to himself as Jo Dirt. From the ashes of that life, Jo made the decision to “Be That Guy” – the guy who would work to change the world through his character and gifts given to him by God. Jo travels the country sharing this message to enlist an army because he says he knows that he cannot do this alone. Jo calls on all of us to use our gifts for good and to make a positive difference daily.

Jo says that God has given each of us gifts – integrity, respect and self-worth etc. - that we are to use for good. All of these gifts combined are our character or heart. He says they are gifts, because for example we give someone else respect. Respect cannot be taken. The world wants to take our gifts and manipulate and twist them to hurt, destroy, sow division, hatred and racism. The world will try and take your character or heart and make you feel worthless and use you to make others feel worthless. The world will push you to look down and feel alone. You will be thrown obstacles and challenges, you will be trampled to the ground and pushed further than you ever thought possible. The key is to face your “dirt”, because we all have “dirt”. Jo says that “Perhaps Goliath has been placed on your path to awaken your David inside of you.” So in life we will be faced with a choice - a choice on how we use our gifts. Jo calls on each of us to give others our gift so that we can make a positive difference. He says “Be somebody that makes everybody feel like a somebody, cause nobody deserves to feel like a nobody”.

I know that the St Andrew’s community will take to heart what Jo has shared with us. We need to go out and be everyday heroes – common people who go out and share their gifts with the world. In sharing our gifts we can live out the motto of our school – Fiat Lux – “Let There Be Light” and we can do as the Prophet Micah expects of us: Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God.”

Issue 44

30 August 2022

This week after dropping my daughter at school, I was excited to see the swallows swirling about their man-made mountain - Mediclinic. Our Barn Swallows spend most of their lives trekking between UK and South Africa in their annual migrations. The swallows make their way to South Africa at this time of year to escape the harsh winters of the north. This signals a change in season from winter to spring. I have always been amazed by these graceful little birds, gliding through the air, usually never landing on the ground, and scooping water in their beaks as they glide over dams and other water sources. The sound of these swallows in their hundreds catching insects, the movement of them like a dancing cloud in the air and the smell of summer rains has always brought a sense of calmness and peace to me. There is a resilience about these little birds that is admirable - they undertake approximately a 9500 kilometre journey twice a year in search of food. As the season changes, they are forced to adapt or die. It is a perilous journey, following different paths across Africa avoiding obstacles and challenges like the Sahara.

Adaptability is the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions. It is a soft skill that means being able to rapidly learn new skills and behaviours in response to changing circumstances. Being adaptable also means that one is willing to change. Without change, one is simply unable to adapt. The world as we know it has changed. COVID forced us to become more adaptable and forced us to change the way we are doing things. Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. Resilient people are aware of situations, their own emotional reactions, and the behaviour of those around them. By remaining aware, they can maintain control of a situation and think of new ways to tackle problems. In many cases, resilient people emerge stronger after such difficulties.

Adaptability and resilience are two important values and skills that all of us (teachers and parents included) need to nurture and develop for our own self development. They are also two critical skills that we strive to inculcate into the boys in our care as we prepare them for a rapidly changing new world, where the world as they know it can change overnight - for worse or for the better. At St Andrew's we strive to encourage our boys to experiment in and out of the classroom in terms of academics, sport, culture and service. They are encouraged to do so in a safe environment, where achievements are celebrated and where making

mistakes and failing is a learning process - of failing forwards. We challenge them by difficult situations and we encourage our boys to persevere and overcome difficulties. We encourage our boys to ask for help. Through all on offer at St Andrew's, we hope to create continued opportunities for our boys to learn and develop adaptability and resilience as two core skills and values. This is why it is an expectation for all St Andrew's boys to be involved in all that we have on offer at the school.

Chaeli Mycroft visited the school on Thursday. She stopped over on her way to Maritzburg for her 5th Comrades marathon. For the first time in history (in Women's Month) Team Beastie is an all-girls team of Chaeli and her partners Chantal and Daleen. She came to share an inspirational message with our school community from her self-published first book, "Unapologetically Able". "It is a story about not being sorry. About living your life your way. Saying yes when everyone thinks it should automatically be no. And about the lighter moments on a journey that challenges everything you thought you knew about living with disability". If there has ever been an example of a determined, adaptable and resilient person, Chaeli is that person. For more information please visit <http://chaeli.co.za/>

Over the weekend of the 9th - 11th of September, our Old Boys will be migrating - like our swallows - back to St Andrew's - returning home again. I look forward to meeting with our Old Boys and joining in the festivities over the weekend.

When you next look up and see the Swallows, I hope that you will look at those little birds with a renewed sense of admiration and also as a source of inspiration - to be a little more resilient and adaptable daily. If those little birds can overcome a perilous journey into the unknown twice a year, how much more are you capable of.

In doing as the Prophet Micah requires of us; "Doing Justice, Loving Mercy and Walking Humbly with God", we can be sure to know that we can overcome any challenges that come our way. "A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking, because its trust is not in the branch, but in its own wings" - Unknown. Always believe in yourself.

“Carpe Diem” – Seize the day. It means taking full advantage of the present moment, while keeping in mind the fact that life is short and bound to end eventually, so you should make the most of the time that you have. It is my hope that my message this week will resonate with those of you needing to hear this: You are the right person!

About two months ago, I went and watched *Maverick* at the cinemas. I can highly recommend the movie as it is very entertaining. It certainly took me back to my childhood and one of my all-time favourites *Top Gun*. What I loved about the movie is the message about being the right person - whether *Maverick* (or pilots like him) still have a place in the Navy. The opening scene is one where *Maverick* is test-flying a hypersonic jet nicknamed “Darkstar”. He breaks innumerable rules and manages to exceed the speed limit set, before the Rear Admiral could arrive to the base on his unexpected visit, and ground *Maverick* and shut down the program. The Rear Admiral engages *Maverick* in a scene and says: “The end is inevitable *Maverick*. Your kind is heading to extinction.” “Maybe so, sir, but not today.” Later on in the movie in an emotional scene where *Maverick* gets to see his long-time friend *Iceman* for the last time, *Iceman* uses his influence and *Maverick* is recalled to *Top Gun* to train the young pilots for a seemingly impossible mission. *Iceman* in his frail state (having throat cancer) stands up and whispers to *Maverick*: “The Navy needs *Maverick*. The kid needs *Maverick*. That’s why I fought for you.” Towards the end of the movie, right before the final battle, *Maverick*’s friend *Hondo* says to him: “You’re where you belong. Make us proud.”

Last week I attended the headmasters conference for Public Boys Schools hosted by Selborne College. I had the opportunity to listen to several talks over the course of two days. One of the speakers, Prof Goerge Euvrard, spoke to a question I have been pondering for several weeks. A question, that I believe we all ask ourselves from time to time. Why me? Why am I here? Am I right for this place? Is it the right time? We can look at this question from two points of view.

1. Spiritual View: There is a divine God who is totally in control. Order was brought to the chaos in the universes and man was created in God’s image to rule and look after the world. Everything God does, He does with a purpose. You were created for a purpose and where you are now, is because you are part of God’s divine plan.
2. Physical / Material View: One must go back about 3.8 billion years of divine intervention for you to be here today. Out of all the billions of people on earth, your

father and mother must have somehow crossed paths and eventually reproduced. Each of them had a father and mother, and each of them had a father and mother etc. They survived wars, pandemics, avoided catastrophic physical consequences and crossed many streets safely... So we can go on. Billions of years and many more billions of decisions have brought you right to where you belong – here in the present.

Either way you look at it – that answer is something special. I believe that you being where you are right now, is because our almighty Creator has predestined you to be where you are now. The question that remains, is what we do with this opportunity and gift that we have. When we start to see ourselves in the light of being the right person - things start happening. You may then ask yourself:

When is the right time? The present is all we have. It is a gift. That is our opportunity. Maybe the wrong time is the right time or the only time.

When is the right place? The right place is wherever we might find ourselves. You have the ability to influence the place and space you find yourself in very easily. Buy a coffee for a homeless person – you are making an immediate impact.

Who am I answerable to? We are answerable to God firstly and ourselves secondly. We don't work for the institution; we work with the institution. We work together to achieve goals that we share.

If you look at the question as to whether you are the right person in this way, you then come to realize that you are the right person, at the right place, at the right time. You always need to live with authenticity, integrity and respect, always being yourself and not pretending to be what you are not. No matter who you are, no matter your circumstances, “Carpe Diem” – Seize the day. Today is the right time, here is the right place and you are the right person.

Seize the day to do as the Prophet Micah requires of us; “Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God”.

## Issue 46

13 September

Fiat Lux - Let there be light. Our school motto. It speaks to the God given inner spark contained in each and every one of us - and every living creature. It is the essence of who we are - a gift from our Creator. With our spark we can impact those around us, and we have a choice called to act and do in such a way that we bring light to every occasion. We are always connected to each other. How we make others feel about themselves is our gift to them. A friend shared a quote with me this week: "Legacy about how we impact or go about impacting others. As the St Andrew's community, we are is not leaving something for people. It's leaving something in people."

We impact others around us through our actions. A mentor of mine said "Everything we do sends a message." All great leaders have the ability to impact others through their inner spark. It is in what they do and what they say and how they act. Leaders inspire, persuade, encourage and influence others – and to influence is to have an impact on the behaviours, attitudes, opinions and choices of others. When your inner spark burns brightly, you start to fan the ember inside of others. As the spark of others start burning brighter you start to change your surroundings and the environment - you set in motion a wave of change.

I would like to believe that at St Andrew's, our Chapel and the messages we share daily, helps fan the inner spark of the young men entrusted into our care. This week an explanation around the cross was shared with the boys by Revd Steenbok and Ms Kotze. It caused me to view the cross in a very different way. It also led to a very audible "aha" moment for our junior boys. The vertical beam of the cross represents God's connection with us – top down. The horizontal beam represents our connection with each other – side to side. One cannot only have one of these – because then you don't have the cross. Both beams need to exist, and they are kept together by forgiveness. At St Andrew's we are in the business of growing light bringers, change makers, leaders, innovators, pioneers and hope bringers. It is our responsibility at school to create a space where the inner spark of our learners is fanned, and they are given the opportunity to develop and realize their potential in a safe environment. It is through our learners that we want to bring hope for the future. A future where St Andrew's learners move to change the environment they find themselves in for the better, impact the people they are surrounded with for the better and ignite the inner spark of those they are surrounded with.

Les Brown says "In order to do something you've never done, you've got to become someone you've never been. I think that all of us have great potential within us, but

greatness is a choice, not a destiny. And in the pursuit of our dreams, we are introduced to trials, failures and disappointments, which take us to the door of discovery and greatness". By choosing to recognize, grow and develop our inner spark, we can bring light to every moment, every situation and every person and we will do as the Prophet Micah expects of us; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God".

## Issue 47

20<sup>th</sup> September 2022

"A boy is the only thing that God can use to make a man" - Unknown. What a privilege to be heading up a Traditional Boys School founded in 1863. I love interacting with our boys daily. As teachers in a Boys School, we have a critical role to play in shaping our boys into men (along with our parent community) - it takes a village to raise a child, after all. The key to successfully shaping boys is that you need to understand boys, you need patience, you need to be consistent, you need boundaries, you need to be fair, and you need to walk the talk - set the necessary example.

We need to create opportunities for boys to belong - because boys need to feel that they belong. Their identity and self-worth are dependent on their need to belong. At schools it is important to create opportunities for boys to belong - be it sport teams, societies, choir, art and drama clubs etc. If boys are unable to find a sense of identity and belonging in schools, they will then look for it in other places outside of school. The danger of course is that often where they find their sense of belonging outside of school, it is not managed, and often (not always) leads to delinquent behaviour. At St Andrews's we have placed an emphasis on our House system. Being a small school, we have created opportunities for the boys to belong to smaller groups - called family units within each House. All boys at school are also expected to be involved in the plethora of opportunities on offer at the school. We rely on the support of our parents to ensure that the message gets home - a St Andrew's boy is an involved boy.

We need to change the language used in schools. Boys need to be educated to understand that they are not being punished for doing something wrong, but rather that there are consequences for actions. Punishment is something being done to a person, and that person has no say, whereas a consequence is different. The goal of a punishment is to shame, guilt, impose authority, or harm. The motivation behind a punishment comes from a place of emotion and a need to maintain control. A consequence is meant to teach, maintain accountability, and maintain safety. At St Andrew's we have a code of conduct with clearly set out expectations. At St Andrew's, we don't punish boys but there are consequences for actions. Our code of conduct is available on our school website <https://sasb.co.za/>

At schools we need to create opportunities for boys to make mistakes in a safe environment, because the consequences for mistakes after school are so much more serious. Schools are the proving grounds for our boys' journey to becoming men. I often say to parents who sit in my office dismayed at what their son has done, that at St Andrew's we understand that our boys are going to make mistakes, we don't write them off for making mistakes and it is our (teachers and parents) responsibility to guide them. We are the sheepdogs who head off the sheep, keeping them in the direction we are wanting them to go. I always chuckle to myself when dealing with a group of boys who have got up to some mischief - when you have one boy, you have one brain. When you have two boys, you have half a brain, and four boys, you have a quarter brain etc. - that is how boys operate.

Always set high (positive) expectations for boys. Boys love living up to expectations and will work to achieve expectations set of them. The key is to understand that at schools we need to set positive expectations. At St Andrew's the expectations of our boys are that they behave respectfully, have manners, greet, are friendly, participate in sport, service and culture, behave in a dignified manner, live a Christian life etc - this is who we are. Teachers at schools, all too often fall into the trap of setting negative high expectations, like saying of a class that it is the worst class in the school - guess what - the boys will rise to meet that expectation. The same happens in our everyday talk with our boys at home. As parents, we need to be aware of the language being used when talking with our boys - be careful of the unintended negative talk that boys will internalize.

Schools need to create opportunities to acknowledge and recognize boys - boys thrive on this. Boys want to know that they are being seen and being recognized - both their achievements and their individual uniqueness and self-worth. Teachers matter here. Teresa Kwant says, "Be the teacher who makes every student feel like the favourite student" and Carl Buechner says, "They may forget what you said but they will not forget how you made them feel". Boys work for their teacher / coach. It is a universal truth, that you can be the world's worst teacher / coach - but if you have relationships with your boys - they will work for you. We need to create opportunities daily, to stop and connect with our boys - something as simple as taking the time to greet a boy, ask how his day is going, checking in on him, arriving to watch him participate in an activity etc. Boys thrive on this sense of interest from their teacher / parent.

We are in a privileged position to be working with and shaping our boys into young men. Every day in Chapel I tell the boys to look out for one another, to look out for their brothers who may be struggling or sitting alone. I also ask of the boys to look out for their teachers

and the staff of the school. I ask them to do as the Prophet Micah expects, "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God" - in all that they do.

A boy gives false promises.

A man honours his commitments.

A boy thinks "me".

A man thinks "us".

A boy blames others.

A man accepts responsibility.

A boy lives off others.

A man lives for others.

A boy relies on himself.

A man relies on God.

- Trent Shelton

## Issue 48

27<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Reflections of a "Barefoot Headmaster". At the start of this term, we adopted two puppies, Kylo and Eddie. They were handed in at the vet, after being found along the road. My wife made the "mistake" of showing the post on Facebook, and I arrived 'just to go look at them'. I managed to convince my wife to come with me the second time to go and look at the pups. On enquiring at the vet, no one had shown interest - the vet remarked that no one in Bloemfontein wanted Afrikanis - also known as a thoroughbred brak. As I stood with the pups, in the vet, a lady arrived with a box full of cuddly Pomeranian pups - and the entire reception area erupted in a chorus of cute, sweet, awww etc. with everyone moving to stroke, pat and cuddle a pup - except the Afrikanis who hardly got a second look. My wife still remarked to the pups, "ag don't worry, you are still cuter". Eddie (named after the Hyaena in the Lion King), because of his beautiful brindle colours, and Kylo (named after Kylo-Ren from Star Wars), because of his black colours and a distinct mask across his face, returned home with us. I have nicknamed Kylo and Eddie the "Brothers of Destruction" - reference The Undertaker and Kane from WWE - an unstoppable force of destruction. Shoes, a smart watch, new summer bedding, a laptop charger and Havaianas slops to name but a few have all met their fate with the "Brothers of Destruction". They are very busy... They are proper "brakke", loyal to the bone, mischievous, able to miraculously escape and make their way onto anything and into any room and are always excited to see you. They are brothers and they always stick together.

The life and daily happenings of these pups remind me of our boys. When I arrive to school

in the mornings, I am always greeted by a chorus of young boys, either playing soccer, rugby or cricket in the quad. Some of the boys are on jungle gyms, whilst others are high up in trees (how they get there I don't know). The quad is always busy with the life and sounds of young boys excited to be amongst their brothers. Before making it to my office, I am always met with boys, running up to hug me or share stories from their homes (yes parents, I know your secrets), their classrooms (yes teachers, I know your secrets), the sports fields (yes coaches, I know your secrets), and life in general (yes God, I hear how you work with our boys). I also know that when I arrive to my office, I will be met with one or other interesting story or situation that needs to be dealt with - perhaps a smart watch that is no more... From my office, I move to the staffroom and then to the Chapel, where I get to interact with our senior boys. Before Chapel, we take stock to make sure everyone is present, and then move into Chapel where we talk to our senior boys about our values, our expectations, and God and life - I suppose you could say, a bit of 'puppy training'. Every puppy gets 'checked' by the older dogs in the pack... This is where we have an opportunity to share in celebrations and also call out behaviour that we need to work on. Thereafter we get into our daily routine.

The younger boys are given an opportunity to be involved with our Integrated Sports Program, where every boy is involved in Physical Education as well as sport training sessions during the school day. Like a puppy, a young boy, needs to remain active during the day, they cannot remain focused and sit still in a classroom environment - sooner or later they lose interest - even with the best teachers. It is important for our boys to be moving, getting out into the fresh air and interacting and competing with one another, before bringing them back to class. At break time, the senior boys rush to the fields for a game as well as the tuckshop. Like a pup, a boy's appetite is never satisfied, where they put all that food no-one knows. Mrs Blair and the staff at Fettas Tuck Shop, provide a delicious selection for our boys. In and around the Tuck Shop area, one gets to experience, how boys manoeuvre themselves, around where they can get the biggest helping of food. Important negotiating and bartering skills are developed as a would be 'sponger' is either met with acceptance and food is shared, or teeth are shown. Our younger boys however in contrast, happily sit together and share in and amongst each other. It is beautiful watching these younger boys, who seem to be very in touch and aware of what each brings to school. Sandwiches, chips and cooldrinks are exchanged freely, and when the inevitable lunch box pops open resulting in food spilling on the floor, the boy is always surrounded by friends consoling and offering an alternate selection. I have often wondered whether some streetwise youngsters do this on purpose to secure a better meal...

When the bell finally rings at the end of the day, our boys excitedly exit the building, like pups waiting to head out into the garden ready to explore. There is so much on offer at Saints. Every boy can find something to involve himself in. If there is one thing I know, you

need to keep a puppy busy - a bored puppy is a puppy that is going to get into trouble. Our boys need to keep fit physically and mentally. It is important for our boys to interact with one another socially and to compete with each other working towards a collective goal. In these extra mural activities, our boys get to learn a lot about life - winning and losing, perseverance, teamwork, handling fear and failure, goal setting, mental toughness, self-discipline etc. At the Saints Music Academy concert on Saturday evening, I spoke with a parent, where we discussed the opportunities on offer at Saints. My son had the opportunity to travel on a bus to Kimberly on Thursday to play cricket vs Newton Primary, he then played in our Heritage Day Soccer Festival on Saturday and also took part as a drummer in the Music Academy concert in the evening. We also discussed the fact that we are a small school, competing against much bigger schools, but what remained important was, that we do we, do to the best our ability. At Saints, our boys are well rounded, they are involved in a plethora of activities, and they get to experience what it means to win and lose - a much more accurate reflection of real life that is not always sunshine and roses.

The key to raising puppies is to be present. One cannot simply leave them with food and water and to their own devices. A puppy needs your presence. They need to feel loved, and they need your input. At school, the staff provide this presence, and at home parents need to provide this presence. Life is busy - increasingly so - but we need to keep perspective. We need to be present as much as we can to help raise our young men. They need us, they need our love, and they need our guidance. As the holiday approaches, our boys will have an increased amount of time at home. Where possible, spend as much time with them, look for opportunities to talk and do activities together. When they return home with their report cards, remember, that they have given of their best. Look for ways to motivate, appreciate and praise them for their efforts. Puppies, need to be praised, otherwise they become anxious, withdrawn and lose their confidence and trust in people.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish our entire community and all the families a restful and peaceful holiday. Take time to switch off and smell the roses. Rejuvenate and reenergize yourself. It has been a busy term, and when we return next term, we move quickly towards the final year end exams. We have several teams and sporting codes involved in tours and tournaments, and I would like to wish them the best of luck. If you are traveling, travel safely, and enjoy the stops along the road on your way to your final destination. In all that you do this holiday, it is my hope that you will do as the Prophet Micah requires of us, "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God".

Since I started at St Andrew's I have ended every message with the quote from Micah 6:8 "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God". I have done so and chosen this verse because in an increasingly complex and complicated world, values of equality, rightness, fairness, justice, love, mercy, humility, morals and religion is increasingly being eroded and threatened by a new worldly normal. The world is turning to the right politically, with right wing leaders being voted in in every part of the world. These leaders seek to cause division and build walls – the exact opposite of what we are trying to achieve in South Africa – where we seek to bring people together – different colours, different religions, different cultures and different abilities. We need to fight against the intolerant and insensitive approach of our leaders.

At the same time, we need to guard against our own intolerant approach that may manifest in our daily lives without us realizing this. Think in terms of how you respond to social media – good people (young and old) acting and reacting in appalling ways, displaying intolerant and hateful behaviours. Our reaction to social media shows our true character – and no other age has had this challenge. Michelle Obama when talking on how to respond to others says 'When they go in low, you go in high'. In other words, always maintain the moral high ground.

The world as we know it, seeks to desensitize us and disconnect us from one another, from nature and from God. We no longer know each other, know God, know our place in nature or know what is expected of us. We have become self-centred, and materialistic and are in competition with each other. Your own rights outweigh the rights of your neighbours. Added to these everyday complexities, life is also not always fair. Hard workers lose their jobs; drunk drivers kill innocent people; powerful men manipulate the system to get what they want, men abuse women and children, power imbalances exist in communities and cheaters and predators lurk everywhere.

So what should our response be in the face of such widespread injustice and darkness? How do we seek justice, how do we seek the light and how do we seek to make change? Micah 6:8 seeks to give us this answer.

Justice - To act justly is to live with a sense of knowing what is right and wrong, to walk responsibly before God, and protect the needs of the innocent. It means that God requires of us to act when it comes to justice, not to sit passively or stay silent when others are being

hurt, abused, in need, or feeling helpless. Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." At St Andrew's we strive to raise boys to be men of action, men who act in the face of injustice. Men who stand up for the innocent, the helpless and the weak. Men who stand up for the rights of women and children. Men who challenge the worldly norms of immorality, injustice, isolation, racism, wickedness and evil. Boys who grow to be good sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers. Men who are hope bringers and change makers, men who take the world in a different direction – one of hope, love and justice.

In May this year, I spoke of dropping my son at a birthday party for one of our young men in Grade 3. His birthday party was held at a Restoration Centre in Bloemenda. In his invitation this young man asked for second hand clothing and shoes of various sizes as his birthday gift. He had invited thirty children from an orphanage to his party. There were clowns, games, cake and food – everything you would expect at a party. The difference was that on arrival, the second-hand clothes were packed out and displayed on a table. The clothing would later be distributed to the orphans in attendance. On enquiring a little more, I found out that this young man and his mother feed 350 malnourished children weekly. What a wonderful example set by this young man. He is an example of a leader: using his inner spark to make a difference for the better.

Mercy - To love mercy is to show "loving kindness" or "loyal love" towards others. Just as God's character is continually loyal and merciful to us, He calls us to live in this same way, both in our relationships with Him and with others. Essentially mercy is defined as "showing compassion or forgiveness towards someone instead of punishment or harm" or put another way, we are required to love one another. Martin Luther king Jr. said "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Mahatma Ghandi said it in another way. He said "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind." At St Andrew's our boys must come to understand that mercy does not mean weakness. They must come to understand truly what it means to be merciful, to forgive others and to love them unconditionally. Earlier this year I shared an example of a boy, who instead of going home when his parent arrived to collect him, opted to stay with another boy who was waiting alone for his transport home.

Often, I find older boys kicking ball or playing cricket with younger brothers on campus. We need to constantly be on the lookout for our brothers who may be sitting alone at break times, who feel alone and unwelcome. When we drive home after school, one simply needs to look at the man and the woman standing on the corner asking for food and shelter. You can make a difference by showing mercy and opening your heart to these individuals. Let's

face it, the world could do with a little more love, kindness and compassion to make it a better place for current and future generations.

Humility - To walk humbly before God, means that we need to recognize that without God's grace, all would be lost. To "walk humbly with God" is the basis for loving mercy and doing justice. We need to fully invest in healing the world around us through mercy and justice and we need to rely fully on God and His wisdom, instead of seeking our own way and doing what is right in our own eyes. Mother Theresa said "There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is suffering and too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways". It is my hope that St Andrew's men will hear the call to walk humbly with God and that their lives will reflect the light and likeness of God in all that they do, so that they can heal the world around them.

I hope by the end of a boy's career at St Andrew's, to engrain the message of Doing Justice, Loving Mercy and Walking Humbly with God, into their very being so that it will become a way of life for our St Andrew's men. Those who chose to live out this way of life will become men of action, light bringers, change makers, leaders, innovators, pioneers and hope bringers. They will move to change their environment and the world for the better.

## **Issue 50**

**18<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

Nora Ephron said "When your children are teenagers, it's important to have a dog so that someone in the house is happy to see you". As I have mentioned, I walk the campus every morning at 4 am with my pack of Afrikanis hounds. It is quiet and peaceful, and it gives me a chance to get my thoughts in order for the day. I also get to spend time with my beloved hounds as they run and play about the campus. Last week I made the decision to take my puppies to the field for the first time. The morning peace erupted into a chorus of dogs barking and chasing each other. The puppies ran about, ran into obstacles and dived into the water puddles in sheer excitement as a whole new world suddenly just opened up. The morning peace shattered!

It did not take long, before the pups settled into the rhythm of running with and following the older dogs. The older dogs know to stick by me as we go about our morning walks, they respond to my call or whistle with no fuss or effort. By default, the puppies, soon realized they needed to do the same. But every now and then, they wondered off, and I needed to

call to them and encourage them back towards the rest of the pack. You see, I cannot just open the gate and let the pack loose – total chaos would ensue. I am convinced that eventually one of the pups because of their inquisitive nature would perhaps leave the campus, maybe get knocked over, or maybe if lucky enough they would be found by a good Samaritan. The same might apply to one of the older of the pack. The pack requires my presence, they need me to keep them going in the right direction, and to keep them safe. I don't always have to call to them, but they need to know that I am present. The puppies learn from both the older dogs as well as me.

I can't help but draw a correlation between my pups and the boys in blue. At home and school, our boys need us in the same way. As our boys grow, we give them more and more freedom and independence, but no matter how old, they still need us. They need to know that we are present - at very least. At school the younger boys look up to and learn from the older boys, their teachers, coaches and parents. The younger boys enjoy interacting with the older boys. They look up to them as their heroes. I always remind the senior boys of this and their responsibility towards the younger boys. Earlier this year, the First Rugby Team visited the junior school ahead of their final they played at Shimla Park. I could not help but chuckle after I received a couple of calls from moms, as the younger boys returned home celebrating the variety of signatures they obtained on their shirts and caps from the First Team boys - that now needed washing or replacement. You can just imagine the conversation... Ahead of one of the U7 Rugby matches earlier in the year as well, a group of hostel boys formed a tunnel for our juniors to run through. The faces of the juniors say it all: <https://www.facebook.com/saintsbloemfontein/videos/388840023100302>

Like the boys learn from each other, they also need us – those with life experience. They need us to show them the way. The world is exciting, and at the same time scary. We have a great responsibility in raising our young men. It is our responsibility as the adults to create a safe space both at school and at home, where our boys can grow and learn as they explore their environment and as they come of age. I offer this bit of advice in this regard:

- Be present, supportive, guide and have a relationship with our boys.
- Create a sense of identity and belonging for our boys. They need to feel they belong.
- Help and show our boys how to do things at first and encourage and allow exploration, inquisitively and independence.
- Set the bar high, challenge and allow our boys to develop their skills.
- Allow our boys to fail, and not get upset by it but at the same time encourage perseverance and trying new things.
- Praise our boys and recognize and celebrate their accomplishments and efforts.

- Allow our boys to make mistakes and learn from mistakes whilst at the same time encouraging accountability.
- Be a good role model to our boys.
- Show our boys that we love them.

In raising our boys let's encourage them to do as the Prophet Michah requires of us; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God" in everything that they do.

## Issue 51

24<sup>th</sup> October 2022

"The biggest quest to learn anything is curiosity. If you are curious about something, you will go and dig." – Rakesh Jhunjhunwala. There is something very special about watching an inquisitive child – right from babe to older. Can you remember watching your youngster explore the world as they grew up. From discovering their fingers and becoming aware of their surroundings, to making discoveries of spiders and weird and wonderful creatures in the backyard. Later in life they become inquisitive with the opposite sex and even try their first puff of a cigarette or sip on their dad's beer. It's something I hope to nurture in all our boys, the desire to inquisitive, explore and experiment.

On Thursday last week, I had a visitor to my office. I was expecting the usual "Hello Sir. May I have a sweet?" the stock standard greeting of boys to my office. Not this time round. In my door stood a boy, eyes lit up, bursting with excitement, with something he obviously needed to tell me. He marched over to my desk and in his muddied hand he produced a black rock. "Genuine coal Sir, I have discovered genuine coal." He proceeded to tell me that on exploring the campus, he had discovered rich coal deposits on the campus.

He was certain that I needed to get in additional expertise, to come and explore the site with him, because this was an opportunity for the school to make some "serious money". I immediately asked him to inform my PA, so that I could make a note to get in this expertise. Well, it was not needed, as next thing, off went my PA with this young man on a prospecting mission. On return, I was also informed of the possibility of diamonds... Like any good scholar he made the connection that coal (CARBON), turns into diamonds at high pressures and temperatures, we just needed to excavate a couple of meters.

Of course, I was extremely excited by the discovery. Hopefully when we start excavation, we can use the soil from the hole to fill in some of the potholes in Bloem, and perhaps use the money from the sale of diamonds to fund our Astro that we will be launching shortly. On Friday, the young man, returned excitedly with a team of diggers, after having found

some more coal, seeking permission to dig to around 1m. He did indicate he was afraid the authorities would find out, because then they would want to sell the school...

The inquisitive nature of our boys needs to be nurtured in schools. We need to create opportunity for the inner genius of every learner to be developed and to come to the fore. They need to explore their classroom environment, their subject material, their extra mural activities, and their interests with a genuine sense of curiosity. They need to constantly explore, and ask why and how? Our boys need to learn through experience – trial and error. There is no greater feeling than the sense of accomplishment and fulfilment, when suddenly that “aha moment” takes place. Paddy Upton when coaching the Indian cricketers, and attending the nets session, by his own admission, did very little coaching. Instead, when a player encountered difficulty with a shot, he asked, what do you think if wrong? What you think you can do to change the end result?

In doing so he encouraged the players to take ownership and figure out the answer themselves, which resulted in better and more accomplished players. We owe it to the boys in our care not to spoon feed them. They need to be encouraged to search, experiment, and try to discover and come to a conclusion by themselves. It is just so much more natural... In sport, I get somewhat ratty, when I hear coaches hammering why one should not do something, as opposed to leading and allowing the players to come to the conclusion themselves, by allowing them to fail at first.

Frank Moore Colby says “Every man ought to be inquisitive through every hour of his great adventure down to the day when he shall no longer cast a shadow in the sun. For if he dies without a question in his heart, what excuse is there for his continuance?” We need keep fanning the inner curiosity, the inquisitive nature and the desire to explore of our boys. May we never allow our backyard explorers to lose that desire to find the next hidden spider, treasure, gnome and fairy or rich coal deposit. Always keep encouraging our boys to explore their relationship with God, and in so doing, we will teach them to do as the Prophet Micah expects; “Do justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God” - in all that they do.

## Issue 52

1 November 2022

“Awareness is like the sun. When it shines on things, they are transformed”. – Nhat Hanh. On Saturday we decided to have the family over for Boerie rolls for supper. Whilst my wife was down the aisles looking for suitable championship boerewors, I stood at the freezer selecting from a combination of Offal (any meats not classified as a cut – trotters, livers, chicken necks etc). I was hoping to spoil my dogs, by putting together a hearty meal for them that evening, whilst the rest of us had a braai. On selecting the necessary chicken gizzards, and making my way to the trolley, it dawned on me. There at the same freezer stood a gentleman, carefully, working his way through the frozen packs of chicken gizzards, looking for the best value for money. This was a gentleman, who clearly was looking for what source of protein he could afford – you just know when you know. It was clear as daylight, that this was all within his means. My heart sunk as I realized how unaware I was in that situation, and how guilty I felt about selecting for my dogs, the same food that would nourish that gentleman’s family that evening.

It immediately became apparent to me that I had missed an opportunity to make a difference. H Jackson Brown Jr. said “Nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity”. Indeed, a missed opportunity. I wished I had been more aware of my immediate situation. I think to myself, it is quite likely I will never have the opportunity to catch up with this gentleman again. It also caused me to reflect on my privilege. Daily, I speak to the boys about the privilege of attending a school like St Andrew’s. Our boys attend one of the top schools in the world. They have access to world class facilities and world class teachers. Our staff are privileged to work in this beautiful environment and are privileged to work with the calibre family that attends St Andrew’s. We are clear about our expectations. Every boy is expected to be involved in a Summer and Winter Sport, expected to be involved in Service and expected to be committed to their Academics

Service is one of the core values at St Andrew’s. It is an expectation that every learner at St Andrew’s is involved in service in one way or the other. There are so many service opportunities available – blood drives, Santa Shoe Box, collection of winter blankets, donation of shoes, collection of non-perishables and the list goes on. Muhammad Ali said, “Service is the rent you pay for your room here on earth”. I agree. I would expand and say, that service is the rent you pay for the privilege of attending St Andrew’s. It is my hope that all families at St Andrew’s are constantly looking for ways to make a difference and improve the lives of others. Our beautiful country presents us with plethora of opportunities to make a difference. One does not have to look hard. There are men and children standing at every street corner looking for assistance. Perhaps we choose not to see. Let’s open our eyes and

our hearts to those in need.

I am proud to be part of a school – a school of opportunities, a school that prides itself on service to God and to others. It is my hope that all who attend St Andrew's, realize that when they leave this school, they leave privileged to have been part of one of the greatest schools in the world. Of course, you needn't apologise for your privilege, but you do have to pay a 'tax' for it. That tax comes in so many forms - showing appreciation, saying thank you, looking out for others, taking part in absolutely everything you can, being proud of your uniform, supporting the school at events, showing manners, picking up litter etc. It is also my hope that no St Andrew's boy leaves the school with a sense of regret for missing out on opportunities. It is my hope that every St Andrew's boy remains thankful for his opportunity to attend St Andrew's, when so many others are not afforded the same opportunity.

I hope that every St Andrew's boy counts his blessings daily, strives to make a difference in the world, and does what the Prophet Micah expects of us; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God" – in all that they do.

## Issue 53

### 8<sup>th</sup> November

What to do when the storm comes. This past week the storms rolled in over Bloemfontein. Dark clouds, thunder, lightning, wind and heavy rains. Personally, I love the rain. I often say it is my kind of weather. It is when I am most at peace. I do realize however, that when a storm rolls in you look for shelter. For those of us who can retreat to our homes, with electricity, warm water, groceries, and those forgotten luxuries, what a pleasure to sit out the storm. Not so for many. When you don't have shelter in place, then a storm can prove to be quite destructive. All of us face our own personal battles and I am quite aware that there are many of the Saints Family who may be weathering storms in their personal lives. My advice to you is that you don't take on the storm alone. You need to rely on God firstly and others to support and shelter you from the storm and get you safely through it. You also need to have the basics in place. Be assured of one thing, the storms will come, but they will also pass. Haruki Murakami said "When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what the storm is all about."

I cannot help but think of the famous painting by Rembrandt - The Storm on the Sea of Galilee, which depicts the miracle of Jesus calming the storm, specifically as it is described in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark. According to the Biblical story, Jesus calms the sea

and then teaches the disciples the importance of faith. When all seemed lost, the disciples turned to Jesus for help, and Jesus calmed the storm. The ocean in the painting is considered to be boundless, a place where one can easily be lost, and can therefore be seen to represent the boundless span of life and the way one can become lost on life's journey. At the same time the Sea of Galilee is where Christians believe Jesus walked on water, calmed the storm, and made Peter and Andrew into "fishers of men." It's where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. And it's where Jesus fed the masses with a few loaves and fish and gave his Sermon on the Mount. Without Jesus, one will get lost in life.

It is my aim to create a happy and safe space for our boys at St Andrew's. Despite what storms boys may be facing, it is my hope that St Andrew's will prove to be a shelter for our boys during difficult times. We have restructured the school in such a way, to emphasize relationships and a sense of belonging. The aim of restructuring our school is to bring the entire school community – boys, teachers, parents, and Old Boys – closer together. In this way we can create a sense of belonging, identity, and safety for our boys. Our House system and family groups is designed to create small groups of teachers and learners who connect daily and look out for one another. Each House is made up of Family Groups, headed by a Head of the family (a teacher), with boys in various grades all making up a particular family. The family group then along with other family groups, belong to a House (Clegg, Champion, MacKenzie or Boarding). Each House is headed by a House Head, who is the teacher responsible for the House. Each House also has a House Prefect, who is the learner in charge of the House. The House Head and House Prefect, work together alongside the Heads of the Families to facilitate the pastoral care of all members of the House. When the storms hit, we need to know about them, because it is at that point that we can action our pastoral care. Please reach out to us and let us know how we can help. I am always available to assist, as are the respective Heads of the Schools (Mr Forster - High, Mr Schneider - Junior and Ms De Fortier - Little Saints), the Heads of Houses the Grade Heads, the Head of Families, the Heads of Phases, the respective teachers, and coaches. There is always someone your son connects with at school, and it is important to keep that person informed in times of need.

At St Andrew's our Chapel remains the heart of our school. We emphasize the importance of living a Christian life, believing in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We strive to create a solid foundation for our boys, based on Christian values. By putting in place a solid foundation for our boys, we equip them with the ability to weather the storms of life. Faith in God brings comfort and cheer, even in the midst of stress and crushing difficulties. Faith is what helps us trust God in difficult times. To see difficulty the way God does, we need Bible verses for hard times we can hold on to. The Bible provides us with

multiple examples of people who trusted in God through storms. King David, the greatest King of Israel, had a life that was far from easy and glamorous. King David embraced difficult times because he believed his future was in the hands of a God that loved him. We too need to believe that our future is in the hands of a God that loves us. Though our circumstances change our destiny does not (Ephesians 1:11). A boy leaving St Andrew's will know that during difficult times they simply need to remember and rely on God.

We are fast approaching the end of the year. The Senior School is into their exams this week, with the Junior School following shortly. I want to wish our boys and the families the best of luck during this stressful time. A study atmosphere should prevail at home, and you need to assist your son in being very selective pertaining social life. Your son should be committing himself to setting goals in terms of study time and compensating for lost time. Weekends, need to be balanced in terms of study goals and social engagements. Please see that your son gets sufficient sleep - for the senior boys 6 hours is the absolute minimum at this stage (10 hours is the maximum required). A clean room, a decent study area, organised notes in each subject and an atmosphere of calm make for successful exam preparation. Exercise is important during long-term serious study which should be balanced with constructive breathers. Allow your son regular breaks – a good run or walk around the block, sometime in the gym or some sporting exercise is advised. Nothing needs more selectiveness than television or electronic media. Maturity, sacrifice and common-sense are the keywords here. It takes all three to limit oneself to a couple of programmes or episodes per week. The problem is that TV, the use of electronic devices for entertainment purposes and social media are addictive and before one knows it the afternoon or the evening is gone forever.

When the storms in life come remember the Dalai Lama said "A tree with strong roots can withstand the most violent storm, but the tree can't grow roots just as the storm appears on the horizon." and Abraham Lincoln said "This too shall pass" Abraham Lincoln was called on to help his country weather an incredible storm - the US Civil War, a terrible war. Lincoln's real strength was his will: the way he was able to resign himself to an onerous task of leading the country through one of its most difficult trials, without giving in to hopelessness. It is my hope that you will do as the Prophet Micah requires; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God", in all that you do.

## Issue 54

14 November 2022

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them. On Friday we held our Remembrance Day Service. We commemorated all those who died in all past conflicts; World Wars, Frontier Wars, South African Wars, Border Wars, and those that have sacrificed their lives in establishing the new democratic South African order and presently serving in active operations throughout the world.

In the lead up to the Remembrance Day Service, we spent some time talking with our boys around the significance of remembering those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, so that we can live the lives that we live today. The Roll of Honour for the school for the period 1914-2011, contain 56 names. We are fast approaching a generation, who no longer have living family members who fought in the World Wars or have been able to hear a family member speak of the war. When the Senior boys were asked whether they knew of family members who were involved in the World Wars, just under half of those present raised their hands. All these years later and the connection to those brave men, women and children is still very much real and relevant. It remains important to reflect on the past, whilst it is not something that we can change, we can learn from it as we look to the future.

A service like this, along with the other services (Valedictory, Speech Day, Carol Service, Old Boys Family Service, Chapel Services etc.) are significant and valued occasions in our school calendar. They form part of the tradition, ethos, and DNA of the school. During the Remembrance Day Service, there are particularly poignant events; our Grade 1 learners lay a cross for our fallen brothers, various dignitaries lay wreaths, the Last Post and Reveille are played, a two-minute silence is observed, the Chapel and Tempe Bells are rung 11 times, the flags are raised, and military veterans salute the fallen. Watching those in attendance (young and old), it is moving to see the respect afforded this very special service. Due to predicted rain and scheduled loadshedding, our Remembrance Day Service took place in the Chapel – I felt a fitting venue for this special service.

A boy who attends St Andrew's will experience ceremonies like Remembrance Day. Ceremonies are important because they mark life's essential moments. They reflect our beliefs, hopes, traditions, culture and spirituality. A ceremony can help to show people they are united and that they belong. They can motivate us, stimulate our emotions and prompt memories. Ceremonies hold a special significance in the St Andrew's community because they preserve our traditions and culture, are used as rites of passage for our young men,

provide opportunities for us to reflect and heal, create a sense of belonging, identity and oneness, and they strengthen and unite our family.

The message delivered by Revd. Steenbok, John 13: 1-7, the story of Jesus washing his disciple's feet at the festival of Passover, was particularly fitting to our Remembrance Day Service and for what is expected of us now every day. Like the brave men and women who served, Jesus, used this as an opportunity, to show his disciples what was expected. In closing Revd Steenbok says "As you leave us as a school, our prayers are that you will be the difference in the world, and you will make a difference in this world, and you will serve in any capacity that you can to be the difference and make the difference, that I know you dream of too. It's time to get our hands dirty. Get involved and serve and be the difference. Its a command from our Lord."

Although the modern world is changing, we will continue to hold on to our ceremonies to preserve the intrinsic aspects of our St Andrew's DNA. Continue to serve and do as the Prophet Micah requires of us, "Do justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God" - in all that you do.

<https://tv.digicentral.co.za/st-andrews-tv/st-andrews-social/st-andrews-remembrance-day-service-1>

## **Issue 55**

### **22 November**

On Friday I was reminded of a story whilst I was sitting at breakfast with three of our guest speakers who had been invited to our Staff Seminar held over the weekend. I was visited in my office a while back by a young man, who came to report to me that he went on his first hunting trip with his father and managed to "bag" a buck. He proceeded to hand me a bag of dry wors. What a bonus I thought, my family are going to love me for bringing home some dry wors. I thanked the young man and gratefully received the bag and placed it on my desk. The young man just stood before me staring me down and proceeded to open the bag and hand me a piece of dry wors. I reluctantly declined, and said I was a bit full, but would enjoy the dry wors a little later on – to which he replied and insisted – No, eat it now Sir! It felt like that awkward moment when you are wearing Nikes and Just Can't Do It! I profess, I am a vegetarian. I stood up from my desk and ran to a "emergency" at the Chapel and promised the young man whilst on the way out, that I would return and have my dry wors. I returned to my office a while later to find neither the boy nor the bag of dry wors. Later that day I found him in the corridor and the young man mentioned that he had taken the bag along, with the intention of returning to see me but ended up sharing it out in and

amongst his friends. He did however keep a piece for me, which he pulled out of his pocket in and amongst the sweet and tissue papers – I feel on the best of days, I would still have declined to have a bite of that piece – but my hound was very appreciative. My wife was not impressed that evening when I shared the story with her, for me not wanting to take one for the team.

Our Guest Speakers for the weekend were Mr Roy Gordon, former Headmaster of St Andrew's who spoke on the topic of Saints DNA, Mr Larry Moser, Deputy Headmaster of Wynberg Boys' High School who spoke on the topic of the House System and Pastoral Care and Mr Paul Cassar, former Headmaster of Eunice who spoke on the topic of Modern Schools. The weekend presented the staff with an opportunity to engage with, reflect and listen to the wisdom and experience of these seasoned veterans. Mr Roger Crawford says, "Reflection is the bedrock of progress". I felt it important for staff new and old to be reminded of our Saints DNA – what is important and what we need to hold onto, whilst making progress in terms of our House System and Pastoral Care, in a Modern school.

Our DNA is the actual make up of who we are, and no two humans have the same genetic makeup - the same can be said for schools. Brian Thiel (former Headmaster), in 1985 wrote a letter to Mr Gordon at the start of his headship, where he remarked "St Andrew's is no bed of roses but serving this community can be very rewarding!" Religion is and always has been important at Saints, because we need to constantly remind our boys of the ultimate end goal of life. Madiba, whilst President, also called on the Church to be the conscience of the State. Our aim should be to give our children a healthy set of values clearly intended by our founders - Bishops Twells and Chandler over 159 years ago. Our Saints DNA has influenced many generations through the constant replication of traditions, cultures morals and values - producing men who have gone on to impact communities *world-wide*. Service has always been a big part of our DNA. St Andrew's produced a Bishop, 8 ordained clergy in the Anglican Church, various pastors, has been under the tutelage of 25/26 Chaplains and multiple headmasters who have emphasized and held onto our Saints DNA. Mr Gordon recalls that Dr Stemmet said to him after a school inspection "You have a fine prestigious school, but not a snob school." Over the years the Board of Governors, Chaplains, Headmasters, Staff, Wives of Headmasters, the Old Boys Association and Pupils have acted as custodians of our Saints DNA - and need to continue to do so in the future. Saints has always produced outstanding leaders and been a place where boys feel that they belong. Our boys are taught to accept challenges and work to overcome difficulties. God has been central to school life, brotherhood and family values are emphasized and boys are encouraged to have fun in a safe environment.

The decision was taken to move to a House system at Wynberg in 1998/99 was based on

how the school wanted to differentiate themselves from other boy's schools and to assist with discipline in the modern era (the cane had just been abolished). The House system has been refined and worked on over a period of more than twenty years, and Mr Moser shared with us the journey Wynberg Boys' have been on as they have developed the House system and pastoral care offered to all boys. The basic premise was that they wanted to be a school that understands boys as well as being a truly South African school where boys feel at home. The House system is a system based on relationships and creating a sense of identity and belonging for all boys. Mr Moser commented that "Boys will work for people they like." The House system also had many unintended consequences - most of which were positive and came to direct the culture and the ethos of the school - this became a defining feature of Wynberg, and the reason why parents chose to send their children to the school. The feeling of the staff was that whilst we were in the fledgling stages of introducing our House system, we would make use of the learnings of Wynberg and adapt this to what suited St Andrew's best. After the presentation a staff member remarked "I feel like going straight back and teaching, because I am excited by the prospect of this new pastoral and House system.", whilst another remarked that "She had thought of leaving, but now wanted to stay." I have no doubt that the seeds planted last year, when the House system was introduced in a simplistic manner, have now firmly taken route, and I look forward to plotting the way forward with the staff to create a unique pastoral system that speaks to our Saints DNA.

Mr Cassar focused on what is expected from a modern school in terms of the leadership, the staff and the pupils, whilst linking this expectation to the Saints DNA (he has come to know Saints well and has taken a keen interest in the school for many years). "Principals must be levers for change" - the pandemic and a rapidly changing world has forced schools to reinvent themselves. Schools need to respond to this change. Mr Cassar remarked that a modern school needs to be a place where "Learners should expect more of themselves and learners should expect more of their teachers." There are around 30 000 schools in South Africa. Each of these schools shape the learners in their care. At St Andrew's there is a sense of place and belonging, heritage and character and a sense of occasion (services like Remembrance Day). We need to hold onto this *tangible* sense of character and "gees" whilst responding and adapting to changes and innovating and leading the way into the unknown. The modern school needs to cater for online learning in one way or the other and technology has to be integrated into everyday life at the school. The modern teacher needs to be smart and talented, be able to engage and connect with their class, keep up with the latest trends, be collegial and committed, be thoughtful and wise, and teach, teach, teach. At the end of the day, our learners, and staff are shaped daily by their interactions at school.

Our values of being a traditional boys school founded on Christian principles, integrity, brotherhood and tradition form the bedrock of St Andrew's in a changing educational environment. Designing a modern school and the process of rejuvenating an educational system set up a few hundred years ago will take some serious consideration and actions to redefine. Creating a new House system that will fit the needs of current and future students will be a multifaceted endeavour. The foundation of building a modern school in my opinion, will be based not only on futuristic architecture, fancy technology, designing advance learning spaces and learning environments but also holding onto values, religion, morals, traditions, and discipline that are constantly being eroded in what seems to be a worldly norm. In essence, building a modern school, will need a rethink of the foundations of what education, teaching, and learning are – whilst holding onto our Saints DNA. At St Andrew's we will continue to send out young men, well equipped for the future, good husbands, fathers and brothers who will do as the Prophet Micah requires "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God" – in all that they do – in an ever-changing world.

**Issue 56**

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

“A seed neither fears light nor darkness but uses both to grow.” - Matshona Dhliwayo. In the afternoons when returning from school, I take a walk in the garden at Harrison House. My dogs join me as we take a walk around the garden and fill up the respective bird feeders. The doves, fantails and various smaller bird species eagerly wait for us in the trees surrounding the garden. Whilst walking the garden, I noticed the beautiful sunflowers starting to take route around the garden. Last year, I made a point of planting sunflowers around the garden and the result was multiple sunflowers sprouting and growing beyond my height in length by the time they were fully grown. The result was even more bird species were attracted to the garden manoeuvring themselves into position to harvest the sunflower seeds. This year, I had not gotten round to planting more sunflowers. I noted in particular, a single sunflower, growing in an area of the garden where I had not previously planted any sunflowers. It can of course be easily explained - perhaps a bird or the wind carried the seed of the previous season to that part of the garden, or when the previous flowers were cleared out, a seed ended up there.

I did not think much of this sunflower growing on its own, but generally caught a look at this young seedling as I passed by on the way to the next birdfeeder. Other than sunflowers being beautiful flowers they are heliotropic, which means that they turn their flowers to follow the movement of the Sun across the sky east to west, and then returns at night to face the east, ready again for the morning sun. Heliotropism happens during the earlier stages before the flower grows heavy with seeds. On a particular day, my eye again caught the sight of this sunflower, something was not quite right, so I wondered over for a closer inspection. A weed had taken route and had climbed its way up the stem of this sunflower. It was clear to me that this was some form of parasitic weed. Parasitic weeds belong to a group of plants which have lost their autotrophic way of life during their developmental process (evolution). They are nutrition specialists to the disadvantage of their host plants. With special organs, the haustoria, they penetrate into the vessels of other plants in order to supply themselves with water and nutrients. This weed had wrapped up this sunflower, weighing it down and pulling it to the ground, and also paralyzing the head of this sunflower so it was unable to follow the sun anymore. This spectacular flower had simply been overcome by a weed.

The image of this sunflower got me thinking about two scenarios; in our personal lives we sometimes allow the weeds to take route, weigh us down and destroy what we are meant to be, and secondly within a school context, our young men in our care, need to be nurtured and cared for, in a safe environment, so as to prevent the weeds from taking route and taking over. It was clear to me that this sunflower was doomed if I did not take action. I moved to immediately remove this weed, which took a lot more effort than I imagined. I

quickly realized that this was a delicate process to remove this weed that had tangled itself, strangled and sunk itself into the very body of this sunflower. Once the weed was agonizingly removed, I had to readjust the stem and brace it with a support. The sunflower which stood no higher than my knee with the weed wrapped around it, now extended beyond my belly button, in height as the weight of the weed had been removed. Over the next couple days, the brace to which the stem was tied, played an important role in supporting the flower, particularly in the storms that made their way over Bloemfontein. After a while, the roots strengthened and once again took root, and the stem thickened hoisting the flower higher than before. Although the stem bore the scars of the weed, the flower was once again following the movement of the sun and well on its way to producing seed. Whilst the weed had been removed and cut back, the remnants of this resilient plant (the weed), kept making its way back to the sunflower on its dubious mission to secure nutrients and drain the sunflower. In life, the weeds constantly move to reclaim their drain on our development and growth.

We need to constantly be aware of the weeds - people (supposed friends and bad influences) and personal problems (finances, relationships, addictions etc.) that weigh us down, strangle us and eventually destroy us. We need to rid ourselves of these weeds, sometimes in a painful process, leaving scars, so that we can regain our purpose, and continue to follow the light (God). In this way we will sow the seeds of life, sustaining others and bringing hope for the future. Often, we need to rely on others to brace and support us, during difficult times. At school we need to carefully cultivate the young minds and hearts of the boys in our care. We need to ensure that we carefully prepare fertile ground to allow our boys to develop and grow to their full potential, and at the same time watch out for the weeds, that take route and seek to grow and strangle the potential of our young men. The weeds come in various forms at school - trouble at home, bullies at school, abused young men, alcohol and drugs, financial, social and personal barriers etc. As the caregivers of our young men, we need to constantly attend to the *well-being* of our young men - emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual - a role we pride ourselves in and prioritize at St Andrew's.

We will continue to strive to create fertile grounds at St Andrew's allowing the potential contained in the seeds of our young men to germinate and flourish, growing to their full potential in a safe environment. Jennifer Willimson says "You plant seeds every single day, in the world and in others, with every thought you think and word you speak and action you take. You have influence. You're making a dent in the universe, and you matter, in a very real way." I hope that all boys who leave St Andrew's grow to do as the Prophet Micah requires; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God."

**Issue 57**

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

As the school year draws to a close, I cannot help but reflect on the special memories made and the lessons learnt as well as look forward to the holiday ahead. Over the past week, we came together as a family and had our Christmas Picnic on the Chapel field. The occasion was well attended with families setting up picnic stations across the field. The sound of children laughing and playing, adults having conversations, musical items and the smell of boerie rolls, pancakes, chips and coffee filled the air. The excitement created by the roar of Christmas Father and Mother arriving on their motorcycles and being followed by the children laughing and shouting as they ran to catch up with the duo travelling around the field, warmed hearts.

On Friday evening the staff came together for our end of year Family Christmas Picnic, a very special event. One of the staff remarked to me, that she had not realized that there were so many children as part of the staff family - reaffirming to me yet again the need to involve our families in the busy life of the school. At this event we were able to recognize staff members for exceptional service to the school (Mrs Gower being our longest serving member of staff with over 40 years of service), say goodbye to staff leaving, award our "special" staff awards, and enjoy the evening together as a family. The children were treated to decorating Christmas Cookies and a visit from Santa. The field quickly filled up with children playing games and staff sitting under trees whilst our expert braai team prepared supper. A fitting end to a busy year.

I love using metaphors when I think of lessons and telling stories. If I think about this year and the lessons learnt, I think of Paguroidea - the hermit crab. You often find these creatures wondering around rock pools or in shallow parts of marine rivers. Hermit crab species range in size and shape, from species with a carapace only a few millimetres long to *Coenobita Brevimanus*, which can live 12–70 years and can approach the size of a coconut. I am sure that as a child you were probably just as fascinated with these crabs, wandering about, carrying different sizes of shells with beautiful colours on their backs. They seem awkward with that larger claw, and when picked up, they quickly retreat into their shells and slowly start to emerge peering out with their stalked eyes. I would think that many of us at one stage or the other probably picked up a shell we adored, only to find it occupied by an owner already or carried our own collection of hermit crabs in buckets on the beach. Perhaps you even happened to have races with friends encouraging your very own "race crab" back to the water's edge. I am sure that most of us have stopped to inspect and admire these tiny remarkable creatures.

Why the Hermit crab?

Hermit crabs, change shells, throughout their lifetime. The shell is used for protection, as their body is soft and not totally covered with an exoskeleton. From a young age they depend on the shells of other animals to survive. As they grow, they vacate their shell and move to find another shell. In order to grow the hermit Crab, has to make the choice to leave the shell and seek a bigger and more suitable shell thereby exposing its soft body to the elements - it has to take a risk. Failure to find a suitable shell will result in the hermit Crab dying, or being forced to grow smaller - yes, they can. Coming out of the pandemic, many of us were forced to peer out of our shells, where we had been hidden for around two years and expose more and more of ourselves, so that we could get on the move again. Staying hidden in our shells, no longer was an option. Some of us took on new roles and challenges, either because we made the choice to change jobs (or were forced for a plethora of reasons), whilst others may have been promoted at work, or perhaps there was a change in our home circumstances, or we faced our own personal battles. Like the hermit crab, growth requires change, and this requires of us to take risks and expose ourselves, so that we could find new and better suited shells. I firmly believe that growth is often uncomfortable and may be painful and risky, but like the hermit crab, it is an essential part of life. A hermit crab may actually only occupy a shell for a couple hours. Change for the hermit crab is just part of life.

Hermit crabs often have growths of algae or other organisms on their shells. They also have symbiotic relationships with some organisms, such as anemones. Anemone hermit crabs attach anemones to their shell, and both organisms benefit. The anemone stings potential predators with their stinging cells and stinging threads and also helps hermit crabs blend in with their surroundings. The anemone benefits by eating the leftovers of the crab's meal and being transported to food sources. The anemone crab will even take the anemone(s) with it when it moves to a new shell. Like the hermit crab, it is to our advantage to establish symbiotic relationships with those around us so that both benefit from the relationship. These relationships are applicable to home, work, school and everyday life. One needs to identify those you can rely on to support you, and carry them with you throughout life. If you get bogged down by unwanted mass or irrelevant algae and organisms, leave the shell, but take those you rely on with you. An interesting fact is that often where there is a lack of shells around, hermit crabs will actually trade shells with other hermit crabs - they will help each other out. When a hermit crab dies, it releases pheromones, to let other crabs know that there may be a potential shell. Hermit crabs are patient and never remove the snails making their future homes, they wait for a snail to die, and then move in to their ready-made home. Hermit crabs (unlike their name suggests) are also social creatures, living in groups of up to one hundred crabs. Like the hermit crabs, we are social organisms and need to exist and co-exist with each other within communities.

When observing a hermit crab, one may have noticed the large and impressive claw. It is very prevalent and certainly looks like it has a very important role to play when compared with the other smaller claw. The larger claw's job is to help the hermit crab balance, hold on to things and defend itself from predators whilst the smaller claw is primarily used to collect food and get it to the crab's mouth. Like the hermit crab, we have different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. We need to develop and harness our strengths and weaknesses so that we can function optimally. Often, we are so focused on the larger claw that is predominant that we neglect and don't realize the importance of the smaller claw. Both play a vital role in survival. Hermit crabs also have a feisty, fighting spirit and have been known to throw down with other hermit crabs. When a hermit crab decides that he wants another crab's shell, he is willing to fight for it. It is common for a shell-jealous crab to start a fight with another crab in hopes of taking home the big prize, a new shell. Like the hermit crab, we need to fight for what we want in this life. We must be willing to go the extra mile and get down and dirty for what it is that we want.

Remember it is a competitive market out there. Rocky Balboa says "Now if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth".

Lesson learnt from the hermit crab:

Growth requires change.

Build relationships with those you can rely on.

Continually work on and challenge yourself.

Be willing to fight for what you want.

Be patient and wait for your prize.

Operate within your community.

At St Andrew's, I have tried to create multiple opportunities and layers of leadership to allow staff and pupils to take up additional responsibilities and head up portfolios so that they can grow. I have tried to encourage other ways of doing things and challenge the status quo by introducing new ideas and concepts. I must say that on many occasions I felt like the hermit crab, having to move quickly, rely on others, and search for the next suitable shell in my growth and learning curve. As you continue to grow along life's journey, I hope that you will grow in your relationship with God and continue to do as the Prophet Micah requires "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God".

During my last trip to Cape Town for the Old Boys Reunion, I spent part of the Saturday at Hout Bay, just enjoying the sights and smells of the busy harbour. I made my way to my favourite restaurant, Fish On The Rocks, to enjoy their hake and calamari combo. I enjoy sitting at that spot because you get to view the whole of Hout Bay and Kommetjie as well as the famous Chapmans Peak Drive in the distance. Sometimes you are entertained by one of the locals enticing a seal out onto the shore to feast on some fish scraps and failing that you can just enjoy the sound of the ocean and the fresh sea breeze. After enjoying a meal, I usually walk out to one of the historical cannon batteries - because Hout Bay is reasonably small, the cannon batteries were positioned in such a way to cause devastation on ships caught in the crossfire because they would have nowhere to run and hide. I usually also meander along the rocky shore looking for some washed up treasure. The rocks are usually littered with interesting pieces of boating paraphernalia. The shore did not disappoint on this occasion either.

On walking along the shoreline, I discovered a beautiful red speckled rock almost the size of a cricket ball. I excitedly approached this find and admired its beauty. Without too much thought I placed this rare rock into my pocket as a special memory from Hout Bay, back in Bloemfontein. As I wondered further, more and more red speckled rocks of differing sizes and shapes started to litter the shoreline. Suddenly my unique find, was no longer quite so unique. I was intrigued by this vast quantity of peculiar red speckled rocks. This required more investigation. As I worked my way through the various examples, it soon became evident what I had come across. I removed the rock from my pocket and took a good look. Indeed, it was as I suspected. What I was holding in my hand had once been an ordinary brick used to build houses. A vast quantity of bricks had been washed out on the rocky shore, having been shaped and weathered by the forces of ocean. I was intrigued by the varying stages of how these bricks were being shaped by the natural surrounding elements. Ellen Dreyer's quote came to mind, "That's the thing about rocks – they don't break easily. When I held them, I wanted to be like them – strong and steady, weathered but not broken".

The matter of fact is that no matter how strong you are, you are changed as you walk this life – we all are. The change is inevitable. So, you are faced with a choice - you can view this as a process of being weathered or refined. Weathered means that you are worn, battered, altered or changed by exposure for a prolonged period to an event. In nature weathering is the breaking down or dissolving of rocks and minerals on Earth's surface. Refining on the other hand is a process of removing unwanted elements to bring about a pure state, free

from impurities. It is all a matter of perspective. I quite fancy my special brick that I keep in my office. It really is unique because I am certain there is no other brick like this. It has its own unique look, shape and feel, moulded by the forces of the ocean over a period. This once rectangular building block is no longer suited to its intended use in a wall, but rather it has a special place in my office. It reminds me to keep perspective when I face trying or challenging times and to continually work on refining the qualities and traits of my character. Similarly, I am reminded of the verse in the Bible where the Prophet Malachi paints a picture of the refiner's fire to show the transformative power of God's influence. We learn that part of God's role in our lives is to refine us, just as a refiner would refine precious metals like gold or silver.

Like this brick, we are shaped daily through our contact and interaction with one another. We can choose to weather (wear down) or refine (bring out the best in) each other through what we say and do. Similarly, as the recipient we can choose how to view the process of what is happening to us – are we being worn down or are we having the impurities removed. Sometimes it may be difficult to distinguish because both involve an extensive process of extremes – heat, force, or time e.g. I have never come across as many people as I have now, who tell me they feel tired and exhausted by what has been a tough year. It seems like the realities and aftereffects of the Pandemic are only now catching up to us. I am hoping that despite whether people feel they have been weathered or refined by the past, that they can take a step back, regain perspective, and see that they are still here – not broken, but different, and perhaps even refined and more resilient.

It is my hope that we will continue to do as the Prophet Micah requires of us; "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God".