



22 May 2020

Dear Saints Family

Our College has never faced circumstances like those it faces now. We write to explain how we are responding. This is both an easy - and a difficult - letter to write. It is long. It is detailed. It is extremely important. Our invitation to you, then, is that you please set aside half-an-hour to immerse yourself in what we want to share with you - for the sake of your children and of the Saints Community to which they - and you - will *always* belong.

As an inclusive faith-based school, it seems appropriate to us to set the tone by focusing on our essence, or, rather, on the essential challenge facing us now: change. Eckhart Tolle, contemporary spiritual thinker, writes:

When faced with a radical crisis, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, when survival is threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems [individuals] will either die, or become extinct; or, rise above the limitations of their condition through an evolutionary leap.

We intend to rise. A collective evolutionary leap is what we believe the St Stithians Community has taken since COVID-19 forced our nation into lockdown. We have had to adapt not only for the benefit of our present generation but for generations to come. Sacrifice is part of adaptation: letting go of what is not immediately essential. And evolving differently that which is. This is what the past eight weeks has taught us. When future generations read the history of St Stithians 2020, we trust that they will comprehend and value the impact of the sacrifices we are willing to make now. Our decisions today will determine what our College will look like in the years to come. We must be courageous, resolute and wise. Our theme of *#Be Stronger One and All* can be seen in all areas of our community. We are a strengths-driven collective.

The Methodist Church

We are grateful to Presiding Bishop Purity Malinga, General Secretary Rev Michel Hansrod, Bishop of the Central District Gary Rivas, incoming Central District Bishop Rev Faith Whitby, Chair of our Council Church Committee Rev Pieter Witbooi and our Chaplains for the prayers and wise counsel during these times. In particular we remember and are grateful to Rev Witbooi for his prayer ([Bishop Peter Witbooi Prayer](#)) which demonstrated that, although we are physically apart, we remain connected not only via social media but more importantly, through our values which anchor us during these turbulent times.

Health and Safety

One area in which we are making no sacrifices is Occupational Health and Safety. The health and security of all who enter our campus is of paramount importance to us as an employer and as an education provider. We have developed a number of policies and guidelines including our COVID-19 Workplace Preparedness Plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the relevant documents can be accessed via our website, listed under [policies](#). These documents have all been informed and developed in line with all government regulations and consultations with key stakeholders including medical practitioners. The schools will be sharing further detailed information with you regarding the return of our students.

INSPIRING EXCELLENCE. MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

The College has been involved in enhancing our security plan for the campus since October 2019. The first stage of that plan requires strengthening our perimeter. Perimeter security consists of access control at our vehicular entrances, pedestrian gates on our boundary and our outer perimeter fencing.

Financial Relief

Soon after the likelihood of a National Disaster was raised, the College Executive did some scenario planning under the guidance of a strategist from GIBS. During that session, and in subsequent discussions, the College Executive applied their minds to targeted areas to bring about savings. Not all these savings have materialised yet, and we commit to driving these initiatives to conclusion. In response to legislative requirements we are facing an increase in working costs which will reduce the savings we effect. We are in the process of lodging a claim under our insurance policy for this increased cost of working.

We thank One and All for your ongoing support of our great College. We recognise that some families are better placed to weather this storm than others. While many in our community have had salary cuts imposed to ensure their businesses survive, others have had their lives ripped apart when they lost their jobs or their businesses.

After many hours of discussions involving rigorous debate and deliberations, including various meetings with the Chair of Council, Chair of the Finance Committee, the Rector and the Head and Deputy Head of Finance (Financial Accounting), the Council Finance Committee has approved relief of R14.3 million (R6 000 per full fee paying student).

This token of financial empathy will be in the form of a monthly credit processed in three equal tranches of R2 000 commencing with your next account. This relief is a combination of savings from stopping Capex where possible, savings achieved since lockdown commenced and our reserves.

Remuneration makes up 65% of our expenses. In addition, we employ via our onsite contractors (cleaners, catering staff, grounds staff and security) a further 180 staff. Uppermost in the minds of Council and the College Executive is the vulnerability of those contractor staff who all earn low salaries. We have committed to covering their salaries while the companies call on the relief measures available to them and are in rigorous negotiations with all providers to ensure their sustainability and fairness to our fee-paying parents.

Boys' College Boarding parents will, in addition to the financial relief detailed above, be credited R4 600 on their next account. For every month until the end of the year that boarders are not permitted to return, this refund will be implemented.

Hot lunches savings are also to be passed on to those who make use of the facility at an amount of R411 in your next account and then ongoing each month we are unable to provide this service.

Budget 2021

The 2021 budget is especially important in light of the indeterminable impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the resultant impact on the national economy. The College Executive with the Chair of Council and the Chair of Fincom are rigorously working on the parameters we will apply in setting the 2021 budget. Thoughts under consideration include a delay in the implementation of a fee increase, a possible fee freeze, or alternatively a low fee increase. We are committed to actively pursue all areas that could bring relief to our parents while still ensuring that we deliver the quality education we are renowned for.

Capital expenditure will be limited to what is absolutely critical yet still ensuring that we maintain the quality of our buildings and property. In addition, ICT remains a priority, and work on that front is ongoing.

Sacrifices are being made by parents to keep their children at St Stithians. We are deeply grateful to our parents who continue to pay their school fees despite the hardships they are facing. The decisions we have

taken have involved many stakeholders. In particular we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to FinCom for their deliberations over the past few weeks, as well as members of our various Council Committees, ensuring that all of our constituents were involved in the discussions. The ability to offer this financial relief is due to the fiscal oversight by the St Stithians College Endowment Fund Trust chaired by Gary Morolo, our College Council and the College Executive and their teams over the past years. It is essential that the same fiscal responsibility continues to be applied as we make decisions for the present to also benefit us in the future. We again thank One&All for your sacrificial service to our College.

Educational Offering

What has not, and will never, be sacrificed is the quality of our education and its continuity. Term 2 began with an enhanced Online and Distance Learning (ODL) programme and continues to be a major focus of our energies. We are grateful to our teaching staff who are committed to innovation *with* ongoing improvement. And to our parents who play a vital role in this partnership.

The quality of our offering ensures that our children continue to thrive. Our teachers continue with professional development, many enrolling in advanced Post Graduate degrees in this time. They contribute to and participate in many free forums, webinars and online workshops; some have been asked to showcase, globally, the work of the College as we continued educating our students online. Membership, participation and association with various international and local organisations keeps teachers at the forefront of best practice. These organisations include *The National Coalition of Girls' Schools, Alliance of Girls' schools Australasia, The International Boys' Schools Coalition*. As well as leading universities such as WITS, the University of Sydney's LCT Institute of Knowledge Building, UJ and the University of Hull, amongst others.

Our Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) focuses its attention on both Research and Coherence and Cohesiveness. This two-pronged approach ensures that all teaching and innovation is grounded in evidence-based understanding of how knowledges are cumulatively built across students' developmental stages. LTC works very closely with the schools' Academic Planning Committees, the Digital Learning Coaches, the Campus Academic Support Committee, the Campus Educational Psychological Services Committee and the Assessment and Report Committees.

A common concern identified locally and internationally is the wellbeing of all during this crisis. In response, one of our initiatives is the imminent launch of our Wellbeing Resource Space. This resource has been developed by our psychologists and will provide support for our families at no extra cost. We are also developing a campus-wide programme of Fitness and Athletic Development (FAD). This seeks to respond to the current reality that our usual sporting programme will not be resumed for a number of months. FAD will also be offering a similar service to our parents once we are able to extend the opening of our Campus to our parents for their use.

IT Infrastructure

Although a process of continual review and upgrading of our IT infrastructure is ongoing, we have escalated our focus on this including network and WiFi upgrades. We are committed to not compromising on these measures as there are strong indications, informed by emerging evidence, that ODL will continue for some months. We are also looking beyond COVID-19 and lockdown to ways in which the necessary mitigating effort and expenditure, across our systems, can provide ongoing benefit to the way we work and teach going forward. We are mindful of the need, facing an uncertain future, to balance sacrifice with giving our students and staff access to the best IT infrastructure we can afford.

Community Initiatives

During the past weeks of lockdown, our Saints Community has showed its strength and togetherness while apart in their participation in the many initiatives that have been shared on our Saints communication platforms.

From our 21 Days of Prayer, the launch of which coincided with the National Day of Prayer on the 26th March as we entered the first phase of lockdown, to our #BeStrongerOneAndAll Day where our Saints Family donned their Saints colours and stood together, showing our support of One and All and our love of our College.

The sharing of #SaintsMoments over the past weeks has been nothing short of remarkable with thousands of #SaintsMoments being submitted via our Moments@stithian.com email address, from first day photos to memories from our founder students, an incredible showcase of the many experiences and moments that have been shared. These can be found on our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram sites and on our Latest Campus [News](#) page.

Our Freedom Day Run on the 27th of April, connected us to our strategic intent of #InspiringExcellence and #MakingAWorldOfDifference, saw over 1000 walkers and runners from our Saints Community both locally and around the world put on their takkies and take part in our Family Home Challenge, all in aid of our Thandulwazi Maths and Science Academy's Academic Scholarship Programme where over R60 000 was raised.

What is clear is that St Stithians is Stronger One and All and we thank you for standing together while apart with us in these challenging times. A collection of videos of these Saints Moments can be found on our St Stithians College [YouTube](#) page.

We are unique across both the country and the globe: there is much to cherish and celebrate as we derive comfort in our privileged belonging to the Saints Community.

Founders' Day

Some traditions should not be sacrificed no matter how hard it becomes to maintain them. Like our alumnus Michael Bean, we at Saints continue to believe it remains essential to *somehow separate from the hum of life beyond* (1999, *The Stythian*, p.28). So although our official Founders' Day has been postponed to the 1st August, preparations are still underway to mark the occasion of the 6th June, but differently: with a [Saints@Moments Online Celebration](#). We will still celebrate and acknowledge the founding of our College this year on the 1st August 2020. We anticipate that it will be live-streamed and will include some stakeholders celebrating on Campus, as permitted by prevailing regulations. We believe that foregoing celebrating Founder's Day on our beautiful Campus will make 2021's celebrations even more poignant.

In Conclusion

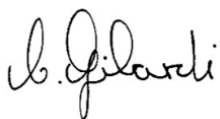
A further communication will be issued from the Rector's office as soon as we receive clarity from the Department of Education and ISASA as to whether independent schools have flexibility regarding which grade/s may return to school from the 1st June.

Please rest assured that you will be informed, in detail, of all the processes and procedures that will be in place to ensure the safe return of our students, staff and parents. Surveys will be sent out from the Colleges and the Junior Prep to determine whether you will in fact send your children to campus. The Girls' Prep and Boys' Prep have completed their surveys.

It is fitting that as this communication goes out the day after we celebrated Ascension Day, that we are reminded that the Kingdom of God is within our hearts and of the ever-present Holy Spirit watching over and protecting us.

We wish our St Stithians Community continued strength as we together forge the path ahead.
#Be StrongerOneandAll

Yours Sincerely



Celeste Gilardi
Rector



Carel Nolte
Chairman of Council



Lorna Kirk
Chair of Finance Committee



Ntombi Langa-Royds
Deputy Chair of Council & Chair of Remuneration Committee