

Rector's Welcome and Address – Founders' Day 3 June 2017

Dr Tim Nuttall



Welcome (at the beginning of the Service)

I greet you this beautiful morning. Dumelang, Molweni, Sanibonani, Goeie More.

I welcome you warmly to Founders' Day 2017, on behalf of our College of seven schools – the Junior Preparatory, the Boys' Preparatory, the Girls' Preparatory, the Girls' College, the Boys' College, Kamoka Bush School and the Thandulwazi Maths and Science Academy.

We have rung the bell 64 times, the years since the founding of this College in 1953 – each moment a ping of sound to remind us of yesterday's baton handed to us today, and which we cherish and hand to the future. We look forward to 2053, when the bell will ring 100 times.

Welcome to our Methodist Church representatives, our Trustees, our Council members, our invited special guests and friends of the College, our students, staff, parents, our alumni, past staff and past parents.

A special welcome to our Matrics and our Matric Parents – you are near the end of your journey with us. We thank and salute you. Here your ship has been anchored. You are about to set sail into new seas.

When our founders created a Trust in 1941 which gave birth to St Stithians in 1953, they most likely did not envisage the St Stithians of today, with its 2 600 students attending school daily, and with its 2 500 participants in our Thandulwazi Academy.

Our founders had the courage to begin. We are grateful and today we express this gratitude formally and collectively. Our founders were of a time and context. We are of a time and context: let that same courage inspire and energise us to advance the power of education to transform lives – now and in the decades ahead.

Alongside the members of the College Executive on the podium, we formally recognise and welcome

- Our guest of honour, Justice Dikgang Moseneke, retired Deputy Chief Justice.
- We welcome Reverend Charmaine Morgan, General Secretary of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and a Trustee of the St Stithians College Endowment Fund Trust as a representative of the Presiding Bishop.
- We record the apologies of Bishop Gary Rivas, our District Bishop, who is presiding over the District Synod this weekend.
- We pray for Mr Gary Morolo (Chair of the St Stithians College Endowment Fund Trust) as he recovers from ill health.
- I make special mention of Mrs Ntombi Langa-Royds, the Deputy Chair of the St Stithians Council, and Mr Carel Nolte, the Chair of the St Stithians Council.

We are gathered, One and All, in these beautiful surroundings. Let us never take them for granted. Please refer to your booklet for the order of Service. We give thanks to God for many blessings and for the responsibilities which flow from gratitude.

Rector's Address

The Landscape of Belonging

The chosen theme for Founders' Day – *Our Community of Belonging* – holds up a mirror, shines a light, acts as a lodestar. How we belong, or do not belong, is mission critical – at this point in time in our country and school. Indeed, there are many tensions in our society that have erupted in recent times about identity and belonging.

As a society, we are in a new, uncharted space. We bear the burden of a fractured, divisive and oppressive past. We also share the light of new promise as we seek to move into a new future which is more united, connected, common, equal and dignified. Our new democracy is living through a long, difficult and painful birth. Despite those who may wish it away, the shadow of the past is real and pervasive. We need to engage with its manifestations.

A younger generation of South Africans pose a trenchant critique of today's society. The self-serving practices dominating the politics and unequal society of today threaten the social gains and goodwill generated since 1994. This is the context in which we have pressing questions to ask:

Who am I? Who are we? How do we feel that we belong? How do we feel that we do not belong? What do we stand for? What do we stand against? Why is stereotyping so pervasive? How aware are we of our unconscious biases? How aware are we of the assumptions that we make?

The silent and submerged factors which erode and undermine our sense of belonging are the most difficult to identify, challenge and reshape. The ways in which we share and grapple with these profound questions today shape the promise and the pitfalls of the future.

To be relevant, meaningful and purposive, a St Stithians education should seek to equip us to be thought-leaders and lead-practitioners in this landscape of belonging.

- What is the 'head' of our belonging – how much do we know about each other, and the multiple contexts of our communities?
- What is the 'heart' of our belonging – how much do we empathise with others, create relationships, embrace diversity as a common good?
- What are the 'hands' of our belonging – how much do we live out a generosity of spirit, lives of connecting, serving and contributing?

To be the head, heart and hands that seek to:

build, not to break down,
hope, not despair
connect, not disconnect
love, not hate.

At Stithians we educate individuals to live out Saints Character, so that our students and staff can

Know myself
Be myself
Make my contribution

Know ourselves
Be ourselves
Make our contribution

This mantra puts authentic identity at the heart of a St Stithians education:

If we belong, we share a common set of values
If we belong, we contribute
If we belong, we assume responsibility
If we belong, we stand for what is right
If we belong, we are affirmed and we affirm others
If we belong, happy fulfilment flows -- those evocative words on the foundation stone of our College.

Belonging in a Christian School

In our intent to be a place of belonging we draw, as a Christian school, on God's love and purpose. The Christian faith inspires, challenges and enables us to value each human being as an individual loved by God. Jesus took on human form and enables a personal relationship with a living God.

God's love for humanity is lived out by human beings – you and me – as respectful, compassionate and empathetic individuals – a wisdom that reaches way beyond Christian belief.

Our guest speaker

We draw inspiration from our guest speaker, Justice Moseneke. As a Justice of the Constitutional Court, our guest speaker has had the responsibility, with his fellow Justices, to uphold and interpret the Constitution of South Africa. The Constitution is a foundation for belonging in a democratic South Africa, defining the rights and responsibilities of equal citizens.

Justice Moseneke has recently published a Memoir titled 'My Own Liberator'. It's a remarkable personal journey. Applied to our Founders' Day theme, My Own Liberator speaks to us about taking responsibility for our own life stories. A strong self-identity and self-belief is the basis for belonging with dignity.

You, Justice Moseneke, were in Grade 9 when you were imprisoned on Robben Island for ten years as a political prisoner. Your life story is about the power that comes from within the human spirit, supported by strong bonds of family and friendship, and we are inspired and challenged by it.

Belonging as South Africans

As South Africans, we have a long road ahead in our journey of belonging, and it is up to each one of us to liberate ourselves so that, here on the tip of Africa, we can truly become a land of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a profound and challenging word in the Nguni languages: I am a person because of other people. Ubuntu speaks of belonging, connectedness, community and responsibility.

What does it mean to be a South African who belongs? Each of us, individually and collectively, needs to think about and live out this question. At this time of moral outrage in our land, our constitution, our dignity, our struggle for human rights provides us with a foundation of values. We have values to stand for. We have values to stand against.

Embracing our common future as South Africans is up to us, each one of us, to own and create. Each one of us to be our own liberators as we build a better society.

St Stithians – our place of belonging

St Stithians inspires excellence and makes a world of difference. As with all that we do and strive for, this intent is our yardstick. Today we apply it to the community of belonging. How do we measure up? There is much that is good and positive, and new initiatives are pointing us forward. We also have much work to do. We have mountains to climb, rivers to cross. We should not shy away from desert spaces. We need to shine the light into hidden places. We need to address our fears. We need to listen to one another. We need to grow together.

I ask you to look at the front cover of the Service Booklet. Depicted there are the nuclei, the energy sources, the relationships of our College community. Depicted there is the badge and brand of St Stithians, the single entity – represented here today by the St Stithians College Endowment Fund Trust, the St Stithians Council, and the Rector. And then there are the seven schools – each has its

own particular character, its sphere of existence. Each school is connected in synergy, to create a whole which is greater than the mere sum of its parts.

In addition to the seven schools, there are three other spheres on the cover page. These represent three major stakeholders in the St Stithians ecosystem.

Our parents – the image of the three mothers in Saints Supporters gear. Thank you, parents, for your investment, commitment and dedication. We have active parent committees in our schools. We welcome and appreciate all that our parents do for us in our community of belonging.

Our alumni – the Old Stithian Association badge. Graduates of St Stithians whose ship was anchored here, and who now sail the seas. There are so many amazing stories of our alumni who inspire us and challenge us. Thank you to the Old Stithian Association for the growing bond with your College. Connecting better with our alumni is a top priority for the St Stithians of today.

Our Methodist Church of Southern Africa – the Methodist logo. Through the institutional links with the Presiding Bishop, the District Bishop, the General Secretary, the Church representatives on Council, and the chaplains: St Stithians is integrally connected to the Methodist Church – our spiritual guide and inspiration, our moral DNA, our link to communities beyond the school gates. Thanks be to God.

Saying thank you and farewell

Our gathering today provides me with the public opportunity to thank three members of the College Executive who are moving on to new roles during the course of 2017.

Mrs Ivanka Acquisto, Head of the Girls' College, assumed her new role as Executive Head of St Andrew's School for Girls at the beginning of May. We bid a proud and moving farewell to her last term, in celebration of her legacy. Ivanka, thank you for being with us today, as we have formally opened the Girls' Sports Pavilion and unveiled your portrait, which will grace the foyer of the Girls' College.

Dr Themba Mthethwa, Head of Thandulwazi Academy, is leaving St Stithians at the end of July to take up a lecturing post in Mathematics Education in Durban. Themba, we thank you for your wise leadership of the Academy these past two and a half years as the first Head of Academy. Your role has been critical in our evolution and growth of the Academy as the seventh school of St Stithians.

Mr Dave Knowles, Head of the Boys' College, has been appointed as Executive Head of Clifton School in Durban. He leaves us at the end of the year. Dave, you have been an outstanding and dedicated Head of the Boys' College these past ten years, and a Deputy Head before that. We will have opportunity to bid you farewell at the end of the year.

In front of the whole gathered College, I thank Ivanka, Themba and Dave. Please join me in applause.

Dr Sally James, the newly appointed Head of the Girls' College who joins us in September, is present among us today, and we welcome you warmly. I wish to acknowledge and thank the joint Acting Head of the Girls' College this term, Mrs Lori Borello and Mrs Karen Prinsloo, who are sitting on the podium.

The processes of recruiting the next Heads of the Boys' College and the Thandulwazi Academy are well underway.

One and All

In conclusion, I am stirred by the College motto, One and All -- a powerful and profound phrase which:

Affirms the unique individuality of each person
Links the individual with the collective
Rejoices in the beauty and strength of diversity
Celebrates us, together
The power of one, the power of many
The spiritual unity
One and All
Our Community of Belonging

