



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

Rector's Speech, Founders' Day 2 June 2018

Dr Tim Nuttall



Dumelang. Molweni. Sanibonani. Goeie môre. I greet you.

To the welcomes already expressed by our Deputy Chair of Council, I add my own.

I gaze out at this gathered throng, together under a blue African sky, and I give thanks. I see the light shining through – young, old, and not so old. Like the shapes and brilliant colours of stained-glass in our beautiful chapel we, each one of us, brings our individuality to the collective of St Stithians – past and present. The blues, reds, yellows, browns, greens, the orange, purple and translucent: the tapestry of colour that decorates our Founders' Service booklet.

This tapestry talks to us about Saints Character, the main theme of Founders' Day 2018:

Knowing myself, ourselves

Being myself, ourselves

Making my contribution, our contribution.

A tapestry of people at this College which represents the beauty of diversity, the beauty of individuality: talents and gifts; reflections in the glint of an eye; a warm glow that connects us as humans when the light shines through. Windows to the divine, glimpses of God's love. Yes, you, me, us – Saints, one and all.

Welcome to Mr Ben Kodisang, our guest speaker

It is wonderful and inspiring to have Ben Kodisang among us as our guest speaker. Mr Kodisang matriculated from St Stithians in 1987, one of the early generations of black students to attend this College. We know from the College archive that Ben was an athlete, musician, gumboot dancer, scientist, and prefect in Mountstephens. His life since then has been a distinguished and prominent one, and we are rightly proud of you, Ben. You represent Saints Character. Thank you for being among us today. You will be formally introduced by our Head Prefect. I take this opportunity to welcome Mark Henning, who was Head of School at the Boys' College when Ben was a student here – I know that there is a special connection between the two of you.

Why are we here? What is the purpose of our College?

I posed these questions to the staff of our schools, gathered in the chapel at the start of this academic term. I take the liberty of asking the question again today, in our gathered whole College community. It is appropriate to do so as we think about the origins of our College, about our Founders. When our Founders created a Trust in 1941 and opened St Stithians College in 1953, they had a purpose. There were elements of that purpose that were noble; let us celebrate this heritage, let us preserve and treasure it. There were elements of that purpose that were tainted by this country's apartheid mindset. Let us own, and then disown, what was not right.

It is our obligation to re-create the purpose of St Stithians in our time. We need, in our present, to ask the question: Why are we here? Let us craft a present and a future that is transformative, that beckons to new imaginings. Our Statement of Intent and Purpose – you can find it on the back cover of the Service booklet – is our best attempt to articulate our reasons for being a College which inspires excellence and makes a world of difference. We are headed towards Saints 2053 – we know that world will be very different from today. It's not the destination that's important, it's how we travel towards that destination. It's the legacy we want to leave behind.

For our children

There is a core emphasis in answer to the question: Why are we here? This College of seven schools exists for our children, who are on the Saints journey of learning to know, to do, to live with one another, to be. To use the language of our foundation stone – we are here to educate for 'happy fulfilment'.

The fulfilment we emphasise is not the shallow, selfish or arrogant fulfilment of entitlement. The transient trappings of success are insufficient, as much as we enjoy and appreciate such moments. Rather, the rationale for a St Stithians education focuses on the lasting impact of significance; the values we hold dear; the right relationships we seek to create; the dignity of being fully human. Our excellence is about intelligence in context, about making a world of difference, about education of and for character, tried and tested, grown through failure and success.

St Stithians exists to create foundations for life, footprints for the future, so that our students may craft their own legacy, their own *seriti*. From the little ones in the Junior Prep, the growing children in the Preps, the young people starting to stand tall and independent in the Colleges and in the Saturday School of the Thandulwazi Academy: the light shining through.

To create our College of significance for our children, we are committed to continuous professional development of our staff, with the skills and passion, the care and the wisdom, the dedication worthy of the calling of St Stithians. Without staff members who are motivated and equipped, committed and enabled, happily fulfilled, lifelong learners, we will not realise the core reason for our existence: the education of young people who know themselves, can be themselves, can make their contribution.

A school is complex ecology of young people and adult role models -- parents, teachers, administrators, support staff. We embrace and celebrate the awesome responsibility and the breath-taking opportunities that we experience daily at school.

We want our young people and staff to have a healthy self-identity.

We want our young people and staff to live beyond self, to advance the common good.

We therefore embrace Saints Character as a whole-school concept and practice.

And so, I say: Let us be the Voice (a reference to the main musical item on Founders' Day, 'You're the Voice').

Let us give Saints Character voice: Viva, Saints Character, Viva!

Mandela's 100 Years

I now shift gear to the second theme of this Founders' Day of 2018. In 1918 Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born. As South Africans, we celebrate Ntate Mandela's centenary this year. We do so with humility, gratitude and we pause for reflection. As families, as communities, as countries, we as humans recognise heroes. We also celebrate milestones, landmarks, points in time. One hundred years is a big point in time, one that we mark here for Nelson Mandela on our Founders' Day.

To assist us in our commemoration, we are going to listen to a poem written by a poet, our very own teacher Ruth Everson. The poem is called 'Madiba 9', composed in 2012. In explaining the writing of the poem, Ms Everson says:

'Madiba 9' was written as a tribute to Nelson Mandela. We often talk about 'walking in someone else's shoes' but there is no one who can walk in the shoes of this great man. On his long walk to his own freedom and ours as a nation, he chose a path of love, sacrifice and forgiveness. He gave South Africa hope. The poem speaks to his legacy, but it is also a call to each of us to have the courage to walk our truth and to make a difference. Mr Mandela may or may not have worn a size 9 shoe but it's not about the size of the shoe, it's about the size of the footprint. What will our legacy footprint be?'

I call on two of our students, Vuyo Khuluse and Bongzi Dhlomo, to come forward to recite *Madiba 9* to us. On their way to the podium, they will unveil the portrait of Mr Mandela that lives in the Rector's Office. This portrait was painted by Paul Blomkamp, the artist who installed the stained-glass windows in the chapel. The light shines through.

Madiba 9

You could buy a pair of shoes (size 9),
That would fit the feet of this man,
But you will not walk in them.

You will not smooth the quarry stones
Into the long road of forgiveness,
Or write in blood words of love.

This man's foot shifted the dying dust,
Lifted from lost, tired tattered Hope,
This man unravelled the blackness
To free the barbed-bound wounded rainbow,
Held it high and wonder-wide for all to see.

If you would dare to walk in this man's shoes,
You must stride alone towards your Truth,
Believing that perhaps, just perhaps,
One
Other will come to walk at your side.

iMadiba living memorial

I am pleased to announce here today that the Madiba footprint will be reinforced here at St Stithians through the building of an iMadiba living memorial on campus. We are the second school in the country to participate in the national iMadiba project associated with the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

The iMadiba memorial is an artist's recreation of Nelson Mandela's cell on Robben Island, walls only half-height, the bars bent open and upward. The iMadiba memorial will be a place for dialogue, for memory, for reflection; for dedication to the values of Mr Mandela; for transformative conversations, for embracing diversity, for circles of connecting. It is thanks to a generous donation by members of the Saints Family that we will build this iMadiba memorial here at St Stithians. Thank you, Siyabonga.

St Stithians has, over time, appreciated direct links and connections with the Mandela family. We therefore mourned, alongside millions of South Africans, the recent passing of Mama Winnie Madikizela Mandela, who enjoyed visiting the campus on occasion.

Nelson Mandela's spirit lives on - *Asimbonanga*

Nelson Mandela is a hero of the South African struggle for freedom. Nelson Mandela is a hero of our young democracy. Mandela knew himself, Mandela made his contribution. He did not, could not, do this on his own. He was supported and inspired by generations of South Africans with a vision for a better country, a country beyond apartheid. Many thousands of citizens who stood and suffered for justice and equality.

Many thousands who want, in the present and the future, to join hands to build a society of human dignity and mutual respect - through acts large and small, seen and unseen. I count it a blessing to have lived and contributed as an educational leader during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. It is a transition that is far from over. We have a great deal to do still to realise Mr

Mandela's vision: he holds a mirror up to us who celebrate his 100 years in 2018. He inspires us to grasp the challenges and opportunities of building our country and its beautiful people.

In 1987, the year our guest speaker matriculated, the South African musician Johnny Clegg wrote the song, *Asimbonanga*, a tribute to the imprisoned Nelson Mandela. In remembering Mr Mandela's centenary, his legacy and his challenge to each one of us, I have chosen to conclude my address with the singing of a chorus from this famous song.

The words speak powerfully to us today. 'Asimbonanga' means 'We did not see him.' In the 1980s, Mandela was imprisoned for his beliefs: 27 long years. Today Mr Mandela is not physically with us. We do not see him, but his spirit lives on. We remember him. *Asimbonanga* talks to us, challenges us.

The translation of the words of the song to be sung are as follows, thanks to our staff Noma Shange for your assistance, and Yvette Schoeman for composition:

Asimbonga - We did not see him

Asimbonang' uMandela thina - We did not see Mandela

Laph' ekhona -Where he was

Laph' ehleli khona - Where he was seated (his context, conditions, position)

Hey ngithi - Hey I am saying

Hey wena - Hey you (each & everyone)

Hey wena nawe - Hey you and you

Siyofika nini la siyakhona - When will we arrive (in our journey of liberation and change)

La siyakhona - The destination we are going to.

I call on our students, Emma Schipholt, Tshepang Letsie, Jason Brown and Mhlali Jiya, to sing from Johnny Clegg's *Asimbonanga*. Let us be still while they come forward. This is a silent moment. A time to reflect.

