



4 June 2020

Letter from Head of School, Eric Mayer

“Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice,
and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

-- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our present moment reveals not only injustice but also power rising up against that which stands against love. We have witnessed public murder at the hands of public servants, characterized by malice and gross indifference. We are also witnessing an unwillingness to suffer this abuse any more, characterized by both rage and self-sacrifice. The words of the former slave, abolitionist, and statesman, Frederick Douglas, come to mind:

“This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted... The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

As we have witnessed in the #MeToo movement, a threshold has likely been passed. Yes, the evidence was there to have passed that threshold earlier, but we nonetheless find ourselves in this moment, unwilling, as Douglas wrote, to endure any more.

The general precondition for tolerating violence is indifference. The acclaimed Holocaust survivor and author, Elie Wiesel, frequently noted that the opposite of goodness is not evil, but rather indifference. A contemporary writer on matters of race, Michelle Alexander, echoes that sentiment: “Racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference.”

Effective schools serve civil society by using education to combat indifference and to enhance awareness. The IB mission, crafted one generation beyond the smoldering ashes of World War II, was that education “create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect”. The values of St. Stephen’s School -- which include scholarship, integrity, creativity, and independence -- begin with a simple, four-letter word: care. Our task, always, is to notice and to care, even when it is uncomfortable.

Spurred by student and faculty passion, St. Stephen’s will continue to examine courses, programs, policies, and behaviors in the unending struggle to create a better and more peaceful world. We encourage current families and alumni to engage in these conversations personally, making use of the ample digital resources for guiding and informing transformative conversations. In so doing, we each may play a part in correcting that which stands against love.