

September 15, 2021

To: The 2021 Convention of the Diocese of Virginia

From: David H. Charlton, President, Church Schools in the Diocese of Virginia; inc.

It is my pleasure to share the experience of the academic year 2020-21 just concluded. It was a year that was much like many in that our goals remained consistent while we navigated multiple surprises and unexpected challenges.

Professional leadership transition continues as it has in past few years. Terrie Scheckelhoff concluded her service to St. Catherine's in the summer of 2019 and Lila Lohr served brilliantly as Interim Head during an exceedingly difficult 2020-21 year. Cathy Sgroi retired from St. Margaret's at the end of 2020-21 after forty-five years of service to the school, the last five as Head. Jeb Byers, after what will be twenty-two years as Head, announced that he would retire at the end of 2021-22.

I will join that impressive group and retire, after thirty-four years of service to Church School, in the summer of 2022 as well. Cindy Trask at St. Catherine's and Colley Bell III at St. Margaret's are in office as Heads of Schools, and search committees are at work for Christchurch and Church Schools.

There are long lists of impressive accomplishments. Honors were granted and performances were recognized. Athletic, academic, and artistic accomplishments were many. There were also the inevitable human sorrows that a part of living in community. There were, however, are now and will continue to be for some indeterminate time, significant medical and social challenges.

Leading a human intensive enterprise is never easy. Those who work in and govern Episcopal schools have a lofty goal. They hope to make the world a better place, and to do so by forming a certain kind of young adult to effect that change. Parents trust the schools with their children and the significant amount of money necessary to pursue that goal. All parties are committed, work very hard and have high expectations.

The current season has three additional distinct but overlapping challenges. The COVID pandemic, the important work around racial justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, and the emerging issues connected with gender identity are each enormously challenging, sensitive, and controversial. Fear, impatience, exhaustion, and honest disagreement are evident in all three.

I am proud that our school leaders have kept the focus of their communities squarely on the core of the enterprise – forming and educating young adults to make a better world. This despite the significant and constantly evolving challenges to keeping a community safe and healthy and the passionate and to navigate the often-conflicting views in the various communities on racial justice and gender identity.

It is the same in world, of course, and in the Church. Schools, however, are our corner of the vineyard and we take very seriously the important work with the young people. I would suggest that the work we are privileged to do in the schools is both the best and the most important work there is.

Faithfully,

David H. Charlton