

Church Schools in the Diocese of Virginia – Report to the 222nd Annual Convention

Academic year 2015-16 was the fifth successive year during which one of our schools was in a transition of leadership. St. Christopher's School celebrated the accomplishments of Charley Stillwell while simultaneously searching for the next Head of School. Dr. Terrie Scheckelhoff, after two four years of steady progress and remarkable accomplishments at St. Catherine's School, is now a Church Schools veteran. Mrs. Lindy Williams resigned Head of St. Margaret's in June of 2016 and the Governors and Trustees moved immediately to ask Mrs. Cathy Sgroi to fill the post. Mrs. Sgroi had been serving as Assistant Head of School and in 2016-17 will begin her forty first year of service to St. Margaret's School. Ms. Kirsten Adams completed her second year as Head of St. Stephen's & St. Agnes and, after a year of learning and listening, has begun to put her mark on the school and lead an ambitious process of strategic planning. All in Church Schools offered grateful thanks and best wishes to Charley and Sallie Stillwell as they set off for the next chapter of their lives after eighteen years leading St. Christopher's. At the time of this writing Mason Lecky, his wife Megan and their three children have been welcomed into the Church Schools family and all look ahead to Mason's tenure as Head of St. Christopher's School.

Our schools face demographic and financial challenges. The day schools share in a national experience of softening demand at Kindergarten and First Grade while the boarding schools combat significant changes in the demographic makeup of the boarding market and substantial shrinkage of the domestic boarding market. These challenges and changes are the focus of board and school leadership attention. Notwithstanding the noted challenges, five of our six schools finished 2015-16 with operating surpluses and go into 2016-17 with the same. I continue to believe that our strong leadership, professional and volunteer, as well as our collective financial strength and collegial creativity around marketing have helped us outperform many schools that do not have our advantages.

The project to publish a second volume of the history of the Church Schools is on track and well underway. Dr. Edward Bond, author of a recent history of the Diocese of Virginia is the primary author and he is supported in research by Julia Randle, Archivist for the Diocese of Virginia. Dr. Bond is retiring from his higher education teaching career at the end of 2016-17 and then will be able to make the Church Schools History project his top priority allowing us to project a completion date sometime towards the end of 2018.

Bishop Johnston has been joined by Bishop Susan Goff in making annual visits to each of our schools a reality. These are wonderful half-day visits during which our bishops visit classes, lead worship and meet with student and faculty leaders in a visible reminder that we are all part of something very important and much larger than ourselves and our schools. Bishop Goff, former Chaplain at both St. Margaret's and St. Catherine's, has a particular interest in our schools and has become involved in a very helpful way as our schools engage issues of gender identity that have begun to emerge and become more visible everywhere in our society.

I close by repeating what I cannot say often enough. Our Episcopal tradition of welcome and inclusion is at our core. It informs our lives in every way. Our professional leadership and excellent volunteers in governance are particular strengths of the Church Schools system as well. The extraordinary number of bright, successful, and generous professionals and volunteers that work in and support our schools is the envy of our colleagues. I am particularly grateful to the Heads of Schools and their Governing Board chairs. I am grateful also to my colleagues in the Corporate Office and to The Rev. Edward O. Miller who as Chair of the Church Schools Board of Trustees is unfailingly supportive and accessible. Thank you each and all.

David H. Charlton, President
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