



Saint David's School

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Headmaster

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Dear Saint David's School Community,

As two of our faculty battled strong headwinds and blood sucking insects this summer, riding their push-bikes one thousand miles from New York City to Key West, Florida, two of the O'Halloran children meandered through the bike paths of New York and the quiet back streets of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. For both groups, it was a memorable and enjoyable first; but not one that came without a price. It took practice, a sense of daring, skill and hard work, not to mention the loss of a little blood, sweat and even a few tears.

To move their bikes, Messrs Carr and Goulding along with Max and Sasha, had to "push." In order to get somewhere; to achieve something worthwhile, one often has to push. For our two sets of adventurers this summer it was literally their pedals; however, they were also pushing the boundaries of their knowledge, expanding their understanding of the world by venturing into the unexplored. They were pushing themselves.

A civilization, it has been said, is not built on what is provided for us; rather, it is built on that which is required of us.¹ In their world, our boys are surrounded by a city and culture that provides almost everything that humankind has searched or longed for, while the satisfaction of basic needs – food, clothing, and shelter – is no longer searched for on a daily basis; instead, it is more often than not taken almost for granted. Our culture has come to expect certain things – luxuries, "rights" – expectations often held without an appreciation for the responsibilities necessary to ensure that they exist in the first place. Our boys are not born knowing exactly what is required of them. It needs to be taught – by their parents, teachers, and their extended communities. And to learn it, they often need to "push."

The Saint David's School mission statement challenges our boys to aspire to be "good men." Being good isn't always easy; just grasping "the good" can be a challenge in and of itself. To the ancient philosophers the good was seen as the ultimate virtue without which the attainment of other virtues, such as temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice, was thought impossible. "When it comes to good things, no one is satisfied with what is opined to be so but each seeks the things that are"². The good is tangible; it needs to be seen, held. The classic virtues can help us understand the good; they translate into the practice of moderation; the exercise of sound judgment; the ability to confront fear, to act rightly in the face of popular opposition, and, the ability to distinguish between selfishness and selflessness. Saint David's boys must learn to determine right and wrong for themselves, to learn, over time, how to look and see the truth, the reality of what is. It is from this search, the push, that *the good* comes – justice, equality, and beauty – a better world.

As you have probably concluded by now, as in years past, we will utilize a school-wide theme culled directly from the school's mission to guide and focus our thinking throughout this 2009-10 school year; the school's 59th. Our theme this year, following previous themes of *Scholarship*, *Spirituality*, *Balance* and most recently *Action*, is *The Good*. As a school for boys, if

we hope to achieve any measure of success, it becomes essential to examine our theme as specifically and as practically as possible, applying it across the four pillars of a Saint David's education, helping our boys see what the good is. In Academics it is *scholarship*, working hard, persevering; in Athletics, *sportsmanship*, respect for the game, players and officials; in the Arts, *aesthetic*, recognizing and appreciating beauty; manners and social graces; and in Spirituality, it's *doing good things* for others, respecting the rights, beliefs, interests and abilities or disabilities of others.

This summer we read, as a faculty, nationally recognized author and psychiatrist Edward Hallowell's book, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*. In it, Hallowell references a major nation-wide study that examined factors that contribute to and prevent negative behaviors and actions³ in children and adolescents – the very antitheses of the good, if you will. The study concluded in part, that there were two factors that most protected children from negative behaviors: connectedness at home and connectedness at school. It seems almost too obvious, but “connectedness,” that sense of closeness to parents, teachers and school, the feelings of being wanted and cared for, that sense of belonging to something greater than oneself are all critical components in raising and educating children. Thanks to the foresight and leadership of our Parents Association, Dr. Hallowell will be at Saint David's in the fall to discuss this year's theme.

In exploring our theme this coming year, with the help of the Parents Association, the school will again be conducting workshops on Internet use and safety during the winter term. The role of the virtual world in the lives and activities of our children is becoming as much a part of their world as the physical world; and, as in the physical world, there are inherent dangers that we cannot ignore. It is our responsibility as parents and teachers to accept this virtual world, know it, and be comfortable in it. While the positive impact of the virtual world is clear, there are potentially negative issues that are not so visible. I strongly urge all families to be represented at these events – they both explore *the good*.

Few would argue that the economic climate of our city and nation has changed. Saint David's has been and remains sensitive to this new reality and to its impact on our families. Due to good governance and quality stewardship, the school remains in a healthy and strong financial situation, enthusiastic and confident about its future. We have developed, and will continue to examine better efficiencies, continued accountability, and the exercise of prudent fiscal discipline with appropriate cost control that will in no way compromise the quality of our program or the fulfillment of our mission. These are challenging times, and the school continues to rise and meet these challenges.

On another front, our Curriculum Initiative will enter its fifth stage. Having answered the *What* (are we teaching), *When* (are we teaching it), and *Why* (are we teaching it) questions over the last several years, this coming year will see the school begin to tackle the *How* question: How do we know the boys are understanding what we are teaching them, and how do we know that our methods of instruction are effective? As we move into this new critique of assessment phase, we will be calling on outside objective support.

In addition to this new phase of our curricular work, improvements and other recommendations from earlier phases will continue to unfold. In the area of foreign language, the school will begin this coming year with the earlier teaching of foreign language. Kindergarteners will now be learning Spanish. If successful, this program will roll forward in the coming years to include all grades. The program developed is a thoughtful one specifically designed for the age group. In addition to this major change, Science improvements initiated last year will continue to unfold; in Language Arts a more meaningful integration of grammar into our new school-wide

Comprehensive Writing Program introduced last year; in Mathematics, more manipulatives in the lower grades to help our boys conceptualize new materials in the context of our traditionally structured approach; in Art, a perceptual drawing strand incorporated throughout the grades; the art history strand will see continued development; planned museum trips will be added to several grades, and the 7th grade will experience an increase to two Art periods per week. In Religion, the introduction of the altar server program will be promoted and communication around the sacraments improved, more emphasis will be placed on the 7th grade's signature essay, including opportunities for public speaking. These exciting changes will continue to further refine and strengthen our program.

The quality of a school never exceeds the quality of its teachers, and Saint David's has outstanding teachers. Our Faculty Initiative continues to evolve. The school's ability to attract and retain exceptional teachers is successful. Competitive compensation combined with a strong professional development program, opportunities for growth, and the cultivation of a supportive, collegial atmosphere continue to be the aims of our initiative. The school's new supervision and evaluation program enters its second full year with improvements and adjustments, including, most notably, increased focus on mentorship of teachers new to the school.

The summer months were busy ones for Saint David's, including the curricular and related professional development work mentioned above; the administrative team met with all department chairs to finalize plans for the 2009-10 school year. Planned construction was scaled back in light of the current economic environment. Projects that were needed continued on schedule, while less pressing ones were placed on hold. Expansion in Building 22 continued although on a smaller scale. An added instructional space was needed to more effectively accommodate the increased number of small instructional groupings created in both language arts and math, especially in the 4th grade.

The push-bikes that Charlie, Ed, and the O'Halloran children used this summer to experience their respective "firsts" launched them into new and exciting possibilities; opening their worlds ever wider. They experienced a sense of independence and control attended by joy and delight. It is our hope that your sons, our Saint David's boys this fall, and throughout their year, will find the courage and support they need. What *is*, was unknown until our bikers pushed themselves, venturing beyond their comfort zones into the unknown. They then had to work, overcoming set backs, knock downs, failures and challenges to discover and understand, all the while gaining knowledge and coming closer to the realization of what *is*. We stand ready for the 2009-10 school year, eagerly awaiting the return of the boys. I remain,

Respectfully yours,

P. David O'Halloran