



14 June 2020

Dear Epworth parents, current pupils, Epworthians and our valued community

#BLACKLIVESMATTER AND RACISM AT EPWORTH

Epworth stands firmly behind the #blacklivesmatter movement which campaigns against systematic and implicit racism. South Africa has its own George Floyds, and post-apartheid examples of this abound. No school, business or organisation can afford to be silent at this time. Nor can they be apathetic. We need to engage in an exercise of deep introspection now and devise proactive ways of bringing about real change and of dealing with the hurt that many of our pupils, both current and past, are experiencing.

I wish to apologise unreservedly to past and present black Epworth pupils (African, coloured and of Indian descent) for the pain and hurt they may have experienced during their time at Epworth. We cannot for an instant imagine that we understand your individual experiences, your feelings of helplessness or anguish when faced with experiences of racism. We do however acknowledge your pain and we see and hear your comments. We want to engage with you. We are committed to change and want to unlearn, learn and listen.

We have set up the email account faithcompassioncourage@epworth.co.za and encourage the greater Epworth community to engage with us on their experiences. Our social media platforms have also been a valuable source of interaction and an outlet for those wronged. We encourage our community to continue to engage with us and believe our strength, in making valuable and real changes at Epworth, lies within this dialogue. We have, this past week, established a Task Team with representatives from the Epworth Board, the school and Epworthians to ensure that we are able to connect with all Epworthians, present pupils and the greater Epworth community who wish to comment, engage and provide input regarding the implementation of changes at Epworth.

In 2017, Epworth formalised an on-going programme to allow for conversations and discussions around all forms of discrimination, social awareness, and injustice. As a Christian school with a Methodist ethos, this is central to our values, beliefs and the constitution of our country. These discussions have taken the form of pupil-led group discussions, staff facilitated

discussions, engagement with outside speakers and the facilitation of workshops. Epworth staff too have attended various workshops and engaged with various speakers.

We also have a Transformation, Diversity, and Inclusivity Task Team, comprising of all school stakeholders. We recently published our Statement of Transformation and Diversity, which includes our Intent and Purpose (this is available on our website). We are also in the process of appointing an independent transformation facilitator to assist and guide Epworth into the future.

Last week, Epworth's Chaplain created a video titled "#open: ears-hands-hearts" that was distributed to all our High School pupils and staff. We have set up grade discussions to give pupils the space to start sharing their stories. The Bible instructs us to "weep with those who weep" – we need to make space for this to happen. We are listening so that we can learn; we are hearing so that we can ameliorate. We are encouraging dialogue because we believe it will be part of the healing process. We recognise the need for change, and the need to acknowledge the hurts of the past and the present.

"When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back." (Paulo Coehlo)

We recommend that you all try to read this seminal work, "A School where I Belong" by Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen, which is about transformation in schools:

"The challenge to school leaders is to seek out difference – to push against the human attraction to sameness and the comfort of familiarity. School leaders need to deliberately create more diverse staffrooms and classrooms, not only because learners need to be able to navigate through and succeed in a multi-cultural and diverse world, but also because it is morally right to do so."

We want to move Epworth forward in order to make substantial, worthwhile changes that will benefit the school as a whole. We would appreciate your input and engagement with the school so that we can expedite the change we all wish for Epworth.

Faith Compassion Courage

Laura Bekker
Head of School