



State of the School Address November 16, 2016

Bart Baldwin, Head of School

After a bitter and divisive campaign, after election results that proved pundits wrong and scientific polls inaccurate, after a week that saw folks in the same community mourning and celebrating results, I am going to start this talk with a statement that may sound surprising, if not irreverent.

At this time, it doesn't matter who voted for whom, and it doesn't matter who won or who lost – at least not in our thinking about St. Luke's School. What matters now is what has always mattered: how we raise and educate our children, for whom four years is a very long time. You and I will be essentially the same people in 2020; however, our children will be completely different. Some will be twice as old as they are today. Some will be entering high school. Some will be preparing for college. Our job after the end of a divisive campaign remains what it was before: to raise children in the behaviors, practices, and principles we hold dear so they can become the people they want to be and the citizens we need. It's about WHO they become more than WHAT they become, and it is about thinking critically, working hard, and preparing for and serving the larger world. Our challenge is to rise to the promise of our own beliefs so we can leave behind the desire to belittle the beliefs of others.

And so I am calling upon the St. Luke's community to become activists in the best sense of that word -- of working to further social change. Let's look at our standards and discern what they compel us to do both within our school and for the community. As one of our Grade 8 students said, "It is most important to ask questions when someone's experience is not your own." What does it mean to be an activist for dignity? What conversations should we engage in? What stories should we hear?

Let us be activists for compassion and reach out to our larger world. As Lauren Stewart shared with our Grade 7 students, "Privilege is wasted if it is not shared." I call upon us as a community to identify ways to use the privilege we have to better support each other and those more distant.

And let us become activists for honesty. Let us be willing to talk about difficult issues with openness and vulnerability, confident that our voice will be heard and our opinion honored. Wrestling with tough issues can be uniting. Disagreement can clarify understanding. Respectful conversation in an open forum is the best way to build community, deepen understanding, and serve children.

I think that tonight's discussion of issues we are addressing at St. Luke's will be most effective if they call back to our core values of dignity, respect, honesty, excellence, and compassion. And so tonight's talk will be organized around our community standards.

Tonight's conversation is also an invitation. On the seats is a card that lists five topics. We want to know which bits of the talk you would like to continue discussing as a community, although in smaller groups. St. Luke's School has done its best work when we have gathered together to discuss difficult, even uncomfortable, issues in the safety of mutual respect, with the commonality of a shared vision and absent personal agenda. We ask that you put a checkmark next to the topic or two that you would most like to continue to discuss.

So, let us begin.

COMPASSION: Addressing issues of stress and anxiety

Several weeks ago, we hosted educator and author Julie Lythcott-Haims, whose book *How to Raise an Adult* is an essential and quick read. She met with students in Grades 5 – 8 in the morning, faculty and staff at lunch, and parents at night. Each group received her with enthusiasm. At the end of her presentation to the students, Ms. Lythcott-Haims conducted an informal survey:

"I want you to think about parents in general, not your parents," she said, "(I don't want you to throw them under the bus), just parents in general. Raise your hand if you think parents in general value a child's character more than their grades?" About one-third of the students raised their hands.

"Now, raise your hand if you think parents value children's grades more than their character." About two-thirds of the students raised their hands.

This is not an indictment of us as a school nor you as parents. After all, we are school that wears our values on our sleeves. We are a school that parents choose because both they and the school value character education. Heck, we were even in a church when that poll was taken! And still, two-thirds of our students think that adults value what they achieve more than how they achieve it.

No wonder children are anxious. Children can control how hard they work. They can control whether they ask questions or not. They can control whether they take risks or not. They need support in each of these areas, but they can have a direct impact on them. But, our children live in a society that judges them by the things over which they have the least control: not just the result of their effort, but whether after all of that effort, all of that work, all of that compliance to somebody else's standards, another organization decides to enroll them in a specific high school or college.

So what are we trying to do about this as a school and a community? Two years ago we began studying and implementing a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum.

We set up advisory groups for middle school. We started friendship circles in Lower School. Over the past two years, we have more than tripled the time we have a school psychologist at school.

We also want children to see many paths toward success, even as the world around them defines success ever more narrowly. Frank Bruni, author of **Where You Go Is Not Who You Will Be**, noted that the most significant predictor of success is engagement. No test, no grade, no school predicts success more than a child's participation in activities in a deep and meaningful way.

You all know the MacArthur Foundation – the people who give the “genius” grants. I am certainly aware of them. In fact, I wake up early every September 21 when they announce the recipients and wait for my phone to ring. I am still waiting, but I remain hopeful. But this isn't about me.

Frank Bruni asked the MacArthur Foundation to list the colleges the recipients of the grant attended. There were over 150 different colleges and universities listed for the nearly 500 award recipients, and the vast majority were small liberal arts colleges – not Ivy's and not colleges that accept fewer than 4% of their applicants. Princeton saw these results and decided to conduct a study of its own. They culled their alumni list and identified those who were most successful and engaged in their careers. They then went back and looked at those alumni's college applications to see if there was a common denominator. There was. It was not grades; it was not scores; it was not high school attended. Surprisingly, the common denominator was a letter of recommendation written by a teacher who enthused about how the student had been a vital member of the school community. The predictor was not a letter about the child's ability to conquer Calculus AB. It was a letter about a child using his passion for science to create a science program in the community, or her passion for sports to encourage other girls to try out for varsity teams.

We are and remain a school where children can get involved. The gift of a small school is that participation is a given. But we have room for growth. I want us to be a school that raises children up, intentionally and systematically, in the cause of leadership.

When we interviewed for Lyn Spyropoulos' replacement as Upper School Head, we had every student in Grades 5, 6 and 7 interview the candidates. Our students were amazing. They toiled over crafting the perfect question. They worried about who would ask what and if they would be too nervous. As they completed feedback sheets, they wrestled with whether they were responding to a personality or to what was best for the school.

We were fortunate that personality and strength aligned, and we are happy to welcome Lauren Mazzari to St. Luke's as our incoming Upper School Head this summer. We plan to ask our students to help design Lauren's entry plan and to meet with her throughout the year as a Head's council. In addition, we will ask students to serve as leaders and advisors in designing our expanding middle school and implementing our

new schedule. We will continue to look for ways to offer meaningful leadership opportunities to our students.

Finally, we need to be a community that supports each other in what we know to be true so we can stand against social and media pressures that don't support children. There are well over 2,000 degree-granting four-year colleges and universities in our country, 1,400 of which are ranked by ***U.S. News and World Report***. That means that there are hundreds of very good to excellent colleges from which students can choose and in which students can be educated, empowered, and engaged. As a community, we need to stand up to the pressures that tell us there are only ten colleges worth attending. We need to stand up to resulting belief that there are only ten successful student profiles that will gain admittance to a successful college.

Let's bring that down to the high school admissions process. There are forty-three competitive independent schools in New York City that offer high school. Even if you dismiss 50% of them because they don't reflect your family's values and needs, that means that there are more than twenty independent high schools waiting for your child. Add to that the growing number of exciting public school options for which our children are strong candidates, and we can all relax. That doesn't even count boarding schools, which always become more attractive when your child enters those pesky teenage years. We do not need to hire tutors to prepare students for an arbitrary admissions test or push a child to take advanced Algebra I before he or she is ready just because some schools demand a specific score or grade.

Let us stand together as a community and say enough! We know our children. We want them to be engaged, talented, caring people who feel that they define their success rather than having them wait for an outside stamp of approval.

So, we will find ways to better understand the factors that add undue stress to our children's lives; we will continue to intentionally and systematically educate them about the social-emotional skills necessary to recognize and combat anxiety; we will expand leadership opportunities to empower them as problem solvers and risk takers, and we will stand united in defense of our understanding of what is best for our children and not cede that authority to a ***U.S. News and World Report*** list.

Let us be activists for compassion in support of our children.

DIGNITY: Talking to each other about the inherent dignity of every identity

I have loved the evolution of conversations we have had about ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Over the past years, they have become richer and deeper because those engaging in them have become more open and vulnerable. St. Luke's role as a safe harbor for discussions will become even more vital as people may see a need to be more protective of their opinions and feel more threatened because of their

identity. Now more than ever, our children must be able to understand themselves and others if they are to engage fully in the 21st century workplace.

Let me be specific. As you may be aware, early in fall our Grade 7 students expressed a desire to explore the Black Lives Matter movement. Susan Yao, our social studies teacher, approached Lyn Spyropoulos, who immediately agreed. She advised, however, that we should first talk to parents so they could engage in conversations at home. Led by Susan Yao, Teresa Hamm, and Lauren Stewart, most of the parents showed up to participate. With minimal prompting, the conversation quickly became open, honest, and incredibly productive. The group emerged invigorated and ready to talk about race with each other and their children. In fact, the conversation continues tomorrow morning with Grade 7 parents and students talking about race together.

Two weeks ago, 60 parents and teachers participated in a two-hour workshop led by Border Crossers, an organization dedicated to helping each of us understand our identities and how they impact our ability to navigate difficult conversations with each other and our children. Again, participants entered the workshop with high hopes and a bit nervous, and again, they emerged calling for more conversations and experiences like these.

Recently I happened upon a few students gathered around lunch with a couple of teachers having a deep yet informal conversation. In class they had studied the sentencing guidelines in our country and the impact of incarceration on families of color, especially those of young black men. Most students listened intently, participated fully, and went on happily to recess. Some wanted to continue the conversation and had begun thinking deeply about systemic racism. These teachers provided a space and opportunity to reflect further on the topic – and since we were dealing with middle schoolers, the students then happily went on to recess. After all, you can only worry about the world so much before you need to laugh and chat with your friends.

Although casual, there were several powerful aspects of that conversation. First, the school initiated it. It can be especially difficult for those who are in the minority of a population to be expected to both participate in and initiate conversations about what it means to be you, especially when you are twelve. We are a school where those conversations have already begun so that they are part of who we are and not just who we aspire to be.

But we have room to grow. It is incumbent upon us to make sure that we are expanding participation and welcoming everyone into the mix. I challenge us to continue the discussions about issues we face individually and as a community, and I challenge us to look around and determine what conversations we should be having but have not yet begun.

Let us be activists for honoring the dignity in each of our children and better understanding the issues facing communities in our school, city, nation, and world.

HONESTY: Dealing with issues of financial sustainability for St. Luke's School and our families

We live in a time of competing economic demands. We as a community must acknowledge that tuition increases have long outpaced cost of living and many people's salary increases. Let's put this on the table: For the past five years, tuition at St. Luke's School has increased an average of 5% a year, which is on par with or slightly less than peer schools. Among downtown schools, our tuition is the second least expensive when we adjust for the cost of lunch. The reality for all nonprofit schools, however, is that the true cost of education is covered by additional fundraising. As the school approaches its maximum enrollment of 320 students and increases the size of its middle school, we will realize some economies of scale, but we need to look at income over time to see how we can fund our school and reflect the economic realities our families face.

There are many families who do not qualify for financial assistance with tuition who are worried about how long they will be able to afford independent school tuition, save for college costs which are increasing at an even higher rate, and ideally be able to retire one day. We also live in a time of a deeper understanding of learning differences and a deeper understanding that it is our responsibility to educate the whole child. As a result, there is a reasonable expectation that we as a school provide more access to school psychologists, more support from learning specialists, more coaches for more sports, and experts in areas such as diversity and inclusion, and we have expanded staffing in each of these areas.

Here are some of the parameters of our budget. We allocate 15% of our gross tuition dollars for financial assistance so that St. Luke's can reflect the city in which we live and so that our children will learn and grow in a mutually beneficial community of different perspectives, different experiences, and different backgrounds. It's who we are.

Once revenues are adjusted for financial assistance, 81% of remaining funds cover personnel expenses. Our teachers and administrators are paid at the median level of peer schools. Since our first strategic plan in 2000, our goal has been to increase teacher salaries to the 75th percentile of peer schools, but we have not been able to make significant progress in that area. On average, our faculty commutes forty-five minutes to an hour because they cannot afford to live near St. Luke's School.

We also face, as do many of you, expenses over which we have little control. Our health care costs increased by 17% this year and have been increasing at a similar rate for several years. The cost of security for our school increases every year as a result of living in a more vulnerable world.

That being said, we need to look at ways to talk about the financial sustainability of St. Luke's and the affordability of independent school education. As with all independent schools, the Board of Trustees sets tuition each year based on an analysis of costs and in response to educational initiatives they ask me to present and justify.

But, let's open dialog about this issue as a community, for while tuition is a Board responsibility it is a school-wide issue. I can't think of a more important topic to discuss.

Let's be activists about being honest in terms of the cost and affordability of schools.

EXCELLENCE: Growing our physical education and athletics programs.

About three years ago, Joe Wood, our Director of Athletics, started a series of conversations with the administration. He saw the opportunity for growth as the expansion of the student body moved toward the middle school. He determined that St. Luke's School should have an athletic and physical education program of excellence; in fact, he became determined that St. Luke's be able to offer the best physical education and athletic program among K-8 schools.

He began by surveying after school sports offerings for each of the 17 Pre-K – Grade 8 schools in the city. They range in size from 124 – 508 students. All of them offer after school sports for students in Grades 6 – 8. Some, including St. Luke's, offer after school clubs or teams to students in Grade 5. Participation at that age is determined by our accrediting agency, the New York State Association of Independent Schools, and not by individual schools. We also looked at larger campus schools such as Poly Prep, Riverdale, and Fieldston. Certainly, their size and space allow for a greater number of offerings and expanded facilities. The reality, though, is that a smaller percentage of their students participate in extracurricular sports through middle school since they do not enforce a no-cut, everyone play policy as we do.

Every Pre-K – 8 school offers either baseball or softball; every school offers basketball, and every school offers soccer. Eight schools, including St. Luke's, offer volleyball. At the time of the survey, most schools, but not St. Luke's, offered either track and field or a running club, depending on available facilities. Motivated by that information, Joe initiated a student and adult running club last year, which has been extraordinarily well received. Three schools, not including St. Luke's, offer lacrosse. If we are able to find consistent access to a local field, we would certainly explore that option.

Joe also reported that if we are to continue to offer no-cut teams in which every child plays a portion of every game, we will need to increase the number of coaches. He encouraged us to use teacher/coaches, a practice with which he was familiar. Teacher/coaches create a wonderful bond with students since they know them as students and athletes and connect with them deeply. We embraced his advice and have used teacher/coaches to supplement and support our coaching staff for three years.

He then came up with a four-year plan, beginning with this year as the baseline, that added teams and clubs on an intentional basis to accommodate the increased number of middle school students. The plan refines our understanding of JV and Varsity teams and uses clubs to both introduce new sports and offer opportunities for exposure to a

variety of activities. If student interest supports this, we will field twenty teams and clubs in 2020 when we are at full capacity. We currently offer nine. Last year we accelerated the hiring of a third full-time physical education teacher/coach, Annie Huang, in preparation for this expansion.

The St. Luke's sports program we have, and the St. Luke's sports program we will build, allows children to both learn and master a variety of sports and rewards diligence, effort, and performance as well as provides opportunities to develop highly competitive teams.

Our physical education teachers have also been looking at and thinking about our physical education program for all grades. We are all excited about the opportunities a new, larger gym affords. But our PE teachers are already asking for more. They are working with designers and architects to think about how to keep our current gym/multi-purpose room as a flexible space supporting our arts program but also available for small group athletic activity. When our rooftop playground is built, that, too, in our PE staff's thinking, becomes a fitness space and not just a play space. They want to be able to use the new gym to have students participate in more active, full court activities without having anyone sit out to wait a turn. Finding opportunities to use one area for skill and fitness reinforcement while the other for gross motor, large space activities will allow that. In addition, we have talked about the potential of using our current dance studio, which is located across Greenwich Street in the basement of the Archive Building, as a fitness center. A long-term goal, this will allow us to introduce our middle school students to lifelong habits of fitness in addition to sports and competitive teams. In short, our PE and sports program envisions every space on our property as a potential area to support and extend physical activity.

We are fortunate to have PE teachers who have become activists for excellence in athletics and fitness.

RESPECT: Honoring the strength of our teachers as they develop and lead initiatives that improve our curriculum and teaching

If the heart of St. Luke's School is our students, then its life-blood is our teachers. We have long known that St. Luke's is lifted up by their professionalism, their creativity, and their dedication. Our teachers work tirelessly to evaluate and improve curriculum and to assess and strengthen their instruction. As mentioned last year, our goal is to find ways to honor excellent teachers by giving them opportunity to grow and lead while keeping them in the classroom. After all, more than all the ways we are growing, more than everything we have spoken of so far, we are defined by what and how we teach.

Since the implementation of our teacher coordinator program, we have been able to look at curriculum more intentionally, evaluate our program more rigorously, and improve our programs more quickly. As Mary Ann shared at Lower School Curriculum Night, the Lower School spent last year looking at our reading, writing, spelling, and

grammar programs. They identified the core materials to support our goals, found materials – both printed and electronic – to extend those programs, and made sure that the classroom and school libraries were fully integrated into reading at St. Luke's. This year, they have completed an assessment of our phonics instruction. Although not every child learns to read phonetically, most do, and all benefit from it. This year the teachers are finding resources and participating in professional development to both build on our phonics program and assure that they are following the most current research and practices.

In Upper School, teachers spent last year looking at how to incorporate writing across the curriculum in a more integrated fashion with the understanding that effective, efficient, and nimble writing will serve students well as they learn in this or any environment. Our teachers have worked with each other, visited other schools, and reviewed research and best practice to identify at least one specific, collaborative writing project for each grade to implement across social studies and English. The students will understand that communication transcends artificial subject divisions and see a deeper correlation between what they write and what they study.

This year, our Lower School math team will complete a total review of the math program to build on the curriculum refinement successfully implemented in our Upper School last year. They have completed a review of literature and spoken to other schools. They have attended local and national conferences and met with vendors. Working with each other and teachers across all grades, lower and upper, they are assuring that there is alignment between what we teach at each grade and our goals for math students graduating from St. Luke's School. Teachers just got a variety of materials to examine and "beta test" with students. One of the most effective innovations in our math curriculum has been the expansion of problem-based learning so that children experience the value of mathematical understanding in addition to mastering basic skills.

Our science program is exploding. Well, perhaps exploding is the wrong term to use with science, but it is changing and evolving quickly. Always project based, science at St. Luke's is now among our most integrated subjects. There has been deep discussion about the role of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) over the past several years, and that discussion has informed how we teach science at all levels. But our instructors have looked at the information about STEM and realized that underlying it is a concept that is called design thinking. Design thinking helps children identify, solve, and assess problems and is useful in every class. It supports and encourages a growth mindset, which is work we have been studying for several years. Every project now has a design component in it. It may be as simple as how to organize a collaborative work group and access materials or more complex issues such as how to account for variables. One of the exciting aspects of design thinking is that it allows all children to act and react as scientists. It provides a framework for analysis and assessment and a vocabulary for discussion.

Just the other day I was walking down the hallway when I happened upon a group of sixth graders running – or as they said, “walking very intentionally” – down the hallway, each unrolling a roll of toilet paper to represent some distance travelled.

“This does not feel comfortable,” I commented warily.

“It’s not supposed to feel comfortable,” laughed a child as she put her hands up over her head, “it’s science!”

If you think about everything that is inspiring your children’s learning – discussions about justice, conversations about current issues, the changes in our math, science, and social studies programs, and deeply engaging students in what and how they learn, then it becomes obvious that education at St. Luke’s School is being transformed. By letting go of some of the control of curriculum innovation at the administrative level, we have not only empowered teachers, but also students. Teachers are responding to student interests and building on student inquiries as they plan and deliver curriculum. They are activists in advancing learning and respecting each child’s role in his or her education.

And finally, I want to talk about a sixth standard. A secret sixth standard that defines St. Luke’s School. Compassion, dignity, honesty, excellence, respect and miracles. That’s right, the standard of miracles, which is a bit of an oxymoron since by definition there is nothing standard about a miracle.

The miracle we are all experiencing is that we are in the midst of a construction project that is running on time and almost on budget. Let’s begin by reviewing the building process through the miracle of time-lapse photography (www.stlukeschool.org/timelapse).

So, a quick update. We expect the entire addition to be enclosed by January 1. They have already begun laying the brick, and that will continue. The interior build out will continue throughout the winter and should be completed by May. Building inspections will begin in June so that we will be at punch-list level of repair in late July and early August. We anticipate walking into our new facilities on schedule and that school will open on time.

This will, indeed, be miraculous, but it also represents a lot of hard work, and we will be ever thankful to Chris Norfleet of Seamus Henchy Associates, our project manager, our contractor, Archstone, and their site supervisor, Nial Monaghan, and our architects Andrew Bartle and Sean Ayeung.

It is good to be an activist in the belief of miracles.

Compassion. Dignity. Honesty. Excellence. Respect. These are the standards that define us at St. Luke's School. They are the values for which we stand. They are the goals which will transcend any transition. It is a gift to be part of a community that stands for something, and this will keep us pointing ever forward in our journey together.

The day before the election, we received some tragic news here at St. Luke's School. Clark Fitzgerald, 28 and one of our graduates, was killed in a traffic accident as he and friends were travelling to South Dakota to support those protesting the pipeline. Our faculty described him and his family as magical people who lived every aspect of the St. Luke's Way.

At his memorial, one of Clark's best friends read something Clark had written as a personal manifesto.

"Live how you want to. Account for real needs and desires whilst making a million and one sacrifices. Do anything for each other. Follow your own path when you need to. Understand that, deeply. Do all the [stuff] you've yearned after since childhood. Start a hunting club, spend a week in the woods with only your will and wiles, get off the damn computer, hold a neighborhood assembly in Rosemary's, build a sensory deprivation chamber, fight so hard you don't feel as if you're going to explode all the time. Make that the great American past time again."

And so, I call upon us to become an activist school, fighting hard for compassion as we look at the causes of anxiety for our children and as we look at ways to address anxiety in our greater community.

I call upon us to become an activist school, standing tall for dignity as we talk about our personal identities and as we engage with people whose stories and beliefs may be far different from ours.

I call upon us to become an activist school, speaking honestly and transparently about issues that confound us, knowing that in sharing our concerns, we are building a community focused on change and not complaint.

I call upon us to become an activist school, striving for excellence in all areas, challenging ourselves to set high expectations and supporting each other as we work to achieve them, both on the playing field and in the world around us.

And I call upon us to be an activist school, realizing that respect does more than build bridges. It provides support for thinking beyond ourselves, for engaging with those different from ourselves, and for serving our children who entered our world not of their own accord, but at our invitation. We owe them nothing less.

So, let us become an activist school, and let us make that our great past time again.