

**Headmaster's Remarks to
Faculty and Staff
Thursday, August 11, 2005**

Good morning and welcome to our opening gathering and breakfast for faculty and staff.

As we come together in preparation for Lovett's 80th year, I want to share some thoughts with you about a quality that—for me—lies at the heart of any great organization and certainly is critical to the success of any great school. That quality is *hope*.

We live in an era and in a culture where hope gets bombarded literally every day by a local or national or international tragedy. And our hope is challenged by personal losses—the death and hurt and illness of loved ones, divorce, the struggles of our children and grandchildren. I don't know whether the times in which we live are necessarily beset by any more tragedy than other times in history but I am persuaded—as others are—that “the real battle, the big struggle of our times is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope.” (God's Politics: A New Vision of Faith and Politics in America, Jim Wallis, Harper/San Francisco, 2005, p. 346). I also believe that this struggle between cynicism and hope takes place throughout our society and throughout our institutions including our businesses, our schools, our religious institutions, our families. As blessed as we are here at Lovett—and by virtually any measure, we are blessed—we cannot escape this struggle between cynicism and hope. And while I think that we are a hopeful and hope-filled community, we should not for a moment think that we can stay hope-filled without daily, intentional actions and choices by all of us for hope. Theologian and pastor Jim Wallis tells us that hope is a noun and a verb and that we must therefore view hope as both a quality and an action. Think about these words by Jim Wallis:

“Hope is not a feeling; it is a decision. And the decision for hope is based on what you believe at the deepest levels—what your most basic convictions are about the world and what the future holds—all based on your faith. You choose hope, not as a naive wish but as a choice, with your eyes wide open to the reality of the world—just like the cynics who have not made the decision for hope” (Wallis, p. 347).

In other words, our school will be a place of hope only to the extent that each of us decides for hope and acts for hope.

As I consider the time in which we live—a time of uncertainty, terrorism, concern about the future into which we shall be sending our children and students—I am not sure there is anything more important for us to do than to work consciously, purposefully, and actively toward nurturing hope—the hope within our community, the hope within our colleagues, the hope within our students and families.

By the way, there is nothing about building hope that is easy. As one former teacher and headmaster points out, hope is not “blind” or “glib” optimism. Hope does not deny reality. In fact, as this teacher reminds us, “hope begins by accepting the cruel realities of human existence—tribulation, injustice, danger, and death—and strives to find meaning in the face of these realities” (With Love and Prayers: A Headmaster Speaks To The Next Generation, F. Washington Jarvis, David R. Godine Publisher, Boston, 2005, pp. 176-177). True, authentic hope deals with the real harshness of life which all of us experience from time to time and amidst this harshness, hope helps us find a purpose. Hope also comes from our gut and our soul and somehow gives us the ability to “endure” the pain and exhaustion that accompany suffering as well as any challenging endeavor (Jarvis, p. 178).

How do we then sustain and strengthen hope? The truth is that I see many, many examples of those actions that bring hope to life literally every day here at Lovett: the spontaneous acts of kindness, the unasked for smile or greeting, a compliment, a note of gratitude or condolence, the loving and caring way

in which Lovett folks reach out to those in need. The list goes on. And of course, so much goes on behind the scenes that I am not even aware of.

A great deal of our individual and collective ability to sow the seeds of hope with each other and with our students and families has to do with how we view the world and how we view human nature. Let me urge us to look for the best in one another and in the people we are here to serve. I believe fervently that all of the members of our community want to build trusting, effective relationships with one another.

Assuming good intentions by all goes a long way toward nurturing hope. And, if we look for the good in one another and if we strive to work together, to listen to one another, and to build trust with one another, we can be successful and fulfilled and in the process, send such a powerful signal of hope to all the members of our school family.

And when those occasions arise—as they doubtless do in any human organization—where there is a conflict or when we say or do something hurtful, I am counting on us to work to make it right, to be honest about our mistakes, and to be forgiving. John Claypool, another favorite pastor and writer of mine, reminds us that “the most creative response to any injury is to do something loving and thus introduce a whole new element to the experience of grievance” (Mending The Heart, John Claypool, Cowley Publications, Boston, 1999, p. 17). As a part of attempting to respond to grievances with love, John Claypool also holds up gratitude as an important action. Even amidst great conflict and suffering, there are good things to behold if we only look for them and there is also amidst tragedy the opportunity to learn and to grow and for that we need to be grateful. Gratitude “deepens our sense of trust” because in being thankful for the good things life bestows upon us, even during very challenging times, we strengthen our trust in and our hope for the future (Mending The Heart, Claypool, p. 66).

Being a welcoming, hospitable community is also important to being a place of hope. Parker Palmer, a highly respected teacher and writer whose work many of you have read, says that good teaching—and everyone in this room I view as a teacher first and foremost—“is an act of hospitality toward the young, and hospitality is always an act that benefits the host even more than the guest. . . . By offering hospitality, one participates in the endless reweaving of a social fabric on which all can depend—thus the gift of sustenance for the guest becomes a gift of hope for the host. It is that way in teaching as well; the teacher’s hospitality to the student results in a world more hospitable to the teacher” (The Courage To Teach, Parker J. Palmer, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, 1998, p. 50).

Hospitality feeds both the guest and the host—the giver and the receiver, the teacher and the student—but it also feeds hope. More to the point, hope is—pure and simple—good for us as individuals. As John Claypool tells us, “Hope is critical to our well being. What breath is to the physical body, hope is to the human spirit. Hope is what animates us. It is the fuel that energizes us, gets us up in the morning, and propels us through the day” (The Hopeful Heart, John Claypool, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 6).

The brand of hope that has been so much a part of Lovett’s being is important to every single member of this community. But without our attention and our action, hope will not sustain itself. If hope is to continue to be real here, we must work to maintain it, to feed it, to grow it, and in so doing, all of us will benefit as will our students, families, and society at large. We say as a school that we want to prepare our students for lives of integrity, moral awareness, and service. By living and working as hope-filled people ourselves, we shall bolster one another as well as give our students those gifts of hope which in turn will allow them to lead the kinds of lives which we envision for them and which our world so desperately needs for them to live.

I thank you for your incredible commitment to our school, for the dignity and character and hope with which you go about your work, and for what you do for these young people in our charge. I look forward to our year together.

Billy Peebles