

From the desk of **Shane Kidwell**



1 December 2021

Dear Parents and broader St Alban's Community

Our Form 3 boys are currently returning from Journey and it is always good to reconnect with them. Each year I spend some time with the boys during their 30-hour Solo experience, when they are on their own, writing letters, reflecting and setting goals for the future. Interacting with these young men is humbling and after this time alone it is a privilege to see how they have grown and what their hopes and aspirations are for the future. I have seen resilience, determination, regret, hope, camaraderie, disappointment, brotherhood and optimism in all my conversations and it makes me reflect on how busy our lives actually are and how this dreadful pandemic has robbed us of time together: family time and community time. These young men also write a letter to me and I find many of them powerful and heartfelt, tinged with an innocence long forgotten by us as adults and a yearning desire to connect with others. To connect with their dads. To connect with their mothers or their siblings or broader families. Sometimes teenage boys present as grumpy and aggressive and unpleasant but beneath that façade there is a desire to be seen, to be heard and to be part of something bigger and more significant than themselves. The written word is a powerful medium to express yourself and to see the impact a letter, from a father to his son, has on a boy's self-esteem is indeed a privilege. I have also unfortunately seen the impact of a family who does not write to their son. I have seen the disappointment and shame a young man has felt at being rejected and I have seen the confidence and love-of-life ebbing away as a result. Boys primarily look to their dad's but to their families to learn who they are as men and who they want to become as men. What we say and do is more powerful than imagined and I would urge all of us to take the time to create situations where we can talk, joke and interact with our boys meaningfully. We need to be more present and emotionally available as parents.

St Alban's College is a community of boys, teachers, parents and alumni and the insistence on good relationships being developed in our village helps us to build into young men's lives in a significant way. It is my prayer that, in a time of complete disconnection, and disruption that we as parents will make every effort to connect and speak into the lives of our sons. To say that men and boys are in crises is a truism, and in a world which is fluid, future focused and cut-throat it is important to remind ourselves that our children need our love. Need our time. Need our attention. Need our affirmation. Need our structure. Need our discipline. Need our support, when the going is good and when the going is bad and boys need to know we are in control and not afraid to say no. If your son is hiding away in his room, always on his phone, always visiting friends, I would encourage you to realise that he is yearning for time with you. Yearning for affirmation. Yearning to hear you say that you love him. Yearning to engage with you. Yearning to talk to you. Young men sometimes do not know how to tell you this but their behaviour often suggests the opposite and I would encourage all of us, as parents, to be more aware of the signs.

I have read numerous letters where boys have expressed how they feel ashamed at how they have let you down as a parent. How they feel they have not lived up to your expectations of them. How they have not reached the standards, real or imaginary, which you have set for them. I have read how boys feel alone and on the outside and I am hoping that as we move into this Christmas period that we will be able to be present. That we will be able to show unconditional love. That we

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will be able to ensure that we do not overprotect. That we will not judge our sons by their results but that we will again be able to see them for who they are: young men filled with hope and dreams of a purposeful future, where they are able to make a difference in the world at large. I am hoping that we can connect emotionally.

I have received many letters, this past year, from parents and community members who have expressed their anxiety on a number of levels: their political fears, financial fears, societal fear, health anxieties and psychological fears. These are real but the College, our families and our broader community needs to realise that we have a responsibility to remain optimistic, to be present and to create the structure and security that our boys need to thrive and build their confidence. I am seeing an upswing in anxiety amongst our boys and trying to resolve this issue by medicating will not allow us to progress meaningfully. Yes, there are times when boys need medication but we as a community and a society need to be more intentional about ensuring that we are emphasizing what is important to us as parents. The health of our sons is more important than good results. Ensuring that boys are purposeful is more important than trying to focus them on a narrow subject choice offering that will stress them out beyond breaking point. Knowing that boys want to engage meaningfully is critical to ensuring that we design experiences which allow them to interact and grow and develop. Holding boys accountable is vital to their development and as we move into a new year, we need to renew our partnership as a learning organization and as parents and commit to ensuring we provide a vibrant and energetic environment which will allow them to be engaged and purposeful as they progress.

Our school is in examination mode at present and the campus is quieter than normal. Our boys are single-mindedly focused on ensuring that they complete the year as best they can and are perhaps reflecting on the vacillation between online education and face-to-face classes and the impact this has had in the last 20 months of their careers at the College. I am grateful to have interacted with many of you at our recent Day and Boarder Family Chapel evenings and I can sense that we are all looking forward to more personal interaction between teachers and parents as we contemplate the start of another academic year.

So parents, I acknowledge that it has been a difficult and disruptive time for all and although anxiety runs like a rabid dog through society, I implore you to step back and take a breath, to understand and contemplate that we are living in unique and extraordinary times. See your young man afresh and remind yourself that this young man of yours who first rang the bell here at 13, has grown and developed his potential, which will ultimately culminate in success. Believe in him, be proud of him and let him fly. Thank you for your support, thank you for your commitment, thank you for trusting us even when we have not got it right. Leonard Cohen said: *Forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that is how the light gets in.* It is a privilege to have interacted with you and with your sons this year, despite the uncertainty. They have managed a difficult situation admirably. Please support them, continue to guide them but most of all encourage them as they close out their year with us.

As we contemplate moving into another academic year, we would like to commit to providing an environment which is relational, community-based, and personal as we seek to create a space of belonging for all our boys and families. Brené Brown says: *We must be guardians of a space that allows students to breathe and be curious and explore the world and be who they are without suffocation. They deserve one place where they can rumble with vulnerability and their hearts can exhale. And what I know is that we should never underestimate the benefits to a child of having a place to belong – even one – where they can take off their armour. It can and often does change the trajectory of their life.* St Alban's is passionate about changing the trajectory of boys lives for good and we commit to ensuring, as we come out of this time of lockdown, on-line education and significant disruption, that all boys feel like they are seen as individuals, that we embrace the diversity of our boys and their families and that we commit to on-campus teaching as much as possible even as we face future lockdowns. Our focus on an all-round education will continue to allow and encourage boys to engage in our cultural program, our sporting program and thrive in our academic offering. We continue to be proud of our Christian values and commit to living these in all we do as we encourage our boys to grow and develop here.

We are acutely aware that the previous 20 months have been disruptive to our rhythms and processes at the College but we are more committed than ever to ensuring that boys experience the full offering as we move into 2022.

## 2022

Our College will be the biggest ever as we move into 2022. We welcome 610 students as we start the new year and as a

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result, we will be continuing our building program to upgrade current facilities as well as plan for new facilities to accommodate this modest growth in numbers. We have some bold dreams for the future and I am sure you have seen that our campus is looking magnificent and I would like to thank Robert Schipholt, our Director of Operations, and our Maintenance and Grounds teams, for all they have done to manage the building projects and maintenance as we seek to provide top class facilities for all our boys. This is a thankless and endless task and I thank them for overseeing many of our projects which have been completed this year:

Some of these include the Astro turf upgrade which was completed on time and on budget, our Maker-Space facelift – where our solar car is built and robotics happens. We have improved our water storage capacity and will continue to do so in 2022. Our aim is to be totally self-sufficient in this area in the near future. Our Advancement Office has now moved to the greyandblue and we have built an outdoor entertainment venue for our Boarders.

We are also about to break ground on some new projects: The Baloyi House common-room, which should be completed by May 2022, will get underway in early January. We will also be building two new classrooms which will accommodate our continued growth. This area will include a series of new pathways and a new plaza and relaxation areas for boys

We are also going Green! We've made our own compost, kept our riverine area and surroundings clean, and we have planted sustainable and water-wise indigenous gardens. We also have a plan to recycle better and build a water filtration plant in the near future. We are also investigating the installation of solar (in the future) to increase our own infrastructure and lessen our dependence on the City Council.

Finally, we will be building a New Boarding establishment in 2023, and have started the planning to upgrade the Nupen Innovation and Science Centre and the preparations for our Diamond Jubilee celebrations are underway. The College turns 60 in 2023 and we will be celebrating this milestone as a community in a number of significant and diverse ways. Our signature project during this exciting period will be the upgrade to the MacRobert pathway and commons. This is a project which will highlight and celebrate our milestones over the past 60 years and, more importantly, will draw us into a new and exciting journey as we consider the challenges and dreams we have as a community for the future. I will be sharing more of this exciting and collaborative project early next year.

## Staffing

Unfortunately, we say goodbye to a number of staff members at the end of this year: **Lente van der Westhuizen** will be leaving after us after a 2-year Educational Psychologist internship with the College and we thank her for her commitment. **Anthony Glutz** has completed his Gap year with us and we wish this talented and passionate young man all the best in the future. **Curtly Diesel** is leaving us to take up an opportunity with South African Cricket. Karen Commerford, our HR manager is semigrating to the coast with her husband and we thank her for setting up this department and for creating structures and policies which will hold us in good stead in the future. **Lauren Amaral** is moving back to Angola where her husband has been employed and her care, organization and dedication will be sorely missed. **Clint Archer** will be moving to Abu Dhabi to join his wife who has already been there for a year. Clint has become a true Albanian in a very short space of time and his positive influence, brilliant IT skills and dedication to excellence will be difficult to replace. **Rob Lodge** leaves us after 16 years of service to the College. Rob has a brain tumour and although he has been living with it for a number of years, he recently had to have an operation from which he continues to recover. Rob is the epitome of living life to the full. He is a maverick, an explorer, a master teacher and school master. His relationships within the College are woven into the fabric of the future focus of the school and I thank him wholeheartedly for all he has done for so many boys over time. **Tracy Mackenzie** leaves us to return to the Eastern Cape. If you were born there, as I am, you will know the allure of being drawn back there. Her daughters will be fourth generation DSG girls and Tracy has taken a step back, at this time of her life, to focus on family. That said: we are losing an excellent teacher, mentor, House Director and life guru. Her ability to believe in young men and drive home this belief has had a profound impact on many lives here. She leaves behind a proud legacy, of love, and empathy balanced with an uncompromising focus and determination to ensure we are preparing young men for life. St Andrew's are lucky to have gained your talents and passion and I would urge you to remember that at some stage you will need to lead and inspire again – there is a time for everything, but most of all keep

believing in the difference you have made in others' lives. **Michael Schwartz** joined the College in 2018 as a Deputy Headmaster and has made a significant difference in the way we continue to grow as an institution. He is a calm, determined







and focused manager and it is no surprise that he makes the leap to Headmastership next year. He has guided, mentored and directed our path during a difficult past 18 months and I have no doubt that he will thrive in his new role of running Tyger Valley College. He has had a difficult time personally after contracting COVID last year and despite this has shown resilience and gratitude. Thank you for your commitment to St Alban's and we wish you well as you take this next exciting and challenging leap. I have no doubt that you will be successful.

As indicated the College will be well over 600 students in 2022 and as such we need to ensure that we continue to attract excellent teachers for our boys across a range of subjects. We have been planning for this growth in the College and will be employing more teachers in a number of different departments to manage this increase in numbers.

**Chanè de Almeida** joins us as our new Head of Department English as a result of John Hunter being appointed as the House Director in Knapp-Fisher House. Chanè is an experienced English Educator with loads of experience in the IEB and we look forward to her collaborating with an already experienced English Department. **Ankia Hallas** joins us in the Arts Department as our new administrator and I am also pleased to announce that we have appointed **Bhelekazi Mdlalose**, who has been with us since the beginning of the year, into a permanent position as a Sister in the Sanitorium. **Ben Mogoswane**, our Printing Administrator, has recently qualified as a teacher and has been taking a few classes in the EMS Department. He will be appointed into a more permanent position from 2022. **Alastair Trafford** completes his teaching qualification next year and has also been appointed into the EMS Department on a more permanent basis. **Laura Mhere** joins us in the English Department next year as does **Tammy Bechus** who joins us from St David's in Johannesburg.

**Bianka Thom**, currently assisting Jaco van Wyk in the Drama Department, joins us in 2022 as an English and Drama Educator to facilitate the extraordinary growth in the number of Drama students which is a feather in the cap of Jaco who continues to do an outstanding job in this vital area of our school. **Chereen Cloete** has been appointed as our new Educational Psychologist for 2022. This is a new position and we are hoping it will create capacity in our Learning Support Unit and improve our offering to parents with regard to subject choice as well as university applications.

We have appointed two new Gap Students who will be joining us in 2022. **Daniel Phillips**, an Old Albanian, and **Jason Coombes** will be helping in the Boarding Houses as well as on the sports field. We are also aware that we need to build capacity in the School Shop and **Ellie Pryke** will be assisting parents and boys on a daily basis as we seek to improve our service delivery in this area.

**Anton Ferreira** joins us as our new Director of Cricket in 2022. Anton brings a wealth of experience in both playing and coaching cricket and will also be our 1st XI Cricket Coach with Mr Chicco Ponela. Anton played 245 first-class games and went on to represent South Africa. He also played in the UK where he represented Warwickshire. After his extensive playing career, he went into coaching and was the Northerns coach for 3 years. He was then appointed as the South African U19 Technical Advisor and attended 6 World Cups in this role. Anton is one of the few coaches to have acquired his CSA Level IV Coaching certificate and is highly regarded for his coaching abilities. He was appointed as the Director of Northerns Cricket Academy from 1996 - 2000. Following that, he was appointed as the Director of Coaching for the United Cricket Board of South Africa, a role he held for 18 years from 2000 - 2018. Anton continues to consult for Cricket South Africa, particularly in educating coaches. He is also currently a Global Master Educator, and has been appointed by the Cricket Council to educate cricket coaches throughout Africa. We look forward to welcoming Anton in the new year and we are excited to be able to have someone with such extensive knowledge of the game leading the St Alban's Cricket Club. We have no doubt that his experience will benefit our coaches and boys hugely.

**Kevin Leatham** joins us as the new Deputy Head: Pastoral Affairs from January 2022. After a lengthy interview and selection process we are grateful to be able to make this announcement. Kevin has been in a similar position before at Jeppe Boys High and currently works for Allan Gray as their Diversity Manager. He is an experienced and passionate educator who will add a wonderful flavour to the Deputy Heads' team.

**Kim Simons-Thebe** continues as our Deputy Head: Academic Affairs and I have no doubt that our standards will continue to improve as a result of her focused approach to each individual boy in the organisation. I am grateful for her passion and professionalism

**Krinesan Moodley** moves into the all-important role of the Chief Operating Officer at the College as our Senior Deputy

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Head. He has been a constant support and a steady rudder since being appointed and his eye for detail and his understanding of boys will continue to guide us forward positively.

Our team continues to grow and I look forward to introducing these wonderful people to you in the new year.

Finally....

The future beckons and I have no doubt that all of us are hoping and praying that we will be able to pick up our rhythm and build momentum in the new year. As indicated we aim to do this and ensure that many of our boys who have not experienced St Alban's in full flight understand what it means to be an Albanian and what it means to thrive in the brotherhood of boys, staff and parents. It has been a difficult year for everyone, but I am extremely proud of our boys who have managed their lives, the uncertainty and disruption with optimism and hope. They are the heroes of the hour. They have been a shining light of resilience, adaptability and future-focus and I look forward to welcoming them back in 2022. But now we need a break, we need time with our families and particularly with our sons and I would encourage you to engage more intentionally than ever before. I also wish you a God filled Christmas as we head off into our summer break. May the love of God fill your homes and lives as we reconnect and find time to relax. While I have been out on Journey our Chaplain, Father Thabang Bengani, has reminded all our Form 3's of this verse in **Philippians, Chapter 4 Verse 6**, and I would like to share it with all of you as we come to a close: *"The Lord is near! Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* Amen.

Yours sincerely

**Shane Kidwell**  
HEADMASTER

