

September 22, 2009

Dear Parents,

I have been thinking a great deal recently about one question in particular: how does an institution grow and thrive? It is a natural question to preoccupy a new Head of School, for at bottom that question takes us to the essence of our stewardship. Judging by the interesting and thoughtful notes that I have received in my two suggestion boxes (placed on Margay's desk and Becky's bar), one way to ensure institutional health is to pay relentless attention to the details. Not very grand, not very inspirational to be sure, but I would bet a lot that those notes are right on the money.

Two moments from last week however, each in their own way both humbling and arresting, made me want to write specifically this week about how independent schools grow.

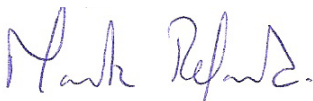
The first involves one of those notes that I am happy to report, come my way quite often. It was a little testimonial to the deep concern that a kindergarten teacher has shown for a child in her charge, and the time, far beyond the normal school day, that this teacher has devoted to being with this student.

The second moment concerns an event that was very close to my heart. Someone wise told me that when I got to my new school I should walk around the place and think about the people who built it. Independent schools do not get built on the taxpayer's dime. They do not appear magically from the earth, or spring fully formed from the city budget, ready to pass on to the next generation the values and knowledge prized in the school's mission. Independent schools are built on the generosity of donors, the joyful giving of, in St. Luke's case, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars.

So last week I attended an event at which were gathered in one happy, noisy room, many of the people who, over the course of the last forty years, have nurtured and grown our school, through the generosity of their financial gifts to our children. It was not an opportunity to ask for more. Rather, as the representative of the school in its present life, I wanted to thank them for the special parcel that they have passed to us, to acknowledge the opportunities their gifts provide us, and to salute the debts we owe.

For me, as I consider that brief testimonial about an extraordinary educator, and remember the faces gathered in that sunny room, what strikes me is that each, in quite different ways, is an answer to the question of how an independent school grows and thrives. The common denominator is that we all must care. Care for the details in which the devil sadly, but famously lives, for the children who need a little extra, and for the financial muscle that enables us to lift and carry forward the school's mission every day.

As we approach the season of the Annual Giving Fund, I hope that everyone will consider the necessity of care. In many ways the Annual Giving Fund is a perfect embodiment of the need to care, that takes us beyond that which is regularly expected of us, just as the teacher went so far beyond the normal job description, and those donors over the course of forty years, went so far beyond what any one of us in the present, has a right to expect.



Dr. Mark Reford