

Feature Address

On the Occasion of the Centennial Celebrations of the Anglican High School

**Celebrating the Education of Women and
Their Contribution in a Rapidly Changing World**

“Inter-generational Dialogues Bridging Time and Distance”

By

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Introduction

I wish to thank the members of the Anglican High School Past Pupils' Association for inviting me to address you this evening. I am honoured and humbled to have been asked to do so.

Congratulations to our AHS family. We are now one hundred years old! This is indeed a proud moment for all of us. What begun on September 18, 1916, as the Church of England High School, with 19 students and 3 staff members, has evolved into an extraordinary community: a springboard for women's empowerment and female leadership.

The Anglican High School has built a reputation for excellence in education, service to community and mastery in sports (particularly netball and athletics). We are proud that our school holds the coveted title of 10 consecutive Intercol championships; and in recent times three consecutive victories. Congratulations to the current Principal, Ms. Madeline Baptiste, teachers, staff, coaches and current students, for keeping the AHS flag flying high.

I pay tribute to the memory of late principals, teachers and administrators, who were early pioneers. I also honour the memory of those hard-working women and men who cleaned and maintained the school through time. I wish to recognise those who are still alive but have retired, or are no longer attached to the Anglican High School. I salute Mrs. Glenda Mason-Francis, former principal. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the school. To former administrative and support staff, thank you for your contribution over the years. To all former teachers who are here this evening, welcome to all of you. We thank you for the solid educational foundation you provided for us. In our moments of self-discovery, you stirred our intellectual curiosity, and helped us to find purpose. We thank you for your encouragement and inspiration. Importantly, thank you for your rod of correction that bent many a wayward tree.

I thank the AHS Past Pupils' Association for keeping the spirit of AHS alive. I particularly thank them for organising this week of activities to

enable us to celebrate our glorious past, reflect on our present condition and perhaps more importantly chart our future.

Explaining the Topic

The broad theme for this week is **"Celebrating the Education of Women and Their Contribution in a Rapidly Changing World."**

This theme is most apt. AHS graduates have successfully blazed the trail in numerous fields of endeavour in Grenada, throughout the Caribbean and in the world. A Skills Bank of AHS Alumni will reveal diverse professions: female entrepreneurs; radiologists; trade union leaders; nurses; accountants; clerical and administrative officers; teachers; lawyers; journalists, bankers; academics; sports women; diplomats, police officers; economists; public servants; doctors; and politicians, to name a few. Through their professional lives, Anglican High School graduates have contributed immensely to the social and economic fabric of society. In their private capacities, they have shaped their societies as

mothers, grandmothers, aunts, mentors and life coaches. Our contribution is multifaceted with multiplier effects through generations.

Within the broad theme, the title of my address is, **“Inter-generational Dialogues Bridging Time and Distance.”** I have framed this conversation with you on the premise, that education is one of the most important pillars for social transformation and for the advancement of our collective humanity. Perhaps Simon Bolivar captured it best in this famous quote:

Nations will march towards the apex of their greatness at the same pace as their education. Nations will soar, if their education soars; they will regress if it regresses. Nations will fall and sink in darkness, if education is corrupted or completely abandoned.

The presentation is structured as follows:

1. I will share some reflections on the AHS and the gifts it gave us;
2. I will then throw out a Call for Action;

3. Finally I will offer a charge to current students which I hope will inspire them

1. Reflections on the AHS

The Anglican High School is an exceptional institution. Over one hundred years, it has evolved as an inter-generational hub; a rotating door for generations of Grenadian women. Our school nurtured young girls. Those young ladies grew up and some of their children, grandchildren and great children returned to the Anglican High School; proudly wearing our school tie and lustily singing the school song. Many returned as administrators and teachers; standing tall within the very institution that nurtured them. There is a Chinese proverb that says:

If **your** plan is for **one** year, plant rice. If your plan is for **ten** years, plant trees. If your plan is for **one hundred years**, educate children.

And the Anglican High School has done that – one girl at a time for 100 years. What a tremendous legacy!! Thank you High School.

As we continue to reflect, you may ask, what are some of the gifts the Anglican High School has given to us, that we can draw on now, in this rapidly changing world? I will outline a few.

1. **Excellence grounded in Humility**

The AHS environment encouraged us to aim beyond excellence, while clothed with humility. Many High School past students exemplify the art of sitting with Queens and Kings, while having the common touch. As we celebrate 100 years, let's re-commit to this noble tradition. As we grow and glow, let's continue to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground. Humility is one of the true hallmarks of greatness.

2. **Boldness and Confidence**

At the Anglican High School we learnt very early how to face the world with a sense of boldness. We developed a healthy pride and became self-assured. Sisters, today, we need to face this world of uncertainty with confidence. For our sisters in North America and Europe, your very survival demands a healthy dose of self-confidence. You can ill-afford to engage in self-doubt, in a world that still defines you by the colour of your skin, and not by the content of your character. To all of us, the global economic weather forecast is often bleak. Yet, we must continue to be face the world with confidence and tenacity.

3. **A spirit of Activism**

The AHS has given us a spirit of activism. Many of you may recall the anti-Gairy demonstrations in the early 1970s. With a deep sense of consciousness, Anglican High School girls joined nurses, teachers, dock workers and others, to march through the Town of St. George demanding not just a society but a **JUST** society. During the period of the Grenada Revolution, the Anglican High School was a ferment of

revolutionary consciousness. I remember learning about apartheid and imperialism in form one. I understood the contradictions of capitalism as a 12 year old girl! We learnt that the purpose of education was for liberation, social justice and societal transformation. Today, that spirit of activism is demonstrated by many of our sisters as they advocate within Civil Society Organisations for gender justice and the protection of the rights of the marginalised and vulnerable.

I must touch on the gender question. While there have been tremendous advances in gender equality, there is still unfinished business. We are celebrating one hundred years, even as women in many parts of the world continue to be subjugated. Despite massive gains, UN Women confirms that women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men, and there are still wage differentials between women and men. Women still bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work in the home. More women than men still work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs, often unprotected by labour legislation. Sisters, many Anglican High School graduates lead female-

headed households. In some cases, hard questions arise: can I continue to service this mortgage and finance the cost of healthcare for my family? Can I afford to take care of this ageing parent or spouse and educate my children? My sisters, there is unfinished business. As long as there is feminization of poverty and inequality, we must still draw on our spirit of activism to empower young women and men to break the cycle of poverty. As long as gender-based violence continues to ravage our homes, our work places and our communities, we must still agitate for gender justice. Even as women's participation in political and economic life has increased dramatically over 100 years, there is still a glass ceiling. We need to advocate for legislation to enlarge spaces for meaningful female participation. Let's reach for the spirit of activism – this precious gift that characterises our High School-ness. It is through advocacy and collective action, that we will be able to break new ground for gender justice.

4. Lifetime Sisterhood and a Sense of Community

Importantly, the Anglican High School also gave us the gift of friendship. We were initiated into a lifetime sisterhood undergirded by a sense of community. Some of my dearest friends I met at the Anglican High School. Charmaine Blackette and Bernadette Roberts are here and they can attest to that.

AHS girls had, and still have, a healthy appetite for fun. Sports was serious business. Preparations for Intercol games and netball competitions, went beyond physical training. I can recall us using our creative energies to compose victory chants or songs of rebuke against THAT other school. Fun for us often revolved around a little mischief. We had some names for all our principals and teachers and knew how to mock them well. I have heard some stories about Mr. Archer days. It seemed like every time a High School girl decided to get up to some mischief, Mr. Archer showed up. Like that time some brave students decided to leave school, dressed in the school uniform, mind you, to go to the Ministry of Finance to tease the late Mr. Lauriston Wilson. What

they did not know, was that Mr. Archer had a scheduled appointment with Mr. Wilson that same day and time. You could just imagine how that turned out?

I must speak about the significance of **the Flat** to those of us who joined the school when it was relocated to its current premises in 1952. Beyond our official playground, the seeds of our sisterhood were planted deeply in the grounds of **that** Flat. Our world was far removed from emails, whatsapp, twitter and face book. Facebook for us was literal – face book – real book. We formed live physical chat rooms on **that** flat. The bell was an unwelcomed intrusion and Prefects were annoyances.

It was on the Flat we also learnt how to share. Whether it was Ms. Griffith's buns and snow ice or Ms. Briggs's hot dogs. I heard recently that some of you often tricked Ms. Briggs. I was told there were instances when a piece of hair would automatically find itself on one of Ms. Briggs' hot dogs, while it was still neatly packed in her basket. Of

course, Ms. Briggs had to forfeit the money for that one, by giving it away! Some of you have some serious atoning to do.

Importantly, the gift of friendship and community transcended the walls of our school. Our school friends became like blood sisters. We witnessed many births and became God parents to one another's children; maid of honour at one another's weddings. When we encountered the death of a parent, sibling, spouse or child, our high school friendships sustained us. Today those bonds of friendship take us through years of highs and lows. Only last October I attended a funeral in Barbados. Two young girls had met in form one at the Anglican High School and became lifetime sisters. One became a Librarian at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus, and the other a leading member of the legal fraternity in Grenada. During the funeral, one wept uncontrollably, at times, as she said her final goodbye to her High School friend, who became her lifetime sister. Let's never ever take that gift of friendship for granted. As we celebrate 100 years, let's re-commit to our friendships and rekindle our bonds.

Our sisterhood was also built on **solidarity**. There was an unwritten rule – High School girls supported GBSS boys - whatever. We understood that theoretically SASS was our sister school, but the Tanteen girls and boys shared and still share an extraordinary bond – *that went far far beyond sports*. I wish to thank our brothers from the Grenada Boys' Secondary School for standing tall with us, through time, and for being such an indelible part of our world. Sisters, many of our Grenadian male folk (not only from the GBSS) would have migrated to Europe and North America. Our fathers, brothers, uncles, nephews, sons. Some of them are in the United States and Britain exposed to deep-seated racism and police brutality. Many of them are police officers who carry out their duties in the context of institutionalised racism. We still need to show solidarity – because their **black lives matter!!** As we celebrate 100 years, let's recommit to the spirit of community and solidarity. As the world throws missiles at us from every direction, let's not feel alone and helpless. Remember, we are part of a community. Let's draw strength from our sisterhood.

2. I now turn to my second broad theme – A Call for Action

I shared some reflections on the gifts the Anglican High School has given to us. I want to now turn to what gifts can we give back to a school that has given so much to each of us.

Even as we celebrate, we must ask a fundamental question: what type of education for what type of society? I posit that any conscious society that advances, does so **intentionally**. I call on those of us who are in positions of influence to be intentional about education. I call for an activist approach to formal and informal education that will mould new types of societies in Grenada and the Caribbean. CXC has served the Caribbean well, but there are some gaps in Caribbean education. Beyond core subject content, educational institutions must help to shape conscious citizens. We need courses on Citizenship, Governance and Ethics at the secondary level. Caribbean history should be mandatory beyond form three. Students must graduate from the secondary school system understanding fully that ethics must be chosen over convenience

and principle over expedience. I call for a sense of urgency to arrest the chronic, systematic problems that be-devil our young men. Even as we celebrate, we need to help to change a culture that values education as predominantly academics. Too many young men are victims of an education system that has failed them and they are trapped in a cycle of helplessness. Gender justice must go beyond the woman question. I call for greater emphasis on vocational education and skills building.

I call for an AHS Alumni Think Tank on Educational Reform. We have past pupils from every walk of life who can make a valuable contribution to this initiative.

Second, beyond formal education, I call for a series of **Groundings with our Sisters and brothers**. This can take the form of inter-generational dialogues to promote public education and consciousness building, as well as mentorship. **The gift of mentorship is a priceless gift we must give back to younger generations**. We can utilise traditional and social media to bridge geographic and generational divides. In this way we can

help to shape a society that in turn will influence the type of students that enter the educational system in general, and the AHS in particular.

Third, I call on us past students of the AHS within Grenada and the diaspora to create a series of **Transnational Support Groups**, for example, on topics such as: women and financial literacy; women and health; parenting in a technological and uncertain world; living beyond retirement; female leadership – just to name a few. Let us consciously utilize common platforms, as women, to reach across diverse divides: party political divides; racial and class differences, for instance, to empower and support one another.

Additionally, many of us have done relatively well financially. I encourage us to use our finances as gifts to support the school building project. I also call on us to use our finances to invest in the current student body. I call for an AHS Alumni Scholarship Fund; an AHS Alumni Book Grant Scheme; and an AHS Alumni adopt a child programme. Where do we begin? I propose that one of the outcomes of

this reunion could be the establishment of a Special Committee to propose concrete ways in which we can initiate and finance some of the proposals outlined above. This will be the ultimate test of our ability to give back to a school that has given so much to so many of us.

3. Finally I wish to turn our attention to the Current AHS Students

Young Grenadian women, AHS students, I salute you. Thank you for your remarkable contribution to our tradition of excellence. You are keeping the baton going. I applaud you for your brilliant performances in the RBTT Young Leaders' Competition, the St. George's Knowledge Bowl, GRENLEC debates, and indeed in Inter Secondary Netball competitions and Scotia Bank Intercol games. AHS translates to mean – Always High Standards. Thank you for the multiple ways in which you are living up to the high standards that are rooted in the DNA of the school. You are making us proud!

I leave you with a few words. First, value education as a virtue. This is a gift you must give to yourselves. One hundred years ago, when the Church of England High School was established, many of your great grandparents did not have the privilege to benefit from secondary school education.

As the historical clock ticked, the space for education widened for the majority working people who knew only too well what Nelson Mandela would later utter: **“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”** The AHS became a safe space for the daughters and granddaughters of plantation women. Education for them was about freedom. Their children’s education was a means for them to reclaim their dignity and their humanity. They had internalised the African proverb that Malcolm X would later echo: **Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.**

Today, you stand on their shoulders. You have a responsibility to that history. Always remember that your education has a dual purpose: for your individual enrichment, upliftment and career advancement but also – perhaps more importantly – your education is to transform the society that produced you. Your education must be linked to nationhood and to advancing our Grenadian and Caribbean civilization in its broadest diasporic sense. Don't take this responsibility lightly. A good educational foundation will open doors for you, as a woman. It will give you access to opportunities. It will enhance your life choices and give you a voice so you can stand up for yourselves and others. A solid education will empower you to transcend the feminization of poverty.

It will empower you to confront and expose gender-based violence in all its guises. The generations that come after you will hold you accountable for what you do with the education that you are privileged to receive today.

Second, value ambition. This is another gift you must give to yourselves.

You are preparing to be the next generation of Grenadian and Caribbean

leaders, at every level of society. Dream big!! Think beyond the boundaries of your circumstances. Do not allow your history, your class, race or gender to limit you. Some people say “think outside the box”. I charge you to go further – remove the box and think! The box still presents cognitive parameters and mental limitations. Go for your dreams. Be ambitious. Be confident and bold. That is one of the hallmarks of your High School-ness.

Third, value community. You are part of a community that is larger than you. Please do not fall victim to individualism and materialism, which threaten our sense of community. I charge you, do not be entangled in an entitlement culture that threatens our tradition of solidarity. Build strong bonds. Cultivate the art of relationship building. This is a priceless gift you must give to yourselves. I charge you to show solidarity to your young brothers, cousins and friends. Pull them up. Bring them along. They must never feel de-linked from community.

Fourth, value and positively utilise technology. Your world is so far removed from those of us who would have attended the then Church of England High School and the AHS in the twentieth century. Technologically, the 20th century is ancient. Tablets for us meant medication. You are blessed to have the world at your fingertips. You are fortunate to benefit from learning modalities that go beyond chalk and talk. I charge you to maximise the benefits of technology to enhance your knowledge. Use technology to boost your innovation and creativity. Master technology. Never allow technology to master you. Feed your mind with consciousness. Develop a world view. Believe in something. I charge you to use the technological revolution to agitate for social justice. Utilise social media to sustain friendships but also exploit it to discuss issues and spread positive ideas. This technological world is yours to explore. Do so with wisdom and positivity.

Fifth, cherish the life gifts that your teachers and parents are seeking to give to you. The very motto of the school is “Factor Non Verba - Deeds not words.” This motto instilled in us the importance of good character,

principle and ethics. Always remember that your dignity is priceless. Your honour is non-negotiable. Your integrity is irreplaceable. You have a responsibility to protect and **guard** your character. You will make mistakes but don't allow your past to define your future. You will win some battles and lose others. Get up, stand up. Live to fight another day.

In closing, let's all be grounded in our faith. Let's continuously feed and nourish our spirits. Sisters, take it from me, we are nothing – absolutely nothing - without the mighty right hand of our God who orders our steps and orchestrates our destiny. As we face the uncertainties of life, let's draw from the fountain of grace, which is the ultimate gift.

Further mountaintops await the AHS. Let's go forth with boldness and confidence. We have come from a glorious past. The future is ours to design today.

Congratulations as we celebrate one hundred years!!

More power to the Anglican High School!

More power to a lifetime sisterhood!!

More power to our spirit of activism and solidarity!!

Hip hip hip hooray!!!

Hip hip hip hooray!!!

Hip hip hip hooray!!!

Blessings and peace.

I thank you.