

“Beyond the Eleven-plus Examination” – Address by Hon. Stephen A. Lashley, M.P. to the Graduation Ceremony of the St. John’s Primary School at the St. John’s Parish Church on Tuesday, June 23, 2009

Master of Ceremonies, Principal, Teachers, members of the ancillary staff and students of the St. John’s Primary School, representative of the Ministry of Education, parents, students, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me also acknowledge the presence of my wife Deborah and my mother.

It is my distinguished honour to have been asked to address you on the occasion of your graduation ceremony.

Most of my comments this morning will be directed at the graduands who are really the ones being honoured today.

It is doubly important to me because I am a product of this school – then called St. John’s Mixed School. When I left many years ago there was no graduation ceremony, so you are the lucky ones.

I would like firstly to congratulate all of you on your success in the recent Eleven Plus Examination and wish you success at your new school. I must also congratulate your teachers for

the hard work they have put in, as well as the non-teaching staff who often play a central role in the overall success of the students.

I want to address you on the topic – “Beyond the Eleven-Plus Examination”

Looking Back

There are several things that stand out in my mind as I reflect on my days spent at this school. I looked forward to lunch-time when we got a chance to play and run around the rocky terrain of the school or pitched marbles.

I also had two maids in the school meals section who would give me extra cakes and pastries.

I recall the anxiety of resuming class after lunch to recite the tables – two ones are two, two into two one, two twos are four, two into four two etc etc. I also recall standing at home before my father (no longer with us) and being called upon to recite the said tables on a regular basis. I recall our walk over to this church every Wednesday for our weekly school service.

I recall being required to scrub the wooden desks before we leave for the summer vacation. I recall the strict discipline of

two headmasters – Mr. Marshall and Mr. Brathwaite and a teacher Mr. Padmore. I recall the total involvement of my parents in my progress at this school. As the saying goes – those were the days my friends I thought would never end.

Then came the Eleven-Plus Examination followed by the results and the anxiety that that brought. Those care-free days of primary school had come to an end and I had landed in the same position you are in today.

After the Eleven-Plus

There are 22 secondary schools and each of you has been selected to attend one of these schools. You may have wanted to attend some other school or you may have succeeded in attending the school you wanted to attend. Some of you may be disappointed based on your parents' expectation, some of you may be happy also based on satisfying your parents' expectations.

But all of that is now history. It really does not matter which school you attend in September. What will matter 10 years from now is what you did with your time spent at that school. Whether you waste your time or whether you use your time wisely to focus on your school work. Can you look at your colleagues around you and tell which one of you will be

successful and those who will fail? I believe the answer will be
– No!

Each of you has the potential to be leaders in your respective fields of endeavour. It is not too early to start thinking of your career path. But while you do, remember that your career must be relevant to the future. Far too many persons are still clamouring for “a Government job”. I suggest that these job opportunities will become less and less as the years roll by. You will have to plan your future based on the requirements of a global market in which your skills will have to match new and evolving technologies. As you contemplate secondary school I encourage you at each juncture to have an open mind that is prepared to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Planning for the future

How many of you are prepared to work for yourselves? How many of you are prepared to become specialists in our evolving off-shore oil industry? How many of you are prepared to become experts in new agricultural techniques offering greater yield per acre of land? How many of you are prepared to develop new solar powered vehicles for use in Barbados and elsewhere?

Are you prepared to be innovators or will you settle to be just followers? What will you do different from the previous generation? What will you do that will make you stand out among those competing with you for success?

Achieving success

While many of you will and must aim for success, you must also understand that failure is a fact of life and a real possibility. In the quest for success some of you will fail. But failure can be seen as an opportunity to reflect, retool and accomplish even greater things. So my advice to you is never let set-backs or failure interfere with your quest for success. All of us have failed at some point in our lives. There were times when I failed as well. But those times gave me renewed determination to excel.

Some of you did well in English, some of you did well in Mathematics – some of you did moderately or poorly. But isn't there something you can do before September to be better prepared for secondary school. You can reflect on your strengths and weaknesses and spend some time during the summer vacation to improve yourself.

I suggest you join the public library and spend more time reading rather than chatting with your friends on the net. Stop

for a moment to consider how you can use all of the chat time more wisely. How do you plan to perform in first form in secondary school? Can you even at this stage influence whether you perform poorly or whether you perform admirably? I suggest that you can.

Begin by understanding that nothing happens by doing nothing. If you want a positive result you have to be prepared to work hard for it. Every step must be based on careful preparation.

Start practicing to always prepare for each task you will engage in. Unless you are prepared, you will not succeed.

Remember that failure is part of the journey to success!

Abraham Lincoln once said that success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.

History has been kind to President Abraham Lincoln. He has been painted as probably the greatest president of the United States of America. It is a good thing that history also recorded his failures. It reflected his frail humanity but also showed his attitude of never giving up.

My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure.” – Abraham Lincoln

These failures could not stop him, he kept moving forward. The following is a short list of his ups and downs and ups.

- *1831 – Failed in business
- 1832 – Defeated for legislature
- 1833 – Again failed in business
- 1834 – Elected to legislature
- 1835 – Sweetheart died
- 1836 – Had a nervous breakdown
- 1838 – Defeated for speaker
- 1840 – Defeated for elector
- 1843 – Defeated for Congress
- 1846 – Elected for Congress
- 1848 – Defeated for Congress
- 1855 – Defeated for Senate
- 1856 – Defeated for Vice-President
- 1858 – Defeated for Senate
- 1860 – ELECTED PRESIDENT

He was defeated more times than he won, but that did not mean he was a failure. Remember, that failures are only permanent if we stop trying. I believe the only real failure is the failure not to move on.

Each one of you has the ability to achieve great things. Some of you will achieve them faster than others, some may take longer to achieve them. But the test of your achievement will be your attention to detail and your willingness to be disciplined.

Concerns

There is usually an annual debate about whether we should abolish the Eleven-Plus Examination. I believe that our focus must be on the quality of education which we are providing to our children. We must engage in meaningful educational reform from primary school through to university that seeks to maintain the fundamental traditions of a moral society while connecting with the hard reality of the need to train our people not for jobs that no longer exist but for the future. If we are saying that we have to earn foreign exchange to survive, what are we doing to develop the talents of our young people to ensure that they leave school prepared to assist in this national goal?

I have already called for the placement of guidance counselors in our primary schools and I repeat that call today. And I am on record as rejecting the call for the abolition of corporal punishment in our schools, rather what we need to do is to ensure that discipline is maintained through the application of various techniques including where necessary the regulated use of corporal punishment.

I am unhappy that more of our males are not grabbing the opportunities that our free system of education allows. Deviance is still a real problem that needs to be seriously

tackled. We need early intervention programmes particularly within the home and at the primary level to reverse this negative trend among our males in particular.

And why isn't the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development embarking on a special recruitment drive to attract more male teachers to the school system. We simply need more male teachers within our schools to create a balance at the instruction level and to transfer positive life skills values to our boys.

In 2006/07 there were 1,308 female teachers in our primary schools but only 315 male teachers. In that same period there were 774 female teachers in our secondary schools but only 515 male teachers.

So I am calling on more males to come forward and get involved.

Conclusion

I now end as I began – The best of luck to you students in your secondary school. Make wise choices and maintain at all times a high standard of discipline and respect for others. Do not neglect the spiritual part of your life – find time to place God at the centre of everything that you do.

Once again – best wishes for a bright and rewarding future. I
thank you.

- *End* -