

ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATION CEREMONY OF KNOX COLLEGE

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Salutation

Master of Ceremonies

Principal, the Rev. Dr Gordon Cowans

Deputy Principals and other members of the Staff

Members of the Graduation Class,

Parents, relatives and guardians

Other Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Appreciation

What a pleasure it is to be asked to come and to celebrate with you what is the largest ever Graduating Class here at the renowned Knox College!

This event is testimony that rural Jamaica is alive and well. You will understand why I reject the idea that important events only happen in the city. This event today, and indeed your record of high achievements here in Spalding, represent a tribute to institutions and rural communities like yours outside of the corporate area.

When I was originally asked by your Principal to come and address you in July, I did not hesitate. And when circumstances beyond our control caused the postponement to today, I made sure to reserve this date for this special and important occasion.

The College's Achievements

The delay in convening this event has given me additional time to better review and reflect upon the many important strides made by your school over its long history and indeed to better appreciate your performance in more recent years.

To those of us who are on-lookers, the complex of educational institutions of which you are a part, conveys the promotion of discipline, practical and applied education, and knowledge delivered in a Christian context and in a healthy, sometimes freezing, physical environment!

I was impressed but not surprised to learn that the core of the educational project here at Knox College is a "commitment to character-building among all students". This is reflected in the School's emphasis on a wide range of co-curricular activities and vocational clubs. Your school's success in taking the Chairman's Trophy in the Manchester JCDC Cultural Development competition in 2008 is an important symbol of your creativity and hard work and the efforts of your teachers in honing your performance skills.

The development of the School's orchestra and its diverse sports programme, reflect a similar collective commitment to high standards. It is clear that indeed, here at Knox, "the uniqueness of the individual is celebrated", and that "all are encouraged to develop skills to work effectively in teams."

These are indeed the qualities that have made student and graduates of this institution grow to become respected adult citizens dedicated to country, community and family.

CSEC RESULTS

Your school also continues to excel in scholastic terms. This year you attained 93% pass rate for English A and 81% for mathematics. Sixty two percent (62%) of those sitting the CSEC examinations for 2009 obtained passes in seven (7) subjects or more. Twenty one (21) of these entrants got nine subjects and one (1) shining star () was successful in a whopping total of ten subjects!

Congratulations!

But we cannot ignore the 79 or so students who got between 3 and 6 subjects in their CSEC examinations. Many of these students as well as some of those in the higher performing group, achieved their results against great odds and at tremendous personal sacrifice by their parents. I also warmly congratulate you and encourage you to keep improving.

The Concept of Outlier by Malcolm Gladwell

Permit me a moment or two to share with you an idea that allows us to remain hopeful and optimistic in our journey.

Those of you who like to read a lot, may have encountered the work of a widely acclaimed Canadian-based writer called Malcolm Gladwell. Time Magazine named him in 2008 one of the world's most influential people.

The international press rarely acknowledges that Malcolm Gladwell is of Jamaican origin. His mother Joyce Gladwell was born just beyond these hills in the parish of St Ann, and a student of St Hilda's and later London University.

Her now famous son Malcolm wrote three best selling books: one called 'Blink!' another called the 'Tipping Point' which won him great fame, and his most recent celebrated book called 'OUTLIER'. (Nothing to do with lying, despite the sound of the title! but about how people come to be exceptional achievers or those he calls 'the outliers')

In the latest book Gladwell makes the point that outstanding performance in scholastic, sporting or professional life must not be regarded as the just the result of in-born talent or one's own effort. Surely those play an important role. But the brilliance of Gladwell's work in is its recognition that when persons become exceptional achievers, or what he calls OUTLIERS, it is also (and maybe moreso) because of the contributions of lots of different people and lots of different circumstances.

While we celebrate the naturally outstanding scholars and encourage them to achieve to their ultimate potential, we know that it is not just about having natural talent. Many talents are sometimes wasted, and sometimes it is those who were one time regarded by their peers, parents or teachers as being not so talented that also end up excelling, and making our school, our family and our country proud.

Many such people, who are NOT born with what you might call exceptional talent, can be guided, supported and mentored to becoming outstanding achievers. The challenge is to build on whatever our natural abilities are, and to seek out the support of others to help us to succeed.

Self-evident as these ideas may seem, they reveal to us the sometimes hidden truth that we, as a society, or as families, actually have more control than we think about who succeeds—and how many of us succeed! That's indeed, as Gladwell point out, an amazingly hopeful and uplifting idea.

Among the other factors that today have a bearing on knowledge, self-learning and success is access to information technology and the skill of information literacy.

Educators and New Media Literacy

The term Information Literacy covers a range of other literacy skills, including media literacy, visual literacy, digital literacy among others. But, they all point to the abilities of individuals to effectively and critically engage in what is now being called a participatory, networked culture. Those who have Internet and other forms of information access are able to both create and consume digital productions and later even market some of these products and services locally and overseas.

Media Literacy as Curriculum Component

The Broadcasting Commission, which I have the honour to lead as Chairman, has been among many who have consistently called for instituting information literacies, including media literacy, more deeply in the school curriculum. And we are pleased that the Joint Board of Teacher Education is partnering with the Commission in a project to assist in this strategic move. This approach would train and enable teachers to guide students in processing media output and in how to use information technologies and programmes that are more appropriate to particular age groups.

It is common knowledge that new media platforms like SecondLife, instant messaging services such as MSN messenger and networking locations which number over 150 sites on the Internet, are mainly dominated by the adolescent to young adult demographic grouping.

Among the sites under reference are Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Flixter, Netlog, Elftown, Goodread, Friendster, Photolog, Hi5, MyChurch, and many others, most counting their subscribers in the tens of million users globally.

These mostly user-driven and youth populated sites are supported by technologies that put subscribers in control of content creation and global distribution. Recent events in Papine, Jamaica, are now all over the Internet and local become global in no time.

This immediacy and global sharing is what motivates many especially those of you in the younger cohorts. We know that access persists well into adulthood. These “affinity spaces” operating in a participatory technological culture are really informal learning spaces, where peers relate to one another on a casual basis and new ideas are allowed to be shared freely. They are “sustained by common endeavors that bridge differences in age, class, race, gender, and educational level, and because people can participate in various ways according their skills and interests, because they depend on peer-to-peer teaching with each participant constantly motivated to acquire new knowledge or refine their existing skills, and because they allow each participant to feel like an expert while tapping the expertise of others.”

However, Several writers suggest that these affinity spaces are fertile grounds anti-social and dangerous contact and that some care must be exercised in using them. We should remember that our profiles or photos or messages often remain permanently on such digital platforms even if it appears that we have removed them and that these youthful engagements can return to bedevil you in later life.

Career background Checks

In the US now, many employers run check to see what your online profile and activity have been before considering employment, as they are trying to ensure that nothing will emerge to embarrass the company later on. This is just a friendly note of caution, even as we advocate engagement with these global communities of peers. Social networking sites are distinct from formal educational systems in several ways. While formal education can be often static and closely restricted, the informal learning within popular sites and culture is frequently experimental, dynamic and innovative. While the structures that sustain informal learning are seen as more provisional, and those supporting formal education are more institutional, they are to be regarded as complimentary.

But don't lose sight of the downsides!

(Make comment on broadcasting landscape and reasons for and results of regulatory responses)

Knox Website, Motto and Values

I was pleased to see the Knox College website up and active and to be reminded therein of the enduring values of this institution.

“As a church school, Knox College is built on the concept of a progressive, community-wide education and its philosophy is rooted in the Christian faith. This philosophy embraces and supports the active involvement of parents, teacher and the wider community in its operation.

This broad based participation is seen as a key factor in motivating students to learn. Knox College strives to give students a wide range of opportunities so they can flourish and achieve their fullest potential within a disciplined school environment that is purposeful and stimulating. These objectives are pursued by the consistent work of the administrative, academic and ancillary staff and student leaders pursue.” Long may these wholesome values remain strong!

Appeal to Students and Parents

In concluding, I say to the parents, whatever your child's performance level, do not despair or take it for granted. Continue to provide support, love and encouragement and they may surprise you in the end!

And to the students, I say, build a community of support and encouragement around you, surround yourselves with positive energy, continue to work hard at your goals and believe that you can succeed, with God's help and against all the hardships and the odds!

I congratulate each and every one of you students for your achievement and challenge you to keep doing even better because it is within you to become whatever you set your mind to achieving!

Remain committed at all times to your commendable motto
"To Strive, to Serve, and not to Yield."

Thanks you!

