April 7, 2015

Dear Members of the St. George’s Community,

We write to you today to share a sad and difficult matter with all members of the St. George’s community. In response to information provided by alumni who attended the School in the 1970s and 1980s, we have come to believe that at least one former employee of the School may have engaged in sexual misconduct with students in those years. Though the events in question took place many years ago, it is tragic and deeply troubling that anything like this could have occurred in our community.

At the time of the School’s founding, the Rev. John Byron Diman wrote in his Purposes of the School that “the specific objectives of St. George’s are to give its students the opportunity of developing to the fullest extent possible the particular gifts that are theirs and to encourage in them the desire to do so. Their immediate job after leaving school is to handle successfully the demands of college; later it is hoped that their lives will be ones of constructive service to the world and to God.” It is with this higher purpose in mind that we strive now to face the challenges of our past, and to do the right thing, in the present and for the future.

It is important that the School have a full and accurate understanding of any misconduct that may have occurred, so that we can do our best to support and protect every former, current, and future member of the School community. To this end, we have engaged an experienced investigator to conduct a full and independent inquiry, with the leadership and guidance of legal and psychological experts. We respectfully request and encourage anyone who experienced, or is aware of, any sexual misconduct that occurred during their time at the School, or who has any information at all that may assist us in our investigation, to please contact Will Hannum at 978-623-0900 or whannum@shpclaw.com. It is clear that even long past transgressions can cause current pain and anguish, and we want to express our sorrow and support for any member of our community who may be suffering.

As we share this information with you, we also want to strongly reassure all members of the community that the safety and well-being of our students is of the utmost importance to everyone at the School. Our faculty, our administrators, and our staff hold as their highest priority the physical, mental, and emotional safety and well being of each and every one of our students. We are acutely aware of the enormous trust that families place in us to care for and protect their children, and we make every possible effort to earn that trust in all we do.

The School has appropriate policies and procedures in place to protect and ensure the safety of our current students, ranging from background checks and due diligence in the hiring process, to training and awareness programs for employees, to reporting mechanisms available to faculty and students alike. Furthermore, with the assistance of outside experts, we periodically review, and where necessary, update those policies and procedures to ensure that we are following “best practices” as they evolve. To underscore this effort, we have recently undertaken an additional comprehensive review of our policies and procedures. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about the School’s current practices and the ways in which we protect the physical and emotional safety of our students.

Though this is a difficult and painful issue to confront, it is important that we do so. Every student who has ever attended St. George’s is a part of its legacy, and in accord with our mission, values, and beliefs, we wish to do all we can to acknowledge and support anyone who may have suffered due to past misconduct. Thank you one and all for your contributions to the ongoing discussion of the important issues before us and for sharing our enduring commitment to our students, past, present, and future.

Yours sincerely,

Eric F. Peterson
Head of School

Francis S. Branin, Jr.
Chair of the Board of Trustees
August 2015

Dear St. George’s Alumni,

We write today, in follow up to our April letter, to provide an update on our investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct by former employees of the School. In the past few months, we have heard from a wide range of alumni, former parents, and faculty who have been associated with St. George’s over the past fifty years, regarding the actions of several former employees. Some have reported direct experience with sexual misconduct, others have shared indirect information, but all of the stories have been important and helpful to the inquiry.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who has contacted us and shared their experiences, and for the many expressions of support and encouragement we have received regarding the inquiry. At the same time, we also acknowledge how difficult this has been for many alumni. We recognize that the anguish can persist long after an episode of misconduct, and that even a letter like this one can revive that suffering in some fashion. With that in mind, we are working hard to conclude our investigation as quickly as possible, while still being thorough, professional, and comprehensive in our scope. Toward that end, we again respectfully request and strongly encourage anyone who has not already done so to please contact the School’s investigator, Will Hannum, at 978-623-0900 or whannum@shpclaw.com.

Many of you have asked, and we want to assure you that the School has continued to focus on its commitment to ensuring the safety of our current students. Their well-being is our highest priority, and as we said back in April, we are acutely aware of the enormous trust that families place in us to care for and protect their children, and we make every possible effort to earn that trust in all that we do. We have in place best practice safeguards to protect our students, and continue to seek ways to strengthen and enhance these precautions and practices.

As noted in our original letter to the community, even though this is a difficult and painful issue to confront, it is important that we do so. Every student who has ever attended St. George’s is part of its history and its legacy, and in accord with that legacy and our values, we want to do all we can to acknowledge and support anyone who may have suffered due to past misconduct. The conversations we have had with many of you are an important first step towards that end.

We will write to you again as the investigation concludes, hopefully within a few months, to share the outcomes of the inquiry and the School’s next steps as we move forward together. Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Eric F. Peterson
Head of School

Leslie Bathgate Heaney ’92
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Dear St. George’s Alumni,

Following our letters of April and August, we write to update you on the progress of the school’s investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct by former employees of St. George’s. While the investigation is not yet fully complete, it is entering its final stages, and we wish to provide you a preliminary report on our findings.

Based on information gathered from alumni, past parents, current and former trustees, and current and former employees, we have identified multiple credible reports of sexual misconduct at the school, ranging from unprofessional behaviors to outright sexual assault. The reported incidents include no present school employees, and took place over a wide span of years, with most of the reports falling between the mid-1970’s and the late 1980’s. At this time, we can inform you that the majority of the reports center around three perpetrators. The first is Al Gibbs, who was an athletic trainer at the school until 1980. Mr. Gibbs, who is deceased, is reported to have committed multiple acts of misconduct and abuse, principally with girls at the school. The other two perpetrators are still alive but no longer in Rhode Island, and based on the information we have gathered in the investigation, we are working with law enforcement with respect to next steps. In deference to the authorities and any possible criminal prosecutions, we are not publicly identifying them at this time.

With respect to the school’s actions in the past in addressing reports of improper behavior, efforts were made to address the misconduct and to respond. At the same time, in retrospect, it is also clear that more could have been done, both to understand the scope of any specific misconduct and more particularly to support the victims. Though these events took place many years ago, we recognize and acknowledge that the wounds of victims are deep and enduring. Accordingly, the school offers its most heartfelt and sincere apologies, and asks forgiveness for the harm suffered.

When the investigation has fully concluded, hopefully by the end of the year, we will write again to outline in greater detail its findings and the broader framework we are crafting to support the victims. However, recognizing that some alumni may want more immediate assistance, the school is creating a victims’ support fund that will be available to reimburse counseling costs related to sexual misconduct at St. George’s. While this offer of aid represents only the first chapter in our support efforts, we hope that this proves to be a timely and helpful measure for those who need it most. Any alum seeking counseling cost reimbursement should contact Will Hannum at whannum@shpclaw.com, 978-623-0900, who will coordinate these efforts.

As we work to craft a full spectrum of support services, we are collaborating and consulting with a diverse group of experts who have a wide understanding of the needs of victims of sexual abuse and the most effective measures to support them. To that end, we intend to arrange one or more victims’ support gatherings. Any victim wishing to attend such a meeting should also contact Will Hannum, who will share details as the meeting plans are finalized.

In closing, we wish to thank all those who have courageously come forward to share their experiences or observations. As difficult as this effort has been, we want to assure all of you of the school’s desire to do right by its graduates, to promote healing in the community, and, as the school prayer asks us, “…to contend bravely for God and the truth.”

Yours truly,

Leslie Bathgate Heaney ’92
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Eric F. Peterson
Head of School