



Love one another as I have loved you

—John 15:12

**EPISCOPAL
SCHOOLS
CELEBRATION**

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Excellence Through Association

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NAES Executive Director's Message



**“This is my commandment, that you love one another,
as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)**

The Rev. Daniel R. Heischman, D.D., Executive Director

What does love look like, in a COVID and post-COVID world? Have the past months taught us to think and act differently, in any way, in our response to Jesus' commandment?

Perhaps love doesn't look that much different: Jesus' command to his disciples has endured and survived many turbulent times, and will always be our fundamental response, as followers of Jesus, to God's love. The love we embody and express consistently remains an outgrowth of how, in the words of John, God first loved us.

That does not mean, however, that love looks and feels the same, right now, as how it has been experienced in previous, "normal" times. Our world, our nation, our schools and churches, our very selves have changed as a result of this great upheaval and tragedy. The way we view almost everything is most certainly going to have a different texture, if not a different face, as we move into the future. Love is no exception. What's more, God's love is as adaptable to changing circumstances as it is unchanged and ever-enduring. Our standing task is to discern how God's love speaks to this particular point and time, just as our schools teach foundational ideas and values while interpreting their relevance to the here and now.

I see two ways that God's love, and our response to it, has taken on a unique flavor as we face the living of these days.

The first is that our love, based on God's love of us, demands a decidedly practical expression right now. Love as a feeling, an interior sentiment, does not fully embrace the urgency of these times. We have seen love in action in the courage of essential workers, who have risked so much over the past months. We have seen love at work in the willingness of countless Americans to advocate for racial justice, challenging all of us to strive for a more equitable world. In Episcopal schools, we have seen this love take concrete form as teachers

made the pivot to online learning and took extraordinary measures to reach out to their students in personal ways. So, too, we have seen it in school leaders planning tirelessly, over the summer months, for an opening of the school year both uncertain and complex, working with different scenarios and listening to a variety of competing voices on what to do. We have seen parents and students valiantly adjusting to new patterns of life, seeking to learn and work together at home. Words and feelings of love alone do not suffice.

We have heard calls for actions, and we have seen courage and compassion in action. This new reality surely requires of us a response of love deeply rooted in what we do.

Secondly, I am reminded of one writer's definition of love: the very thing we would prefer not to be doing at a given time, but which must be done. Love is the willingness to press on, to hunker down, and to face difficult situations even though we would much prefer to be headed in a different direction.

As this school year began, there were so many ways we all wished things were different. We longed for a beginning that reflected our normal excitement, our predictable idealism and hopefulness this time of year. How we wished we could embark on 2020-21 in a fresh and vigorous manner, the pandemic behind us. Sadly, it was not to be. The days required of us a persistence in face of fear and danger, a persistence we have learned over the past months but would happily discard. The difficult road we have been traveling has been extended, and as decidedly unglamorous as it is feels, this is love in action. Our response to God's love currently has a sobering tone, seen, for example, in the ways our teachers and students have had to adapt their working and engaging with each other in a manner so different from what they yearned it would be.

Jesus' commandment, may well take a very distinctive expression right now. It is, however, no less compelling or inspiring, no less a reflection of what God offers to us and equips us to be. What's more, it is no less evident right now in the daily life of Episcopal schools than it has ever been. Indeed, we are now living out an eloquent expression of God's love in a season that will forever transform and redeem us.