“This is what God requires of you – to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God”

Written by the Old Testament Prophet Micah, this statement has been challenging people for thousands of years.

When we chose the core six action words, “Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly” as our school motto we knew we were setting the bar very high! Any community that aspires to live out these words needs to constantly monitor its progress in making rhetoric reality: i.e. what does “Act Justly” look like in the day to day?

When students are surveyed as to what they value most in teachers, one of the top rated qualities is invariably fairness. The opposite is also true – the easiest way to inflame anger between people is when there is perceived injustice. For classroom teachers there is the continual challenge of treating students fairly, whether that be in regard to classroom behaviour issues, academic assessment or when school rules are broken out in the playground.

Students face many situations where they can choose to behave justly or not. This includes their interactions with their peer group, school staff members, and their parents. All members of the community are under the same imperative to do what is right.

When complex issues are referred on to Heads of School, their biggest challenge is usually getting a clear picture of what actually happened, and then to arbitrate on the consequences so that these are seen to be fair to all involved. Sometimes it is just not possible to satisfy all the aggrieved parties, but the guiding principle has to be what is just and right and fair.

The School Leadership, answers to God, as to whether they administer the school fairly. Are staff paid appropriately, and are they supported in their roles and treated with respect?

In regard to offers of employment of new staff; promotions and entitlements - are these dealt with transparently and honestly? Are school resources managed well, and is the school a good corporate citizen in terms of paying its debts and meeting other obligations?

Parents have a right to be treated justly. This includes how the school manages waiting lists and potential enrolments; fees and other monies; appropriate reporting and communication and, of course, dispute resolution.

A potentially fraught area is dealing with complaints directed against staff members by parents or students. The challenge is always to try to find a solution to the problem that is just and right and fair, and upholds the dignity of all involved. Sometimes this is impossible to achieve, but the aim should always be to act justly.

Of great importance in a school that seeks to honour a God of faithfulness and justice is to actively speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

This includes lobbying on behalf of students with special needs that they be treated fairly and are supported according to their needs. It also means looking out for others within our community who are struggling, as well as vulnerable members of the broader community. Our students should be educated regarding the issues faced by the wider world with its stark needs and inequalities and encouraged to respond appropriately and, hopefully, inspire them to want to make a difference in the way they live.

In so many, to act justly is a constant challenge to all of us, but there is a bigger problem. Acting justly by only adhering to the “letter of the law” can be cold and judgemental to all of us who are fallible and imperfect.

We need more than justice. We hunger for forgiveness and grace. I’m glad that Micah didn’t stop there!
The children of Israel needed detailed laws to teach them how to live rightly amidst the pressures of the barbaric tribes that surrounded them. However, it is all too easy to formalise rules into harsh legalism. Military units, outlaw bikie gangs and Taliban style organisations are all intolerant of rule breakers, and retribution can be swift.

The worst of schools can be horrible places ruled by a combination of institutional rules and street “justice” meted out by bullies.

The Good News is that there is a better way to live built on love, grace, peace and the therapy of forgiveness. What could that look like in a school?

Sometimes a student spectacularly breaks the rules by having an out of character “brain snap”. How this is followed through by those in authority reveals a great deal about a school. Whether the errant student is subsequently forgiven and accepted back by their peers says a lot more.

I hope BHCS remains a school of second chances – including for those who have left badly from their previous school, and honestly crave a fresh start.

Staff members also make mistakes! Are they then “made an example of”, or shown mercy in a way that minimises professional humiliation?

A supportive community also shows mercy towards parents who are in pain for a range of reasons, often beyond their control.

In all cases of strained relationships the dynamic truth is that love covers a multitude of sins. We all make mistakes, irritate one another and sometimes, to our shame, wound those closest to us.

It’s only because of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ that we can be set free from our own guilt, be forgiven, and then go on to live out that forgiveness to other serial sinners like us.

Of course there is always the chance of mercy being abused …but should that prevent us extending grace?

Wisdom is required at all times to balance justice and mercy, to endeavour to do what is right and just and fair.

Nicky Gumbel writes eloquently about this in an article named Justice & Mercy. You can read this article by following this link...

http://www.htb.org/bioy/commentary/1129
The third action part of our school motto, ‘Walk Humbly’, is intriguing.

How do we as individuals, and together as a community, “walk humbly”? What would that look like in our day to day life together?

Sometimes it is helpful to consider how the opposite of this would appear. Imagine a school whose essence is an attitude of pride in all it had achieved by its own efforts and who then looked down on other “less successful” schools.

The Scriptures are very clear that pride is the most toxic sin of all. It is fuelled by a spirit of rebellious independence from God, and a destructive idolatry of self. In an individual this manifests itself as unattractive arrogance (the self-made man who worships his creator). If widespread in a community, this self-centredness erodes compassion for the poor and the vulnerable, instead these people are regarded as undeserving “losers”.

The Bible teaches that God opposes the proud of heart, but is on the side of the down-trodden.

True humility is not abject self-loathing (therapists know acutely how damaging this can be to mental health), rather it focuses on gratitude towards our Sovereign God for His love, mercy and great faithfulness. Love for God also bears sweet fruit in how people respect, honour and serve others.

In the “upside-down” Kingdom of Grace those who seek to walk with God in humbleness of spirit will, in due time, be lifted up (by God Himself!) as they are ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven.

At BHCS we must guard against the seductive trap of praying “thank you Lord that we are not like other schools”. Instead, may we puncture dangerous pride by emphasising gratitude to God for His bountiful blessings.

John Wesley, in his commentary on Micah 6.8 encouraged believers to “Keep up a constant fellowship with God, by humble, holy faith”. This is a wonderful way to build a school that truly honours Christ’s name by living out a robust faith in unselfish service.

We have a challenging and encouraging school motto that motivates us to be authentic in our faith walk and where rhetoric is earthed in reality. May I conclude with “The Message” translation of Micah’s call to God’s people first heard around 4000 years ago:

But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women.

It’s quite simple:
Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,
be compassionate and loyal in your love,
And don’t take yourself too seriously -
take God seriously.

By Andy Callow (Principal)