

## Episcopal High School or “Spread the Word” MAESA Matters Dec 2018

"My testimony is my life."

These are the words that still ring in my ears almost a month after Nov. 9, the day that Episcopal High School commemorated 50 years since our integration in the fall of 1968, when two students, Regi Burns and Sam Paschall, joined the community as freshmen.

The words were spoken by Tony Chase, a member of the class of 1973 and one of three black boys who joined Burns and Paschall the next year. All of Episcopal's early black students were brought to EHS through the Anne C. Stouffer Foundation whose mission was to promote the integration of preparatory schools in the South.

Chase currently resides in Houston, TX where he serves as Chairman & CEO of ChaseSource, LP, a firm consistently ranked as one of the nation's largest minority-owned companies. Chase addressed the community several times throughout the commemoration including a commemorative chapel, a panel discussion, and at the Spirit of the High School Dinner with faculty, staff, parents, and alumni. Chase was joined by The Rev. Jesse Jackson, grandfather to a current Episcopal sophomore, who offered a benediction in chapel, was a participant in the panel discussion, and led a blessing in the evening.

"My testimony is my life," Chase said, "the life I was prepared for right here on this sacred Hill; the life I have lived since." Coming to Episcopal shaped him, Chase reflected, but, he knows that it also shaped those around him in ways he cannot know, like his fellow members of the Class of 1973 who came to support the weekend's events, and in ways that he can see, like the moment when he became overwhelmed, standing in front of the current diversity present in our student body during the morning chapel. He was witnessing a diversity that he did not know in his time at EHS and, perhaps, could not have even dreamt.

Before hearing from Chase and Jackson in the panel, the community watched a [video](#) produced for the event by Luke David '93. The video explores the atmosphere at Episcopal in the late 1960s as the School prepared to welcome Burns and Paschall. After a morning meeting announcement was made announcing the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968, a group of Episcopal students cheered. The idea of it hits you in the gut. The film goes on to explore, through generations of students, board members, faculty, and administrators, how we have navigated this journey and how we need to tell the truth of that journey in order to look ahead to our next 50 years.

Along with Chase, several dozen black alumni from the past 50 years, including faculty and a former chaplain, returned to campus to mark the event. All students participated in afternoon sessions, which included:

- Numerous small group conversations with alumni;

- A presentation by a recent alumna on her historical research project, [“Voices of Integration at Episcopal”](#);
- A panel of History of the South students sharing their research on [“Episcopal’s Southern Culture and The Civil Rights Movement”](#);
- Another panel featuring history teacher Wade Morris of the Lovett School in Atlanta, professor and author [Dr. Michelle Purdy](#), and artist and art history professor [Amber Wiley](#) — discussing “Integration and the National Landscape.” Morris completed his master’s thesis on [the integration of Episcopal schools in the South](#) (PDF). Purdy is the author of [Transforming the Elite: Black Students and the Desegregation of Private Schools](#).
- And finally, a workshop on [“Becoming Beloved Community,”](#) a conversation tool centering on racial reconciliation that has grown from the Episcopal Church’s work over the last three years.

Joel Sohn, Director of Community and Equity and one of the principal organizers of the commemoration events, saw reason for hope but much work still to be done.

“It takes a lot of courage for our students to hear the words of Tony Chase and Reverend Jackson and then process them as lessons to take to heart. I hope our students will truly work toward unlearning the things they've taken for granted and the habits they've formed,” Sohn said. “Perhaps this weekend saw some seeds planted, but those seeds need constant water and nourishment, so we can't stop talking about these things.

“I'm not going to stop talking about these things because these conversations are what makes community that much stronger and that much more welcoming and inclusive.”

Chase closed his chapel talk by encouraging students not only to value where they were in that moment, sitting in their pews, as students of this School, but to imagine the world they will be stepping into very shortly and the important choices that they will make in the future, choices that come from their life at Episcopal.

“In many ways, this diversity in which you live is an artificial community that exists primarily in academic settings. The administration here has the capacity to choose and select a student body that has the carefully-balanced ranges of cultures, experiences, and backgrounds that now makes up EHS,” Chase noted. “But when you get out in the real world, the business world, or wherever your lives will take you, beware. Those worlds will be much less diverse. In fact, they will tend to be highly segregated, not legally, but by choice. Your choice. I encourage you to take this experience of diversity with you. Take this commitment to diversity with you, into your worlds, into your neighborhoods, into your lives.”