Transcript of speech made by Abenathi Gqomo in Grahamstown Cathedral in January 2013 to celebrate the appointment of Mrs Cecile Mager as the new Head Mistress of the Good Shepherd School

*Abenathi is a Harry Birrell Scholar who has recently matriculated with 3 distinctions from Victoria Girls High in December 2012 to start studying for a law degree at Rhodes Univeristy in January 2013. She is a former Good Shepherd Primary school learner.*

“Good morning to the clergy of the Cathedral; to the Harry Birell Trust Fund personnel; to the SGB, staff, parents and learners of the Good Shepherd Primary school, I greet you all in the name of our Lord. Amen.

The year 2001 saw the first year of what would be a long and fruitful school career for me. I was introduced to the Good Shepherd family at the age of 7 years, and because I was a bubbly and a curious character, it never took me long to capture the minds and hearts of the Good Shepherd staff. There I was taught self-confidence, how to carry myself as a young girl and the firm love that I received groomed me into the young, confident and opinionated woman that I am today. During my stay at Good Shepherd, I fell in love with English and I remember vividly how passionate Mrs Mager was in the classroom. My second love was music- singing in particular and I also remember how Mrs van der Linde tried, with little success, to get us to sing in key.

When I was in grade 7, I was awarded with a Harry Birell bursary to study at Victoria Girls’ High School, and that is when I met Mrs Birell. Throughout the meetings that we had with the Harry Birell Trust Fund personnel over the past 5 years, I gathered that Mr Birell was a man with a big heart and an even bigger brain that was hungry for education and that he was a man that wanted to see deserving children that came from disadvantaged backgrounds receive an education of good quality. It was only last year that I learnt how the money that is used to pay for our studies was gathered. Mr Harry Birrell’s younger friends would gather together to partake in marathons and host cocktail parties, their end-goal being to win the cash prize and be able to fund our studies and ensure that our goals and dreams would be realised. Last year, when I was completing my matric, I thought of the direction that I wanted my life to take and today I am proud to share with you all that in a few weeks’ time, I will be taking my first step towards obtaining a Law degree at Rhodes University, and this is all possible because Mr Birell was self-less and compassionate enough to have a shared vision with younger friends to fund my high school years. I have big dreams and an even bigger ambition in the pipeline but I will share one dream with you today. In the words of the famous Martin Luther King Jnr, I have a dream of starting a campaign that will ensure that girl-children and boy-children receive an academic education of good quality, that children of both sexes are made aware of their worth in society, their beauty and their intellect. I will work to the best of my abilities to ensure that this dream becomes a reality.

Before I take a seat, I would’ve done as good as nothing if i did not express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Harry Birrell Trust Fund, to the Good Shepherd Trust and the staff of Good Shepherd, you have sculpted a bright future for me. I leave you with the words of Matthew 5vs7: “Happy are those who are merciful to others, God will be merciful to them”

I thank you.