

Senior Prizegiving 2022

Kia ora, Bula Vinaka, Malo e leile, Talofa lava, Kiaorana, Kamusta, Mauri, Greetings and welcome parents, guests, staff and most of all young men of Saint John's.

I begin with a quote:

"The world is passing through troubled times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress."

Attributed to Peter the Hermit in A.D. 1274, but could easily be from 2022. In my view we make far too much of the mantra of 'youth today are out of control they have changed, not like back in my day'. Youth have not changed; a small minority are responsible for the bad press. They still have all of the same fears, desires, dreams and needs as they ever have. Boys still want and need a place to belong, a place they can contribute and where they are safe and where they matter. They need strong leadership and role models in their lives as they make sense of not just the world around them but themselves and where they belong in it. At Saint John's we endeavour to be that place for our young men and help prepare them for life. And I have to say that the young men of Saint John's are far more caring and respectful of others than they were in my day.

What has changed for youth is the world around them, a world they did not create and one that is 'passing through troubled times' as Peter the Hermit stated. It is undoubtedly more difficult for youth to navigate the many aspects of life largely due to technology and how it has changed the way they communicate with each other, interact and access information, information which is not always appropriate or healthy.

For these reasons it is important to cut through what I call the 'static' or 'white noise' and provide young men with a simple road map to becoming a successful adult. The world continues to change and evolve at an alarming rate, but the future will always want from its youth what it has always wanted. As part of the Board of Trustees' strategic review we met with members of the

trades employment sector. It will come as no surprise to many of you that the general feedback was that they were far less interested in what subjects our students might have learned in school but rather, stressed that the main attributes they were looking for were maturity, social skills, initiative and work ethic. Anything else could be learned on the job.

Our Marist pillars align directly with what our sons' need as they grow and move into a complex adult world:

Living in a family spirit – i.e. treating family, friends and work mates as family.

Love of work. – Marcellin detested laziness, he and his Marist brothers built La Valla by hand from rock and mortar. I have it on good authority that the first Principals of Saint John's 62 years ago (who were all Marist brothers) had the task of cleaning the boys' toilets at the end of the day!

In the way of Mary – someone who says yes when asked to do the difficult tasks because they trust that it is the right thing to do. Someone who stands beside the persecuted and supports them.

Presence - (presence in mind, body and spirit) – being present at work and home, being there for others in their time of need because often that is all they need, just for you to be there.

Simplicity – Being authentic, saying what you mean and meaning what you say.

We have seen a change, particularly in the last decade of what are socially accepted norms in a variety of settings. If our young men are able to live by the above it makes navigating what can be a difficult social, political, cultural and religious landscape so much easier. It's about being able to filter out the static or white noise to get to the bedrock of authentic Catholic values.

In order to encapsulate and simplify what the pillars mean in everyday life and to acknowledge our young men, this year we launched the **Marist Man** award. We canvassed a range of school and community members including students, old boys and clergy asking what they considered to be the defining attributes of a Marist man; we wanted to keep the descriptors to three. So, what are the three key fundamentals of being a Marist man, what three ideas are our mantra? Marist men are men of **Faith, Integrity and Service**.

1. **Faith** – we cannot aspire to be Marist Catholic men without some element of Faith, otherwise we are simply endeavouring to be a good

state school with values, rather than a Catholic one with Gospel-based values. I am not naïve enough to think that all of us hold unshakable faith – while there will be some who stand at this end of the spectrum there are others who are essentially agnostic, and it is not for me to judge. What I state to our boys and community as they enrol at Saint John's is I ask that they have an open mind, heart and soul to the potential presence of Christ alive in them, for faith is a journey. And some do hear the calling, as shown in the number of boys who take up the opportunity to become baptized confirmed Catholics by taking part in the RCIC programme we run every year at school. Some find God later in life. So, to tick off the Faith aspect of a Marist man you will take an active part in Religious Education, attend Mass at school and behave in ways consistent with our core Catholic values.

2. **Integrity** – Integrity is a strong word that denotes doing the right thing in difficult circumstances, standing up for victims, preventing and stopping bullying. This is also about being authentic, being yourself under pressure. Young men (all men) need to own their mistakes and learn from them. It means working hard and achieving to the best of your ability.

3. **Service** – The ultimate and most influential servant leader is Christ himself. 2000 years ago he walked and preached, giving himself up for us so that we may have salvation. 2000 years later one third of the world's population is Christian! And of those the biggest denomination is Catholic. We all owe a debt to those who have paved the way before us, given of themselves to make our lives better. To be a servant leader is to act and perform in a manner that enhances the lives of those we work for. In my case I tell my boys that I work for them, my job is to ensure that they have the very best experience of school in all its facets. I am quick to say that that does not mean that they get to tell me what to do...although that does not always stop them. To achieve the service aspect of the award the boys need to complete 20 hours of service.

It is heartening to hear the boys often saying to each other 'that's not a Marist man thing to do'. It is, of course, half in jest but also a sign that the language and ideas get through. Boys need to know boundaries.

Continuing in this theme of keeping things simple is that it is also the key to boys' education in the classroom. Which is why, although the Ministry insists on new builds being open innovative/open/modern learning environments, our redevelopment of Chanel Block will be single cell class rooms. There are hefty floor to ceiling concertina doors which in theory can be opened but this will not be the norm. Our classrooms will continue to have one teacher, one subject and each boy responsible for his own work. Recently, well-known education researcher Dr Michael Johnston requested that the Ministry of Education (MoE) provide basic information including data on the number of new learning environments built, their cost, and their effectiveness as learning environments. The MoE was not able to provide any of this information, which is concerning.

I am thankful that this cohort of year 13 young men in front of me have had a relatively normal year. They have had three years of COVID disrupted schooling and while there has been academic fallout, it is the social that has been the the biggest struggle for many students. This year they have been able to enjoy sports day, the ball, full school masses, weekend sport, arts awards and most importantly the opportunity to be at school with their friends and teachers in the classroom and during breaks. However, it is my belief that the strong Saint John's culture of love and connectedness has played a huge part in helping us all get through the challenges of the past few years. Thank you to our head students Daniel Ticklepenny, Kyran Rangitutia and head boy Alistar Sequeira. You have been a superb team this year and outstanding role models to the younger boys.

Recently we held the annual Blue and Gold lunch and while anyone is welcome it is mostly attended by old boys of the College. This year we had day one students from 1961 through to recent leavers of only three years ago. It is obvious that Saint John's has reached an age and stage where our old boys community are wanting to reconnect, reminisce and give back to our College, and I count myself among this number. As old boys we all want to hear that the school is doing well, we want to be proud of Saint John's and be able to relate to our friends and family how well the College is doing. It is a testament to Saint John's that so many of our old boys have gone on to have very

successful careers. One example is Brian Dickey the guest speaker. Brian is Crown Prosecutor and warrant holder for Auckland. He has prosecuted many high profile murder cases. Needless to say it was a sobering speech.

Finally, I wish to thank our dedicated and hard-working professional staff. It is a privilege to work alongside you at Saint John's and I know that you all contribute to this special place in a myriad of ways, including a great deal of volunteer work. I look forward to next year with genuine excitement.

Ngaa mihi nui and God Bless