

Senior Prizegiving 2023

Kia Ora, Bula, Malo, Talofa, Mauri, Kia Orana, Kumusta, Welcome...

Many speak of the values that we have at St John's - yes, we have values, and they are faith-based values. Without faith as the backbone on which we build our culture and community, we are nothing more than a state school which espouses virtues. Being a Catholic school gives us and our young men a real advantage over state schools in countless ways. In a world of constant distraction, our faith-based values give us a starting point, a way point, and an endpoint, a place to stand, and a place that we can always return to. The St John's College, and wider Catholic, community is enormous and together has a common purpose and understanding of what it is we want for our young men here.

It is true that at St John's we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. For me, Monsignor Frank embodies all I have been talking about. Marist Education recently celebrated 100 years of education in Hamilton. The original Marist school, which went from what we would now say was Year 6 to Year 13, was situated at Beale Street where Marian is now. As the school grew, the High School was split from the Intermediate in 1961, and became St John's College. Initially, the Hillcrest Road site was not ready and the school moved up on the hilltop in 1962. However, speak to a Day One Old Boy, and he will insist the start date of St John's is 1961. Monsignor Frank was one of these Day One students and has some great stories from his time. Frank went on to become a Marist Brother and taught me here at St John's, and eventually was called to the priesthood. Father Frank has since been bestowed the title of Monsignor and fittingly is now our Chaplain and celebrated Mass with us today as he does every fortnight at school. Frank's witness and commitment personifies what it is to be a Jonnies Boy, a Marist man and an integral part of this community. Thank you for your service, Mons Frank.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of listening to Br. Emili Turú who was Superior General of the Marist Brothers Order at the time. He described himself as having a direct line of leadership coming from Marcellin Champagnat himself. I have always remembered the way he described faith and religion. Faith is like water and religion is like a cup. Without structured tradition, a set of beliefs and rituals to make sense and order of our thoughts, feelings, our beliefs and faith, the water runs away and dissipates, leaving us empty and without purpose and a way forward. The religion (or cup in this metaphor) holds the faith so that we can revisit, replenish, and take comfort

from and grow in our own understanding and conviction. As Catholics, we do ritual and tradition well; we have a set of beliefs that we celebrate in the eucharistic Mass in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, and I for one take comfort in the ageless foundation of our faith. Tonight, the Year 13 boys will be presented with a Bible as a leaving gift. It may well sit on a shelf for some years and gather dust, but it will be there for when they are ready.

Our Marist Man award clearly states our purpose. We want men of Faith who have an open mind and heart to the presence of God in their lives. We want Integrity - young men who not only know the right thing to do but have the courage and determination to do it. And we want men of service, men who will put others before self, particularly the needy and those in their lives who rely on them.

At the Year 13 retreat, I spoke to the boys about what was about to happen over their last days of school. A certain stillness comes over them as they realise this is the last few moments that they will be together as a whole group. Of course, they will catch up and remain friends, but many will move out of the area to take up new challenges a fair way from St John's College. This is a very real, and quite frightening, but also exciting time for our boys. While I feel this mix of emotions for these young men who have been able to socialise and grow in a safe sheltered environment, it also gives me a sense of pride to see them as they are now, men of love and integrity. Loyal young men who will stand by their mates for life. Young men who are prepared for life.

I recently heard said that St John's is punching above its weight in academics and culture and sport. I disagree: as a Marist Catholic Boy's school in a growing city we should be an organisation at the top of its game, and we should not be shy about publicly celebrating our successes, just as we want our boys who are receiving prizes tonight to be proud of their achievements.

Term Three was a frustratingly disrupted time with strikes. It is easy to blame teachers but in real terms, teachers' salaries have fallen dramatically and schools are finding it difficult, if not impossible, to find staff particularly in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects. We need our best and brightest entering teaching if we want our sons and daughters to succeed in all aspects of life when they leave. We need to attract quality teachers to the profession. It will also come as no surprise to you that only 18% of those training as primary teachers are male and 40% at secondary level, and this figure is falling, which should be an alarming statistic for us all. The student teachers that I see coming through our school are, overall, very good

but there is just not enough of them, and not enough in the right subject areas. Teaching is a vocation where we have the privileged opportunity to make a real difference in young people's lives. I always meet with the student teachers and the first thing I say is that the most important quality they need is to love working with teenage kids, which is a more important quality than any qualification. A love of teaching and students cannot be faked. New Zealand needs to raise the esteem with which we hold teachers.

Bali Haque, a New Zealand educational expert of some renown, was responsible for an Independent Review of the New Zealand Compulsory Schooling Sector. He has since written a book which covers the Tomorrow's Schools Reforms, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), the revised New Zealand Curriculum (2007) and the National Standards for primary schools. 'None of these reforms', Bali writes, 'has been as successful as one might have hoped', and adds, 'mistakes have been made again, again, and again.' I can see that the latest change in NCEA will yet again be a mistake. NCEA is not broken, subject areas are currently able to choose from a wide range of standards to tailor a course for their learners. Going forward, each subject will have only four standards, one of which is an exam, which will not suit our more challenged learners. My staff have told me to 'relax, it'll be fine', or words to that effect. I'm not convinced it is the right way forward but I do know that our great staff will do everything they can to make it work for our boys.

We have been really pleased with the introduction of compulsory laptops in recent years. My fears were largely unfounded as to a) whether they would get used, and b) if we would have theft and or breakages. I am happy to report that they are used regularly in class and that there have been minimal issues with their safety. This is important as we continue to look to intertwine traditional methods with modern technology, and these boys will be doing assessment digitally and most certainly using technology in their jobs. And, knowing how to 'game' on a laptop does not equate to knowing your way around an assessment document or a job task.

Roy Amara was an American scientist, futurist and President of the Institute of the Future. He famously coined the following adage, that was to become Amara's Law: "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." I believe our foray into the digital world has been timed just right. The next challenge will of course be AI and smart devices, but we will manage and respond appropriately. Issues of authenticity aside, it will inevitably become part of the educator's work to help

students use these technologies as they will increasingly be more useful tools in the workplace.

2023 has been a great year for St John's, a school I am privileged to lead. Thank you to my hard-working talented staff and to our supportive parent community, and congratulations to all of the winners - you deserve your accolades and all of the successes that the future holds for you.

God Bless