

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa, Bula, Mauri, Kamusta, Kia Orana, Talofa Lava, Malo, welcome to our Saint John's community.

Recently I had the privilege of hearing the prospective year 12 student leadership candidates for 2025 speak in an assembly to their peers prior to the voting taking place. Apart from the confidence and bravery shown by these young men who were 'putting themselves out there' with the full knowledge they might well be unsuccessful, was the fact that they appeared to understand the ethos of Saint John's and what the boys wanted to hear from them. Almost all spoke about the need to give back, to lead by example, to look after the vulnerable and to be that person that others could talk to if needed. They wanted their legacy to be part of ensuring that the Jonnies brotherhood remained strong. If our young men are able to articulate this as year 12s I believe as a community we have gone a long way to preparing our young men for life.

Election cycles mean that education and schools (along with health and crime) are 'political footballs' and pivot points where parties score votes. While this is a natural fall out from a democratic process the issue for schools is how unhelpful the constant changes are. In 2024 we saw the introduction of new level 1 NCEA standards which have created a huge amount of work for staff. Predictably it has come with numerous glitches which have compounded stress on staff and students alike.

The Common Assessment Tasks in numeracy and literacy have been particularly troubling. Large numbers of students are failing these assessments (nationally more than 45%) and I have seen firsthand the impact this has had on some of our young men. Without passing these assessments they simply cannot gain an NCEA qualification at any level no matter how many other credits they accumulate. While there is no perfect assessment system it concerns me that we appear to be returning to something similar to the days of 'School Certificate' where there was a scaled 50% pass and fail rate.

While some might argue that students got the results they deserved under the one-off exam of school certificate, we were effectively telling half of our 15 to 16-year olds that school and academics was not a pathway for them and they might as well leave school, and in the days of failing School Cert most did. What NCEA has over the old system is that it tells a student or employer what **they can do not what they can't**. Having said that I acknowledge that literacy

and numeracy rates among New Zealand students need to improve, and that is a challenge for all of us.

This year sees the first of the digital exams coming into play. It was an unusual feeling walking into the gym to see 200 boys with laptops and not an exam paper in site. I am glad we went with compulsory laptops when we did. One reason alone is that many schools simply do not have the infrastructure to put enough computers in front of students, without BYOD we certainly would not. It is also about getting the boys used to typing and finding their way around documents. I have heard the term that this generation are 'digital natives' and that my generation are 'digital immigrants' – while this might be true (particularly for me), knowing how to game online is not the same as knowing how to sit an exam online. Those that have good typing skills and can navigate a computer well will have an advantage. Hopefully overall, digital exams will help our boys, as boys, in general, are notorious for having poor handwriting, and at times handwritten exams scripts are simply not marked because of legibility issues. Also, I suspect the boys are faster at typing than they are at handwriting.

There was a time, decades ago, when teaching as a profession was seen as a soft option with good conditions and loads of holidays. I remember 30 plus years ago at my first job there were darts and a pool table in the staff room for down time, you won't find that now (to be fair there is still a darts board in the PE office I notice!). I very rarely hear people talking about teaching as a soft option now, it's much more likely that they will say that they don't know how we put up with teenagers and wouldn't dare want the job.

In truth the students are the most enjoyable bit, and it is encouraging to see that the student teachers coming into our schools for placements are doing so for the right reasons. I always spend some time with them discussing the unique being that is the Kiwi teenage boy and what works best in a classroom. Our Founder Saint Marcellin Champagnat said that we must 'love children and love them equally'. This is the first thing I say to student teachers, that they must love teaching teenage kids. This is the one part that cannot be learnt and certainly cannot be faked. Boys know within 10 minutes if a teacher likes them or not, and if a boy knows you don't like them, they won't 'walk with you', and with boys in particular, if they perceive you to be unfair they will give up on you, and then themselves. Teaching is a noble profession, a calling, a vocation and we are fortunate with a quality staff, but as a society we are beholden to

raise the esteem of the job. For the sake of our sons and daughters and our future society we need our best and brightest in front of our youth.

It is 35 years since the last Marist brother Br. Doug Darwick locked the doors of the now demolished Brothers' house at Saint John's and left Hamilton. We continue to do our utmost to follow the Marist Man mantra of Men of Faith, Integrity and Service. Young men who have an open heart to Christ, young men who have integrity knowing what the right thing to do is and doing it, and young men of service who put others before self and give back in recognition of all that they receive. Although it is a pity that there are no Marist brothers at Saint John's, if we do our jobs well, then we hope that they can rest easy knowing that their work here is done and that we will carry on the legacy. We are reminded once again ladies and gentlemen that we stand on the shoulders of those that have come before us.

Catholic schools in general are becoming increasingly popular for these reasons and, particularly in urban areas, they are all full, meaning that Catholic students are now missing out on places in Catholic schools. As state integrated schools we have a maximum cap.

So, what is the biggest challenge facing us? Of course, there is pushing our boys to achieve at the highest level but perhaps what is most difficult is to remain authentically Catholic in an increasingly secular society. It is the same challenge that our founder Marcellin himself faced when he came across a dying boy who was uneducated and had no knowledge of God and Christ and was ultimately the catalyst for him creating the Marist Brothers. And it was the same challenge facing the Marists when they came to New Zealand.

The strength of a faith school is that while we are all different, we acknowledge that there is a common bond amongst us all. We may be of different race, culture, an artist, or a sportsman, but we all have a mutual tie.

As parents of boys we worry about their place in the world, their future, their happiness, and their safety. We do as much as we can do through harnessing the supportive relationships that can be created between the family, the school and the wider community, the rest is up to our boys. I believe we have a formula that at the very least offers a lighted path, a blueprint, an outline that our boys can use to paint a picture of what the future could look like for them.

We have been blessed in having a very capable and engaged board who have been an enormous support and I also want to thank our head students Callum, Raphael and Leighton, you have made a great team and have been superb role models to the other boys. I also acknowledge Monsignor Frank, a day one student of Saint Johns, a Marist Brother and teacher at Saint John's (including me), and now our Chaplin. Thank you Mons.

Along with the Board of Trustees we believe we are on the right path in terms of boys' education and while there will be ongoing adjustments and tweaks to the outer layers there will be no wholesale changes to the core of who we are, and what we are here to achieve. The key to being a successful school is one that serves you, our community. For us that is preparing young men for life, men of Faith Integrity and Service who strive for excellence in all they do. Young men who take responsibility for themselves, their actions and for those that rely on them. Many indicators would suggest we are doing that.

God Bless and congratulations to the winners tonight.

It is now my pleasure to announce and bring forward the head students for 2025.

Deputy head boy Isaleli Pati

Deputy head boy Monty Carter

Head boy 2025 Arden Morunga