

PG 2025

Kia ora koutou, Bula, Malo e lelei, Mauri, Talofa, Kia Orana, Kamusta, Namaste welcome. Welcome to you our community and to the young Marist men of Saint John's College.

The last few years have been an interesting time in the New Zealand education space, beginning with the compulsory structured literacy and numeracy in Primary – which was a good idea- and more recently the messaging around the dismantling of NCEA. What is perhaps the most disturbing about the latter is that 25 years of school students have had their NCEA qualification devalued by that announcement. By stating publicly that it does not work, employers here and, more so, overseas, will be skeptical of what a young person has actually achieved and is capable of. Unfortunately, in New Zealand we have a habit of coming up with rushed and poorly thought through ideas in education, then spending a decade trying to fix them before abandoning them altogether. The modern learning environment experiment is a case in point.

NCEA has issues and should be improved, however it shows what a student can do rather than what they cannot. It was also structured so that students who might struggle academically could still access a pathway. It is not difficult for an employer to read a student's record of learning to see just what that pathway has been, we have -after all - had 25 years to learn this ladies and gentlemen. I'm all for a more robust and transparent system but we cannot go back to the old days of school certificate with a one-off scaled exam where half of the 15-year-olds fail and their journey in education effectively ends. This is the very reason NCEA came to be. It's interesting that, regardless of academic success, people do better in later life the longer they stay at school, so any new framework must provide some meaningful incentive to stay in school, particularly when we hear that the leaving age may be raised to 17. It is not uncommon for students who may have bombed at year 11 due to a lack of focus and work to mature and have real success at year 12 and above. Let's not cut them off too early.

We will no doubt see more changes to the proposals before they come in; after all we were already meant to be implementing the new level 2 standards this year before they were pushed back two years, and now probably scrapped. (And please Ministry of Education don't scrap level 1, no one wants two years of year 10 – 4th form in old money.)

Despite having said the above, I am still positive about the future of education. It is such a pleasure to turn up to school and work with these young men. As teachers we have the opportunity, or even the duty, to change young people's lives for the better. As such it is vital that we attract quality people to teaching, we all know it's not an easy job, but it certainly is a rewarding one. After 30 plus years in education, I still have rewarding interactions with our young men every day. I remind myself to see the face of Christ in our students, I see him every day.

We have continued to build on our Marist Man ethos, the mantra of Faith, Integrity and Service reminds us and the boys constantly what we are here to do and achieve. It serves as our compass, our true North. Faith – the way I describe it with the boys is that we are on a journey and are somewhere along a spectrum of 'I don't think I have any' to 'I truly believe in God'. All I ask of the boys is that they keep an open heart and mind to the potential of Christ in our lives. What I insist on from the community – that is our staff and you our parents, is that you do not discourage your son in any way as he works his way through this. This is between him and God only.

Integrity as a Marist Man is something we can all understand, and it challenges us to do the right things, at all times. Finally, service. Christ was the ultimate servant leader who sacrificed himself for us. Life is a gift and I believe we have a duty to leave the world in a better place than we found it. We all want these young men to be successful, happy, good Christian citizens. Good husbands and great parents. To do this they need a blue print of how to get there, they must be shepherded along the way, allowing them to make their own mistakes. But at the end of their time with us, if they are Marist Men, men who give of their best, take responsibility for themselves, their actions and for those who rely on them, then we have done our bit.

As we come to the end of the year for our senior boys I remind them that it is a privilege to have been here and that the mates they make here will be the mates they have for life. This was made clear to me earlier this year when we had the 40th reunion of our 1985 1st XV team, one that I was a part of. Incredibly 15 of us turned up for a visit to the school and then attended the All Blacks game in town. Some traveled from overseas to be here. After 40 years the bonds we made at school are still strong and although I hadn't seen some of them for years we quickly settled into an easy and familiar banter. By any measure the team members have been successful in both their professional

and private family lives. Taking them around the school was like herding cats as they reminisced and even argued about what teacher or classmate did what where. Men want to be proud of where they have come from and it was great to see how genuinely impressed they were with the modern facilities we have and how well the college is doing.

I recently had the privilege of travelling with a Marist contingent which consisted of a Marist Priest, a Marist Brother and five other Marist school principals to Rome, to the Marist headquarters and the Vatican, and to Lyon in France to follow in the footsteps of our founder Marcellin Champagnat. We visited his birthplace, his place of ordination as a Priest, the site of his dedication to starting the Marist brothers' teaching order, and even his bedroom and deathbed.

What impressed me most was the sheer scale of what he achieved. These were hard men living in hard times. This was nowhere starker than at L'Hermitage where he and the brothers literally carved out a 50 metre stone wall by hand (pick axe) and used the material to build a facility to house 80 brothers who trained there before going to establish schools and teach. The wall took more than a year to cut through. There are 2,300 Marist Brothers' schools in 82 countries today. Sometimes Marist is misinterpreted as perhaps a soft touch as we look to support "the lost, the last and the least" in our schools, however there was nothing soft about Marcellin's approach nor his expectations of others. We need to hold his line when it comes to our young men and their approach to these most crucial of teenage years at school. I don't need to tell you as parents how much a Year 9, 13-year-old boy, grows, changes and develops during his time at secondary school. (I also could also add - stops communicating, sleeps to all hours and is glued to his phone.) There will come a time when there are no longer Marist Brothers in New Zealand as they seek to work in countries who have a higher need of their labour. My message to them is that they can rest easy, they have set a sound foundation, the New Zealand Marist schools are in fine heart and we will continue the work they started 200 years ago.

One thing different about this year for me has been the growth in the Arts. The sheer number of opportunities and events during the year has been stunning. Our arts evening this year was outstanding with Drama and Music performances. The quality was highly polished and very entertaining. It is important in a boys' school that there is an outlet for young men who have a

passion for the arts or we risk becoming a sport only school. Performing live generates skills that are transferrable to many facets of life and builds self-confidence and a sense of place in the world. Many thanks to the staff and parent helpers who have worked tirelessly to support the Arts programme. Art is a profound form of therapy for the mind and soul.

AI presents many opportunities and challenges alike; One of my fears is that there will come a day when song writers, actors, musicians, painters and their like are no longer required. What are we without avenues of expression of conscious imagination in beautiful, thought provoking and entertaining ways. I sincerely hope that is not the case and the human in humanity is retained.

I briefly wish to acknowledge the sterling work of Jude Bartrum and Dominic Tester as they move on to other opportunities next year. You are leaving Saint John's in a better place than when you arrived.

Finally, a thank you to you, our community for your support of your sons' education from we, the staff of Saint John's College. May the eagle soar.

God Bless