Prize Giving 2026

Kia Ora, Talofa, Malo o lelei, Kamusta, Maudi, Kia Orana, Bula Venaka, Namaste, Malo ni.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and you the fine young men of Saint Johns College.

I begin by acknowledging tonight the passing of one of our own flock Jace de Ramas. A year 9 boy who tragically died in early October during the holidays. Jace was a bright boy excelling in his academics with a close friend group. He will be sorely missed as one of our Marist men. Our prayers go with the family.

An enlargement of a photo taken of the 1962 first year of Saint Johns College students up on the hill (1961 was in fact the inaugural year of the college but it hadn't been built so they stayed at the beale street Marion site). The original Marist Brothers school went from primary right through to secondary school and has been in Hamilton since 1922 so over 100 years at the Marian site.

The boys in the 1962 photo are about 95% pakeha and it remained this way throughout the 80's and 90's and similarly the makeup of the staff. So the fact that I greeted you in Maori, Samoan, Fijian, Cook Island, Kiribati, Indian, Takolau, Filipino and English gives us pause for thought.

Our Ethnic makeup has, and continues to change. We are now about 50% pakeha 20% Maori 8% polynesian and 20% Asian 2%

other. I see this as a strength, it is important that as our boys make this journey with us into adulthood that they do so in an environment that reflects the population of Aotearoa New Zealand. They will be working and living alongside each other, marrying and having children together. Likewise the makeup of our talented staff has also changed where we are now from all over the world. This is the new New Zealand and in preparing young men for life they need to be exposed to different cultures. Interestingly for our young men this is normal, this is what they are used to, it's probably more my generation that is adjusting to the change.

Catholic schools have many advantages over state schools and one of those is that while we are many we are one, while we may be of different color and creed we are united as Christian men. This is not a conflict to be one or the other, I am not Pakeha or Catholic, I am Pakeha and Catholic.

There have been some standout highlights this year. One striking point of difference has been the tremendous work our year 13 student leaders have done. These young men epitomized the service element of the Marist Man and nowhere was this more evident than on our Marcellin Champangnant founders day. In the Gym during the afternoon activities these leaders put aside their natural inhibitions and shyness and expressed pure joy and camaraderie smiling, yelling and laughing as they encouraged their boys in their houses to get stuck in. It is extremely rare that you will see young men drop all pretense of being cool or shy and shout their voices horse in encouraging their fellow students to win the tug of war. In leading as they did these boys unshackled

the younger ones and in turn it became safe to be a boy without fear of ridicule. Along with the house singing that day (with actions) competition, although I still think Billy Joel's 'uptown girl' was a hard ask for Pompelliar house, they have set a new bar for us - I can only see these traditions growing in the future. In 35 years I have never experienced anything like it.

However it is still incredibly disappointing that we have boys avoiding the days when we have full school mass or retreats - why would you? It's the best day of the year. These absences are usually condoned by parents with a phone call in or email to say they are sick. These days build character, culture and are the days they will remember in later years. There is a reason that we are a high performing sort after school, our values are gospel values and Saint John's is a package deal.

I could spend considerable time discussing the plethora of curriculum changes foisted on schools recently however if there is one thing I have learnt is that these changes too will change by the time they get to our doorstep. I do find some irony in that the New Zealand Ministry of Education 'requires state and state-integrated schools and their boards to remain politically impartial and neutral.' while education itself is very much a political football. Having a cross party agreement on a concrete 10 year plan on education would help tremendously, save time and money and perhaps encourage more young people into the profession. As teachers we will work with what we are given but just please stop the constant change, It is our future generations we are experimenting with.

The impact of the Marist Man award has been clear for us to see as our boys look to better themselves. This is an award that encourages and rewards open displays of faith, integrity and service. Boys need a simple and clear blueprint to follow and succeed and Marist Man does that and is obtainable by any boy in the College.

In a similar way we continue to have a focus on achieving excellence and with the launch of the Marist Scholar we have a broader range of ways in which we can acknowledge the successes of those that have achieved academic success. Rather than acknowledging students for academic excellence publicly only at a prize giving we do this much more regularly throughout the year in a way that other boys are witness to and will strive for.

The success story of the year for the College is undoubtedly the performing Arts. There has been an explosion of activity, participation and success in areas that have not always drawn big numbers. Far from being shy about participating in what in a boys school has traditionally been seen by many as uncool, these boys know it actually is cool. And because they believe it they have made it true and they are the ones literally having the times of their lives. Much like the leaders I mentioned earlier, the staff and students have created a momentum and culture where it's not just ok to act, sing or play an instrument - it's actually cool. Who would have thought that putting on a Karaoke event where you had to pay to sing in the library at lunch time to raise money for the choir would work! Well it did. And yes I sang, I pretended to be reluctant but wild horses couldn't have stopped me, and yes

I even paid for the privilege. The renaissance to a large degree has been down to the work of motivated talented selfless staff. There are too many highlights to mention.

Our old boys association recently held a Race day fundraiser at Te Rapa which was a real success. I had an old boy come up and say that they are really proud that Saint John's is punching above its weight in academics, sporting and culture - and it was not like that in his day. While it may not have been like that for him I disagree with his sentiment. Saint John's is not punching above its weight. We are a high performing school just as we should be. A Catholic Boy's school in the Marist tradition with a proud 65 history should indeed be doing well. We know who we are, what we are here to achieve and what type of legacy we owe to the next generation who will continue to take Saint John's forward. We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. Particularly the Marist Brothers.

After 35 years educating teenagers I still get real joy out of the in between moments. The unscripted interactions. You can say many things about the teenage male but he is most certainly 'in the moment' which is the best place to be. Without fail as I walk out of my year 9 English class I will hear boys asking each other what class they have next and if its options - the bell has gone and it is time for said class to start and they have no idea. In the end they follow the kid who has some idea and generally end up in the right place. There is something sublime about those moments and interactions, and there is a purity about being neither worried about the past nor the future, simply being a boy

in the moment. Long may that last and there is a lesson in this to us adults.

Saint John's is a sought after school by Catholic families for very good reasons and are, unfortunately, turning away Catholic boys as we cannot take them all. We are working hard to get a roll increase so that we can meet the demand.

Thank you to you our committed and generous community
Thank you to our dedicated staff and most importantly to you the young Marist Men of Saint John's College - we are indeed all very fortunate to be part of this community.

God Bless