

**“Welcome Address”**  
**by the Head of St Mark’s College, Adelaide,**  
**Professor Don Markwell,**  
**at the College Admission Ceremony,**  
**Thursday 20 February 2020**

In welcoming you to St Mark’s College and this Admission Ceremony, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plain and pay respect to Elders past and present.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land, and we acknowledge that these are of continuing importance to the Kurna people living today.

It is such a pleasure and an honour for me as Head of College to welcome you here this afternoon to this Admission Ceremony at which our new students become, and are recognised as, new members of St Mark’s College.

After the College Club President and I have spoken, the Director of Learning, Dr Rachel Buxton, will introduce each new student by name, home location, course of study, and university. I will formally welcome you as a new member of the College, and then the Dean, Professor Peter Tregear, will ask you to sign the College Roll of Members.

After this ceremony, everyone is invited to a barbecue outside this Hall, after which our new students will say a fond farewell to their family – and I hope a word of gratitude for this life-changing opportunity - before going to a meeting with Residential Advisors in the Learning Commons upstairs.

Parents and other family members and guests are warmly invited to join us again, if you can, at the College’s Commencement Service next Friday afternoon – Friday 28 February – at 5pm in St Peter’s Cathedral, right next door to us, and for drinks afterwards on the Downer House lawn.

Today, it is a delight to welcome you to this Admission Ceremony - our new students, of course, and also parents, other family members and guests who are here to support them. The very warmest of welcomes!

I hope that our guests won’t mind if I address my remarks particularly to our new students – who are, after all, why we are all here this afternoon.

In signing the Roll, each new student becomes officially a member of St Mark’s College, and a member of a special community to which you will belong for the rest of your life.

This College was founded 95 years ago, largely by people who had had the benefit of experience in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge in Britain. They wanted students here in Adelaide to have the same benefits they had had of integrating learning and living together in a college. They saw a college as a residential academic community, in which it is possible

to bring together a variety of elements alongside what each student gained within the wider university – college elements such as academic support, broader intellectual stimulus, activities such as sport, music, drama, and more, community service, opportunities for spiritual reflection in this Anglican Christian foundation, and social activities.

This, they rightly recognised, would enrich the all-round education and personal growth of university students in a community where every student could have a sense of belonging and was supported and challenged to be their best, in which leadership and teamwork skills could be further developed, and in which friendships flourish. That was the goal of our founders in 1925, and that remains our goal today.

Some of the new students whom we welcome into membership of the College today have come from distant Outback towns, some from places nearer, and some from further afield. For every student, wherever you have come from, coming here creates an exceptional educational opportunity for you – almost certainly a life-changing one. I urge you to make the most of this opportunity.

I know from my own life how special such opportunities can be. Please forgive me if I say a word or two about what I have learnt from my own experience. I was born in a little town in the Outback of Queensland, a town then of some 500 people – plus our pet kangaroo - nearly 1000 kilometres west of Brisbane. The nearest high school was 200 kilometres away, the nearest university nearly 1000 kilometres away. The question of whether or how my brothers and sisters and I could go beyond primary school – something our father had not done - was solved by my parents’ decision to move us to Brisbane – where there were high schools.

So, like many people here, I have some personal experience of moving a long distance to have a life-changing educational opportunity. Several years later I had a further experience of moving a great distance for a profound educational opportunity when I was awarded a scholarship to study at Oxford University. Again, a whole new world of opportunities opened up, and five years later I had a permanent teaching position there. No pet kangaroos in Oxford, alas.

It was there that, like the founders of this College generations before, I was exposed to the immense benefits for students of collegiate education – benefits which my colleagues and I are keen to share with all our students here at St Mark’s.

Just this month we have welcomed two new members of staff who have also shared in the benefits of collegiate education both in Australia and overseas.

Our new Director of Learning, Dr Rachel Buxton, was a student here at St Mark’s, and President of our College Club, before going to Oxford as Rhodes Scholar for South Australia in 1998 to do her doctorate in English literature. Rachel has done brilliantly in Oxford, most recently as Senior Tutor of Merton College, one of the most academically successful colleges there, and has returned to us this year as our Director of Learning. In this role, Rachel is responsible for academic support for all our students, and she leads an Academic Team here that is committed to doing all they can to help our students, new and returning, to achieve their best in their studies – something which is crucial to your later life opportunities.

Our new Dean, Professor Peter Tregear, was a college student as an undergraduate and then postgraduate student in Melbourne, before going to King’s College, Cambridge, to do his doctorate in music. Peter too did brilliantly in Cambridge, serving as president of the graduate

students' body at King's College, and becoming a teaching Fellow of Fitzwilliam College, before coming back to Australia to be Dean of Trinity College in the University of Melbourne. He has since held various senior positions, including as Professor of Music and head of the School of Music at the Australian National University. Now as Dean here at St Mark's, Peter oversees our residential life, and is responsible both for student welfare and for upholding our values - including, where necessary, for discipline.

When I say that the Dean is responsible for upholding our values, the truth is that we are all responsible for upholding our values. This is a values-based community in which every member must accept responsibility for living by and helping to uphold our values. In signing the College Roll of Members, each new member of the College is signing under these words: "Upon my enrolment as a member of St Mark's College, I agree to be bound by, and obey honourably, the by-laws, *values*<sup>1</sup> and guidelines as set out in the College Handbook, and do all in my power to promote the honour of the College." This is the pledge which you make today in signing this Roll.

Our values include a commitment to integrity and a commitment to service. A brilliant exemplar of this commitment to service is our Old Collegian Dr James Muecke AM, who was recently named as Australian of the Year, in recognition of his pioneering work in blindness prevention, especially through the charity Sight for All. All our current students have many opportunities to show their commitment to serving both this College community and, importantly, the wider community, including through our St Mark's Charitable Foundation, about which you will learn in coming days.

At the heart of our values also is a commitment to respect and dignity for all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other attribute. We are committed to upholding a culture of respect, of genuine inclusion, and of safety. We will not tolerate sexual misconduct, such as harassment or assault, or degrading, demeaning or dangerous activities of any kind.

The Handbook, which I sent to new students by email last week and which you have in hard copy today, sets out our values and expectations more fully. If you haven't read it yet, please do so in coming days – and help to uphold the values which it sets out.

In becoming a member of this College, you join a values-based adult society – a community in which each student is treated as an adult, and expected to behave as an adult. Like universities and university colleges generally, we deal directly with our students as adults – rather than, as at school, with your parents. Coming to college is a major step on the path from dependence to independence, and it is important that our students – and your parents – understand that ours is a direct relationship with you as an adult student.

Being an adult does not mean there are no rules. Every adult society has rules. Our rules are an expression of our values, and are what is needed for 200 talented and energetic young adults to live together in mutual respect and harmony.

Various of our sessions over the course of Welcome Week will help you to navigate some of these issues – including sessions on respectful relationships, on how to recognise and report sexual assault, on alcohol and drugs, and on developing your leadership capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added.

Leaving school and coming to university and to college represents for most students a step into greater freedom than ever before. It is essential to think carefully about how to use this freedom, and to choose wisely in what you do, and in what you choose not to do. Mistakes recorded on social media can do you immense and permanent harm – and harm also to the College, I might add.

One of the things that I hope will be immediately clear is that this is a community in which there are many people here to support you in good times and in bad. I have mentioned some of our outstanding staff team – and there are others, whom I will introduce to you tomorrow morning. You are meeting with the Residential Advisers upstairs at 7.30 this evening, after the barbecue and after you have said farewell to your family or friends who are here. There are other student leaders as well, such as members of the College Club Committee, members of the Academic Team, and our Assistant Deans – Bronte Phillips and Chad Lennon.

If at any time you need help, or simply have a question, do approach your Residential Adviser or a member of staff or one of the other student leaders – all will be happy to help! Remember that it is entirely natural and completely common to have uncertainties and anxieties, and that the only issues we can't help you with are the ones we don't know about.

Almost all our new students have come straight from secondary school, in some cases after a gap year. This is the beginning of your university studies. As I have mentioned, we are committed to doing all we can to help you in your transition to universities study and in fulfilling your potential this year and every year of your studies.

It is important that every student attend next week the orientation sessions their university has put on, so that you are ready to make the most of your University, your faculty, and your course, from the start of classes on Monday 2 March.

Our academic team – Dr Buxton, the Senior Academic Tutors, and the Academic Coordinators – will help to make you welcome here at St Mark's over coming days, including with a "Uni101" session next Thursday. This will help you to think about the skills needed for success in study at university, and the transition that is needed from what may have worked at school but might not at university.

In my own experience, the lessons include:

- the importance of managing your time, of planning ahead, knowing what you have to achieve by when and thinking ahead about how you will get this done, and of taking responsibility for your effective use of time when neither your parents nor teachers will guide you in the way they often do in school years
- the value of studying consistently through the semester – something you will later regret not doing if you leave things too late, and
- the need to think through for yourself every topic you are studying, of working genuinely to understand what you are aiming to master – to understand the core principles – and not simply to memorise material. This is something you can often perfect and test by talking through what you are learning with other students. Trying to explain something to others can often deepen your own understanding. Asking questions whenever you don't understand can often lead to clarity.

Talking through what you are studying with others is one of the benefits of studying together with other students in groups – something for which college is often ideally suited.

Conversation with others is at the heart of College life – conversation about matters large and small, conversations with students from disciplines and backgrounds quite different from you own as well as within your field. This Dining Hall, where we meet for Formal Hall four nights a week during the teaching semester, is one of the places where conversations happen and where we come together as a College community.

This Dining Hall was built some 60 years ago as a result of generous donations to the College, especially from former students of the College – Old Collegians – who were grateful for the life-changing opportunities they had at St Mark's, and wanted to pass them on and enhance them further for future generations of students. This tradition of philanthropy – of the generosity of friends of collegiate education giving to create the College in the first place, and of Old Collegians and others giving to improve it over the decades – has been central to creating opportunities for students here for nearly a century.

The commitment of Old Collegians to improving the College for the future reflects the fact that, in becoming a member of this College, you are becoming a member of a community to which (as I said at the outset) you will belong for the rest of your life. It is likely that within the next few months, perhaps sooner, you will recognise that some of the friendships you are making here this year will remain some of your most special friendships forever. These friendships will be one of the bonds, I hope, that will sustain your lifelong links with the College.

Like Old Collegians of earlier generations, I hope that every student of the College will in time recognise your debt of gratitude for the generosity of those who have helped to make possible the opportunities you have, and will aim in time – over the decades ahead – to do what you can to hand these opportunities on even better to those who come after you.

More immediately, I hope that tonight you will also recognise your debt of gratitude to your parents and family members, here tonight or elsewhere, whose love and support has made it possible for you to get to this landmark point in your life and to be here this afternoon.

The staff and student leaders are all delighted to welcome you here – and to welcome our new students into the St Mark's College community.

I hope that your time here will be for you, as it has been for so many students in the past, a time of success in your studies and in your extra-curricular activities, a time of growth and broadening horizons, a time of fun and laughter, and loyal friends as well.

Once again, the warmest of welcomes and the best of luck!