

Towards the College's second century

Address to the St Mark's College Old Collegians' Association Dinner

on Friday 26 August 2022

by the Head of College, Professor Don Markwell

Thank you, Michael¹, for your very kind introduction.

Before I thank you further, I want to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plain. We pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.

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.

Thank you again, Michael, for your generous introduction, and thank you for the dedicated service which you have given to the College through your presidency of the Old Collegians' Association over the last three years, and for your nine months as Acting President.

It has been a pleasure to work with you in that role, and I look forward with enthusiasm to your continuing contributions to the College through the Old Collegians' Association, the College Foundation, and in other ways.

Many thank also to others who have been serving on the Old Colls' committee and to those who will serve over the next year. In particular, hearty congratulations to the new President, Riley Glynn, whom I look forward enthusiastically to working with.

If Riley serves the maximum term open to a president under the Old Colls constitution, his presidency will conclude in 2025, our Centenary year – and what a year it is going to be!

As Michael has said, the title of my remarks tonight is “Towards the College's second century”, and I have been encouraged to speak about my vision for the College's future.

St Mark's College was officially opened on 15 March 1925 by the Governor of South Australia, Sir Thomas Bridges, following detailed planning and fund-raising over previous years by remarkable men led by Canon Julian Bickersteth – and also, it is important to note, a women's committee led by Mrs Ernest Good, as she was known in the style of the time. Our founders were committed to creating here in Adelaide the opportunity for university students to have the kind of opportunities for collegiate education which most of our male founders had had in Oxford or Cambridge, or in some cases at Trinity or Ormond in the University of Melbourne or St Paul's College, Sydney.

Nealy 100 years on, my vision, and the College Board's vision, for St Mark's today is that we aspire to offer our students the best all-round university educational experience possible in Australia, and we aspire to making it increasingly comparable with the best in the world – a university experience grounded in the pursuit of academic excellence, collegiality, and service.

¹ Michael van Dissel, President of the Old Collegians' Association in 2019-22.

We aspire to this quality of all-round collegiate education so that we can make the greatest difference for good in the lives of our students that we can, and so that we can help them to make the greatest difference for good that they can in the lives of local, state, national and international communities.

In a very real sense, this vision is to give the best effect we can in the circumstances of our time to the enduring ideals and values for which the College was founded nearly a century ago, and to the centuries-old tradition of collegiate education which our founders had seen so brilliantly expressed in Oxford and Cambridge. Our founders had as their model and their standard the greatest colleges in the world, and so should we.

So, before I talk a little about how we do this in the 21st century, let me say a little more about our founders' vision for collegiate education here in Adelaide.

Our founders wanted to create the opportunity for students of diverse disciplines and backgrounds to live and learn together in a residential academic community that brought together academic aspiration and support; guidance – what we might call mentoring - and pastoral care from the Master, the Chaplain, resident tutors and perhaps other academics; and opportunities for rich extra-curricular life in sport or the arts or other fields, together with social activity. As this was and is an Anglican college, our founders expected participation in Chapel - though the College was always open to people of all denominations or faiths or none. It was expected that enduring friendships would develop between students, and that mature behaviour would prevail among the students and where it did not that remedial action would be taken.

The founders expected that the College would help to develop the leadership capacities of its members, and that many would go on to leadership roles in their professions and the wider community. Importantly, the founders believed that the College could and would promote among its members what they called “the ideal of service”: this was at the heart of the values on which the College was founded. The founding Master, Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, spoke of applying the trained academic mind to the service of others.

In this, by the way, he held up as an exemplar one of our founders, Charles Hawker, who might have been Prime Minister had he not been killed in a plane crash in 1938. Charles Hawker's portrait is in this Ballroom; the anonymous and selfless generosity of his sister, Lilius Needham, later made possible the purchase of Hawker House, named in his memory; and his great-nephew is the outgoing president of the Old Collegians, Michael van Dissel.

The founders explicitly saw themselves as initiating, not only the creation of this College, but the creation of what they hoped would be a network of colleges in Adelaide. It should be no surprise that in later years members of the St Mark's community, perhaps most conspicuously Lady Price – wife of Archie Grenfell Price – helped to lead the creation of St Ann's as a college for women, at a time when single-sex schools and colleges were overwhelmingly what the community expected. This year, of course, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of coeducation at St Mark's, and we are very proud to do so.

In the 1920s, the founding of the College was made possible through generous donations which, in the first instance, enabled the purchase of this building, the former home of the Downer family, in 1924. All of the buildings that have been built or bought since the founding of the College – from the purchase of Downer House and then the construction of

Newland, through to the construction of East Wing and more recently of the carpark – have depended on philanthropic gifts.

In the 1920s also, our founders looked ahead to the creation of scholarships and prizes to attract students to St Mark's, to enable students of potential who could not otherwise afford to be here to do so, and to reward excellence of achievement. When in the early years of the College the first major donations for scholarships came, there was great excitement on the part of the Master and of the College Council. Over subsequent years, reflecting the desire of the founders to build up scholarships to help students to come to St Mark's, more donations came for scholarships and other purposes. Most of the scholarships which have been offered over the decades have depended on generous gifts, as they do today.

Since the opening of the College in 1925, the vision, hard work, and generosity of many have built a College of which we can be very proud – a College whose alumni have given and give so much to the South Australian, wider Australian and international communities, and whose current students show so much ability, vigour, and potential. But like any institution, we can always do better.

Commencing in September 2020, precisely 100 years from the first motion in the Anglican Synod aiming at creating a College, the College Board has spent much time working on a College strategic plan to guide us through to the Centenary and beyond. Through our e-newsletters and in other ways we have invited input from Old Collegians, current Collegians, and friends of the College. Earlier this year, the Board formally endorsed the new strategic plan which emerged from this process. The new strategic plan will be reviewed from year to year, with a major review intended around the time of the Centenary.

In the new strategic plan, the College has committed to providing life-changing opportunities for students in coming years through focusing on seven areas of strategic priority.

These strategic priorities are:

1. Actively encouraging **academic excellence** and supporting career preparation
2. Promoting **student wellbeing and belonging** in a safe, respectful, diverse, and inclusive community
3. Working to **support all students who need it** through a major expansion of scholarships and other financial support for students
4. Developing the **strongest team of staff** who contribute to an exceptional student learning experience
5. Providing an inspiring and sustainable physical environment with **outstanding facilities** and services
6. Developing the **financial resources** needed to achieve these priorities, and
7. Engaging our alumni and friends in **lifelong connections** and in positioning St Mark's for its second century

There is more detail on each of these priorities in the strategic plan, which is, of course, on the College website.

We are working to give effect to each of those priorities, including planning for how to give best effect to them over the years ahead.

Although our founders used different language, I believe that these priorities genuinely do help us to give effect in our time to the founders' vision, appropriately adapted to the circumstances of today.

While we are never complacent, I think we can be proud of where we are today.

In 2022, this is College with a strong academic programme and with strong academic results. Our extra-curricular life is rich and rewarding, and our performance in sports has us leading in the High Table Cup competition, with seven sports down and four to go. Our artistic life is reflected in inspiring Arts Evenings, and in other ways. This October, after a three-year break because of the COVID pandemic, we look forward to the return of Marksensfest as a celebration of the arts and culture. The social life is busy and fulfilling.

The focus on community service, which our founders thought so important, is strong, with excellent work by our students' Charitable Foundation. And each year now we recognise a student who has given selfless service through the awarding of the Lilius Needham Medal for Service. Students have so many opportunities to exercise leadership and develop their leadership skills, and the quality of our student leaders is high.

Being realists, we know that from time to time there are aspects of behaviour that do not live up to the values we stand for. One of these areas is in occasional sexual misconduct. Preventing this and responding appropriately to it is something to which we have given and give very focussed attention, as we work to promote respectful relationships and gender equality. We are clear about our values, especially of respect and dignity for all. Our training, such as on consent and bystander intervention, is extensive and professional. Our policies are clear and strong, and are improved from year to year. And when there is an issue, we take action, firmly but fairly, to uphold our values.

Earlier this year, the College Board – I think wisely - decided that it was time to review what we do and what we can do better to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual assault. We engaged Professor Catharine Lumby from the University of Sydney, a respected expert in this field, to undertake this review. Her review is well underway, and we expect to publish her report in early October.

I am proud of the way our students have contributed to this review, and how many student leaders have taken ownership of the importance of promoting respectful relationships and of continuing to strengthen the positive bonds of community in College.

In this, our students are supported by what I think I am qualified to describe as a truly exceptional staff team. This year, we have been able to expand our staff support for students, through the appointment of a psychologist, Stuart Meldrum, as inaugural Director of Wellbeing, and the appointment of Rachel Buxton to a new mentoring and advisory role. They work alongside our new Dean, Professor Jonathon Allen, and Director of Learning, Dr Katrina Stats.

There is much more I could say to you about the College today. But in short, as we head towards our second century, the College is in good shape. And like any institution, we can always be better. Implementing our strategic plan will guide us as we work towards that.

As we look ahead to the Centenary in 2025 and to our second century beyond, there are three elements that I especially want to mention before I conclude:

First, last year we announced the appointment of two fine historians from the University of Adelaide, Associate Professor Paul Sendziuk and Dr Carolyn Collins, to research and write a history of the College to be published early in the Centenary year. They have been hard at work, using our archives and conducting oral history interviews with older members of our College community – beginning with our oldest Collegian, Dr John Skipper AM, who was in College in 1940 and whose 100th birthday we celebrated in this ballroom last October. Our Centenary historians warmly invite anyone with recollections of the College to be in touch with them. The details of how to do this are on the page of our website called, somewhat unsurprisingly, “Towards our second century”.

Secondly, we will, of course, mark the Centenary with appropriate events. I mentioned that the College was officially opened by the Governor on 15 March 1925. Exactly 100 years to the day, we will mark our Centenary with a gala dinner, which the current Governor, the Hon. Frances Adamson AC, has agreed in principle to attend. We have tentatively booked the Adelaide Convention Centre for this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Other events to mark the Centenary will also include the launching of the Centenary history and, I hope, as on past landmark anniversaries, a service – I hope led by the Archbishop - either in the Cathedral or in the College. I look forward to working with the Old Collegians’ Association on the programme of events for 2025 – and, I hope, to the involvement of as many Old Collegians as possible in celebrating this historic landmark for our College.

Thirdly, just as our founders wanted to see major benefactions for scholarships as well as buildings, so today, as I have mentioned, one of our top priorities is to work to support all students who need it through a major expansion of scholarships and other financial support for students.

While there is significant work to be done to maintain and improve our physical facilities, for which we will need philanthropic support, our most pressing need is for scholarships, especially to enable students of potential to be able to come to and remain at St Mark’s who would not otherwise be able to do so.

Every time each year that we invite applications for scholarships and request detailed financial information about students’ circumstances, I am struck – staggered sometimes – at the extent of the need. The need is real. And every time our students write letters of thanks for the scholarships they receive, it is clear – often movingly so – how important this support is to them and to their families.

Many of our students can only afford to be here because of financial support the College gives them. In some cases, students of potential cannot afford to come even with what we can offer. And too many students need to work too many hours of paid employment, when it is available, at the expense of their marks or of their ability to take advantage of the opportunities that College life should give them.

And so - in addition to the Centenary history and Centenary events for 2025 – we will, in the spirit of our founders and in line with our strategic plan, be undertaking a Centenary fundraising campaign which will have its greatest focus on scholarships.

I am delighted to say that, as well as providing generous support through Annual Giving to help fund our annual scholarship awards, some members of our College community have come forward to endow scholarships. I hope to announce at least one new significant endowment in coming months. But the need remains great, and more needs to be done.

I hope that this is something which everyone in this room tonight, and as many members of our College community as possible, will support with enthusiasm and generosity, to ensure that our College is as well positioned as possible to support our students in our second century.

In this and in other ways we will fulfil our founders' vision, refreshed for our time, and create the best life-changing opportunities we can for our students, whom we are here to serve.

Thank you so much for your support.