

**“Commencement Address”**  
**by the Head of College, Professor Don Markwell AM, for the**  
**Commencement Service for St Mark’s College**  
**St Peter’s Cathedral, Adelaide**  
**Saturday 24 February 2024**

On the day – just nine days ago, though it feels much longer – when our new students were formally admitted to their membership of St Mark’s College, we were welcomed to country by a Kurna Elder, Uncle Rod O’Brien, and a smoking ceremony was conducted by a senior Kurna man, Robert Taylor. As well as playing the didgeridoo, Robert explained to us the significance of the smoking ceremony – including, in his words, as a sign of a “new beginning”.

This Commencement Service is also about a new beginning – the beginning of a new academic year, full of opportunity and potential for every single student; the beginning for our new collegians of their lifelong membership of the St Mark’s community; the beginning of Steve Daughtry’s service as our Chaplain.

The song – the hymn – we sang at the start of this service, “Morning has broken”, is also about new beginnings – each day as a new beginning, “God’s re-creation of the new day”.

Each new day, each new year, is a chance to make a new beginning; and Monday, the first day of university classes, is an especially important chance to make a new beginning, whether you are new to university or your course, or taking up where you left off at the end of last year.

And speaking of last year... I am delighted to be able to say that the overall academic results earned by our students last year were again excellent by any measure. Let me just mention one such measure, which our new collegians heard me mention in the Admission Ceremony: all three of our students who were doing 4<sup>th</sup> year Honours last year secured First Class Honours, and one of them was chosen as Rhodes Scholar for South Australia for 2024, which will take him to postgraduate study in Oxford later this year – the 30<sup>th</sup> Rhodes Scholar in our history.

This is just one of many reasons why we at St Mark’s enter the 2024 academic year with a spring in our step. Our student leaders are excellent, focussed on supporting their fellow students, and have already taken many positive initiatives. Our staff team - here to provide academic, wellbeing, and other support to our students – is second to none. Our superb physical facilities continue to improve, including with the purchase from the Cathedral of the Deanery late last year. This elegant house, right next door to this Cathedral, is home to seven of our students; its purchase in December marked the first expansion of the College’s grounds since 1969, and was fully funded through a most generous gift by our Honorary Fellow Dr Pamela Wall OAM, whom it is a pleasure to welcome here today, along with other supporters of the College to whom we are also very grateful.

As with many other supporters of the College and our students, Pammie and Ian Wall's support for the College arose from gratitude – gratitude that Ian's remarkable success had, he believed, been made possible through what he gained from his five years as a student at St Mark's. We in turn could hardly be more grateful.

As well as being grateful to donors towards our physical facilities, we are most grateful to those – a number of whom I am delighted are here today - who create life-changing opportunities for students through the provision of scholarships which enable them to be at St Mark's. The need for such scholarships remains very real indeed, and their positive impact is profound. I join with the students who benefit from these in saying heartfelt thanks.

St Mark's was founded 100 years ago next year to create transformative opportunities for students, and next year, of course, we will celebrate our Centenary, for which we are excitedly preparing, including with the writing of the history of the College by two University of Adelaide historians, and preparing for major events, including the Gala Dinner on Saturday 15 March 2025, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the day of the opening of the College in 1925. I hope that everyone here today will help to celebrate the College Centenary next year.

The founders of the College had high ambitions for St Mark's, and a strong sense of values. Today we too aspire to offer our students the best all-round educational experience we can, and for this to be grounded in enduring values.

An important development of the last 18 months, initiated by our student leaders, has been the writing by students of what is called the Living Document of Values – a document that, revised from last year to this by student leaders, sets out key values and what they mean in the lives of our students. Those values are: Integrity, Collegiality, Respect, Growth, and Generosity. Yesterday and today have seen, for the second year in a row, the signing of the Living Document by our students, pledging to uphold those values. And the signed document will again be hung prominently in the College as a frequent reminder of the values by which we live.

One of the motivations of our founders in creating St Mark's was for it to be a place where students would learn the importance of service to others, and for St Mark's students to go on to serve the wider community throughout their lives, including applying their academic learning to helping others. That sentiment is expressed in the College prayer, which says: "Give to all who study here a true love of knowledge ... so that we may be equipped for service". It is expressed in the College hymn, which our Choir will soon sing, which asks that the wisdom of "those who teach and those who learn" may be turned to the service of our fellow men and women.

In the same spirit, in the Living Document of Values, our student leaders have said, under the heading "Generosity":

As St Mark's Collegians, we are in the fortunate position to be able to actively support others inside and external to our College community. The College experience is transformative, and we can use what we have gained from our time here to benefit the broader community, both while we are students here and once we have left.

This, I think, is a statement and a commitment of which our founders would be proud, and they would be proud also of the work of our students' Charitable Foundation in its emphasis on volunteering time and effort to help others, as well as on fundraising for charity.

They would be proud also of those many members of the College community who, grateful for what St Mark's does in the lives of its students, do what they can to hand on and improve this life-changing opportunity for future generations of Collegians. This too is a form of service to others.

You might have noticed that while the College prayer refers to the love of *knowledge*, the College hymn refers to *wisdom*; and our first reading from the Bible today, read by our Director of Learning, Dr Katrina Stats, also urges us to seek wisdom. Wisdom is greater than knowledge – wisdom means not just knowing things, but developing deep understanding, developing good judgement, reflecting on and learning from experience, knowing how to use our knowledge for good purposes, and being grounded in good values – good values such as those referred to in our second reading, read by our College Club President, Eloise Montefiore, and good values such as those set out by our student leaders in our Living Document of Values. It also involves, in a phrase we have often used in recent years, working to be “the best version of yourself”.

While College is a place for acquiring knowledge, immersing yourself in a range of activities, developing friendships, and having a great deal of fun, I hope it is also a place where you can pursue wisdom, develop good judgement, reflect on what you can learn from the experiences you have, think about the values you believe are important, and live those values, including a commitment to service, every day – both while you are in College and in the years to come.

I wish every student of St Mark's, and everyone here today, a great year in 2024 – a new beginning for us all.