

**Address at the Final Service for St Mark's College
by the Head of College, Professor Don Markwell AM,
St Peter's Cathedral, Adelaide
Saturday 26 October 2024**

The theme of this service is gratitude. It is, after all, a Thanksgiving Service to mark the end of the academic year.

Our wonderful Chaplain, Steve Daughtry, to whom we are very grateful, has reminded us of the importance of gratitude, of identifying what we should be grateful for, and of saying "thank you", perhaps even doing so tonight.

In this spirit, as I look back on 2024 at St Mark's and ahead to 2025, I too would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks. In preparing for this service, I have thought a lot about what I am grateful for.

I am grateful that St Mark's College has such inspiring students – young people of potential, sometimes greater potential than you realise, who are not only great achievers but who are good people, and fun to be around. I am proud of the students of St Mark's, and I am grateful for you.

I am grateful that we have a college culture that is, with rare exceptions, safe, inclusive, and respectful. We aspire and we work to have a culture of excellence, a culture of wellbeing, a culture of service, a culture of friendship: a culture we must never take for granted, but all of us must do our best to embody and uphold, recognising when we fall short and doing all we can to make that good.

I am grateful that we have been fortunate to have such able and committed student leaders in 2024 and in recent years.

I am grateful that we have a truly outstanding team of staff, who work with such commitment to support our students, who work in partnership with our students, and who are a joy to work with.

I am grateful that the College's Board has helped to guide the College to its current strong position and towards our second century.

I am grateful that St Mark's is a community based on values, and that our student leaders of recent years have written and revised and helped to uphold a statement of the values for which we stand – the Living Document of Values, which every student has pledged to uphold. You may have noticed that the values expressed in the Living Document were cited in the prayers which our 2025 Assistant Deans prayed earlier in this service. Those prayers said – I quote:

"Help us all to demonstrate the values of integrity, collegiality, respect, growth, and generosity, and inspire us to live lives of service ... "

I am grateful that St Mark's College was founded nearly 100 years ago based on values, including a commitment to educating young people who would "live lives of service", using their talents and their education to serve others. This commitment to "the ideal of service", as some of our founders called it, has been reflected in 2024 in the outstanding work of the Charitable Foundation, not only in fundraising but even more importantly in volunteering time and effort to serve others.

It has been inspiring to see such new student initiatives in service, including the volunteering for the Mary Magdalene Centre, with students preparing over 800 meals for people in need, and for the sleepouts to deepen understanding of being homeless; and the Ping-pong-a-thon to raise funds for the battle against modern slavery.

I am grateful too that our students of 2024, including but not only our student leaders, have done so much to support your fellow students. The ethos of looking out for each other, of helping each other, is strong at St Mark's.

We place emphasis on service that does not seek recognition or reward – service to others that is its own reward. Later this evening, we will present the Lilius Needham Medal for Service for 2024, awarded to a student who has given significant and sustained service to the College or the wider community in a selfless way.

This emphasis on selfless and humble service was reflected in our prayers read by Annie and Ben, which spoke of "choosing always to serve rather than to seek attention and honour", and gave thanks "for all those who quietly serve the community".

It was reflected also in "The Servant Song" which our Choir sang just now.

It struck me, in listening to that beautiful song, that there is a strong link between the notion of selfless service – of helping others, of being there for others, without seeking reward – and the fact that so many of us make, as I hope you have, deep and enduring, perhaps even lifelong, friendships in this community. As "The Servant Song" says:

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are trav'lers on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will weep when you are weeping;
When you laugh I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
'Til we've seen this journey through.

As well as in the countless acts of kindness we see between fellow students in our community, we see this commitment to helping each other reflected in the work of our wellbeing team – our Residential Advisers and Wardens and our Indigenous Student

Advisors, working in partnership with our Director of Wellbeing – and we see it in the work of the Club’s Equity Officers, including their new initiatives of 2024.

One part of our emphasis on wellbeing is helping students to develop those skills and character traits that will enable them to deal resiliently with the ups and downs of life. One of the ways of doing this and of promoting your own wellbeing is to identify and to express what you are grateful for.

Just as students and staff alike have provided wellbeing support to others, so our academic team – our Senior Academic Tutor, Academic Coordinators, and our many tutors, working in partnership with our Director of Learning – have provided great support to fellow students in their studies. Our overall academic results for last semester were outstanding, and a great encouragement to do well in the assessments ahead.

So I am grateful for the work of student leaders and staff in providing both wellbeing and academic support, and in providing all those social, sporting, cultural, and other activities that make our College life so vibrant and enriching.

I am grateful for the hard and effective work of the College Club Committee, working in partnership with our Dean, in all they have achieved so well from Welcome Week to today – just two of the many highlights for me this year have been the Christmas-themed College Ball and the superb Marksenfest, our annual music festival.

I am grateful to everyone who has taken part in or supported the sporting life of our community, contributing not only to our wins in swimming, women’s football, women’s hockey, men’s basketball (for the first time since 2016), and in athletics, but showing good sportsmanship and, when needed, grace in the face of disappointment. Next year we intend to be just as gracious, but less disappointed! Hashtag: yes we can.

I wish that time permitted me to go through all the other students and staff to whom I am grateful for what you do for the College and for our students. To you, I say “thank you”.

Let me say “thank you” also to our donors. Our donors are people who recognise all the good that St Mark’s can do, and in many cases are grateful for what St Mark’s has done for them or for their loved ones – and so they give generously to provide opportunities for current and future students of St Mark’s.

Perhaps, being grateful for what St Mark’s has done for you, you too will in years to come do what you can to help St Mark’s Collegians who come after you.

You may have heard me say before that every building that St Mark’s has bought or built – from buying Downer House in 1924 to start the College, to buying the Deanery less than a year ago – has depended on the generosity of donors committed to providing for the students of St Mark’s; and we could not be more grateful.

The Deanery has enabled us to provide more students with the opportunity to be at St Mark's last year and this than at any time in our history. And record enrolments seem set to continue next year as well.

Many students depend on scholarships to be able to be at St Mark's, or to be able to take full advantage of their student years; so I am grateful for the remarkable generosity of those who give to create life-changing opportunities through scholarships, especially enabling students to be at St Mark's who otherwise could not.

In 2024, six new scholarships have been created through the generosity of donors, scholarships which will be awarded for the first time in 2025. This includes, most recently, the gift by the Old Collegians' Association of \$100,000 to the College to mark the College's Centenary and to endow a new bursary.

What a wonderful way that is to mark the College's 100th birthday and the start of our second century, and to change the lives of future Collegians!

And speaking of the Centenary – one of the highlights of 2024 was the excitement of launching the Centenary logo with it painted brightly on the College tennis courts, with a throng of students and staff surrounding it captured by drone photography.

I am grateful that there is so much interest among current and Old Collegians and friends of the College in coming together to celebrate our Centenary, including at our Gala Dinner on 15 March 2025, 100 years to the day from the official opening of the College in 1925, and other events on that Gala Weekend in mid-March, and later on Founders Day back in this Cathedral on Sunday 4 May. All members of the St Mark's community, including parents of current and past Collegians, are welcome at all the celebrations.

As I think about all I am grateful for, there is so much more I could say.

I am grateful to the Choir and to Steve, and to the Cathedral, including the Cathedral organist and stewards, for all you have done for this service.

But let me finish by saying that I am grateful to those who are leaving the College for all you have contributed to St Mark's, and for your commitment to staying in touch with the College, both in our Centenary year and over the decades ahead.

I hope that tonight and in times to come you too may take a moment to reflect on what you are grateful for, and to do what Steve has encouraged us all to do, which is to say "thank you".