

**“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 1 March 2025**

Over the last nine days, it has been a great pleasure to welcome new members of the St Mark’s community – our newest Collegians – to the College, as well as welcoming back an exceptional number of students returning to St Mark’s.

Not only does 2025 see the largest enrolment of students in our history, but it also sees a student population of exceptional talent and potential, excellent student leaders, and a staff team to support our students which is second to none.

These last nine days will perhaps be a blur of activity for many, but I hope that in that time all our students have been made to feel welcome – genuinely welcome – in this community, have in some ways become ready for the start of university classes on Monday, and – I hope – have lived our values in action, and seen their fellow Collegians do the same.

In another nine days from now, on 10 March, it will be 100 years to the day since the first students moved into their rooms in Downer House, then the College’s only property, in preparation for the official opening of St Mark’s College by the Governor of South Australia on 15 March 1925 – and exactly 100 years on from that official opening, we will mark the Centenary of the College with a weekend of events in which I hope that everyone will take part as much as you can.

Our founders, setting out to create a college, faced many challenges. One of them was to buy a property to house the College, and it was only because of generous donations that Downer House could be bought in which to make a start. They also had the challenge of deciding on a name. Living in the dark shadow of World War I, they settled on the name “St Mark’s” because the Anzac landings at Gallipoli in 1915 had fallen on St Mark’s Day; and as the winged lion was the symbol of St Mark, it became the symbol of St Mark’s College, as it is today.

The College opened in 1925 with only nine students, but with a great vision, clear values, and high hopes to create a college that would give to students all the benefits of living and learning together in a residential academic community with academic and wellbeing support, extra-curricular activities, and the prospect of lifelong friendships.

That remains our goal today, and the achievements of our students, including in excellent academic results and in community service, and the friendships and mutual support that develop here suggest that the vision and values of our founders are alive and well today. I

am delighted that several of our academic award winners of last year have come back to be with us here this evening.

As we celebrate the College's Centenary, we also enter our second century, and as we do, we recommit to upholding the values for which we stand.

In the mock exam which our first-year students did this morning, they were again this year asked how many times the word "values" appears in the College Handbook. The exam paper actually gave them the answer: 102. And the mock exam also asked our new students to name the five values that are in the student-written Living Document of Values which our students signed yesterday, pledging to uphold it. As Steve<sup>1</sup> alluded to, the answer is: integrity, collegiality, respect, growth, and generosity.

I think that the founders of the College would have been very pleased to see our values expressed by the students of 100 years later in those words. They would have seen in the word "growth" their and our commitment to academic excellence. They would have seen in the word "respect" the kind of mutual respect between individuals, including between men and women, that they wished to encourage, just as we do. And they would have seen in the word "generosity" a commitment to what they called "the ideal of service", and which we try to live up to in service within the College and in the wider community, including as we encourage every student to think about how they can, throughout their lives and careers, put their skills and knowledge – the fruit of their education – to the service of others.

As we recommit to upholding the values for which we stand, we of course recognise that not everything is always as it should be, but we continue to strive to narrow the gap between noble aspiration and imperfect reality.

Nowhere is this more important than in promoting respect for all regardless of gender or ethnicity or other attribute. We live in a world, even in a country, that has witnessed in recent years a resurgence of racism in various forms and a resurgence of sexism, including with some young men deluded by social media influencers and others into thinking that sexist attitudes or actions are okay. They never are, and we at St Mark's reaffirm our commitment to the belief, which we will continue to uphold, that all people deserve respect and dignity regardless of their gender, race, or other attributes.

The celebration of our Centenary will reflect the fact that, not only is St Mark's a values-based community, but that it is a community of which you will be a warmly welcome member for the rest of your life. Around a thousand people will be taking part in our Centenary Gala Weekend, and most of them are Old Collegians coming back from around the world and around Australia to reconnect with their college and to reconnect with the friends they made here, as well as to make new St Mark's friends – including perhaps in some cases with you.

Many of our Old Collegians, being grateful for all they gained from their time at St Mark's, and many friends of the College generously donate to create opportunities for later

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<sup>1</sup> The Chaplain, the Rev'd Canon Stephen Daughtry.

generations of Collegians, including through improving our facilities, funding scholarships, and even helping to sponsor students to attend the Centenary Gala Dinner. I hope that one day you might do the same.

I am very grateful that several members of our Old Collegians' Association committee are with us here this evening, along with many other much-valued members of the St Mark's community, and I am very grateful that the Old Collegians' Association is making a generous gift to the College to mark our Centenary through endowing a bursary – another scholarship – for future St Mark's Collegians.

Each year current and Old Collegians and friends of the College join together soon after Anzac Day to mark Founders' Day, when we honour our founders, and also honour Anzac Day and St Mark's Day. This year, our Centenary year, we will have a very special Founders' Day on Sunday 4 May, with afternoon tea at the College and then a Founders' Day service in this Cathedral with the Archbishop. I hope that all of us will take part in that special Centenary celebration, honouring our heritage while building the future.

One of the reasons that so many Old Collegians will take part in Centenary celebrations is that St Mark's has been for them a place of friendship and mutual support.

In a few moments, Grace and Rachael<sup>2</sup> will sing what I have to confess is one of my favourite songs, "Stand by Me"<sup>3</sup> – a song that's essentially about standing by each other in times of trouble. One of the things that endlessly impresses me about the wonderful students of St Mark's College is how well they – you – stand by each other in times of trouble as well as in good times, in times of disappointment and distress as well as in times of triumph.

That beautiful spirit makes me very proud of the students of our College, and I think our founders would be proud of you too.

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<sup>2</sup> Grace Cher and Rachael Bird.

<sup>3</sup> Written by Ben E. King, Jerry Leiber, and Mike Stoller.