

HIGH ACHIEVERS ASSEMBLY, 2020

Principal's Speech

Good Morning High Achievers of 2019, families, staff and students

Every Australia Day we acknowledge those people in our country who have made a significant contribution to the lives of Australians and for some people around the world. The highlight of Australia Day is the recognition of the Australian of the Year. 2020 was no different.

2020 Australians of the Year

1. **The Australian of the Year** was James Muecke, eye surgeon who works in helping to prevent blindness. Commencing his career in Kenya he has more recently turned his focus to Type 2 Diabetes, which is the leading cause of blindness in adults
2. **Australian Local Hero of the Year.** Bernie Skakeshaft is the founder of BlackTrack Youth Works Program which works with at-risk teenagers in Armidale NSW to help them on the path towards employment and further education and training. (For note, Bernie is an ex student of Marist College Eastwood in Sydney.)
3. **The Senior Australian of the Year** is Professor John Newnham who is a world leader in the prevention of preterm birth, which is the single greatest cause of death and disability in children up to five years of age.

His program, the Raine Study, has helped prevent preterm birth, receiving results of an eight percent reduction in premature births in WA.

4. **The Young Australian of the Year** is Ashleigh Barty. Ashleigh Barty is the World No 1 Ranked Women's Tennis Player. She is a tremendous competitor. Her achievements have been many, notably winning last year's French Open, the Women's Tennis Association and holding down the No. 1 Ranking since September. On winning this prestigious award, Barty said:

- *"All of my values that I've lived by and try to live by every single day, regardless of whether it's in sport ... all come from mum and dad," she said.*
- *"It's about being humble and respectful, and giving it a crack - trying to be the best you can be, and that's all you can ask of yourself."*

On giving back to community she said

- *"I'm very proud of my Indigenous heritage Giving back to my community is very important to me and I hope to inspire many more Indigenous kids to get active and enjoy their tennis."*

Ash Barty is an incredible Australian.... She is all of 23 years of age. She has achieved so much. Her message, underpinned by a grounded humility, is significant for all of us here today..... "It's about being humble and respectful, and giving it a crack - trying to be the best you can be, and that's all you can ask of yourself."

As we celebrate the achievements of the graduating Class of 2019, the challenge for all of us is how we seek to participate, contribute and make a difference to the world in which we live. Put simply, *giving it a crack*.

Each person who was recognised this year in the Australian Day honours has made a contribution to society by seeking to improve the lives of others and in doing so building a better world. Ash Barty, as an example, inspires many young people to take up sport by her commitment and diligence to develop the gifts and talents that she has been given.

What is also perhaps less known about Ash is that she is a proud Ngaragu woman from southern NSW and north-eastern Victoria. As an indigenous Australian she wants to make a contribution to Closing the Gap in the inequality that permeates the lives of indigenous Australians.

Last week, the Australian Government reported on the Closing the Gap initiative which commenced in 2008. In 2020 the report shows a staggering failure still to meet targets in improving levels of Indigenous childhood mortality, life expectancy, school attendance and employment. These areas we see as a right, not a privilege.

Mr Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians, said *"an Indigenous child mortality rate is twice the rate for non-Indigenous children and that this shouldn't be occurring in a first-world nation."* His statement to governments and agencies was, *"we still have a lot of work to do"*.

As Australians, we all need to ask ourselves, how can we make a contribution to walking with indigenous Australians. Mr Wyatt said Australians needed to show kindness and believe in indigenous Australians to help close the gap. This is the way forward, he said.

The significance of this for us today is that learning enables us to have choices and make decisions about how we will seek to serve our community into the future. The example of why learning is so important and why we celebrate it today is exemplified not just by the inspiration of the Australians of the Year, like Ashleigh Barty, but also by the two significant people we recognise in this College –

- St Marcellin Champagnat – 200 years ago he saw a need to support the education of rural young people in Southern France. In 2020, there are Marist educational institutions in over 80 countries.
- St John Henry Newman - Newman lived in the 19th Century; he was a theologian, poet and priest. But what he was revered for was his pursuit of academic excellence as a writer and critical thinker. His prolific writing focused on the search for truth and the freedom of conscience. Newman's writings fostered community and prioritized education.

All of these people provide inspiration to every member of our College community. We can make a difference, we can change the world, we can dream big.....and it starts today, as it does every day with the opportunities we are afforded by living in this great country.

For the Class of 2019, you are acknowledged today because of hard work, belief and faith in what was possible.

Your efforts, demonstrated by application, resilience, discipline, shared values friendships and self-belief, have enhanced our Newman culture. Many thanks must go to Ms Bramanto, leader of wellbeing, your teachers and families for supporting you on your journey.

Thank you for sharing your gifts and talents, for sharing your leadership; your presence today is valued and acknowledged. Let us put our hands together for the Class of 2019.

TO OUR STUDENTS PRESENT IN THE AUDITORIUM TODAY

The journey you are undertaking is only the beginning. Aspire and dream about the things you want to do in life. Take each day as a new opportunity to learn something new, to deepen your knowledge, cultivate relationships and participate and contribute to every moment of your day. Newman College affords you so many opportunities that for many people are a privilege. It is incumbent upon you to take responsibility for your learning, for your future as Australians. We can all aspire to be like Ash Barty and it starts by *having a crack* today.

CONCLUSION

- As a community we will continue to support each other to grow in our strengths – students, teachers and families.
- To do so, like the Australians of the Year, we need to be resilient, work hard and set goals.

For our High Achievers we wish you all the best in the next stage of your journey. We will pray for you as we do for all ex-students as they seek to make their mark in the world.

In the words of Saint John Henry Newman:

Let us grow in wisdom and love
and act with courage to choose what is right.
May we always be open to change
and have the strength to accept
what is new and valuable.
Give us peace and happiness in what we do.

We ask this through Jesus, Your Son,
and Mary, our Mother.

Amen.
