

Years 7-11 Awards Assembly 2020

Good Morning Students, Staff and Families

Unlike those across the world, Australia has been relatively free of COVID-19. Around 570,000 cases world-wide are confirmed each day and approximately 8,300 deaths are recorded as well.

Australia is currently recording 0 community related COVID-19 cases and 0 deaths.

Leading into Christmas, here in Perth, we are looking forward to celebrations with family and friends, with no restrictions on numbers.....and possibly a holiday within WA or even interstate.....

But we must not forget those students around the world of similar age..... For them, the coming festive celebrations will be very different as their experience of COVID-19 has been one that has seen many of them learn in isolation.

Across the world, many organisations, both government and non-government, have come together to assist students and communities in their efforts to support the wellbeing of communities, particularly students at this time.

One such organisation is UNESCO which is an organisation that contributes to the peace and security in the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and communication, in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for universal freedoms.

As a result of COVID-19 a key UNESCO initiative has been the “MY COVID-19 Story” where young people have been invited to tell their stories and experiences.

The questions they were asked to consider included:

- how they feel, how they act
- what makes them feel worried and what future they envision
- how the crisis has affected their lives
- the challenges they face
- new opportunities being explored
- and their hopes for the future

Nanda, 17 year old from Indonesia says

“I miss seeing my friends and talking to them face to face and having classes together. I also miss my school routine, waking up early in the morning and worrying about the homework I didn’t do. I believe we will get through this, stay optimistic.”

Marwa, a high school student from Lebanon says:

“I know that we are all living in difficult times, but remember that after the rain, there is always a rainbow. Coronavirus might be tough, but we are tougher.”

Laura a student from Italy says:

“People inside the community start to be more aware of how much their behaviour can affect the world, - toward a more sustainable mentality to appreciate what really matters in life: health and family.”

The experiences of these students have not been our experiences in Western Australia of COVID-19. Our lockdown, for all of 9 days, gave us a brief glimpse that has not been a lived reality for so many other young people, in our own country, specifically Victoria, and for many others across the world.

Today, we have the opportunity to give thanks and be grateful that we can celebrate the achievements of our College. And in doing so take this moment to place ourselves, perhaps as that student in another country who today is sitting at home isolated from their extended family, from their friends, from their school and from their community.

Recently, I was speaking with members of our Marist community in our Victorian schools who had been in lockdown for 120 days. They were asked what were their hopes for 2021.... All in unison said that they wanted to go back to normal. Normal is.....

- That we can move freely without restriction about who we see and how we see them,
- To go to school, to see our friends, cultivate our relationships and build community
- To be able to celebrate milestones such as we have done this year with our Year 12 Graduation, and now this week with our Year 10 River Cruise, Year 11 Dinner Dance, let alone have this Awards Assembly.

In recent days there has been a light emerging from the darkness with the news of the successful trialling of a vaccine to combat this coronavirus.

What this pandemic has offered the world has been the combination of the very best minds who have sought to solve this crisis, working together in solidarity.

The World Health Organisation has called for a political commitment from world leaders to ensure equal distribution of vaccines when they become available. This is particularly so for communities that are marginalised and where access to the provision of health care is scarce because of their abject poverty.

In our community we particularly think of those non-government organisations we have worked with in the Philippines over the past 5 years. The Preda foundation, as example, supports young marginalised youth, specifically homeless children who often are incarcerated - that is in jail cells where there could be up to 50-60 children living in a normal sized classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit communities such as these hard and it is our hope that they will not be forgotten in the coming months.

It is important within our Catholic community, if not our country, that we continually look out, not just in; that we promote the common good, the option for the poor, the needy who deserve the same right of distribution of a vaccine as any other person in the world.

Today we recognise the achievements of those who have excelled in their academic, sporting and cultural pursuits. We celebrate our Vision for Learning - Shine through Discovery, *let your light shine*, and what it represents - that we in our PK-12 College value learning, value education and the impact it will have on our destiny.

More specifically, our Vision, our Marist school, values the individual dignity of each person and the gifts and the talents God has given us and the opportunity they we all have to *let their light shine*.

The pursuit of excellence is a decision we all have to make - what you do, with what has been given to you is your decision. In this Marist school you, we, have a place, a space where you are valued, you are cared for, loved, cherished, and supported. Education is not a privilege, it is a right. Your aspirations, your dreams are yours to live.

Our hope in this community is that you grow to be critical thinkers, to be advocates, to be change agents who seek to make a difference in the world. Perhaps there are aspirant scientists here today who will solve future crises as we've seen in 2020.

Students, your time in school is limited but the impact it will have on your life will be defining. Use your time wisely, make the most of it.

As we rightly affirm and celebrate today, I want all of you to remember those students across the world who do not have the same privilege as we have.

Education is a precious gift; nurture it, embrace it, make the most of the opportunities that are afforded to you here, preparing you for the journey ahead.

Thank you for the wonderful year that we have had; there are so many lights that shine in each one of you. Thank you to your teachers, your family and friends for the love, support and mentoring they provide every day.

I particularly would like to single out a very special person in our community who is finishing their tenure as Vice Principal at the end of this year. Ms Fogliani has been a leader who has exemplified the very the living embodiment of what it means to be a Marist educator. Her commitment to and love for young people is demonstrated by service and a humility that enables those in her presence to shine. Her gifts are many and her efforts are tireless in being present to all people. We thank you as a College community for what you have achieved at Newman College. We give thanks to God and we wish you the very best in your appointment as Principal of Mercy College Mirrabooka in 2021.

In conclusion, as we move into 2021 let us not lose hope of what is possible for ourselves, for each other and for our community.

Pope Francis in his Fratelli Tutti Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship (#55) says this of hope...

I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope “speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks too us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love.... Hope is bold: it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life

more beautiful and worthwhile". Let us continue, then to advance along the paths of hope.

I wish everyone the very best for the remainder of the year, filled with the blessings that Christmas and the birth of Christ bring to us all.

John Finneran

PRINCIPAL