

Sr Margaret Mary Flynn Province Leader Australia and South East Asia and members of the IBVM, Mr Andrew Quoye, Chair of the Loreto Normanhurst School Board and members of the Board, Fr Michael Stoney and the Very Reverend Dr David Ranson, Special Guests, Members of the 120 Year Committee, Parents, Staff and Students.

On a rainy day, much like today, in 1896 a formidable Irish sister called Mother Gonzaga Barry was brought here to this beautiful land. When she arrived the clouds parted and a rainbow appeared and she said "This is where I will build my school". A year later on this day 120 years ago in 1897 the school was built and operational and the foundation stone was laid and Loreto Normanhurst had begun.

So, what did those words mean for Mother Gonzaga Barry 120 years ago?

School for her, as we know, was essential for young women and for Catholic families. It was important to her that education was holistic and accessible. School for her meant that every girl, despite her background, was given '... a chance of distinguishing herself...'. She had opened a school in Ballarat twenty years earlier and then a teachers College later when there were no teachers for her schools. For Gonzaga Barry and for all those that followed her there was a commitment to the values of Freedom, Truth and Sincerity, described by Mary Ward in her writings hundreds of years prior. These new Loreto schools were places where girls could thrive, learning about the love of God and a relevant education of the times.

At Normanhurst in 1896 when they found the land it was bare apart from orchards and farmland and so this place would be the new country boarding school accommodating the students and the sisters together. Now 120 years later that tradition of country boarding is still at the centre of our identity here at Loreto Normanhurst. How lucky are we that Gonzaga Barry and her supporters had the foresight to build our school and how wonderful that our school has thrived and grown through the excellent stewardship of the IBVM and those that have worked in partnership with them.

Throughout those 120 years we have been the parish church of Normanhurst from 1954 when the Chapel was built, we have been the novitiate where many of the IBVM sisters who sit with us here today, spent their formative years as young Loreto sisters. We have been a school that has contributed greatly to the growth of women and the growth of education in Australia. We have been a place where faith is central, academic rigour and a striving for excellence is encouraged, a place where community is celebrated and where young women find their bliss through extra-curricular pursuits.

We have been and continue to be a school where social justice underpins and informs our choices and where joy is palpable. We are a school that is diverse and supportive, where we are known for being natural, relaxed and quietly self-assured.

Today, it is fitting that we should celebrate our 120 years together with song and dance and in prayer expressing our gratitude for all those present and to those who have walked the path of Loreto Normanhurst before us. To the Guring-gai people who first walked on the land, to the sisters who worked the land and taught the lessons, to the girls that sit before us to the many that skipped through the halls over the years, to the parents that supported each new idea with respect and encouragement and to the dedicated staff who have brought their brilliance and enthusiasm to their everyday work.

To all of us that have made the colour that has made our beautiful Loreto Normanhurst rainbow come alive for each and every one of those 120 years right up until and including all of us assembled here today, we give thanks.

Thank you to all assembled here today for the contribution you make to Loreto Normanhurst in your time here and for what you will go on to achieve. You must take your Loreto education with you as a precious gift wherever you go knowing you have a responsibility to share your gifts with others.

Never forget you must always do your best to stand up for what is right, to spread your gentle feminism resolutely and wisely and contribute in a positive way to promote a faith that does justice.

Today we are 120 years young and we cast our eyes forward to dream of the next 120 years just as Mary Ward, Teresa Ball and Gonzaga Barry did in their time, knowing that we must always be Loreto people who are “constant, efficacious and loving”.

Thank you

I now introduce St Margaret Mary Flynn Province Leader to the podium.