



Principal's Message Transcript – 29 January 2021, Newsletter

Good afternoon to all members of the Loreto Normanhurst community and welcome to the 2021 school year. Welcome back to those returning families and a most warm welcome to all our new families of students across Years 5 to 11, in the day school and in Boarding. As I said to you yesterday in my message, you're most welcome in this beautiful open circle of friends and I hope that last night your girls either picked up the phone or had a video call or came home if they're a day student with stories of their first day here at school.

For us, most definitely, the heartbeat of our beautiful school returned from Wednesday afternoon when the boarders started coming back. And yesterday, of course, we were all one once more. And you could definitely feel the energy pick up, as I said to a few staff members; you could feel the energy of this place really gaining intensity and in remarkable Felicity, as all those lives returned for another year of learning, another year of growth and relationships and another year of friendship and accompaniment as we make sense of our days and our lives.

I hope it's been a restful break for all of our families - an opportunity to slow down and possibly a different way of spending Christmas with various things happening and not being able to hop on planes as we often do at that time of the year - but that it was a true time of joy and tranquility for you, and no doubt rest. As many of the girls told me, they had an opportunity for a lot of that as did we, the staff here, which is always something of great delight over the break.

However, lots of stuff happening since we were last together as you would expect no doubt. Of course, we ended the year with those remarkable academic results of our Class of 2020. And I hope you're able to engage with those stories of our girls; we're remarkably proud of each and every one of them, and look forward to the opportunity to having the girls back next week when we celebrate and acknowledge their achievements at the Senior School assembly. We're really looking forward to that.

Over the break here onsite, I just thought I'd share a few updates of what's been happening. We've had a lot of work going on to ensure that this school year was ready to start as we want it to. And of course, the grounds are looking beautiful for our girls and the staff as always and there's a lot of work done there, for which I'm very grateful. We've also had some upgrades in our learning spaces. Two of our six science labs have been refurbished; the remaining four will be refurbished in the next holiday break. So we've had some upgrades and science upgrades in the Music and Visual Arts areas as well, which is very exciting in the Senior School. There's just a little bit of construction left - the final days of the installation - of a new lift to improve accessibility for students, staff and visitors on the site in some of the senior school areas. That's also been a significant piece of work. And with great excitement, I was able to confirm for the girls that we've also refurbished a space in the Mary Ward Centre with a sprung floor so that we have a second space for our dance students, a beautiful dance studio space where they're able



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to express themselves, to learn in their dance lessons, as well as in their extra-curricular activities in a truly fit-for-purpose space. So I just wanted to update you parents and to thank those parents who contribute to the Building Fund of the school. We're most grateful for those contributions. And to give you my assurance, as always, that those contributions go directly back into improving the campus, the programs, and into ensuring a truly holistic education for the girls. So thank you. And hopefully, over the months and weeks, you'll have an opportunity to visit some of those spaces I've just described, and most definitely to hear all about them from your girls.

Over the break, some of our athletes have been particularly active, far more active than me, if truth be told. We had an extremely successful rowing camp in January. My gratitude to Mr. Edmunds, the Head of Rowing and to all the rowing coaching staff for the way in which they carefully and thoughtfully programmed that rowing camp week, and then obviously for all their work day by day with the girls. Congratulations to the girls for your grit, your friendship and camaraderie from the videos and stories and photos I've seen. From my conversations with the rowers, it sounds like it was a really successful preparation for this term ahead and for the second half of the rowing season.

Congratulations also to our swimmers and to our Loreto Normanhurst Swim Club. There was the State Championships over the break in December at SOPAC and you'll read about that in the sports pages of the newsletter. Some outstanding achievements in swimming, and in athletics over December as well, so well done to all of those girls, and to the coaches, parents and staff who supported them.

It is a new year. And we get to really think about the way we wish to proceed, regardless, of whether you make resolutions or you don't - I, for one, don't. However, I always find the energy and the rhythm of the beginning of a new year to be one of possibility and one that draws me into that space of dreaming, and that possibility and the way in which we can do things together. So I wanted to ensure that all parents in particular are aware of the 'It Takes a Village' program, a phrase we use very frequently based on that beautiful African proverb here at Loreto. We use it frequently to really affirm the critical importance of our partnership with our families. And I know Mrs. Long and I have been talking a lot about it in the last few weeks. And she's written some thoughts on that to share with you in her feature article in this newsletter. And also we outline for your planning purposes, some opportunities for parent workshops for you to be engaged by the school or by other experts in ways that will assist you in your role as the primary educators of your daughters.

In particular, I'd like to draw your attention to the date of the 24th of February. Whether you're able to make that date or not, I do encourage you to look out for information around that time when we'll be launching the Oak Seed Program here. The oak tree is the reference to those deep, deep roots of the oak tree and the beautiful story of the oak tree here on the site. And the Oak Seed Program is a bespoke program we've been working on in partnership with Dr. Danielle Einstein and key members of staff - including



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Mrs Sally Munro, as Director of Pastoral Care - in their respective teams have worked alongside Dr. Einstein, who is a clinical psychologist and researcher with the University of Macquarie and the University of Sydney. She's a specialist in the field of uncertainty, and how to promote resilience and enhance wellbeing in adolescent, young people. And so this program of the Oak Seed is one that we will be exploring throughout the year and beyond, of course, and your role as parents is critical in that. So I do bring your attention to that, as well as many other opportunities for practical workshopping, hearing from expert people, both within Loreto and externally. So that idea of partnership is not just the most critical link between the school and families. But also we know at the school that we can't do it alone, just as you can't as parents. And so those relationships we have with academia, with industry, and with other experts in their fields are critically important to us. And we're looking to further enhance those relationships as the years go by.

It's the beginning of a new year and the beginning of that dreaming, as I said about the future and what might be. I also bring your attention to us launching our new Strategic Plan, the new Strategic Plan for Loreto Normanhurst, the 2023 strategies launched to the community today. There is information in this newsletter, as well as there being further information sent to you next week in relation to that strategy. And the School Board, the leadership team and staff have really spent a lot of last year reviewing our progress on the previous strategic plan, and really discerning the way forward; how to allow those three pathways of who we are as an ecology-centred school, a faith-centred school and a person-centered school to progress further so that they may evolve. And the work that was done last year resulted in this strategy which I commend to you, and which you'll be able to engage with via a microsite to this school website. And there'll be all the links that you need in the newsletter today.

As part of that work, and as part of our work in preparing for the return of the girls and preparing for the week ahead, we had some really encouraging and fruitful staff Professional Learning days. I extend my gratitude to the staff for all of the work that's been done up till now to get the school year running and ready to go. In reference to this idea of dreaming in the future and also the direction and the vision for these critical three years for our school, as we continue in those pathways and as we work within the framework of our 30-year Master Plan, we have entered into a really exciting research partnership with the Transdisciplinary Faculty of the University of Technology, Sydney. The members of that TD school were with the staff earlier this week as we explored the best way to implement this strategy and in particular, to ask some critical questions around research, around transdisciplinary learning and around professional practice, as we try to understand the attributes that we know are embodied in our learners here at Loreto Normanhurst. And how to ensure that our research our practice, and all that we do in transdisciplinary learning and holistic learning is really, really enhancing that embodiment. So I just wanted to give you that little update there of how the year has started for the staff and how the work is progressing. And of course, that will continue to be shared with you as the weeks, months and indeed years, unfold.



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So today with this drizzle that there is in Sydney over the last couple of days of relief after the heat of earlier this week, I'm speaking to you from my office. Behind me, you may see some photographs. And I thought of sharing - without giving you a complete lesson - just some thoughts around this photographs because they were photos that I took when I was on the Mary Ward pilgrimage with other colleagues from Loreto schools and other Loreto ministries in 2016. And you can see perhaps behind me, some significant doorways and pathways that were key places of time and location for Mary Ward and her story, which began in 1585. And there's a doorway there that symbolises the site on which she was born on the 23rd of January 1585. Because this week, we've been celebrating Mary Ward Week with every other Mary Ward school and Mary Ward community in the world. Mary Ward Week extends from the 23rd of January to the 30th of January tomorrow, which is the anniversary of her death. And as I ponder those doorways, I think of all those moments and times, the way in which she remained felicitous and hope-filled and joyful and courageous throughout her life, always sending words of encouragement and joy to her sisters, even in those days when she was imprisoned, in urging them to keep this mission and this legacy and this great vision of hers - that 'women in time to come will do much' - alive even when she thought that perhaps everything was being suppressed. And it's quite a remarkable story that we've been gifted. And those gifts that she was given in 1615, of Verity, Sincerity, Freedom, Justice, and Felicity are the gifts that we are given as well. And if we're brave enough to explore those gifts, in relationship with one another and with our God, then we also have the opportunity to flourish.

And we're in now this year of Felicity, the most beautiful of years, where we know that Felicity springs from a spirit of freedom, springs from a spirit and a sense and a work towards justice. And it springs from sincerity, allowing oneself to explore who we truly are, and appearing and being in that truth of that sincere way of being. And, you know, after hearing of the four Australians of the Year all being women, and also the exciting news that two of our alumni were also in the Honours List of Australia Day, I think that Mary Ward would be very proud to know that those words - 'women in time to come will do much' - are very much at the core of who we are, what we do, and coming to life in our every day. And so on that note, I would like to extend my congratulations on behalf of the school, to those two members of our ex-student community, our alumni. Natasha Luschwitz of the class of 1998, who was awarded a Public Service Medal for outstanding public service to emergency crisis management in New South Wales, specifically for the 2019-2020 bushfires and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. And Genevieve Jacobs of the class of 1984, who was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for her significant service and contribution to the broadcast media and to the community. So congratulations, Genevieve and Natasha, for bringing to life that beautiful maxim, that 'women in time to come will do much.'

And in the spirit of hope and felicity, the prayer that I leave you with today is one that grounds us in this knowledge that when we are deeply in that spring, in the dwelling of



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our hearts, of courage and of joy, then we are one in a felicitous partnership with our loving God. And so I invite you to enter into this prayerful space, in the name of our God, a God of hope, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God of Hope, you are close to us as we begin a new school year. Like Mary Ward help us to talk to you and to listen to you. As we celebrate Mary Ward Week in a special way, may we use our minds to think clearly and carefully, our hearts to love deeply, our words to value others, our hands to serve those in need, and our feet to walk towards new adventures. May we find God in the good, and the not so wonderful parts of our everyday lives.

In Jesus's name, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

And so with all the blessings of joy, courage, and hope to you and your family for the year ahead, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Ms Marina Ugonotti

Principal