

MARIST SCHOOLS COUNCIL



P.O. Box 46410
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Johannesburg
South Africa

Director of the Marist Schools Council

Address to the 2015 Sacred Heart College

Senior High Awards Assembly

In a recent speech to a national conference of the Italian Catholic church Pope Francis said "We are not living in an era of change but a change of era." This is a statement acknowledging change on a grand scale and you, young ladies and gentlemen, are representing humanity in living and leading that change.

Good evening to you all but primarily to the young people who are here to recognize the achievements of 2015. Good evening too to Mrs Heather Blanckensee, Mr Colin Northmore, members of the Board, staff, parents and guests. 2015 has seen change in our country and in society on a scale not seen before. Often it rocks the very rules that we have become accustomed to and reeks of anarchy but is it? Or is it the emergence of a new order?

I felt nothing but respect for the two young ladies from Wits University who led the #Feesmustfall protest recently. What we saw there were two young people; articulate, dignified, brave and courageous, focused and sincere. The equivalent of some of our struggle leaders from years gone by. An example to the scores of other students who so effectively took up the cry for what, arguably, should rightly be a Constitutionally protected right to education.

I felt nothing but disdain for the motley group of opportunists who tried to derail this cause for their own purposes. My prayer is for the sincerity of the original protest to prevail.

On the world stage we have seen an equal changing of the rules of engagement.

My disdain is equal for the terrorist groups perpetuating such merciless barbarism in so many areas of the world. Syria and the Middle East, politically motivated cruelty in Africa and creeping into Europe, the recent attacks in Paris as example.

And again, I feel nothing but respect for the many good people who have stood firm against such atrocities and spoken out with voices that must be heard. At the forefront of this outcry is Pope Francis; a man giving me real hope for the future of the Catholic Church.

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So where do we stand in the midst of this cauldron of change? We are the change. We must be the change. We must lead the change.

Tonight we have acknowledged/will acknowledge the winners of prizes and awards and achievers in so many areas and to them, well done. However, and at the risk of sounding clichéd, the winning aspect of our country is in the hands of all of us, but most particularly, the hands of the young people here tonight, every last one of them. A daunting responsibility.

I have been fortunate of late to draw a lot closer to Sacred Heart College and I have felt privileged to do so. A word of advice to you all if I may; if I had to choose a place to prepare a young person for the daunting responsibility of change ownership and responsible citizenship which I described above then Sacred Heart must be right up there with the best of them, if not at the top of the pile. Why do I say that and how does that relate to each young person?

With credit to Mr Mike Thiel whose five characteristics of a great school I have shamelessly stolen below I invite you to listen to each characteristic and rate our school against it. And then, young people, take it to heart because, I believe, while each of these characteristics makes for a great school, it equally makes for a great human being. Timeless advice I would suggest.

The first characteristic of a great school is an ability to acknowledge & celebrate the past.

Our history and past at Sacred Heart is the story of a brave struggle here in Johannesburg but also here in South Africa. It is peppered with brave stories and anecdotes of the work done by good and brave people from our past.

Young adults, think deeply about your past and Sacred Heart is a part of it. Never forget where you received your roots and your grounding. You will move on into a world that needs more people with roots like yours.

The second characteristic of a great school is one where the people count more than the place.

Never has this been truer than what I have witnessed at this school. Yes, we have facilities to be proud of but never does that get in the way of first considering the human element of everything that gets done.

Young adults, whatever life throws your way, always remember that people count more than anything else. Your close circle of family, guardians, friends - you mean everything to them and they should mean everything to you. A (slightly modified) quote that I love and cannot even acknowledge properly because I don't know and can't find out who said it, suffice it to say that I have borrowed it; "May you remember to

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be kind to those who live around you, endeavour to remain aware of the quiet world that lives behind each face."

The third characteristic of a great school is a belief in something bigger than ourselves.

Sacred Heart College, part of the Marist world, part of the world of Catholic education in South Africa, is aware and acknowledges that it is a part of a far greater whole. My thanks and congratulations go to the team tasked with running this school, every one of them. Whilst continuing to manage the internal complexities of running a school they have never lost sight of the bigger picture and carry on contributing to it so very richly.

Young adults, you are part of something so much bigger, your school, your city, your country and, at the heart of it, the gospel values that Sacred Heart has so ably shown to you. Never forget to acknowledge your own God, take strength from that relationship and make your own contribution wherever you can to that something bigger.

The fourth characteristic of a great school is to embrace change and innovation.

The wave of technology and how it is used to best effect in teaching in South Africa follows on what is happening here at Sacred Heart. That though is just the technology. At Sacred Heart you have also been shown how to not only embrace change but indeed to look for change and, if necessary, create change. Few schools are as adept as Sacred Heart at seeing the positive in and having the courage to embrace the new.

Young adults, follow that lead. Learn to get rid of the dark side of technology (and yes it does exist) but don't let it deter you from using the wonder that technology gives us to live life more fully than ever before. Take those lessons and embrace the change that I spoke of in my opening, you have had fine role models here at school and the future will belong to those who are willing to create it.

The fifth and final characteristic I am going to offer of a great school is the promotion of life-long learning and action for an increasingly interconnected world.

Your staff, your teachers, your leaders here at Sacred Heart continue to learn and take action, even those with grey hair, failing eyesight and, to your minds, over the hill. They look for opportunities to learn and not just the formal opportunities, equally the informal, impromptu learning opportunities that present themselves daily. They see them, grab them, shake them and learn from them. They are connectedand interconnected, I promise.

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Young adults, the interconnectedness that you take so for granted. It is brilliant! Use it for everything it is intended to provide; the fun, the gossip, the information, but most of all use it to learn. Never feel that you know it all; all that education has shown me is how many things I know so little about and I'll die trying to continue to learn more about those things. Your lives are rich and will be richer and richer for as long as you continue to learn.

So, to conclude, your school has provided the example and the role models in abundance. These characteristics, I would suggest, are as true today as they will be in 50 years' time. Hear them and go proudly forward in your careers here at school and, in time, as proud members of a proud society.

Again, my congratulations go to everyone who was acknowledged tonight and also to every one of you for your own achievements in your own space. My thanks and the thanks of the Marist brothers go to all who have lived and continued the Sacred Heart story for another year.

I wish you all a blessed Christmas and a restful break over the holidays.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Greeff'.

Mike Greeff
Director
Marist Schools Council South Africa