

End of Year Service & Graduation Ceremony

Principal's Address

9th December 2016



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Special guests, staff, students, parents and friends of The Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School.

Thank you for joining us tonight on this very special occasion in our school year. Tonight is a night for celebration; we celebrate and give thanks to God for blessing our school in so many ways. We celebrate the tremendous contributions made by many people throughout the year. People who have given so much of their time, their skills and their energy to make 2016 another successful year in the life of our school. We also celebrate and congratulate our Graduating Class of 2016. We wish our graduating students all the very best as they commence the next stage of their learning. We have been privileged to have walked with you on your learning journey and to witness the wonderful growth that has taken place. And we are confident in your preparation and readiness for secondary school. Tonight is the first in a number of graduations you will have in your lives. Tonight one stage of your learning journey draws to a close and you are about to commence another new and exciting stage.

For you (and your parents) there may be some mixed emotions. Excitement and enthusiasm for what is in store for you; new experiences, new surroundings, new friendships, new learning. Maybe there is also a little apprehension, uncertainty and nervousness as you leave the comfort and familiarity of Good Shepherd and you step forward into your new school. Be assured that we have every confidence in you. The time is right for you to experience and learn from everything the future has in store for you.

Tonight is also a night to express our thanks. Thank you to you, our school parents. Thank you for your support of our school... your school. Thank you for your support of your children; thank you for your support of our teachers and other staff members; thank you for the contributions you make in so many ways.

Thank you to the staff of Good Shepherd; teaching and non-teaching. I recognise and appreciate the great work you do; the time that you give, your commitment to your professional learning and above all, your love and care for the children that have been entrusted to you. I am privileged to work with you, as together we serve our school community.

And thank you to our students. Thank you for all you do to make Good Shepherd a special place. Your energy and enthusiasm, your love of learning, your pride in your achievements and the tremendous effort you put in to each and every activity. And thank you for your fun, friendship and care for each other.

Tonight is also a night to say farewell. We farewell those children and their families who will not be with us next year. Some families have come to the end of a journey with us that stretches back many years.

We also farewell a number of staff members. Mr Daniel Weller who has been our Assistant Principal for the past three years and Mrs Michelle Hanrahan who has been teaching Year 1 with us during 2016. We wish them every blessing and success in all that the future brings and thank them for their service to Good Shepherd. We also thank and farewell Mrs Jenny Burr and Mr Alan Wiebusch who have faithfully served on School Council. Jenny and Alan are both concluding their service on School Council at the end of this year.

At Good Shepherd, we regularly refer to our “school community”. We talk about working together within our school community. We use words like partnership, support and community spirit. We encourage positive communication and respect for the various roles we each play.

I have been reflecting a lot lately on what it is that makes “community”. In the dictionary, you will see that community is a noun and that community can be defined as “a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common”. Community can also be defined as, “the condition of sharing or having certain interests in common”.

By those definitions, Good Shepherd (its parents, students, staff members and friends) can quite assuredly be referred to as a community. As a community we share the common goal of learning. We work together to support our students’ learning. We strive for the best for our students; we do all that we can to help them to thrive. That does not mean that we all have the same roles or that we all contribute in the same ways. But it does mean that we have the same objective... we want our community and our students to flourish.

Being in a community does not mean that we all have the same opinions or views; that we all think the same; that we will never be in disagreement. In fact, a community that is not open to change or to considering other ways of doing things, that does not reflect on the past and challenge what we are doing, does not value and appreciate diversity; is a community that does not continue to grow or improve and is in danger of losing relevance. However, an effective community, a caring community, a Christian community, is comfortable in its diversity and responds to difference of opinion and alternate views constructively, with sensitivity and respect for the individuals that make up that community.

A community that does this is a community that is more open to innovation, is respectful of diversity, shares responsibility and ownership, works together for the common good and supports the Aims of the School.

It is interesting that when we think of community, our school community, in this way, we begin to think of community as a verb rather than a noun. We begin to think of “doing community”. Words like respect, appreciate, value, defend, support, care, cooperate - are action words. They are actions that build community and grow community spirit.

When you reflect on The Good Shepherd community, what comes to mind? What sort of community is it for you? What sort of community do you experience? What sort of community are you contributing towards and helping to build?

First and foremost, I pray that you experience Good Shepherd as a Christian community. A community where God’s message of love and hope is lived. A community where we openly share our faith; where forgiveness is not just an academic exercise but an expression of our faith. Where God’s promise of salvation through Christ comforts and reassures us.

I also pray that you experience Good Shepherd as a caring community. A community where each person is valued, where each person cares for others.

Martin Luther King, the American civil rights activist said in the 1960’s, “life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?”. How do you care? How do you show care when so many in the world seem not to care?

The author Anthony D’Angelo more recently said, “Without a sense of caring there can be no sense of community”.

In September of this year, I had the opportunity to take part in an informal forum with Dr Richard Weissbourd, a faculty member of Harvard Graduate School of Education and co-director of the organisation, “Making Caring Common”. This organisation’s mission is to help educators, parents and communities raise children who are caring, responsible to their communities and committed to justice. Their research indicates that our children are growing up in a world where there is less and less motivation to care for others. The work of the organisation focuses on developing effective

strategies for promoting in children kindness and a commitment to the greater good and to influence a national conversation about raising and educating caring, ethical children.

As a Christian faith-based community, we have a calling to care, to show God's love through our actions of service towards each other. At Good Shepherd, I am proud of the way our school community cares for each other. There are so many examples where caring and service are modelled and lived out in our school.

I also hope and pray that your experience of Good Shepherd is one of a "learning community". A learning community that prepares students to thrive in today's and tomorrow's world. A learning community where 21st Century learning skills equip our students for a future that is uncertain. Think about it, the Preps who commenced at Good Shepherd this year, will be of retirement age in the 2080's! Who can predict what our world will be like; what employment opportunities will be available? More than ever we need to equip students to be life-long learners, to be adaptable, innovative, critical and creative thinkers; to be able to collaborate and cooperate and communicate at an advanced level.

It is a demanding and challenging time to be a parent.

It is a demanding and challenging time to be a teacher, but it is also an exciting time. I have been excited by the way our teachers have engaged with and embraced the Learning That Matters initiative. The way our teachers reflect on what they do through the lens of how it will enhance student learning in the areas that matter most. A learning community, however, is not static. A learning community needs to be dynamic, growing and changing to meet the needs of our children.

At Good Shepherd, I see countless examples of community in action. People serving others independently and cooperatively. People working together to make this school the best that it can be. As Mother Teresa once said, "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things".

Tonight we come to the end of another school year. Much has happened during the last twelve months; in our school, locally, nationally, internationally. The world is a different place and at times we feel a little helpless, maybe even hopeless. Gandhi challenged people to "be the change you want to see in the world". But how do we make a difference? I believe we can make a difference through community, our community. And we can start small and start today.

Tonight, may I encourage you all with the wisdom of Mother Teresa. Her words are an inspiration for each of us to do our little bit to build a community we want to live in and our children to grow up in. Her words are like a blessing to us when she says, "Spread love everywhere you go: first of all, in your own home. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbour... let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness on your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your greeting".

Thank you for your support, thank you for your care and thank you for the part you play helping us be and do community.

Thank you very much.

Greg Schneider

Principal

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