

2020 End of Year Service and Graduation Ceremony



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Principal's Address

A Year to Forget or a Year to Remember?

Special guests, parents, staff and graduating students of 2020.

2020 – A year to forget, or a year to remember? It is interesting how language defines our attitude and view of the world. Yes, 2020 has been a very challenging and demanding year for us all in so many ways.

It would be easy to write 2020 off as a year to forget. There is so much we would like to forget, or recover from. The tragic loss of life; the impact upon families, work and employment; the impact upon how we go about learning; the impact on freedoms and liberties that we have always taken for granted; the impact upon relationships, mental health and our state of wellbeing.

It has been a year when one could have been easily overwhelmed by the year, the frustration, the anxiety and the sense of helplessness. Yes, I can imagine people wanting to forget all that. Yet we know that so many countries and communities around the world have been devastated and impacted upon so much more than we have. It does help when we keep our situation in perspective.

It has been easy this year to focus our attention on what we have missed out on. Year 6 students, it would have been easy for you to focus on what you have missed out on; the experiences, the opportunities, the aspects of your final school year that you were so much looking forward to. But it is not a very positive or helpful way of facing the future; in fact it is not particularly healthy. We could become a little self-absorbed and ignore the opportunities to grow as people. I have been so impressed with how you have adapted to such an unsettled year. Your perseverance, your enthusiastic outlook and the way you have appreciated and enjoyed the alternative arrangements that have been made, has been a wonderful example to your fellow students, and to us all. Well done!

2020 – A year to forget or a year to remember? How much more positive, enabling and empowering it is to reflect upon this past year in terms of what we have learnt and how we have grown.

What have I learnt through the COVID experience?

If you walk the corridors and visit the classrooms of Good Shepherd, you will see repeated reference to the Good Shepherd “Learning That Matters” approach to teaching and learning. You will be reminded of the key question that guides all we do, “What do our students need to thrive?” It doesn’t seem too hard to thrive when the environmental conditions are just perfect; when everything is predictable and going smoothly; when you don’t have to be very flexible or adaptable; when everything goes as expected. It is interesting, however, that adversity often brings out the very best in people. People have needed to be creative to be successful, to thrive. All through history we see examples of adversity bringing about changes that have had a huge impact upon the world. You may have heard the saying, “necessity is the mother of invention”. Maybe we could say “adversity is the father (or mother) of creativity.”

I have witnessed numerous examples this year, where staff, students and parents have demonstrated their creative inspiration, and have produced results and achievements that have far exceeded their expectations. There have been creative ways of doing things, arising out of our need to comply with restrictions, that will continue as good practice well after the restrictions have been lifted. Great ideas that have arisen through adversity.

Throughout this past year, I have learnt that highly effective learning can take place in so many ways. We have seen the amazing capabilities and opportunities that technologies can provide. We have seen how digital technologies have allowed learning and communication to continue, while being physically removed from each other. And we have benefited from the incredibly creative uses of these technologies.

I have seen people develop new skills using technologies that they would never have thought possible. And we will see that growth in people’s capacities and that willingness to experiment and try, impact upon new ways of learning going forward into the future. I have learnt not to underestimate what people are capable of.

I have learnt that people (students, staff, parents) can be extremely adaptable and flexible. During this past year, it has been very seldom that we have settled on Plan A. For almost every activity, we have had a Plan A, B, C and D... and then refined

Plan D. We have had to be adaptable and flexible. And at times the uncertainty has been exhausting. I have learnt that resilience is an essential attribute for our students to grow and thrive. The ability to bounce back from disappointment, to accommodate the changes put before them, to grow in their own independence, and to face new challenges. We have witnessed a huge growth in student resilience and independence. Let us strive not to lose that.

I have learnt that people within our community can be incredibly thankful, compassionate, understanding and caring. Actually I have always known that... it's just that there has been so much evidence of this during this past year. I could share with you numerous examples of people within our community going out of their way to care for others. At a time when it would be very easy to become insular and protective of what we have, people have shown great generosity.

I have learnt that I cannot do it all on my own. I need people around me to help me and support me. I have learnt that at times when I'm feeling a little overwhelmed, there are people who care for me. I have learnt the power of collaboration, where people with skills, initiative and creative inspiration can produce wonderful outcomes.

I have been reminded that at times all you can do is what you can do... and then place it in the hands of God.

How ironic it is, in a year when we have been so appreciative of the capabilities of ever improving technology enabling us to communicate with each other, we are able to communicate with our Heavenly Father in a way that defies our technological imagination. We can simply pray; out loud or silently, together or alone, at any time... and He promises to hear us. He knows our very thoughts. When talking with God He never puts us on mute!

In a year when face masks have become the norm, I have learnt how much smiles matter. The impact of a smile is immense. Smiles help us connect with each other, smiles break down barriers, smiles tell us that it is all ok, smiles are incredibly important to our mental health. Now that face mask restrictions are being relaxed, we must all make a resolution to smile more. Show people how much you care with a genuine smile. And do you know what? Smiles are just as contagious as the COVID virus.

2020 – a year to forget or a year to remember? Year 6 students who are graduating tonight, I hope you look back on this past year and reflect upon how much you have grown and developed as young people. How your experiences have helped prepare you for whatever is thrown at you in life. I hope you remember how well you coped, and how you pushed negativity to one side and focused not on what you missed out on, but what you gained. I pray that you remember your Good Shepherd years with fondness and that you take with you many happy memories.

It would be remiss of me to not take this opportunity to say thank you. Thank you to students, staff and parents for your tremendous efforts, your support, cooperation and understanding as we have met the challenges of this year. As Principal I have been blessed and privileged to work together with you. Thank you for your support of me during this past year.

May you have a blessed Christmas with those whom you love, safe holidays and a wonderful 2021.

Thank you.