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College Captain

Speech Day, 4 November 2016

Good Afternoon Father Rector; Head of Senior School, Mr. Coffey; Head of Junior School, Mr. Fitzpatrick, Guest of Honour; Dr. Suzanne Le Mire, distinguished guests; staff members, parents; friends and students.

At first, I was in a room with a whole lot of strangers, I didn't know what to expect. Then, as time went on it just became normal and somewhat fun. I made friends and discovered my place. In the final years, things got serious and I found a whole new world of experiences, opportunities and knowledge. Now when it is all about to end there is a new feeling. A feeling of gratitude and appreciation for all aspects of College life that were just assumed.

Firstly, the strong sense of social conscience. While we can often feel this sentiment during significant milestones such as students partaking in Immersions, or Social justice run initiatives, I have realised the passionate flare for striving to make a difference is often most prevalent during the in-between and mundane moments of schooling. While these moments can reveal what type of people we are, it is more so how we react that truly defines us as men and women for others. For example, I think back to the Rector's assembly following Easter, where Mr. Coffey spoke about the suicide bombers who caused absolute carnage in Pakistan. While we did not directly help these people, as there is not always room for action, collectively our College community paused for a moment in our busy day, to share the emotions of such a sad event, and reflect on its meaning and tragic impact on people quite remote from us. As it is often easiest to take a detached approach regarding issues that do not directly affect us, during this assembly I was proud to be an Ignatian as we were challenged to care. This moment was just another in the life of school, but it well represents the words borne out in the prayer for Pilgrims composed by Fr John Ramsay,

“impart to each of them a passion for truth, a love for justice and a divine discontent with injustice – In all its forms a discontent that leads to action”.

Or in the words uttered famously by school chess captain, Tim Gregory, “it's your move”.

Secondly, I have always taken for granted the sense of gender equality and the opportunities I have been presented with at Saint Ignatius. While it should be a given that both males and females are treated equally, unfortunately within society a glass ceiling and unequal opportunities do exist. Saint Ignatius College was founded by the Jesuits as an all-boys school. In 1971, female students were allowed in the senior years only. However, in 1996 the College made the visionary move to become entirely coeducational, a decision that has undoubtedly

proved to be successful. So what does it mean to be a female at Saint Ignatius College in 2016? It means equal opportunities in sports, academics, leadership roles and travelling. It means being taught by female teachers who are exceptional role models. It means being surrounded by male peers who also believe in equality and treat us with great respect. While equality should be always assumed, if we look at education systems around the world, many are still against the education of women. I look at 19-year-old, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the head by the Taliban as a consequence of her fight for the educational rights of women. This is a dramatic extreme, but for some, a reality. In this context I acknowledge the privilege of being treated with respect by my teachers and male peers and see this lesson of equality instilled in them too. Saint Ignatius College has always been a great boys' school. It then became a boys' school with girls. In 2016, after 20 years of full coeducation, I can report to you that we have grown to be a great school for all, and especially a great school for girls.

Finally, our sense of community is often just assumed. All schools have communities, and in many cases they form the core of the greater community, so Saint Ignatius College does not have the exclusive rights to claim we are any better or worse. What we do have is a unique point of difference where the school bond goes across all levels. In reception we are all assigned a 'buddy' from a more senior year. The sentiment behind this simple, formal arrangement is not lost for the rest of our years at school. Up and down the years, there remains a strong bond and mutual respect, and Students relate easily to their younger and older schoolmates. At School sporting events, the sense of community is evident across all grades. In the Drama and music productions, all year levels play their role to achieve a great outcome - so evidently successful in this year's production of 'Grease- the Musical'. In general life, outside the school gates, we are proud of our schoolmates and I have heard more than once this is a trait of Saint Ignatius that sets us apart from others. On a day like today, we celebrate all members of our Ignatian community. While not everyone's' strengths are recognized and the large proportion do not receive a prize, it is noted that each member contributes in their own way, and each talent brought to the table interweaves to form the vibrant atmosphere that defines us.

Community, Compassion and Equality are some of the beacons we will use to navigate through our lives. For the Class of 2016, we soon leave to discover a world that might not always value or practice these qualities, but it is our task now to take them to the world. With the start that Saint Ignatius College has given us, we are well equipped to take up this challenge.