

End of Year Assembly – Rector's Farewell and Thank You

Christine Leighton

Friday 25 October 2024



You all heard from me yesterday in my chapel message, it was heartfelt, and I hope reflected my passion for this special school.

Tēnā koutou katoa. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.
Thank you for your kind words and good wishes.

When I arrived at St Andrew's College in October 2007, my induction ceremony was in this assembly on Friday 8 October. I clearly recall the youngest Year 1 students sitting cross-legged on the floor looking wide-eyed and innocent. These little ones will now be five years out of school, the leavers of 2019. Isn't it fascinating that while they have grown up and changed so much, that I haven't changed a bit!

I remember the hymn chosen for this occasion was *Jerusalem* and I recall how enthusiastically the students sang the College Song. I now sing it with passion and understanding and know it will always send a shiver up my spine.

In that inaugural assembly I briefly addressed the school in te reo Māori. That was the beginning of our journey to recognise the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our College.

Yesterday my chapel talk to you focussed on belonging and my encouragement for you to recognise the personal responsibility that comes with this. To belong you must respect your community and what it stands for.

And now today my simple message is about leaving. Leaving somewhere you have belonged is hard and tinged with sadness. But in leaving you can reflect upon what you have achieved, who you have become and recognise that this opens up new opportunities.

My new opportunity at St Andrew's College has been the most challenging and rewarding time of my 43-year teaching career. People have come and gone in that time – Board members, teachers, support staff, students, parents. Most of you currently in Year 13 would have been around one year old when I arrived.

I guess the people who have remained constant are the ever-growing numbers of Old Collegians. When you leave you will always be a St Andrew's Old Col!



And over those 17 years I have come to love this place. Because, over time as I have known more of the stories and experienced good times and challenging times with this community, I have felt I belong, not only to St Andrew's, but to the wider educational community.

So yes, leaving is hard and there is so much to miss.

I acknowledge each and every one of you; Board, staff, whether we have had one, five, or 17 years together; students, those I have known personally by name, or perhaps just a smile or greeting passing by. There will be opportunities in coming weeks to thank staff in more detail, but in the meantime, I want you all to know you have been appreciated and I hope you feel valued.

First of all – we belong – then at some time we all will leave, and while your time here will not be perfect, I hope you, like me, can leave with no regrets. Because in belonging and leaving comes understanding.

I understand that nothing lasts for ever
I understand that we are always learning
I understand our mindset will determine how well we do
I understand that our strength is in team and collective endeavour
I understand that people are the most important thing in the world – he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

So I thank you, the people of St Andrew's, for your kindness, your thoughtfulness and joyful spirit. I applaud your courage, wonder and curiosity. I honour your humility, resilience and compassion and I am grateful for your enthusiasm, patience and ability to learn from your experiences, both the successes and challenges. Most of all I am grateful for the time I have had to spend with you and this wonderful community.

As 10 Rectors throughout our College's 107-year history have taken their leave, it has become a tradition for their portrait to be painted and hung in the entrance to Strowan House. Last Saturday night my portrait was unveiled in a small ceremony in Strowan House. The artist, Neil Driver, and I unveiled the portrait which was quite an experience!

Neil Driver lives in Clyde and usually chooses to paint landscapes and still life. However he agreed to take on this new challenge, and I am pleased to say I like the result. His style is realist, using many layers of thin acrylic paint to slowly build up tone and colour. You will notice numerous St Andrew's College symbols behind me in the painting.

- the photo of the Centennial Chapel at the heart of our campus – and representative of our College Value of Faith and symbolic of our traditions and community spirit;
- the Pounamu Mere – signifying the status and authority of the Rector which passes from one Rector to the next, giving them strength and courage as they stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before them;



- the Embroidered Tippet – which I am wearing, made for me by Professor Malcolm Lochhead from Glasgow University for the occasion of the opening of the Centennial Chapel in 2016. Professor Lochhead also made the beautiful embroidered Antependium hanging on the back wall of the Centennial Chapel for the same occasion. Both Malcolm's works represent the links between St Andrew's College and Scotland.

The paper weight featuring the St Andrew's Cross, and the metal plaque featuring the thistle, were designed to commemorate our Centenary in 2017.

High Flies the Cross – is the history book of our first 90 years of St Andrew's College, written by Old Collegian, former St Andrew's College teacher, and Canterbury historian, Gordon Ogilvie.

The leather-bound book on the top left, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* was gifted to Henry Dowling who was a first day pupil in 1917. In 1930 he came back to teach at St Andrew's where he taught for 39 years. This book came into my hands in 2013 when Henry's son Graham Dowling, also an Old Collegian and now in his 80s, gifted it to the College.

So, you can see St Andrew's College is full of stories and associations, and it is worth learning some of these as they are part of your association with this wonderful school. I don't have time to tell you any more stories now, but this wouldn't be a Mrs Leighton address if I didn't end with a whakatauki, and the following seems most appropriate to this occasion:

Mā te whakarongo, ka mōhio
mā te mōhio, ka mārama
mā te mārama, ka matau
mā te matau, ka ora.
Through listening come knowledge
through knowledge comes understanding
through understanding comes wisdom
through wisdom comes well-being.
Knowledge, understanding, wisdom, wellbeing.
I wish all these things for you and your future.
No reira – kia kaha-tena koutou katoa.