

ACADEMIC AWARDS GIVING CEREMONY

Thursday 1st December 2011

PRINCIPAL'S ADDRESS

Kite ingoa o te Matua, o te Tamaiti, o te Wairua Tapu. Amene

Nau mai, haere mai, mihi mai. O te whanau o te kura tuarua o Hato Perenara, tena koutou.

Nga mihi Mrs Gordon, Vicar for Education; old boy David Hoffman; Chairperson of the Board, Mrs Baucke; trustees, distinguished guests, students, staff, parents and friends - greetings and welcome to you all. Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Malo ni, Ni sa bula, Kia orana, Fakaloha lahi atu, Kumusta, Namaste, Tena koutou katoa.

I am very pleased to be part of this important celebration and for the support your presence offers the college and our students. I acknowledge the hard work of all those who are here, not just the winners of the academic and special awards. Many of the students will have strived to do their best in order to be part of this ceremony and I believe they represent the true spirit of our college: "Respice Stellam, Voca Mariam – Look to the Star, Call upon Mary". That motto also applies to the staff and parents to whom I am very grateful for their contribution, teaching and guiding these boys to very well deserved academic success. At St Bernard's we aim high, strongly driven by our Christian values, where the dignity of work in pursuit of excellence reflects our enduring belief in Gospel teachings and the God-given talents.

Principals' prize day speeches tend to be a litany of achievements of students and of their school. While it is really gratifying to do that, if I were to mention everything that we did well this year, instead of the 10 minutes I have been given, we would be here till Christmas. I am certain that you would have all received our colourful newsletters or visited our website where you have seen and read about such successes.

However, I would be remiss, if I did not mention the athletes who qualified for the North Island championships. One of our swimmers made it into the finals of the North Island championships and then collected 6 medals at the national champs. Winning the competition for regional senior badminton and waterpolo shows that we have excellent players, coaches, managers, supported by a hardworking sports coordinator. We won the grade in hockey; the 1st XV took the inaugural Hibernian Society Trophy, while the 2nds also won their grade. It was encouraging, but painful, to make the finals in rugby league (junior and seniors) and football 1st and 2nd XI. And it is not only the players. Mr Higson received from College Sport Wellington the award for "Distinguished Contribution to Football". "Chunuk Bair" drama performance was a timely reminder of the great acting talents that are waiting to be discovered and, while not exactly full strength, the Kapa Haka Roupu through its 2nd placing at the regionals has won the right to go the Nationals next year. The vibrant display by the Polynesian Club at the Tu Tangata festival is always memorable.

What about the academic side? At my last count 20 students gained distinctions or high distinctions in the ICAS examinations for Computing, Mathematics, English and Science. More awards were won at the regional Science Fair. Best of all were the NCEA results; 53% Level 3 was the highest we have ever achieved – definitely excellent for a school like ours to be named and honoured in the *North & South* magazine November issue which reviewed why faith schools are HOT. I quote:

“These (twenty five) faith-based secondary schools ... are a selection of those identified ... as strong performers within their decile, both for academic achievement and pastoral care.” This accolade is a tremendous endorsement of our staff, students and parents, more so since we are the only boys’ school named from the Wellington region.

Although we all know, taking part is a key element in team sports, school events and life in general, it is the high expectations and aspiration to do well that are the strong motivators that make us push ourselves to achieve our full potential. The same applies for academic study. Completing school work, practising on examples, fixing mistakes, revising for tests and exams, make the difference between achieved and excellence. On one hand we need to get our boys to move away from the fear of failing, which causes embarrassment, or the fear of succeeding as this stops them from even trying. On the other hand, we have to be careful we do not become obsessed with the need to achieve at all costs as this also affects their performance. For some, “good” is what they are capable of and one has to accept that. But it would be extremely disheartening and frustrating to see some students who due to a poor attitude, an allergy to hard work, disorganisation, questionable decision making and wrong priorities end up settling for “achieved” when “excellence” is definitely within their grasp.

Our Special Character Marist theme for this year was “Family Spirit”, where we fostered the values of respect, nurturing, inclusiveness, compassion, forgiveness, self-control and giving. Our boys talk openly and proudly that we are one school, one family, all brothers, irrespective of colour, creed or ability. Fraternity is something we must exploit more. If peer pressure is a fact, then we should use it as

a strong counter-culture tool. An event like today should be inspirational. To those who are receiving the awards – I praise you. To the others, I encourage you – take the risk, rise to the challenge, do not be afraid to compete, do not settle on your first idea; work on developing your writing and expand your thinking skills. Next year, it may be you who comes up these steps to receive certificates and scholarships. If your aim is to make it as a top sportsman, then your other goal should be to gain merit and excellences in all your assessments. Do not settle for good as good is never good enough.

We are all in it together and next year's Special Character theme "Love of Work" cannot come sooner. This means that we will be pushing the values of perseverance, responsibility, honesty and commitment – taking charge of our lives, doing what we say, and making success happen. When we make a mistake, we do not surrender to self-doubt, but every mistake is an opportunity to learn and get it right second time round. We will provide opportunities and set expectations to see our boys fostering the belief that what is worth doing is worth doing well; otherwise it is a waste of time. Boys tend to respond well to an ethos that encourages and stimulates high standards, that engages their interest and commitment and that insists on good behaviour and the school developing close partnerships with parents. Boys perform better in schools which have a strong learning culture and a sense of community, and which demonstrably value all students by celebrating their achievements and by treating them fairly and with respect. Extra-curricular activities – sports, drama, music, debating, cultural groups – all make a significant contribution to the boys' views of our College. And we need to get as many as possible to be involved – without having to chase or plead. Finally, the importance of a clearly defined disciplinary framework is especially essential for our boys. They respond

best when there is a consistent and fair-minded approach to discipline, backed up by effective pastoral care systems and learning support.

The above sounds like a tall order and the beckoning question is “how do we engage 585 boys, 50 staff, a 1000 parents to be on the same page, singing the same song”? With difficulty! Yet any task can be as easy or as difficult as one makes it to be. My maths teacher used to say that there are no easy or difficult problems – either you knew how to solve them, or you did not and his job was to help me think and work through the possible solutions and find the correct one. It did not just happen. It involved a love of work, a love of mathematics, tutorials after school and real graft. In the end it became easy. Now I ask you: “Do you want to settle for a good education or do you aspire for an excellent one?” In our minds and deep in our hearts we all know the answer. The next step is to go from ‘want’ to ‘do’. We will be able to continue to raise achievement, when we raise our ambitions. “Look to the Star, Call upon Mary”. Do not settle for less. Hence we look forward to 2012 with excitement and anticipation that our love of work will take us to new heights and success. I need everyone to be with me if we are going to produce men of learning, men who care. It is only then that we can truly live the promise and show the pride of Bernard’s men!

I close by thanking all those who have contributed their share to make St Bernard’s College the great school it is. My gratitude goes to the diverse groups and the different people who make up our community and the help we receive from them; Marist Community Development Trust, the Parents, Friends and Supporters; the Samoan Parents Association; the Maori whanau. I thank the priests who regularly minister our spiritual needs. I appreciate the trustees on the board for their time,

effort, support and ideas to improve the college – they help me stay grounded, yet challenge me to grasp the future. My senior leadership team is an amazing group of committed, hard working people whose top priority is the interests of staff and students. The rest of the staff is fully aware that they are valued and their loyalty and hard work are never questioned. The ride is always going to be bumpy, yet we together we overcome many obstacles; we have grown; we have stretched ourselves. We farewell with regret and much appreciation for their work, Ms McDonnell and Mr Rynne, who are leaving. Finally, my sincerest love goes to my wife who day in, day out has had to put up with my passion for this College and my dedication to our boys.

We pray for those who challenge us, for they remind us of doors we have closed, and doors we have yet to open. I ask that you promise me you will always remember: you are braver than you believe; stronger than you seem; and smarter than you think. Together, we will make great things happen in 2012. Kia kaha; kia kotahi matou; kia kotahi tatou.

E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga iwi.

Kia noho te Ariki kia koutou

Hato Perenara, pray for us.

Hato Marcellin Champagnat, pray for us.

Maria, Morning Star, pray for us.

A blessed Christmas and prosperous New Year to all. Faafetai lava.