

SPEECH by Sr Judith Redden at Garden Party official ceremony Sunday March 28, 2010 as part of the 130 year celebrations

Your Excellency and Mrs Scarce, Adelaide Congregation Leader Sr Helen Owens, Sisters of Mercy, old scholars from the past 80 years, members of the SAC community and friends.

A strong sou-westerly was blowing on a 66 degree Fahrenheit day as the Orient Steamer the 'Aconcagua' ploughed through rough seas and berthed at Port Adelaide on the evening of Sunday 2 May 1880.

'The Shipping News' in the 'Adelaide Observer' of 8 May 1880 reported that, among the passengers in the front saloon, were Mother Evangelista Fitzpatrick and 23 Sisters of Mercy.

Today, 130 years later, we are celebrating the outcomes of this voyage by intrepid women – the founding of the Sisters of Mercy in South Australia and the founding of St Aloysius College.

Sr Evangelista Fitzpatrick, the leader, and Sr Baptist MacDonnell, her Assistant, both contemporaries of Catherine McAuley, **foundress** of the Sisters of Mercy, had with great courage made the decision to leave Argentina and establish new foundations in South Australia.

Through these sisters and their companions, Catherine's **vision** was to be nurtured and preserved in South Australia.

What was this **vision** of Catherine McAuley?

- **Deep compassion** for the sick and dying and all who suffered discrimination on the margins of society
- **Prophetic courage** in risk-taking and fearless overturning of the status quo
- **Wisdom** in discerning the signs of the times and **daring** to cut through to new initiatives on behalf of the poor
- the importance of **community** and **friendship**
- the **freedom** to be joyous and outgoing
- the **judicious** use of **subversion** in the service of her vision

On their arrival in Adelaide, the Sisters were welcomed by Mother Mary MacKillop, foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph, who graciously offered them accommodation at the Kensington Convent. Mary MacKillop made available to the Sisters of Mercy an established Josephite school in Russell Street in the city, so that they could make their first contribution to education in South Australia.

In 1890 Mother Baptist and five Sisters from the Mt Gambier foundation returned to Buenos Aires to refound the Mercy Congregation in **Argentina**.

- 113 years later St Aloysius College began to develop a strong relationship with the Sisters of Mercy in Argentina. Since 2003 a group of **students and staff** have travelled to Buenos Aires every two years to support the Mercy ministries to the poor of Argentina.

Archival records tell the story of the early Sisters' courageous and untiring work in establishing the Mercy presence in South Australia. The founding Sisters were not deterred by the conventional position held by women at the time, a position that denied women access to, and acceptance in, the world of business affairs. These early Mercy women proved themselves to be cast in the mould of their foundress. With **strength** and **courage** they set about their task, tenaciously **resilient** in the face of public and ecclesiastical criticism of their ideals, and of their **sense of identity** as Mercy Sisters.

They had to deal with church and state politics, with both the legal and the business worlds, and with a late nineteenth century approach to girls' education which ran counter to their own principles of education.

Their steadfast spirit in remaining faithful to the charism of Catherine McAuley is their enduring legacy to the community that became St Aloysius College.

Hospitality was one of the graces of Mercy treasured by Catherine McAuley. The same spirit of hospitality has been extended to us by **His Excellency** and **Mrs Scarce** and the **staff** of Government House today. They have made us feel very much at home. We greatly appreciate their generous welcome to the grounds of Government House on this historic occasion.

Over the years, SAC has enjoyed many associations with Government House.

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From 1914-1917 Governor Sir Henry Galway's step daughter, **Charlotte d'Erlanger**, the **daughter** of Lady Galway, attended St Aloysius College.

In 1924 **Lady Bridges**, wife of Sir George Bridges Governor of South Australia, brought **Dame Nellie Melba** to the Convent of Mercy in Angas Street. Nellie invited the Sisters to attend all of her operas and expressed delight at the Sisters knowledge of her songs, name and fame.

In the 1930's SAC students were invited to perform the musical '**Hiawatha**' at Government House.

SAC students and their families are regular guests at Government House as recipients of Merit Awards recognising outstanding achievements in year 12 and Gold Medal recipients in the Duke of Edinburgh Program.

From its earliest years SAC has been influenced by best educational practices. First hand knowledge gained by the foundation Sisters visiting schools in **England, Ireland and France** and their observations of **new systems of education** influenced the early formation of St Aloysius College. This **openness** to the influence of innovative educational approaches, together with a commitment to ensuring that staff were both **academically well qualified** and **imbued with the spirit of Mercy**, have continued to be hallmarks of St Aloysius College.

In the research for 'Making Space' - the history of the first 120 years of SAC, many students testified that SAC gave them a **strong sense of self confidence**, a sense that they could achieve whatever they wished.

Through the lives and work of former students we find countless examples of our old scholars **breaking new ground for women within their professions**.

Dame Roma Mitchell is an excellent example of this. She was the first woman to be appointed as a Supreme Court Judge, the first woman in the Commonwealth to be appointed as a University Chancellor and the first woman in Australia to be appointed to the position of Governor. She often expressed her gratitude for the education she had received at St Aloysius College.

As Governor, Dame Roma forged a new path making the role more relevant to the community.

During her term as Governor, she hosted morning teas each year for the families and recipients of our Dame Roma Mitchell Justice Scholarships. These occasions are held as precious memories by those who were involved.

As an aside, we are pleased to note that last Thursday, a former student, Grace Portolesi, one of 3 women in the new Cabinet, was sworn in as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and Multicultural Affairs in the re-elected South Australian Labor Government.

Of course there are many other old scholars who have been outstanding in their fields.

The SAC Old Scholars Association has prepared a splendid display for today featuring the pathways of some of them.

The **careers of our old scholars** form a mosaic that enables us to judge the outcomes of 130 years of academic excellence, of **dedication to social justice**, and to a **determination to make the world a fairer place**.

Over time there have been a number of ambitious building programs which have transformed the SAC campus into an educational oasis in the centre of the city. The Wakefield Street sports ground and adjoining "Babies' Playground" were replaced by the Campion Jordan building in 1967. In 1983 the Mitchell Building replaced the former Barr Smith residence on Angas Street and in 1986 St Cecilia's Hall, which had been central to the dramatic, musical and social life of SAC from the 1920's, was demolished to make way for the Carmel Bourke Expressive Arts Centre.

The addition of the state-of-the-art gymnasium and fitness centre on Angas Street in 2008 and this year's landscaping of the Roma Mitchell courtyard have all been significant in this transformation.

In the midst of these physical changes two significant sections of the school remain unchanged – the Convent (now known as the Cloisters) with its beautiful Cunningham Memorial Chapel and the three storey building (now named after former Principal Sister Mary Teresa Dunlevie). This building once housed the whole school and provided accommodation for the boarders until the transfer of the boarding school to Mercedes in 1954. Old Scholars are always delighted to revisit the historical and spiritual heart of SAC.

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In the past 130 years, **uniform styles** have also undergone considerable changes. Uniforms are never intended to be fashion statements. However, it is acknowledged that students throughout the years have possessed an uncanny knack of wearing the uniform to reflect fashion trends!

SAC students of 2010 will now model a range of uniform styles representing different eras. Please welcome the compere of our Uniform Parade, Rhaneela Punitham.

Thank you Rhaneela and our student models.

Irrespective of which style of uniform we wore, all of us gathered here today have been part of SAC's history. Buildings and uniforms have changed but one precious element of SAC has remained constant – its spirit:

- the spirit of **hospitality** and **inclusivity**, welcoming **indigenous students, newly arrived immigrants, refugees** and providing social mobility for the poor;
- the spirit of **innovation**, embracing the latest **technological advances** and **innovative approaches** to education in order to ensure positive educational outcomes for all students
- the spirit of loving kindness in all of our relationships and
- the spirit of reaching out to those in need beyond the boundaries of our own world

This is the spirit which the Sisters carried with them to Adelaide in 1880 and which continues to define SAC in 2010.

We have **all** been embraced by the Spirit of Mercy which has characterised SAC from its beginning in 1880 to the present time. Our graduates numbering many thousands, continue to be inspired by this spirit to make a positive difference in the world.

The contemporary interpretation of Catherine McAuley's charism of Mercy underpins all of our educational endeavours, constantly **challenging** and **inspiring** us in our **social justice efforts** to work for human rights.

We need to celebrate **all** the events of the past 130 years for we are **shaped** by the past. It colours the way we look at **today** and think about **tomorrow**.

In fact,..... “the **past** is a storehouse of the memories that have **formed us** and **shaped us** and **prepared us for the worlds far beyond the one in which we grew**. The past is an **alleluia** for graces **then** unknown and **now** full of meaning.

Every moment of life is an **alleluia moment** for **the past**.

One of the major graces of life is to come to realise that.” (Joan Chittister, Vision and Viewpoint, 8 March 2010, Benetvision)

And so we say **Alleluia** for the **pioneer Sisters of Mercy** and **all of the Sisters** who have followed in their footsteps.

We say **Alleluia** for all those **co-workers past and present** who have responded to the call to continue the work of Mercy at St Aloysius College.

We say **Alleluia** for our **present** students and for the **graduates** of St Aloysius College over the past 130 years whose lives have mirrored the spirit of Mercy.

The poet Gerald Manly Hopkins proclaims:

“I say that we are wound with mercy, round and round”

And so we are.

This is an extraordinary blessing – to be wound with Mercy round and round – and it carries with it the extraordinary responsibility of bringing God's mercy and compassion to those in need.

Alleluia and **rejoicing** for this Circle of Mercy which binds us.

**Judith Redden RSM AO
Principal, St Aloysius College Adelaide 28.3.2010**