



# St Andrew's College

ESTABLISHED 1867

## Address for 20 Years of Undergraduate Women Celebrations

Saturday 26 March 2022

Wayne Erickson, Principal

Your Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley, Governor of NSW, and Mr Dennis Wilson; Professor Mark Scott, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sydney; Former Chairs of Council Mr Charlie Taylor and Mr Andrew Murray; Former Principals Dr Hugh Cairns, and Dr Bill Porges; Principal-designate, Dr Robert Leach; Senior Student, Ms Elisabeth Woodcock; Chair of the Foundation, Mr Niall Cairns; President of the Alumni Society, Mr Alex Rhydderch; Councillors and Honorary Fellows of St Andrew's College; Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me begin by thanking Onyi for her acknowledgement of country. The land we are meeting on today was an important place for the indigenous communities of pre-colonial times; a place where men and women of the southern tribes would meet, to talk, to teach and to learn, on their way to gatherings in what is now the central business district. I acknowledge with deepest respect the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, their elders past, present and emerging, and extend my respect to aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people here today.

It's my very pleasant duty to welcome you here today to the Dining Hall, this great gathering place of the College community, to acknowledge an important anniversary in the life of this community.

20 years ago we welcomed 50 undergraduate women as first year residents into St Andrew's – the first intake of fresher women in our history.

This conversation about co-residency began long before 2002. At various times in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the Council, at the urging of Principals Cairns and Cameron, had considered the admission of female undergraduates. The replacement of the College's original 1867 parliamentary Act in 1998 affirmed the possibility that a college now set up for the 21<sup>st</sup> century could indeed be co-residential. It was not until Remembrance Day, the 11th of November 2001, that a motion to make the College fully co-residential passed through Council, with only two votes cast against. The idea of admitting women as full members of the College community was highly divisive. Council chair Andrew Murray, whose strength of leadership throughout was a vital element in the process of change to co-residency, encountered fierce opposition, and more than one member of Council resigned over the issue. The Senior Student in 2001, Alex Nock, supportive of the change to co-residency, also fought hard against strong opposition to the change amongst the students.



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After such a long and sometimes painful deliberative process, the Remembrance Day decision represented a brave, “all-in” approach. This would not be, as it has been elsewhere before and since, a few token places given to women, but a fast track to full co-residency. Principal Porges was given three months to find 50 women who would come, and stay. And stay they did, most of them for three years, forming a committed core who were joined in their second year by another 65 women, so that in the second year of co-residency, the College was 50% men and 50% women. This represented an extraordinary achievement on the part of Principal Porges, whose commitment to the idea of co-residency, and his leadership of the multi-layered challenges associated with its delivery, were defining features of his principalship.

Even so, the leadership was conscious of the charge that this place would remain a men's college with women in it, and as a caution against this, Council established a special committee made up of students, staff, Councillors and selected external experts, to attend to all the nuance required. In addition to such vital mundanities as room allocation, bathrooms, menus, the provision of sporting and other performance opportunities, the committee dealt with the construction of a new pastoral and mentoring overlay, together with the first attempts to provide educative sessions about the expectations of what constituted respectful relationships in this newly co-residential community. From our friends at Wesley College – co-residential for thirty years by then – came a policy and procedures template that guided our own as we sought to set up the structures for an enduring community of women and men. For many of our long term, fiercely loyal staff, this involved adapting to a completely new dynamic, and the College will be forever grateful for their on-the-ground contribution to making it work.

The mostly male leadership of the Students' Club were tireless in their determination to re-write their constitution, and their culture, to ensure structural equity and equality in participation in everyday life and in the opportunity for leadership. Whilst a number of male residents in those early years decided that this “new” college was not the place for them, mention must be made and praise duly accorded, to the men who remained, and whose contributions as allies hastened the progress of integration towards a fully co-residential community. Such efforts were guided by other men; Vice Principals John Sergeant and Terry Beed, and Senior Fellow Ian Jack, men whose strong commitment to the principle of young adult agency manifested as a necessarily light, but nevertheless effective, touch.

Of equal importance was the appointment of Dr Hester Wilson into residence in 2003 – first as Senior Tutor and subsequently as Vice Principal. Hester has been the senior female presence in College for these 20 years, supported by a richly talented group of prominent senior women in residence who have given generously of their time and expertise, and who, like Hester, have been outstanding role models in support of their younger fellow residents: including Elly Howse, Dean of Students and Senior Tutor, whose commitment to academic excellence and her feminist perspective were indispensable elements of her many interactions with students in her decade in residence; and others, including Reingard Porges, Jenny Sergeant, Minami Takahashi, Rebecca Read, Jess Wilson and Gillian Bowen; and in particular, my wife, Debra Maher, who in addition to her engagement with students on a group and individual basis, has managed the extra burden of ensuring that this Principal's perspective had the necessary balance with the many variations on the theme.



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And to return to the importance of a strong and consistent approach at all levels of the College – staff, students and Council – I wanted to acknowledge the subtle strength provided by Council over the course of these twenty years, not just in governance but also in personal engagement, and particularly from those women on Council in the early days – the Reverend Theodora Hobbs, Professor Ros Croucher and Professor Jill Gordon, who were the first of a total of fourteen women councillors elected so far, all of whom added enormous value and diverse perspective to Council discussions with their male colleagues on matters great and small, strategically sensible and devilishly difficult, cheerful and challenging. Margaret Mackenzie was the first woman to lead the College's Business Committee, and Council in February this year elected Sasha Kovic, who was a fresher here in 2005, as our first female Chair of Council.

On reflecting on my own introduction to this new co-residential college, I was reminded of one of those first 50 women students, Allison O'Brien, who in 2004 became the first woman elected to the Students' Club's Executive. In December 2003, as part of my application for my first position on staff here, Allison and I spent an hour or so together as she showed me around her college. I remember afterwards telling my wife Debra that if this was the calibre of young men and women I would be working with in St Andrew's, I would be very happy indeed to be part of such a community.

Did we get it right all of the time? Well, no. There were occasions where the pressure of a more complex day-to-day reality caused some of the strands of our theoretical integration to unravel. The impacts of alcohol on emerging adults are magnified in residential communities, and the challenges of managing this and other pressures contributed to incidents that caused real damage and hurt. In this regard, the College has had to face the trauma and address the challenge of sexual harassment and misconduct, and this week the latest report on the impact of sexual violence on Australian university campuses has shown us that this scourge continues, and we must keep doing what we have done, and whatever is necessary, to make the College the safest of homes for all who live here.

This commitment began in the early days of co-residency when women on Council, and staff, in recognition of this reality, formed a reference group, working with women in residence to find solutions to these issues. These important conversations formed the basis for a more formal process which became known as "Holding the Mirror", and which in combination with other initiatives, has embedded a structured yet decidedly Andrew's-specific approach to cultural review and renewal. The success of this project continues to rely, as in all things in Andrew's, on the outstanding character and quality of the Andrew's women – women who are strong in their dealings with fellow residents, and insistent on the principle **and practice** of equity and respect.

If culture is defined as "the way we do things around here", then it's perhaps useful finally to examine the impact of twenty years of undergraduate women on that culture. We have seen our own version of the widely held view that the bringing of the "other" to formerly single-sex university colleges produces at its best, a civilising effect on each gender, where the excessive extremes of each are modulated by the impact of the other. Conversely, we have seen that those rarer excesses – those outliers of unacceptable behaviour – which remain, have greater potential for negative, far-reaching impact.



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In more positive terms, this co-residential community over the last twenty years has enjoyed clearly demonstrated, greater success, for men and women across the many domains of college life. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, in elevated academic performance, in men's and women's sport, in the creative arts on both the competitive stage and in the simpler joy of making music and art for its own sake, and in a vividly rich tapestry of social engagement which demonstrates a collective and individual energy in the willingness to be part of the lives of others and to have them be part of yours.

The College began this journey over twenty years ago, with trepidation, but with determination to succeed in creating a co-residential community that was faithful to the foundational values of St Andrew's, yet which acknowledged the realities of the modern world. That journey is of course not complete, but ongoing, and we are delighted to take this opportunity to pause and to celebrate both the successes and challenges of this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of undergraduate women in St Andrew's.

Many thanks for joining us today.

Welcome to St Andrew's.