

FOUNDERS' DAY 2022

Good morning One & All, Dr Sooliman, Mr Morolo, Mrs Langa- Royds, Ms Mashilwane, invited guests, parents, staff and students a very warm welcome to our Founders' Day 2022. A further welcome to Doctor Cyril Clarke (an alumnus from the class of 1975). Doctor Clarke is the Provost of Virginia Tech University in the United States and a generous Thandulwazi donor – it is a great honour for us to have you join your alma mater this morning.

Every year, our College song reminds us that our purpose today is to gather 'in gratitude to Founders, cherish this our school'. Traditionally, the Matrics always sing the last verse with gusto as they look to the future: 'When school's a distant memory of happy, youthful years.' Contained in this verse too, is a promise of continued connection – 'We'll oft times look behind us, To all that still endears.'

The College song unites us. It is sung by One and All. There is, in the singing of it, such a comfortable familiarity that at times we may forget its essence. I will return to the idea of essence often. Over the last three years, we have lost the comfortable familiarity of the world as we knew it. Where we thought there was certainty, the rug was pulled from under our feet on more than one occasion, but even though we were sometimes off balance, we didn't fall. I take great comfort in the certainty that the roots of our faith and values go so deep that in years to come, the Class of 2022 will have a College to be proud of and they will be able to gather at reunions and remember many years later, all that still 'endears'.

Inspired with Purpose



Driven by Passion

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We choose a theme every year to highlight our focus. This year, we are threading Inspired with Purpose. Driven by Passion through all that we do. But this is not only how we identify ourselves in 2022. This theme would have been equally appropriate twenty years ago and will be as relevant in twenty years' time. This is the consistent tradition of who we have been, who we are, and who we strive to be.

The College is not what it was when it was founded in 1953 on a 'portion of the freehold farm known as Driefontein. Parts of the farm 'were thickly wooded with bluegums and wattles and was almost impenetrable.' (To Serve the Future Hour p1) If Gilbert Tucker and William Mountstephens visited us today, they wouldn't recognise the school that they founded, with its sprawling campus and modern amenities. They would, however, feel comfortable in the Chapel and at this service and in conversation with our staff and students, where our values and intentions still align with their vision. They established a school that would 'favour a greater emphasis on the teaching of Christian principles and thought more should be done within the school to develop leaders in social matters.' (To Serve the Future Hour p9) Just as the Founders, in the words again of the College Song, 'were called to service' in 1953, Inspired with Purpose, Driven by Passion, we too, are still called to service. The school has changed in many ways, but our essence has not.

In thinking about consistency and the need to feel that we are on stable ground, I found an interesting connection between two very diverse sources related to education and architecture. Álvaro Lobo Arranz, SJ, in an article entitled 'The Meaning of Catholic Education in the 21st Century',

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MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

likens education to the building of a cathedral and notes that as with any building, the foundations need to go deep. Anyone who has been in a great cathedral understands the depth of knowledge and artistry needed to build something strong enough to stand for centuries. The great gift of these structures, he says, is that they realign our perception and make us feel part of something much greater than we are.

We do not have a cathedral, but we have built something that, because it is educationally deep and lasting, individually for our students, and collectively for our community, makes us part of something greater than we are.

In a world and on a campus where we often feel swept up in the pace of change, we stand on the bedrock of certainty that is our faith and vision, to serve the future hour, whatever that hour may bring. An education in depth enables us to ask questions that will take us beyond ourselves to meet increasingly complicated and evolving educational demands. We must deliver an education that will make our students contributing global citizens when they are called to serve.

Founders' Day is one of our many traditions. Tradition gives us consistency, but Father Arranz offers a word of caution, he comments that: 'We must remember that the worst betrayal that can be inflicted on tradition is that of repeating the traditions but forgetting their essence.' In upholding all the traditions that are celebrated at the College, including Founders' Day, we must examine the essence of who we are and what we bring into the educational space or fall into the trap of, I quote, ('turning tradition) into a strange nostalgia for a past that is always considered better than the present.'

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MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

According to Father Arranz, there are two elements essential to a cathedral. The first is brightness – light must stream through the stained-glass windows, as it does in our Chapel, bringing people closer to God. In this, we carry last year's theme of Hope and Light with us. The other is the keystone, without which the building would fall, and our keystone is consistently our Methodist faith.

The second reference that links to the idea of structures is the multiple award winning but often controversial Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas. He is known for shaking up established conventions. He uses his buildings to challenge the notion of certainty. His philosophy is based on this: 'Change tends to fill people with incredible fear. ... I automatically embrace the change. Then I try to find ways in which change can be mobilized to strengthen the original identity.'

The notion of using change to mobilise and to strengthen our original identity is crucial for me. I believe that this is what we have always done and must continue to do. We cannot escape change. We cannot protect our children from uncertainty. But we can continue to serve them by providing them with a world class education. We can teach them the skill of resilience and give them the brightness of hope that comes with quality education and the keystone of faith to navigate a world that Koolhaas describes as 'shifting incredibly fast; (where) the bubbles of certainty are constantly exploding.'

The ideas of Father Arranz and Rem Koolhaas are brought together in the essence of our guest speaker, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman. Dr Sooliman answered a call to service on the 6th of August 1992 and has since dedicated his life, Inspired with Purpose, Driven

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INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

by Passion, to bring hope and dignity to those in need in over 43 countries around the world. Part of the vision of Gift of the Givers is one that we share – to empower leaders of tomorrow. We must aspire, like Dr Sooliman and the Gift of the Givers, to use our College to “make a real and telling difference by serving mankind for the ‘Greater Good.’”

Gift of the Givers exists to meet the uncertainty brought by disaster. They mobilise communities not only to help them but to strengthen their original identity. Their work is based on a recognition of our common humanity and brings diverse people to work together. Their focus is on giving individuals dignity, regardless of politics, race, religion, gender or any other factor.

This morning, under this vaulting cathedral sky, filled with brightness and firmly set on the keystone of our Methodist faith, I am inspired by the people gathered here. I know that we will continue to serve the vision of our Founders. I know that together, our Saints community can serve for the ‘Greater Good.’ The German social psychologist, Erich Fromm, gives me a good ending point: ‘The quest for certainty blocks the search for meaning. Uncertainty is the very condition to impel one to unfold ones’ powers.’

My fellow Saints, we must continue to ask hard questions as we search for meaning. This is the essence of education. My call is for us to stand together, to mobilise, and to unfold our powers for the Greater Good. If I am certain of anything it is this, we face the future hour together, not weakened by difficulties but ready to sing all the words of the College Song with gusto, knowing we make a sacred promise as we do: ‘With hearts and minds we praise thee, Our saviour and our king To

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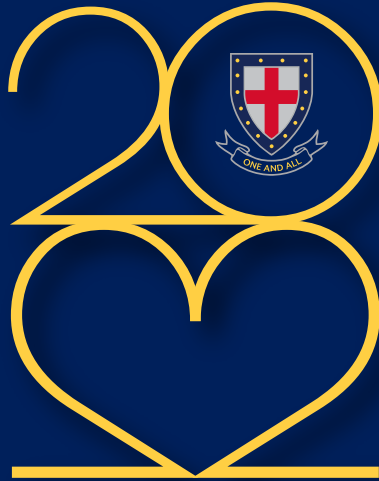
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Thee our lives we render, Our all to Thee we bring.'
Our all to Thee we bring, Inspired with Purpose, Driven by
Passion.

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