

## PRINCIPAL SPEECH FOR MERICI 60<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY DINNER

LORETTA WHOLLEY

I would like to begin with excerpts from an Ode to Merici that was written by students in 1997.

*'Our prestigious school motto fidelitas. Always displayed on a banner at mass. Faithfulness is what it means. On our school jumper it can be seen. Blue, yellow and red are our colours. Sometimes we wish that we had others. The senior girls wear navy and white. Always feeling cheerful and bright. A checked dress with many a pleat. Keeps the juniors looking neat.'*

For the past 20 years Merici College has had the mission statement:

Love Life, Have Hope, Be Faithful and Build Futures more wondrous than you Dare to Dream.

It captured the essence and spirit of the 40 previous years and I am sure will go on to shape the next 40 years too.

I am standing on the shoulders of past principals: 5 of whom are here tonight - Julie Dempster, Anne Cummins, Frances Menz, Catherine Rey and Ann Cleary. Thank you for your foundations, for the work and dedication you gave to the College over the years - I hope that I am doing justice to your vision and being faithful to our founding Sisters.

I have been privileged to part of this community now for seven years. I was entrusted to lead Merici and have done so with the guidance of the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn, the Catholic Education Commission, and the Directors of Catholic Education including Geoff Joy and Moira Najdecki who are here tonight. Our current Director, Ross Fox has sent his apologies for tonight (he and his wife Joanne welcomed a little boy - Benjamin into this world only last month) and I would like to take this opportunity to read a message from him.....

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## MERICI 60TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER – DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Good evening, I would like to extend my apologies for not being able to join you for this special dinner. Thank you all for attending this significant celebration of Merici College's Diamond Jubilee. I know that Catholic educator and founder of the Ursulan Order, Saint Angela Merici, is smiling tonight.

Merici College forms an integral part of the rich history of Catholic education in our region, as the first Catholic Girls High School in the ACT, and one of the eight Catholic colleges within our

Archdiocese. In 1960, Archbishop Eris O'Brien travelled to Rome for a personal meeting with Pope John XXIII. In this meeting they discussed the Archbishop's unique idea of a Catholic Girls' High School in Canberra. The Pope praised Archbishop O'Brien for this important initiative.

In writing this message, I read the school hymn and was struck by the words "We are women who are determined to make a difference in the world". Whenever I visit Merici, I know these words are guiding the students, the staff, parents and the wider community, motivated by the courage of St. Angela Merici, inspired by God's mission, and working to make that difference in the world.

Merici's reputation for excellence in educating exceptional young women and future leaders continues today. Our alumni have actively contributed to the Canberra community in various roles, including Rosemary Follett AO, the first Chief Minister of the ACT and first woman to become the head of a government in any Australian State or Territory. Merici's tradition of producing leaders and innovators continues and our students are well placed to follow in the footsteps of our alumni.

The student and staff faith formation program and the religious life of the College responds to the need to develop and renew ways of embracing unique traditions, educational values and the spirituality of the school as the foundation for all they do.

From its beginnings, Canberra Catholic Girls' High School, as it was known then, embraced a spirit of innovation, as it did not follow the conventional model for Catholic schools at that time. Today, Merici College, under the leadership of Loretta Wholley, continues to lead the way with the implementation of the International Baccalaureate.

On behalf of the Archdiocesan Catholic education community I congratulate everyone involved in Merici College over the past 60 years. Your dedicated involvement has been very much appreciated. I look forward to Merici continuing in the next 60 years to contribute in the Canberra community and the nation through the education of young women.

Congratulations and thanks.

God bless all involved in Merici's ministry of Catholic education.

Ross Fox, Director

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The planning for this year's celebrations was one we tackled with great gusto. I thank all the

members of the committee, my leadership team, the teaching staff, support, administration, catering and maintenance staff, board, parents, current students and especially ex-students. Your attendance, support and assistance at each event has made this year very special.

Tonight, I am going to single out two women. Amy Connellan has organised the most amazing liturgical celebrations for us this year. Focusing on our theme of fidelitas and bringing it to life for every member of the community who attended our prayerful events. Thank you, Amy. The other person is Ros Parisi. Ros has been the powerhouse behind every event. She leads with passion and enthusiasm and never says no to me, even when I take over her desk. Ros you are amazing. Thank you.

Merici now, and as Canberra Catholic Girls High Schools was and always will be a place of innovation - taking bold risks and forging through society with great initiative and pride. We will continue to be faithful to the Gospel values of Faith, Hope and Love and with the Spirit of our 10 Religious Orders will go on to be a place where women and men - respond to the call to go out and make a difference in the world.

And I end with the words from that same poem – Ode to Merici:

*This is where our speech concludes. The end of our rhyming interlude. Our hopes and dreams for the years. Are what encouraged us to come here. To all of you we wish the best of luck. And hope that nothing runs amok. May your lives be strengthened by the challenges you face. Cause in your heart, at Merici, you will always have a place.'*

God bless to you all. And thank you.

Loretta Wholley

Principal