

Tolerance

(Principal's address to staff: 30th August 2012)

I spent the first days of the summer vacation visiting the choir at a festival held in the city of Turin in northern Italy. This year's Europa Cantat festival brought together choirs from around the world to share in the joy of choral music and performance. We were the only choir from Hong Kong participating in the event and our boys were able to showcase their talents and really get into the swing of the festivities. A highlight of their week in Turin were the workshops with other choirs. I sat in on the rehearsals at one workshop where half of our boys, along with Mr. Fu and Miss Leung, sang alongside young people from Germany and Brazil. This particular workshop focussed on hip-hop music, with a very distinct Latin American flavour, that incorporated rap and beat-box elements. Obviously this was a brand new experience for our boys. It involved branching away from the choir's normal repertoire of church and classical music. It also meant loosening up and understanding that singing does not always require you to stand still and that you can sway to the music. By the end of the three day workshop sessions the boys were ready to take to the stage in the main piazza in Turin for an evening concert in front of more than 5,000 members of the public. We were all so proud of their musicality and newly found sense of Latin rhythm.

I really enjoy the summer holidays. It provides me with an opportunity to relax, unwind and hopefully recharge the batteries before the start of a new school year. A measure of a successful summer holiday is when I can go an entire day without thinking about St. Paul's College. I am sure you would agree that the ability to unwind and de-stress is so important for anybody involved with schools be they teachers, social workers, librarians or office staff. Although some in the community might question the need for teachers to receive such a long break, nobody who goes into a classroom each day would argue that a long rest is not absolutely essential. School holidays allow teachers to remain sane and free from burn-out that can be an outcome of working in such a high-pressure profession.

I certainly need to have a decent break. In fact, I seem to need that break even more as the years pass. Psychologists often say that older people are happier than younger people. In fact, they say that people become more positive and optimistic as they age. However, I am not sure about this. I know many people

who become grumpier, more argumentative and less tolerant as they get older. Indeed, this might well be said of me! I do find that my tolerance levels decrease as the school year progresses and reach a climax of intolerance sometime in May or June. I wonder if the same applies to you. I've also read that the brain changes over time. As men age they become more rigid in their opinions and intolerant of differences in others. Apparently, as women age they become more tolerant and flexible!

How tolerant are you? Do you become less tolerant as the school year progresses? If that is the case, what causes you to be intolerant? Are the younger teachers more tolerant than those of more advanced years? Are the ladies on staff more tolerant than the gentlemen?

Interestingly, you will not find the words tolerant or tolerance in the Bible. However, there are many passages in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, that use other words to encapsulate the terms. Tolerance can also mean patience, sufferance and open-mindedness. Do you have endless patience; show a willingness to listen to the views of others; and keep an open-mind when new ideas are placed on the table for discussion?

There are some practical ways in which each of us can show greater tolerance;

- We can be more patient with each other and tolerant of what we might see as shortcomings in our colleagues, understanding that each of us is different and as a consequence deal with issues in different ways.
- We can focus on a student's strengths instead of on their weaknesses. Boys are far from perfect and even the most challenging of students needs encouragement and guidance.
- We need to care for each boy in our charge and not show favoritism to a small group of students. It is too easy to focus only on those who cause the least disruption to our daily work schedule.

Most importantly, we need to demonstrate our tolerance by displaying kindness and acceptance to all - not just those with whom we are comfortable. As written in James chapter 2 verse 8 *If you really fulfill God's law according to the Scripture "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

I hope that tolerance will be shown by all as we live and work together each day of this new school year.

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