

St Pius X
2018 Student Leaders' Investiture
26 October 2017

Thank you for the invitation to join your Leaders Investiture this morning.

When I was 15, in Year 10, my all-consuming passion was to be a drummer. I would practise each and every day, before and after school. I saw myself as the next Keith Moon. He was from a band called The Who (which you've probably never heard of). I drove my family and our neighbours psychotic. By the time I turned 16, the drum kit was in the corner of the garage ... abandoned. I had moved on ... By that point I decided my future was as a vocalist and my practice was with a hairbrush in front of the mirror. It wasn't a total reprieve for my family and my neighbours but it was something ... an improvement.

The chances are that what was important to you last year isn't quite as important to you now. Go back five years and what mattered to you then ... what your priorities were then ... are a world away from what they are now. You're older, maybe wiser as well. You've changed.

That change will continue. It will be a constant in your life. The change will not always be predictable or welcome; it may sometimes be painful; it will to a significant extent be guided by the relationships you have, the company you keep, the choices you make.

None of us wants to be buffeted by change ... and end up somewhere we'd rather not be. We want to control our own destiny. We want fulfilled lives ... great relationships, good health, a worthwhile career. We want to be happy.

How do we get to that point? How do we set a positive course and remain true to it? How do we manage change and choice? And what's any of this got to do with leadership?

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When you're a police officer on the streets, you come across more than your fair share of people who've made bad choices.

And they generally get bad outcomes.

And it would be a mistake to think that they're all criminals ... at least in the sense that we usually understand that term.

A typical example is the guy who has three more drinks than he knows he should, jumps in a car and drives his friends home.

Police get called in because somebody has had an accident ... has run into a pole ... The guy's mates are still living, though seriously maimed ... their condition is a nightmare he lives with for the rest of his days.

It can be something as simple as that. Not a bad person, but a bad choice. And don't think you won't make bad choices, because we all make them.

And if they're bad enough, they can ruin your life.

The million dollar question is how do you protect against making bad choices? What can you do to make sure that bad choices you make are limited and that they do not restrict your potential?

While I don't have all the answers, here's what I have observed:

First and foremost, good choices are rarely inspired by self interest or profit. You'll find yourself on firmer footing if you base your choices on the greater good ... If you factor in other people's interests, not just in your own.

It doesn't pay to make choices for some external approval or affirmation of success. In my experience neither is a good basis for decision making.

Unpopular choices can prove worthwhile ... Remember it's you that's got to live with them ... think of the drunk driver who leaves his car behind rather than risk driving his friends home. He might get offside with his friends but it's for the better.

You are almost guaranteed not to make wise choices if you succumb to pressure ... If you just go along with others because it is easier.

And you don't necessarily fail and make a poor choice if you persevere and hold to your beliefs when they are condemned by others. Conversely, you don't necessarily make a poor choice if you concede or accept compromise.

Good choices follow more or less naturally from a value system in which respect for others holds a central place. If you have respect for others ... if you surround yourself with people who are community spirited and have respect for others ... if you learn in a school which places value not just on academic results but to the good to which they can be put ... that is, how you can help others ... then you are already well down the track to a fulfilling life.

You make positive life choices if you approach the world looking out for others ... if you look for what you can contribute rather than what you deserve.

Such an orientation is the hallmark of leadership. And when you reflect on it, it is often by the positive choices they make that we come to recognise and admire leaders.

It **is** characteristic that leaders show acceptance and advance the greater good. Their motivation is not popularity or profit. They know that a cause need not be popular to be worthwhile. They know that winning is not everything and that there can be merit ... glory even ... in defeat ---if you persevere and hold to your beliefs in the face of condemnation.

The chances are that in the next few years you will join the workforce. There you can expect to spend between 30 to 50 years. (And you thought your school years were long!)

It's a long time to spend at anything and I would suggest that one of the best ways to approach your future career is to keep front of mind the idea of working for the community interest ... working for the greater good.

In my experience this principle, used as a compass, will do more to sustain you than any amount of money. It will keep you grounded, motivated and useful. It will nourish you and provide you with a driving purpose. It will provide you with a fulfilling and worthwhile life. And before you shout out and say anything, it won't necessarily keep you poor.

I said that acting for the general good of the community is the hallmark of a leader. But it is not just that. It is a principle with general application ... and a rule to run over practically everything you do ... over every choice you make.

At the start I mentioned change being a constant in all of our lives. Some of that change – like my metamorphosis from a would be drummer to a would be singer – is inconsequential in the scheme of things ... no more than a phase.

Other changes, though, are significant. Life can deal out any manner of blows ... death, trauma, rejection, serious illness. They can come from out of the blue. They happen to us and they happen to those we love. They are unavoidable.

It is at those times ... times of crisis ... when our contribution to others can make all the difference. It is then we have friends who can really support us ... who can help get us through.

Now, as a female Executive in a traditionally male-dominated profession, I can't leave today without saying something about gender diversity and equality. Of course I look forward to the day when it won't need mentioning – but we are not there yet.

Whenever I speak to women, I remind them to be firmly aware of their inherent worth - and their rightful place in any career or role they pursue. So it is only proper that I also say something to you today, our men, and male leaders, of the future.

You are young and you have the opportunity to separate yourself from old attitudes towards women – and in doing so, lead real change. You have the education and the insight to recognise direct and indirect discrimination, unconscious bias, unfairness and inequality.

You have a wonderful opportunity to lead the way... To be men who speak up when you encounter discrimination or a lack of respect for women. And that's because gender equality is not a 'women's issue' – it's a human rights issue that we can all influence in our personal and professional lives.

You will be the champions of a new generation of men who respect and support women and in doing so we will achieve a real sophistication and equality in Australian society.

I see that in you. Here at St Pius you've got a great school and many advantages. You learn together, play sport together, share good times.

Whether you think about it or not, these are important and formative years ... you are already building the relationships that you will carry forward in life.

And as you go, don't forget to pause and reflect. And possibly to reassess as well. Evaluate your choices. Check your motives. Think about what you're doing and why you are doing it. Understand that good choices, realising your potential, and leadership are not separate entities but are inextricably bound together ... and furthermore none is possible without contributing something to the community of which you are a part.

If you do that, you will do yourselves, your family and your school justifiably proud.

Thank you.