

The One Hundredth

Today is rather special for me. A little over six years ago, on the 1st September 2006 to be precise, I spoke at a morning assembly for the first time. Today is the one hundredth time I have addressed this assembly. It was over the summer holiday of 2006 that I decided to change the format of College assemblies to provide more focus and structure. I dropped the Tuesday assembly in favour of a Form period and insisted that assemblies would not be the time to make announcements and notices about forthcoming events - new flat screen televisions were installed around the campus for that purpose. I decided that whenever possible, Monday would be the Principal's assembly, Wednesday a Guest assembly, Thursday a Worship assembly and Friday the Students' assembly. By and large, that has been the format we have followed over the past six years.

I believed it was important for boys and teachers to hear from the Principal on a weekly basis. The question I needed to answer was 'what message did I want to convey each Monday morning?'. I felt it was an excellent opportunity for you to listen to another native English speaker given that we are an EMI school. Over the past six years I have attempted to present topics of interest that hopefully have stimulated your minds. There has also been a format to my assembly addresses. From the outset I wanted to cover current world events (sometimes predicting what might happen in the future), local Hong Kong news, matters directly related to you and life at school, stories about the College's past, my own personal stories and reflections, and of course, the Christian message that underpins our school community. Sometimes the messages have been a little humorous, on other occasions they have been sad.

My first assembly address six years ago, on the first day of a new school year, focussed on the challenges for the year ahead and the need to work hard in class, develop leadership skills and take a global position on world issues. This theme was followed up a few weeks later with a talk on the College's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities and the importance of respect for one another. One of my early addresses centred on the ridiculous trend in Hong Kong for private tuition and the celebrity status ascribed to young, fashion-conscious, smiling tutors who are plastered across the buses and trams of this city. I have also spoken about Hong Kong's neglect of its heritage in the face of commercial property development and the loss of community networks. Money and power have dictated what happens in our city with air pollution and housing for poorer citizens given scant attention. The shocking case of tainted milk powder that contained the chemical melamine dominated the news in

September 2008. We were also saddened by the typhoons, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters that occurred around the world over the past six years. More recently, we have reflected on the terrible ferry collision off Lamma Island.

Some of my addresses have covered up to the minute events. In November 2010 I talked about freedom of speech in a digital age and the breaking news that an organisation called WikiLeaks was planning to release classified emails and documents. Four years ago I spoke about the US presidential campaign and the challenges that faced the newly elected Barrack Obama. Last November I told you about disputed islands south of Hong Kong and the danger that this region would become an international flash point. My prediction was correct expect that the islands at the centre of the current dispute between China and Japan are to the north east of our city.

At one level a series of assembly talks is no more than that - a collection of speeches. At another level, however, the past one hundred talks have provided a snapshot of life at St. Paul's, Hong Kong and the world over the past six years. Six years spans one generation of SPC students and the talks have embraced the diversity of activity that has taken place in the College during this time. Monday assembly addresses have also stressed the Christian and spiritual dimension of our school. I have spoken about Christmas and Easter, about our patron saint St. Paul, about our love for one another and about spreading the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. Assemblies bring the College together at the start of a new school day to sing God's praises, to hear the word of our Lord and to affirm our faith. Very few Christian schools in Hong Kong or around the world for that matter place such importance on assembly time as we do at St. Paul's.

I trust that you have enjoyed the past one hundred Principal's assemblies. To those sitting in this hall who have heard all one hundred talks I trust that you have not found the experience too tiresome. If that has been the case, however, you should remember that the 'two assemblies per day' format has meant that I have listened to my own speeches two hundred times! I thank you all for listening so attentively during Monday assemblies and hope that my messages have been interesting, stimulating and helpful.

J.R. Kennard