

Thank you to you all for joining me for this end of year assembly.

I can't quite believe that we have reached the end of the academic year – it just does not feel like July without the senior school exams, the Prom, Sports Day, Leavers' Service, Sixth Form Ball and all of the creative events that happen in the Junior School too. The rhythm of the academic year has been interrupted and it just feels very strange.

In her song, Big Yellow Taxi, Joni Mitchell sings, "You don't know what you've got, 'til it's gone"

I strongly believe that we do know what we have got here and I believe that I can speak for the whole of the Sion community – pupils, students, staff members and parents - when I say that we know how special our school is. However, "lockdown" and distance-learning has certainly opened up my eyes once more to just how special and connected this community really is.

Teaching online is OK, but the absence of human-to-human real-life interaction never really feels quite right. I certainly have missed the moments of connection around the school, the humour shared between us, the gestures of goodwill and kindness, the nuances noticed in a smile or from a look or through the subtleties of body language as well as the more obvious communications that young people are just so good at!

We know each other – we know each other well – after a few days of "lockdown", it soon dawned on me that I was missing my school family - "my other family". We spend a great deal of time together. We talk to one another – we share with one another – we eat together – we ask for support from one another and we offer support too – we play together – we learn together – we meet together – we care together – we feel sadness together when someone here goes through difficult times. We celebrate together when one of our school family achieves great things. We are proud of each other when we reach our goals. We like each other's company. It's good to be together. So yes! I was actually missing my "other family". That notion really hit me between the eyes. I think that is really rather beautiful.

I was missing my school family.  
That's powerful and precious.

Lockdown reminded me again of the beauty and value of community. The sense of community in Sion is very strong. We were certainly fortunate to have a group of Key Worker's children with us from the very start of "lockdown", and this group has certainly developed close friendships during this period. More recently, welcoming additional young people back into school – initially in the Junior School and then in the Senior School – has been momentous. Being able to see these youngsters again and reconnect with colleagues (in the flesh) was energising and a huge relief. A school without children and the staff is just not right – however, it reminded me again that school is the people, not the building. Social-distancing meant that the long-awaited greetings were rather staid, but a thousand words were spoken through smiles and through the eyes. This was a long-awaited reunion and it

really felt as if some of the breath had been returned – the light had been switched back on...the energy was spinning once again. Unfortunately, there are so many more of our Sion family who have not yet returned to school. We all miss you terribly and certainly look forward to being back together in September – all being well. I can actually see that now in my mind's eye - and I can't wait – although let's not wish the summer holiday away before it even starts!

Whenever I meet visitors to the school, I always tell them that we care very much for each one of our young people and also their families. Getting to know parents and even grandparents is as important as we all work together to look after these wonderful children. I would like to extend my huge gratitude to parents for working so hard to support the online learning during these recent months. Your support, communication and feedback has been instrumental in enabling us to carry on teaching our students and ensure that the learning process continued successfully. As teachers, we have been so grateful to you for your messages of support which often came just at the right time when we were frustrated with battling our own internet issues and Wi-Fi nightmares. We also valued the more critical communication which led to review and reflection and in some cases resulted in developments and a refining of the online learning provision. Thank you. All communication is welcome and all brings its own energy. There has been a huge amount of positive energy which I know has been so invigorating for teachers who were desperate to provide a great experience for their students through methods that were initially quite strange and certainly a million miles away from the kind of human interaction we all cherish within the physical classroom.

In a roundabout way, I am highlighting that we are a community – and a community that cares deeply for those within it and around it. To miss my community as I have done, reminded me of the uniqueness of Sion. I have loved every school in which I have worked, but this one is different. This one really is a family – it doesn't just feel like one.

My prayer is that every person who encounters Sion will feel the same. I strongly believe that Our Lady of Sion is a very important place. What a child experiences here will not be experienced anywhere else.

There's a soul here and it is good.

Singer-Songwriter, Michael Card explores the beauty and power of community in his song, The Basin and the Towel.

In the chorus, he sings:

*And the call is to community  
The impoverished power that sets the soul free  
In humility, to take the vow  
That day after day we must take up the basin and the towel*

Let's take a moment to listen to his song:

Sion is a community that serves the other. *Consideration Always* is not about how I am being considered, it is about how I consider others...always. It's proactive. It's mindful. It's about every moment. What am I doing to consider the needs of others? This is the foundation of our ethos. Serving others.

I admire the selfless service known as Seva in Sikhism – a service performed without any expectation of result or award for performing it. That's the Sion ethos too.

We have seen so much going on around the world during this period of lockdown. In amongst the sadness of covid19 and the barbaric actions which destroyed George Floyd, we have seen a coming together of communities to save, support and bring about change. Our Founders, Alphonse and Theodore Ratisbonne believed very strongly that Sion schools should be places of dialogue where young people could engage in discussions to develop knowledge and understanding. Peacefully challenging abuse and injustice is at the heart of our ethos. I was recently challenged for posting a statement about "Black Lives Matters" on our school Facebook page. I was vehemently chastised for being political. It's an interesting viewpoint. However, change does not happen through silence and inactivity. Young people want to work together to make this world better. They certainly have my blessing to explore how that can be achieved. Reading some of their thoughts in the pages of our Writers' Block Blog inspires me no end.

Former monk and long-term peace and environment activist, Satish Kumar writes:

*When you see a conflict, see it as an opportunity to negotiate. Communicate in such a way as to come to a conclusion together that is good for both of you. That's the challenge. Sharpen your communications skills. Just like when you cook – don't use a blunt knife, sharpen your tools. Refine your tools of communication and learn the art of speaking in such a way that you will open the hearts of other people. Then you will be able to use a crisis as a moment of opportunity.*

*The solution is not in the thinking. The solution is in the action. How are you going to climb Mount Everest if you stand at the bottom and look up? The mind is pessimistic, thinking is pessimistic, but actions are optimistic. Action gives you hope. So don't look at the top of Everest.*

*Don't look at a society and think it is so big, so complex, that nothing can change. Don't think: "I am one single person, what can I do?" That is despondency; that is pessimism. Instead, whatever you can do, do it. Step by step. The Great Wall of China was not built in one day. Apartheid did not come to an end in one day. The British Empire eventually ended. So lots of big changes have taken place. When the Buddha started, did he think: "How am I going to teach my four noble truths to the world?" No, he just started to teach. And now his truths are known around the world. Jesus Christ was one person. You are one person, I am one person. We do our best with dedication, commitment, perseverance, without anxiety, without any fear. Do your best, serve the world.*

Whenever there has been a challenging event happening somewhere in the world, we have talked about it in school and shared our fears and asked our questions. Although we have not stopped communicating - thanks to tutor times and microphones/webcams - it has not been the same as getting together in the same room for an assembly, or meeting in the Chapel to discuss our worries and fears. COVID19 is certainly a

challenging event to say the least. At a time when we needed each other, we were forced to separate. That just felt so wrong. Satish Kumar's words here are most definitely aligned with the ethos of Sion. Covid19 can seem overwhelming. The devastation of the economy can seem overwhelming. The desperate cry of "Black Lives Matter" can feel overwhelming. But in all of these challenges, there is hope. Listen to your own voice. Recognize the incredible strength that you have within yourself. Return to your breath – find stillness and silence. In those moments, you will see the part that you can play in responding to all that is going on around you. Try not to be afraid. Fear can be paralyzing. You are all amazing people, with unique gifts and what you bring to your community makes a huge difference. During this strange time, you will have learned so much more about yourself. That learning will be significant, even if you have not realized it yet.

As young people of Our Lady of Sion School, I would like you to continue to learn about yourself. I would like you to learn what it means to love others. I want you to discover more about yourself and how you might use your life to serve others. I want you to believe in yourself – to not be afraid of failure, but to use failure to propel yourself to carry on towards success. I want you to aim high and achieve amazing things – making yourself proud and even surprising yourself. I want you to fall in love with learning. I want you to respond to what you see happening in the world. I want you to discuss your feelings and share your views. I want you to be proud of who you are and never try to be something that you are not. I want you to challenge injustice and abuse. I want you to hate bullying but love the bully. I want you to look out for others and notice those who look sad or lonely. I want you to feel at home with saying I believe in God or I don't believe in God, or I love Allah or I follow Jesus or Om Shanti or "Black Lives Matter" or "I'm not sure, can you help me understand more about what you believe?" Let's celebrate our individuality and encourage one other to be ourselves.

Sion is a unique school. To be part of Sion carries with it certain responsibilities. Unkindness is not tolerated. Bullying is a disgrace. Rudeness and disrespect will be challenged, and

Poor behavior and bad language will also be challenged. Sion students demonstrate how communities should live together. We all work hard to consider one another and build each other up rather than destroying each other – that is not how we want to live here.

I love this school. I wish that when I was your age, I came to a school like this. You should feel very blessed that you have a place here. I really hope that you will always feel proud to be part of such an amazing school and my prayer is that you continue to make it even better because you are here. Over the summer, return to questions such as these:

What are my dreams? What do I want to achieve? What are my goals? What matters?

Aim for the sky – you are an amazing person. This school is full of so much potential – When you are at school, can you feel that energy? I can – every single day. It's exciting. It's very exciting. I am very glad that you are there. Make it count. Every moment of every day – use it for good. Develop yourself and encourage others to do the same. Set yourself goals each day and work hard to achieve them.

Saying farewell to colleagues is never easy and this is certainly even more difficult this year as we cannot do this face-to-face. I would like to share my appreciation for the part

that each one of these colleagues has played in the history and the success of Our Lady of Sion School.

Aurore Valentine  
Alex Adamantos  
Beverly Daniels  
Ellie Bielski  
Anne-Marie Coe  
Kiera Vassallo

You have all been fabulous colleagues and given so much of your time and energy to the young people of Sion -and to your colleagues through your support and kindness over the years. You have served well and your contribution to this place will never be forgotten and undoubtedly your legacy will remain and be forever honored. I hope that your memories of Sion are good and the energy that you take with you is positive. You are always welcome here – this will always be your other family – just you remember that. Please stay

In touch. I am so grateful to each one of you for giving so much of your life to Sion. Often, so much of what we give is seemingly unsung, but I pray that you will always know that what you did and said made a difference to so many. You will be carried in the hearts and minds of so many people – students, parents and colleagues. Be proud of all that you have achieved and feel the blessing that comes from using your working life to serve others.

I would also like to say thank you to Dr Orchard for the part he played in the ongoing progress of this school. Since 2015, Simon worked tirelessly to serve this community, and was instrumental in inspiring staff and students to transform it into the school we all know and love today. Simon Orchard was a great support to me over those years and I very much enjoyed learning from him and working as his deputy. I shall certainly miss him and know how much he has appreciated the kind messages from students, staff and parents. I am sure that you will all want to join me in wishing him all the very best for the next phase of his life and career. He served this community well and we are all very grateful to him for his dedication and commitment to Sion.

Saying goodbye to students is never easy. Our thoughts and prayers are with Nika, Lucia and Mimi as they move to different schools next year. Thank you for all you gave to us whilst you were here. We will miss you all so much.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues too for their extraordinary support and hard work during this strange time. Developing a new way of working and working very long hours revealed once again your steadfast dedication and commitment to our children. I am ever so grateful – I do hope that you manage to find some rest over the summer.

I wish you all a blessed summer - I really hope that you all have a super time. Foreign Travel plans may well be abandoned, but I am sure that you can still have a memorable time enjoying all that our own country can offer to us. The most important thing is that you enjoy having family time together.

When the first light of sun-

Bless you.

When the long day is done-

Bless you.

In your smiles and your tears-

Bless you.

Through each day of your years- Bless you.

May you see God's light on the path ahead

When the road you walk is dark.

May you always hear

Even in your hour of sorrow, the gentle singing of the lark. When times are hard may  
hardness never turn your heart to stone,

May you always remember when the shadows fall— you do not walk alone.

May god bless you all

Sending love and light – always

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020