

Today we stand in footsteps millennia old.  
May we acknowledge the traditional owners  
Whose cultures and customs have nurtured,  
And continue to nurture, this land,  
Since men and women  
Awoke from the great dream.  
We honour the presence of these ancestors  
Who reside in the imagination of this land  
And whose irrepressible spirituality  
Flows through all creation

“Acknowledgement of Country” by Jonathon Hill

Today we stand in footsteps millennia old. We acknowledge the Gadigal people who are the traditional custodians of this land.

We pay our respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

\*\*\*\*\*

Welcome! Welcome to the women and men joining our Sancta Sophia College Community, for the first time. Welcome to their parents, family and friends – you too are a part of our Community. Welcome to our Council members, welcome to Father Rolando, welcome to College staff, and welcome to our returning students.

My name is Fiona Hastings. I am the new Principal of Sancta Sophia College.

Like many of you here, I am new to Sancta. My family and I have lived here for precisely one week and one day. You will come to know my family – my husband Anthony, my son Will and my daughter Sophie are all living in the College with me. Our oldest son Andy is 27 and doesn't live here, but this mother is hoping he will visit often.

Like you, I am at the beginning of a journey.

Most of you are just starting life as a university student. Some of you are living away from home for the first time. Some of you are excited, some are feeling anxious: like me, you might be feeling a bit of both. Over this next year, we will all experience struggles of one sort or another. All of us will have moments of joy, and all of us will have times where we will need to lean on others. I am confident

that together we will help each other feel the full benefit of this Community, and that each of us will, from time to time, reach out for help when we need it.

I look forward to learning with you the ways of Sancta, embracing the spirit of the women who formed this college community, and giving our all to honour the people, the places, and the experiences that helped bring us here today.

Because I am one week and one day ahead of you, I have already seen the staff and student leaders in action. I am already impressed by their dedication, their knowledge, their willingness to share ideas, and care for each other. This really is a community that Walks in Wisdom.

Our student leaders have given up the last fortnight of their holidays to return to College and plan for the coming year, and to attend a variety of trainings and sessions to assist them support you. [To them:] please accept our thanks and gratitude – your contribution is remarkable.

I had the good fortune of witnessing the student leaders as they worked through a process to discern and define the values that will guide the whole College in 2018. I watched, with admiration, the intelligence and insight these women and men displayed. Please be assured that in our senior students we are in very good hands. We will hear our senior student, Mary, share these values with you in a moment.

Examining our values is particularly important for us right now. You have most likely heard of the Broderick Review. This Review represents an important moment in the history of our College. The students, the staff and the council have all taken very seriously the process of contributing to the review, and the Broderick Report itself. We are committed to its recommendations, and will continue, throughout 2018, to ensure that we stand out as a College of safety and support for you, and for the parents and friends who have entrusted you to us.

I now invite Cath Crossley, Maryanne Pidcock and Mary Schnelle to read a Statement of our commitment to the ongoing process of cultural renewal.

Cath Crossley is the Sancta Sophia College Council Chair and is reading on behalf of the council

Maryanne Pidcock is the vice principal of the College and is reading on behalf of the college staff

Mary Schnelle is the 2018 Senior Student, reading on behalf of the student body.

\*\*\*\*\*

***Preamble – read by Cath Crossley, Council Chair***

*In 2017, the University of Sydney commissioned Elizabeth Broderick and Associates to review the values, systems, behaviours and processes in the University's residential colleges. The students, staff and Council of Sancta Sophia College actively participated in this review process. The report, "Cultural Review at the University of Sydney Residential Colleges", was released in November 2017.*

*The report highlighted many positive aspects of colleges and college life at the University.*

*It also identified areas of culture in need of strengthening and renewal.*

*In particular it drew attention to the practice of “hazing” and bullying, the issue of sexual misconduct and the role of the misuse of alcohol in facilitating these unacceptable behaviours. It called for focused education programs to inform students, robust policies to clearly articulate the Colleges position and adequate counselling services where required.*

*The following is our statement of commitment to cultural renewal.*

**Statement – read by Maryanne Pidcock, College Vice Principal**

*The College Council, Staff and Student Leadership of Sancta recognise the need to continue to evolve and are deeply committed to the cultural renewal process.*

*We accept without reservation the Recommendations of the Broderick Review and are committed to their implementations at Sancta.*

*We have much to be proud of at Sancta and we will continue to build a strong, authentic and passionate community where people feel like they belong and are at home; where individuals feel valued and respected and feel a sense of responsibility towards themselves, others and the college.*

*Throughout 2018 we are committed to look courageously at our traditions, our practices and our policies, to ensure that all we do aligns with our values.*

*Our student leadership have articulated Sancta values.*

**Values – read by Mary Schnelle, Senior Student 2018**

**Respect:** *we treat ourselves, each other, and our home with dignity, help all feel safe, celebrate our diversity and differences and remain without judgement*

**Support:** *we welcome newcomers warmly, and reach out to assist all in our individual and collective endeavours*

**Integrity:** *we stand up for what we believe in, live by these values and are conscientious in all we do*

**Inclusive:** *we are a community of individuals, we embrace our diversity and listen to the voices of all*

**Empowerment:** *we help each other grow, embrace our strengths, be the best people we can be*

**Spirit:** *we are positive in our relationships and attitudes, and ambitious for our community. We are enthusiastic in celebrating our own and others’ achievements. We embrace our history as a College for women, founded by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart.*

**Courage:** *we are fearless in examining ourselves and our actions, we speak up on behalf of others, we hold ourselves and each other accountable, and we are honest about our mistakes*

**Compassion:** *we treat each other with kindness and gentleness; we act with empathy and understanding*

**Commitment:** *we are responsible for and take pride in our College. We have a duty of care to everyone in our community.*

\*\*\*\*\*

These values speak clearly to me as head of the College. I will use them to guide me in working and living in community with you. While it was students who discerned and articulated these values, it is the whole College community adopting them as our guide for 2018.

There has been publicity over the past few years, months and weeks, highlighting some disturbing incidents at University Colleges around Australia. We are aware that there will be further publicity in the coming week. While Sancta's experience suggests that we are not likely to be drawn into such publicity, it might prove distressing to you or your families. We understand if this is a time of anxiety for you. To all of you we say:

- The safety, welfare and wellbeing of our students is our primary and enduring concern
- If you are feeling unsafe or in any way at risk – there is help here for you
- If you notice another student having a tough time – let us know, we will find ways to help
- We are a community that does not allow, does not condone, does not tolerate and does not turn a blind eye to bullying, hazing, or sexual misconduct.

Sancta Sophia College takes its duty of care to you seriously. We actively investigate and respond to complaints or concerns. When necessary, we will ask students who are not living within our values, to leave the College. Our commitment to you is to continue to put student welfare ahead of any other consideration.

We love Sancta, and we are proud to be here. We can't wait to get to know you, to celebrate with you, to have fun, and to see you experience all that is on offer at the College and in the world of University.

I won't be able to satisfy your curiosity today about what kind of principal I will be. I can tell you that my beliefs about leadership are founded and embedded in Catholic Social Teaching – to maintain dignity for all, to work for the common good, to support others to make decisions that affect their own lives, to walk in solidarity with others, to be a steward of not just the resources, but the positive traditions of Sancta Sophia College.

We are a community here. We will Walk in Wisdom together. We will help each other through difficult times and we will celebrate each other's successes, large and small.

Congratulations to you all. You have worked hard to get here, and we will work hard to welcome you, celebrate with you, support you, and help you be the best that you can be.

Welcome to Sancta Sophia!

Fiona Hastings

Commencement 2018

24 February 2018