

24 September 2007

## Facing Up to Our Responsibilities

I attempt to bring you a new message when I address you at assembly on Monday mornings. I do this to maintain your interest and hopefully minimize the number of students tempted to fall asleep! I also do it to leave with you each week a new thought or idea, something that you can take away and think about after the assembly has come to a close. My talk today is a little different, however, because I am going to talk about a topic that I have already spoken to you about; at an assembly exactly one year ago. This morning I want to stress again the importance of facing up to our responsibilities.

One afternoon last week, a new Form 1 at another local school in Hong Kong was killed on his way home from school. He was struck by a mini-bus while crossing the road and received serious head injuries. The accident occurred at 6.30pm but his injuries were so severe and he died a little later that evening in hospital.

Sadly, there is a very human side to all accidents on our roads. One wonders what the last day at school was like for the young Form 1 boy. Maybe he ordered his lunch from the canteen; listened to the guest speaker at assembly, talked to his friends at recess, watched the basketball at lunchtime, made an excuse for not handing in his homework, borrowed a book from the library, worked on his English assignment.

Traffic accidents such as this are not uncommon in Hong Kong or any other large city. In Hong Kong pedestrian deaths are particularly high among the elderly and the young with the main cause being crossing the road carelessly. The community believes this issue to be so serious that a Road Safety Campaign is in place with a vision of "Zero accidents on the road, Hong Kong's goal." The official message of the campaign is "Stay alert. Be courteous and obey the law."

This is why I am so concerned about your safety and why I continue to push the message to you about the dangers of jaywalking. We should not forget that it is not too long ago that one of our boys was knocked over by a mini-bus on Pokfulam Road. Thankfully, he was not too seriously injured and recovered after spending a few days in hospital. The outcome, however, could so easily have been very different.

It is my responsibility and the responsibility of your teachers and parents to keep reminding you of the dangers we face when crossing our roads and why I insist that you use the pedestrian crossings on Bonham and Pokfulam Roads. But it is also your responsibility to look after your own well-being. Unfortunately, accidents happen. What each of you must ensure, however, is that you remain alert and take steps to minimize the danger that you face.

It is important that you face up to your responsibilities. On Page 19 of the Student's Handbook is a section called *The Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*. You will have noticed that the Charter comes before the School Rules, rules that cover the next 20 pages of the Handbook. There are four basic Rights and Responsibilities that all of us, and by all of us I mean students and teachers, should adhere to.

Firstly, we have the right to be respected. We have the right to be valued as a human being and the right to be treated with dignity. Nobody at St. Paul's College should be made to feel underrated or undervalued; we are all of equal value. But it is also our responsibility to respect the rights and feelings of others. We need to respect that others will have different opinions to our own and that they have the right to express their views.

Secondly, we have the right to a clean, healthy and safe environment. Each of us has the right to come to school each day knowing that we will be safe, that we will not be hurt, bullied or placed in any danger and that our health and well-being will be protected. But it is also our responsibility to respect and protect our environment by making sure that the school grounds are kept clean, that the classrooms remain healthy and that we do not place anybody else in danger.

Thirdly, we have the right to physical and emotional health. Therefore, it is our responsibility to make decisions and take actions that are in the best interest of our own being. Your decisions will shape your future and the person that you will become. You must pay attention to your physical condition by eating healthy foods, getting sufficient sleep and exercising regularly. But it is also important that you look after your emotional health and seek help if necessary. Students in all years can find the pressures of school life difficult and need the guidance of experts on the College staff. Do not be afraid to ask for help; by so doing you are protecting your own health and well-being.

Fourthly, we have the right to learn. When each of you comes to school each day you do so with an expectation that you will engage in learning. Access to education is not only a right for students at St. Paul's College; it is a fundamental human right. Therefore, it is our responsibility to help build the best possible learning environment for ourselves and others. This starts in the classroom, in the specialist teaching areas, and in the playgrounds. We need to build an excellent learning environment in our College and work hard to ensure that it is the very best environment for students and teachers.

This school is proud of its *Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*. Our four basic Rights, embracing respect, safety, health and learning, are the cornerstones of what we strive for in this school. It is also our task to face up to our responsibilities so that we can say with honesty and confidence that we have a good school; a school that cares for the rights of all students and teachers.