



Be of  
**COURAGE**

## PRINCIPAL'S REFLECTIONS

### MIDDLE SCHOOL REFLECTIVE SPACE DEDICATION

### SATURDAY 20 JULY 2022

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- Welcome
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Apologies from those who cannot be present

As I speak today, I would like you to consider how the concepts of the past, present and the future apply to our actions and the response to children who were harmed at The Geelong College.

The purpose of our gathering at the reflective site today is to take a moment together to pause and reflect on the experiences of children of this school; to be honest in those reflections and to acknowledge some children were harmed in a variety of ways by their peers or teachers as students of this school. Although unpalatable, it is important to acknowledge this took place.

Today's gathering is an important event and another component of the ongoing commitment to engaging positively with survivors of harm and demonstrating ongoing support for them.

The Loud Fence Ceremony in March 2018 was the first of its kind at College. It was a significant event at which we gathered as a community to acknowledge the truth of the experience of some Geelong College students. Today's event is extension of a commitment stated in March 2018 to continue to meaningfully acknowledge and support survivors of harm.

The installation of Loud Fence ribbons presented to the College community that day remains front and centre in the College Chapel.

As the Principal of The Geelong College I am grateful for and have benefitted from the courage of survivors of harm who have come forward and shared their stories with me.



Although I do not feel culpable for the harm that took place in the past, I feel completely responsible for the way we deal with it now. Respect, compassion and kindness for survivors feature strongly in my thinking when working with survivors. I work hard to try to ensure the virtues feature in the engagement with survivors of harm.

Through their courage some of these survivors have grown in confidence in their relationship with College today and now feel able to return to College to meet with me and tour the grounds. This is not the case for all survivors, and I absolutely understand this must be an extraordinarily difficult thing to do.

I would also like to acknowledge the additional harm to families and loved ones of survivors. Together we work to help those who we love so they might heal, beyond the harm they encountered. Many have endured significant challenges through no fault of their own as a consequence of the harm. Patience, love and kindness are sought by survivors from those close to them, sometimes without the disclosure of the harm at the root of the problem. This places huge pressure on relationships.

It is important for the community of today to know that the stories of awfulness have guided the actions of College today. We have learned from them, and we are desperate for things to be different for the children of this school now and into the future.

Not only is it a matter of complying with the Child Safe Standards and associated policies and procedures but it is a matter of consistently working on the community culture to ensure we are collectively vigilant in protecting our children from harm.

Our practices are different today. I think schools are now more humane places for children, but we will always have more to do. Our culture is different, and we look to build the collective responsibility of care for children in our community as well as meet formal requirements.

This Preparatory School reflective space has been developed through consultation with a small number of survivors of harm. These are former students who have been keen to ensure their experiences serve to shape the future in a positive manner. Some of those contributors are present today and I am very grateful for their guidance to bring this about.

I believe the first step in shaping the future is to be honest about our past. Another key step is to ensure those who have been harmed in the past, betrayed, or silenced now feel valued and listened to. To be received with compassion and kindness are critical. These practices are important to me as we engage with survivors of harm.

The Reflective Space here provides a space where our students sit, chat, listen, debate, eat food during recess or lunch time as well as engage in their formal learning during lessons as they retreat from the nearby Year 8 learning areas. This area and knowledge of its creation brings the past into the present and shapes the future.



Our students use this area regularly and they ensure it is a part of their lives. In so doing, the stories from the past find their way into the lives of the children today.

We still have a long way to go as we seek to assist in healing with those who were harmed. This is an aspiration as we seek to improve the lives of all who have passed through the gates of The Geelong College.

My message to those who were harmed at this school is simple. I am deeply saddened to hear their stories. The College Council and I are committed to working with them to assist in their healing in some way, recognising the needs vary for each person.

*My wish for all those who were harmed at this school is captured in the verse from the book of Jude 1:2 that is included on the bronze plaque located at the reflective space: "May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance".*

Thank you to everyone who has chosen to participate in this gathering this morning. I am grateful for your interest and support.

**Dr Peter Miller**

Principal

30 July 2022





