

FEATURE ADDRESS

FOR HFC PAST PUPILS ASSOCIATION DINNER ON SAT 5 DEC 2015

The value of a Past-Pupil Association

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Good evening my friends. It is an honour to have been asked to address you on the value of a Past-Pupils Association (PPA). Congratulations to HFC's PPA on your 30th Anniversary. What an accomplishment! I congratulate all those – past and present, who have served on the PPA.

Like everyone who has passed through these hallowed halls, I am extremely proud to be a past pupil of this noble institution. It is important to reflect on the ways in which we demonstrate our pride of our Alma Mater. Attendance at the annual Christmas dinner is not all that is required of past pupils.

What is the value of a PPA? Inter alia, it provides a wonderful opportunity to network with others both here and abroad; to bask in the enduring warmth of friendship; and to plan and/or participate in any events that are planned by the PPA.

But more than looking for what we can get from the PPA, it is critical that we consider the part that we can play in helping to build up our Alma Mater – for example by offering ourselves as role models and mentors to students at HFC, as well as to those who have completed their studies here.

Studies show that giving makes people happy. The PPA allows us to plough back something into this great institution and this should make us very happy! The value of volunteerism must not be underestimated. So let us volunteer to assist HFC in whatever way we can. For example, let's offer our services to support current students in their personal and career development e.g. by giving students insights into what it takes to succeed in the various professions/areas of work in which we are involved. Those Past Pupils who have businesses can consider providing work experience for some students. The PPA can run Mock Interview Workshops for students and can run fundraising events for the benefit of providing HFC and its students with the resources they need to support the teaching and learning process. To whom much is given, much is expected. The HF Sisters and our teachers and staff at HFC were/are true professionals and their dedication and commitment to the task of drawing out from us our God-given talents, are enough to spur us on to play our part in doing what we can to facilitate the continuation of quality education at our Alma Mater. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

I can honestly say that HFC and my parents, played an enormous role in shaping me. I am who I am today because of the universal values and virtues that were

instilled in me at home and at HFC. I am sure many of you will agree with this point of view.

We past pupils have all taken various paths in life, but wherever we go, HFC is embedded in our hearts. I have many treasured memories of my years at HFC. Indeed, I am truly blessed and privileged to be part of the HFC family.

The love that developed among HFC students and staff continues to radiate in our lives today. I recall that at one of the many dinners held at my home for my HFC classmates and a few of our Teachers, we joined hands and sang our school song with great gusto. The author of that song was none other than our former Principal, Sr Magdalena Mac Bride. She chose her words well.

In the 3 stanzas of this song can be found Catholic values of, for example, kindness; friendship; respect for ethnic, religious and cultural diversity; love; and unity. These values are essential for character-building and nation-building.

The PPA has a duty to promote HFC as a community of love; a community that is committed to excellence and to integral human development; a community that is concerned to deepen its relationship with God, neighbour and creation. The identity and ethos of HFC is permeated by these aforementioned values which underpin the lives of pupils and staff and they continue to enrich and strengthen us as we journey on in life. It is these values that have nurtured our self-esteem and have helped many of us to assume leadership roles effectively. HFC nurtured in many of us a spirituality that enabled us to live our Faith in the market place – touching every aspect of our lives.

It is important to note that while we celebrate the many scholarships that HFC students have won over the years, our Alma Mater is not only concerned about academic achievement but about integral human development, which our Popes continue to encourage us to promote.

It is worth noting the words of Pope Francis - uttered on 21 Nov during an audience with more than 2,000 participants in a Conference marking the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education. He spoke about Catholic identity in education and when asked what made a school "truly Christian", he said: Christian education was not just about providing catechesis but required educating children and young people in human values', particularly the value of transcendence.

"Educating that was too focused on the tangible and ignored the spiritual dimension of existence was 'the biggest crisis' facing Christian education, he said. 'We must prepare hearts so the Lord can manifest himself' which required an education that strived to reflect the fullness of humanity that has this dimension of transcendence'....When asked how Catholic schools could contribute to building peace in the world, the Pope called on them to educate the poor and the marginalised..." (CNS) - see Catholic News Nov 29, 2015.

In my work as an educator in the UK, I always used HFC as an example of a school that welcomes students from poor economic backgrounds in its fold and offers them high quality education without placing a ceiling on their potential. I know from my own friends who passed through HFC and who entered the teaching profession, that they also ensured that the inherent dignity of poor students were promoted and that conditions were created for them to achieve their potential. HFC students continue to excel in various fields in society – here and abroad; proudly playing their part in nation-building – wherever they live. Before I close, I would like to thank the Holy Faith Sisters for their vision in responding to the call to serve as educators right here in Couva 65 years ago, as well as in other parts of TT. HFC opened its doors in Couva to 50 students in January 1951 – 6 months after I was born. I consider myself lucky that the Sisters planted a school here.

Sisters, you, and the other HF Sisters who have gone before you, are true servant leaders who have played a pivotal role in the development of countless young women in our country. For this we say: “Thank you!”

I commend all those who have dedicated their services to HFC’s PPA over the past 30 years and encourage those present to find time to support the PPA and to encourage your friends to do so also. We must:

- resolve to put our shoulders to the proverbial wheel and take our Alma Mater forward;
- share our time, talent and treasure with our PPA so that they will achieve the goals to which we all subscribe; and
- offer our services and gifts as role models and mentors to our Alma Mater.

May kindness and love continue to abound in our hearts as we continue to ascribe to the highest standards in all our endeavours. May God richly bless us all as we embark on the Jubilee Year of Mercy from Tuesday 8 Dec 2015 to Nov 20 Nov 2016, and as we strive to assist HFC to meet the challenges of the 21st Century – taking her to ever higher heights of excellence.

I end with the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

"The Church (and I would add, our Catholic schools and our PPA) must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."

I thank you.