

October 18, 2014

Dear Members,

I would like to begin my annual report to you as Chairperson of the Foundation with the questions: What does MCS stand for in today's society? What are her values and priorities?

It is an important question to ask because the world we live in is far from simple. In the past three weeks, what happened in the streets of Hong Kong and the debate that ensued have engulfed us all. The debate takes place at many different levels. At one level, it is about values and what happens when they seem to clash with each other. Right vs duty. Justice and its relationship with the Law. Stability vs freedom. Democracy and its relationship with quality of life. No matter which side you are on, what opinion you hold (and there are indeed different opinions), no one can deny that the issues being debated and what is at stake are significant.

As a member of the society of Hong Kong, MCS cannot and should not stand detached from important trends and developments in society. We are fortunate to have a beautiful and iconic campus that reminds one of a medieval castle. Entering the Maryknoll campus can lift people into a more tranquil space mentally and physically but it is important to remember, despite this, we are not isolated. Nor are we out of sync with our times. As a school, Maryknoll shall always be an engaged member of society.

The form of engagement, however, poses an interesting question. It was inspiring to me that at the height of emotions in the first week of October, when Hong Kong was confused and stressed, our School responded by providing an opportunity where students and some former students were able to share experiences, ask questions and explore a very difficult topic. Students from F1 to F6 were given a choice to either continue class or join the School Hall program where such discussions took place under the organization of some former students. Speakers of different views were represented. Some teachers also spoke. Some talked about the importance of civil liberty and democracy. Others talked about the importance of critical thinking before jumping into actions. I happened to be there so I talked about the importance of practising compassion across the aisle and not let the seed of hatred take roots in our hearts. Students who participated in these talks had the opportunity to have small group discussions and from what I could see, the discussion was lively and the views were diverse and interesting. After a couple of days, all students elected to resume class as usual as they felt that was the most sensible thing to do. By so doing, our Scholl skillfully turned a crisis into a learning experience for our girls.

At Maryknoll, we champion love, peace, compassion and respect for each other. To get there, we believe diversity is a good thing and freedom to explore and express oneself is healthy. We trust that our students are capable of critical thinking and coming up with both questions and answers. Our job as a school is to provide them with that environment and encourage them to acquire

knowledge as well as understanding. We are glad that this spirit is well and alive at our school. Just a quick footnote, our Primary section went through the past three weeks without hiccup and a normal school life continued.

The importance of being clear on one's values and priorities also extends to academic life. The stress in the Hong Kong education system is easy to see. Teachers, students and parents all feel the pressure to achieve academic success. How do we strike a balance between helping students, on one hand, attain good academic results within a defined timeframe and, on the other hand, nurture in them the creativity, the balance and the ability to learn that will serve them well in the long run? This is a big topic. I tried to initiate that conversation with the teachers with a speech that I gave to both primary and secondary sections. I also sent a copy to you by email before the AGM and hope you had a chance to read it.

We recognize the pressure that comes from parental expectation on the teachers to produce good academic results. The more I talk to the teachers, the more I realize how heavy this expectation weighs on their shoulders. Thus we want to balance it with an assurance that as a sponsoring body, we think success is more than mere grades. We are trying to send a message that as a sponsoring body, we are willing to take a longer term view of things and we encourage the school management as well as teachers to put greater focus on HOW they teach, HOW the students learn, and not only on what grades the students score.

This brings me to Teaching and Learning. I mentioned to you at last year's AGM that Teaching & Learning is an important focus at our School. At the end of the day, what is a school if not about teaching and learning? However it is important that we give this a great deal of real focus and not just pay lip service or go on like business as usual. Teaching methods have evolved over time and will continue to do so, as technology changes and the skills required for young people to do well in society also change. With the internet providing information on pretty much everything, what you know does not really count as much as how to find, select and process information to achieve one's objective. If we get our teaching methods right, we can accomplish a lot of what others are trying to do through Small Class Teaching. If we can adopt teaching methods that cater to different learning levels and styles among students in a classroom, we will be able to overcome the challenge that comes with not being able to select our own students because we are an aided school. While we follow the EDB's curriculum, there is always room for improving our teaching material selection so that our girls can acquire the skills not simply to handle the public exams in Hong Kong, but to do well in universities and at workplaces.

On this front, there are several things worth mentioning. One is, last year, the School commissioned an outside consultant to do a high-level review of the school's current state. He called it the Critical Friend's Review ("CFR"). I asked the Supervisors to share with the audience at the AGM the highlights of the CFR report and what the School is doing in response to his findings and suggestion. Everyone found their reports informative and helpful.

Secondly, upon the suggestion of the Teaching and Learning Committee under the IMC, the School came up with a Policy on Curriculum, Learning & Teaching shared by both Secondary and Primary sections that places clear emphasis on developing students' digital literacy, creativity, critical thinking, innovation and communication skills, and the importance of continued exposure and professional development for our teachers on topic of instructional strategies and best practices.

Thirdly, one of our Councillors and education expert Doris Au has begun to offer talks and training workshops to our teachers. After the AGM, Doris gave a short presentation giving the audience a glimpse of what she is talking to the teachers about.

Compared to the past, we are sharing more information with you (using the AGM as a platform) about what is going on at the School so that you can have a better understanding of where things stand. Without a proper understanding of where things stand, I do not believe there is a solid basis to talk about where we shall go. It is a long journey and full of both challenges and opportunities. We are a school with history and reputation. It is a double-edged sword. History and tradition give us strong roots and a good compass on core values. Reputation helps us attract students and teachers. But institutions with history are often those with the most baggage and are most resistant to change. *Don't rock the boat. Too much is at stake. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.* I can tell you when you are in the middle of it, it is very easy to feel that way. It is a challenge that faces many established and renowned institutions here and abroad.

What history tells us is institutions that fail to change with time will fall behind. Institutions that are not able to continuously improve, that are not willing to let go of old ways of doing things, that are not in touch with developments outside of one's schoolyard will over time be overtaken and become marginalized. Remember Polaroid that used to dominate instant photography and Kodak that used to dominate films for cameras? Where are they today? Sony used to dominate portable music players. Remember Walkman? Sony has completely missed the boat with smartphones. But at least Sony still tries to keep up by coming up with new business models. And then there is Microsoft, the giant of computer software, desperately trying to get into new fields to avoid long term decline. Today, the best computer engineers no longer look for jobs at Microsoft. They go to Facebook or Google and probably some companies that are even younger and fresher than Facebook and Google. **The world is constantly changing. The only constant in life is Change.**

As Maryknollers, we remain true to the Christian values embedded in our Mission and Vision Statement but these values do not tell us how we shall teach. How we shall teach MUST evolve over time – as our students change and their needs change.

To do this, we need to ensure strong leadership at our school over time and there will continue to be new blood with new ideas coming down the pipeline. On this note, I am happy to report to you that at both Secondary and Primary sections,

we have a new Vice Principal. Mr. Herbert Ma has become our VP at Secondary since 2013. Ms. Ivy Ng is our new VP at Primary since the summer after Ms. Maria Cheng retired this past year.

To conclude, I shall quickly turn to our Foundation's internal matters. We have two departing Councillors this year – Kenzie Kwong and Ronna Chao. I would like to extend my appreciation and gratitude to both of them for their dedicated service to the school. Especially Kenzie who has been my Vice Chair at Foundation and Convenor of Communications Committee. She has done a great deal for the Foundation and the School. And she will remain active at the IMCs and as deputy Supervisor of Secondary. We also thank Ronna for her contribution and look forward to still seeing her at our meetings and events.

Thank you and may God bless you and Maryknoll!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Maura Wong', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Maura Wong
Chairperson of MCS Foundation