

**Speech by The Honourable Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma
at the Graduation Ceremony of
Sacred Heart Canossian College
4 July 2019**

Sister Agnes, Sister Veronica, Distinguished Guests, Students,
Teachers and Parents, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would first like to congratulate all recipients of prizes and certificates today. You do your school proud, you do your parents and families proud and you do yourselves proud.

2. It is a great honour to be asked to say a few words at the Graduation Ceremony of Sacred Heart Canossian College, particularly this year as the College enters its 160th year since its establishment in 1860. SHCC is one of the oldest educational establishments in Hong Kong and those who

attend this school have much to live up to. The value of a school and the extent of its success are measured largely by the sense of community of its students. An education will enable a person to master individual disciplines such as languages, history, the arts and the sciences, but it is the school that teaches the necessity of being a part of the community and all facets of the community.

3. The history of secondary schools in Hong Kong is very much a history involving the influence of religious orders, whether Catholic or Anglican as well as others. The Canossian Sisters brought to life core values of family, truth, love, justice and community. Whenever I look at old black and white photographs of school children, the one part that always captures my attention is the presence of children who are not well off or fortunate. Schools in Hong Kong like SHCC have always had as part of their identity a sense of

humility and the mission to provide a good education for everyone including the poor, the abused and in the early days, the orphaned. And there have been many of these unfortunate children over the years in Hong Kong. From a barely occupied farming and fishing community in 1840, Hong Kong transformed itself into the central hub of trade, finance and commerce that it has become today. The population in Hong Kong in 1841 was just under 7500, by the turn of the century in 1901 it had risen to nearly 369000, in 1951 the population was just over 2 million and in 2001, it was over 6.7 million. Now the population is nearly 7.5 million. Prosperity in Hong Kong meant the influx of many people from abroad and from other parts of China seeking a better life, sometimes as a result of social upheaval, but as we all know while some had the good fortune of that better life for them and their families, others were not quite so blessed with luck.

4. Schools like SHCC have always looked after those who have not been fortunate and have given them an education which they otherwise could not afford. Many schools, inspired by Christian values, embarked on what can simply be called social service. Well into the 20th Century, many schools, some now among Hong Kong's very best, ran classes for the less fortunate. The Canossian schools (Sacred Heart and St Mary's) ran charity and free schools for the less fortunate in the late afternoon after day school ended. Teachers and senior students volunteered. DBS had Sunday School classes for the poor at the Shek Kip Mei squatter areas; DGS ran a Children's Club in Temple Street to help educate the poor; Heep Yun School, Maryknoll Convent School and Ying Wa Girls' School operated schools in slum areas. As Dr Patricia Chiu puts it in her excellent book *A History of the Grant Schools Council*¹: "Not only did the schools serve the

¹ Grant Schools Council 2013, at Pg. 19.

needy through their staff and students, they also nurtured a spirit of compassion and generosity in their students, which inspired a number of them to become philanthropists and community leaders serving Hong Kong for generations.”

5. During the day time, the more fortunate students who worked and played alongside the less fortunate ones could see for themselves that a community consisted of persons of varied backgrounds: rich and poor, fortunate and unfortunate, persons of different racial and cultural backgrounds, and so on.

6. All this contributed to a sense of community in Hong Kong and I believe this has never been lost in our society. It has never been lost because this is the culture of our schools and it is the culture that SHCC has tried and continues to instill in its students. This is not just some kind

of mission statement or motto, it is the central part of the College's teaching philosophy.

7. A sense of community means a respect for the rights and dignity of everyone in society. This mutual respect – or to put it in another way, a respect for the rights of others – is an integral part of Hong Kong and it is this that truly makes Hong Kong our home.

8. Recent events in Hong Kong may for some people have cast doubt on the sense of community I have just talked about. I believe this to be a passing phase. As always, the fundamentals will shine through. Fundamentals include the rule of law which has always served Hong Kong well and will continue to do so in the future. Another fundamental is the philosophy and tradition of schools like SHCC. Your own theme of “Celebrating the Past with Gratitude, Embracing the

Future with Hope, Sharing our Life in Love” captures this precisely. This theme encapsulates the very ideals I have been discussing: being a part of the community, contributing to the health and future of that community and mutually respecting each other within it.

9. I once again thank SHCC for inviting me this evening to this important event. I wish the College every success in its future endeavours. I wish each student here much happiness and fulfillment in all your dreams.

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