2010 has been a ‘red-letter’ year for MSB as we complete the 90th year of the College’s service to education and stand in awe of the century of ministry by the Sisters of Mercy to people of this region and beyond. Before the Sisters ascended the Herberton range in 1910, as did the first Europeans 40 years or so before them, this place was and remains the precious land of Djirrbal people. Our school community offers respect and friendship to their elders, and acknowledges the deep spiritual relationship between the people of the Djirrbal nation and this land.

One hundred and thirty five years ago word spread amongst the goldfields of the Palmer River and, further south, the mining fields of the Hodgekinson River, [north where now stands Dimbulah], that a lode of tin ore was discovered on the banks of the Wild River. Prospectors and their families came from the north, others tramped west from the coast and still more from the prospecting fields west and south of where Townsville now stands. They were chasing a dream, an Eldorado, with the hope that the precious ore from the ground might create a better, more secure future for them and their families. Imagine Herberton in 1880; or even 30 years later in 1910 when the first Sisters of Mercy arrived.

It would be a very shallow understanding of the history of this place if we did not appreciate that the earth has offered a precious gift to those who have lived here, not only over the past century or so, but over the last 400 centuries and more. The Djirrbal people and their forebears have transversed the song-lines and sacred...
places among these hills, honouring the cycle of the seasons and the deep spiritual truths about life and kinship revealed to them by the creator spirit.

It is in this context of the pursuit of the precious that we understand the significance of the arrival in these parts of the Mercy Sisters, who added to the work of the laity and clergy who had established this parish 125 years ago. They brought with them precious gifts; the gift of faith and the gift of education. Together they drew the truth from the Gospel that the truly precious is not what is in one’s pocket, rather it is what emerges from one’s heart and mind. The true quest of education, and Catholic education in particular, is to nurture the heart and expand the mind. It is to reveal and honour the unique God given dignity of every person and to create new possibilities in education’s search for truth, goodness and beauty.

- This year has seen much growth and success at MSB. Our Senior class graduated in November with very creditable results. 92% of graduates were awarded both a Vocational Education & Training (VET) qualification and a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). Of OP eligible students, 100% achieved in the OP range 1-10. All students who made application to QTAC received a tertiary offer. These outstanding results evidence not only the academic commitment and application of our students, but also are testimony to the professionalism, dedication and excellence of MSB's educators.

- This year saw an expansion of MSB's transition learning program with the introduction of a second unit, Dungarven. Our transition learning program is designed to meet the needs of young learners who for a variety of reasons require intensive literacy and numeracy facilitation to enable a successful engagement with the core curriculum. Students are well engaged in their learning and are consolidating literacy and numeracy capacities. Students have shown an increased capacity and willingness to engage and concentrate in the classroom setting; a precursor for learning advancement. Students take pride in their learning outcomes and are willing to celebrate this in the broader school community. Educational experts from QUT have partnered with MSB in analysing empirical data related to student learning so as to identify the most suitable junctures for student transition into core curriculum studies.
• Academic programs across the core curriculum have been the focus of ongoing development in response to emerging needs identified in the Australian Curriculum. In the VET area, a major success has been achieved through MSB's partnership in the Cairns Catholic Colleges Trade Training Centre Consortium. The Consortium successfully won in excess of $9m in Commonwealth funding for this project.

• The development of MSB’s buildings and facilities has brought many benefits to both Teaching & Learning and Boarding operations. Our participation in the Commonwealth Government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) and Digital Education Revolution (DER) programs enabled the total refurbishment of the Science and Language facility, while new and extensively renovated residential facilities came on-line in the early part of the year. These facilities have greatly enhanced living and learning at MSB.

• MSB’s particular outreach to young learners from remote communities of the Cape, Gulf and Torres Strait is an ongoing hallmark of MSB’s contemporary commitment to educational need and an active investment in ‘closing the gap’ for indigenous Australians. The cultural diversity of our community is a great source of our pride. MSB’s NAIDOC celebrations this year were a feast of the senses; ritual, dance, song and feasting became a focus of unity for our school community.

• Co-curricular engagement by the student community continued to expand in 2010. Students successfully participated in Rostrum Voice of Youth, Legacy Junior Speakers, Lions Youth of the Year, and Student Constitutional Convention events. MSB’s renowned Expedition Program once again saw significant personal growth and community cohesion amongst participants. This was complemented by a mid-year visit to our Nation’s Capital and a few days in the ski fields. September Show Case was once again a wonderful celebration of student achievement and performances. MSB life in 2010, as ever, has been rich, colourful and vibrant.

If we imagine the first school room at St Patrick's 100 years ago, with slates and inkpots and nibs, and compare this against today’s’ high tech classrooms with laptops and data projectors and smart boards, we may believe we are in a different world. However, the one constant is this; the classrooms, both then and now, have always been places where learners and teachers have together sought understanding through which to make sense of life and to imbue it with meaning.
and purpose. From this vantage point I hope we can say ‘look at how far we have come, but see how close we have stayed’ to what is truly precious.

While we have a responsibility to the past and the rich traditions we have inherited, our greatest responsibility is for the now, for making the most of the opportunities presented to us. We honour the past, but we do not live there. Our work, our task, is in the here and now.

I thank our students for their hard work, their creativity, their yearning for justice and their sense of fun. I thank our school families for entering into partnership with us in the nurturing of their children.

I thank my colleagues in education here at MSB. On their behalf, I salute the Sisters of Mercy who have carried the day across a century. I ardently believe that all who work here in whatever capacity are ‘educators’. Education is like the laying down of a long-term investment; an investment that pays a return that we may never see in our life-time; nevertheless an investment that will pay dividends across generations.

Finally, on behalf of the College community – students and their families, our staff, the many, many friends of MSB made across the past nine decades – I thank the Cairns Congregation of Sisters of Mercy who have brought the gift of education to be shared in this town, and beyond, across a century.

God bless!

Mr Luke Reed
MSB College Principal