

The 160th Celebration Dinner

One of the highlights of the College's anniversary is the dinner. Held every five years the dinner provides a wonderful opportunity to reunite alumni and to welcome retired teachers, current teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, students and special friends of the College to celebrate the anniversary. The celebration dinner, sometimes called the reunion dinner, is organised by the St. Paul's College Alumni Association.

This year's anniversary dinner was held on Sunday 11 December in the Grand Hall of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai. The grandness of the venue was complemented by the number of guests. Two thousand four hundred guests sat down to dinner at two hundred tables; the maximum number of diners that can be accommodated within the Grand Hall and in the foyer outside. It was the number of people in attendance that made this year's function even more memorable. Few schools in Hong Kong or overseas could hope to attract as many guests. The fact that SPC was able to do so tells you something place our College has in the hearts of so many people.

On arrival the guests were invited to pose for the photographers and television cameras. The guests were then asked to sign the Welcome Wall and it was not long before every part of the canvas was filled with names and messages. Finding one's seat took a little time, not due to any inefficiency on the part of the stewards but because of the sheer size of the venue. Two hundred tables covered a large floor area although the master seating plans at the main doors helped people move in the right direction. A great deal of effort went in to the table settings with flower decorations, prizes and souvenir bags adding that special touch.

Members of the College Council formed the procession along with our special guests for the evening; Archbishop Paul, Archbishop Emeritus Peter, Bishop Thomas and Bishop Louis. The official party walked in to the Grand Hall, to the music of Scottish bagpipes, cheered on by the dinner guests each waving a College flag. The atmosphere was electric as the official party made its way through the throng to the head tables. It was at this point that the orchestra led the gathering in the singing of the College Hymn followed by a Toast to the College and the first rendition for the evening of the College Song.

I shall not dwell on the food served at dinner suffice it to say that the four courses of abalone, lobster soup, veal & lamb and assorted desserts were delicious!

The MCs, two alumni well known on local television, held the evening together. Wandering between the tables, they conducted on-the-spot interviews with some prominent alumni living in Hong Kong and overseas as well as with retired teachers of the College and the Primary School. Yet the highlight of the evening for the hundreds of alumni gathered was the presentation of two groups of people on the stage. The first group was many of the girls who had attended the College since the initial cohort was enrolled in 1970. It was wonderful to see some of the original girls in our College standing next to some of the latest graduates from the Class of 2011. However, it was the second group to move onto the stage that everybody really wanted to see; the retired teachers. Some were teaching at the College in the early 1960s, others had retired more recently. Their presence brought back many memories for the hundreds of alumni seated in the Grand Hall.

I wonder if you will be at the 200th Anniversary Dinner in December 2051? The majority of you will be in your early to mid 50s at that time although some of the Form 7s will be much closer to 60 years of age. I'm sure that the organisers of the evening will also invite the retired teachers on to the stage most of whom will be in their 70s and 80s in forty years time. I would like to join you on that occasion; however, I may well have to send my apologies in advance!

What was deeply moving at the 160th Anniversary Dinner was the final rendition of the College Song that was sung to bring the evening to a close. The loyalty to St. Paul's College and the passion of the alumni for their alma mater was plain for all to hear. Long may that passion continue.

J.R. Kennard