

Principal's speech

Damascus Day 2025

Good morning staff, students and members of the Damascus College community.

Today is a significant moment in the life of our school. We gather not just to celebrate Damascus Day, but to mark 30 years since the formation of Damascus College — 30 years of Catholic education inspired by the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers. Thirty years of building something unique, something lasting — something that started, like many great things, from small beginnings.

It's fitting to reflect today on the song *"From Little Things Big Things Grow"*, written by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody. The song tells the story of the Gurindji people and their struggle for land rights — but its message speaks to all of us, here and now. From humble beginnings, with courage and persistence, great change can come. From little things, big things grow.

When Damascus College began in 1995, it was a merging of communities, cultures and identities. That wasn't always easy. But over time, through the dedication of staff, the leadership of students, and the strength of our values, we have grown into the vibrant, diverse and faith-filled community we are today.

We now see a beautiful sign of our college's legacy — many of our current students have parents who once walked these same corridors. That generational connection speaks volumes. It says this is more than just a school — it's a place of belonging. A place where values are lived, stories are shared, and community is built over time. It is a privilege to watch new generations write their own Damascus story, while honouring the footsteps of those who came before. Some of our Year 10 students are visiting some of our founding students at Mercy Place in Ballarat now in their 80's reminiscing on their experience at Sacred Heart.

Damascus College was founded as a coeducational school — and that vision remains as important today as ever. We are a community where young people of all genders learn together, lead together and build mutual respect through shared experience. We aim to model respectful relationships, promote equity and create a culture where everyone is seen, heard and valued. At the heart of our school is inclusion — not just as a value, but as a practice. We are called to accept and uplift all people, especially those on the margins. That is what it means to be people of Christ's Mercy.

But what does *mercy* look like in the 21st century?

It's not old-fashioned. It's not weakness. Mercy today is radical empathy. It is having the courage to see the world through another person's eyes — and to act with compassion and fairness, even when it's hard. It means building bridges, not walls. It means listening before judging. It means choosing kindness when the world tells you to compete or condemn.

Christ's Mercy is not just a story from 2,000 years ago — it's alive in every act of inclusion, every time we forgive, every time we reach out to someone different from ourselves. And when we live that way — as people of mercy — we change the world, one small act at a time.

In recent weeks, we've seen conflict and division in our city. Violent clashes between groups who look different, believe different things, or come from different places. It's been unsettling — even frightening. But it is in these moments that we are reminded why Damascus exists. Our world desperately needs people who live Christ's mercy — people of compassion, justice, and inclusion.



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That means you.

Whether you're in Year 7 or Year 12, you have the ability to shape your world. To listen when others are shouting. To include when others exclude. To show courage and integrity in a world that sometimes rewards cruelty or selfishness. You are not too young. From little things, big things grow.

So, on this Damascus Day, we celebrate the past — 30 years of vision, faith, and determination — but we also commit to the future. A future where the values of mercy aren't just written on our walls, but lived in our actions.

Before I finish, I want to acknowledge and sincerely thank our outgoing College Captains. Your leadership this year has been marked by integrity, courage, and a deep commitment to student voice and agency. You have given generously of yourselves — through your presence, your listening, your words, and your actions. You've shown what leadership looks like when it's grounded in service. On behalf of the entire Damascus community — thank you.

May this Damascus Day be a time of joy, reflection, and renewed purpose.

And may we all continue to grow — from little things, into something great.

Thank you.