MESSAGE TO THE OLMC PARRAMATTA COMMUNITY – CHRISTMAS 2012

13th December 2012

Dear Families

As the school year closes we can look back upon 2012 and the many and varied achievements of our students. Our Year 12 girls have completed the HSC and we expect that they will achieve good results, allowing them to proceed with confidence onto the next stage of their education or working lives.

Students have also demonstrated excellence through their involvement in a range of co-curricular areas including sport, the arts, public speaking and debating, with the past year seeing a number of new initiatives including the conduct of the inaugural competition for the Rosemary Crumlin Art Prize and the involvement of students in the adornment of the College’s new facilities with symbols that represent visible signs of Mercy.

We farewell Vivien Brewer (Assistant Principal) and Janet Frost (Director of Teaching and Learning), who are retiring at the end of 2012. Vivien and Janet, both former students, have made significant contributions to OLMC and we thank them and wish them well for the future. Kathleen Polo (Director of Staff Services) and Claire Thomas (Director of Mission) joined the College Executive recently as will Tanya Appleby who takes up the position as Deputy Principal at the start of 2013. Kathleen, Claire and Tanya are also Mercy Girls, returning to the College in positions of senior leadership. Sandra Stockwell, who has taught at the College for over 30 years and who manages all aspects of administrative services will also join the College Executive from 2013, as Director of Administration.

The funding responsibilities of governments are important to OLMC and the Board is closely following developments in this area and working with representative bodies to secure the most positive outcomes available. We expect that details of the review of school funding following the report of the Gonski committee will become known during the first half of 2013.
It is hoped that there will be no negative consequences for OLMC, particularly following the NSW Government’s recent action of freezing funding to independent schools which will lead to the loss of over one million dollars in funding by the College over the next five years.

During the year, the College community has made great use of its new facilities in the Christina Creede Music Centre and the Barbara McDonough Student Centre. In addition, minor refurbishments have been completed during the non-term breaks this year, providing a dance studio and an additional drama theatre.

Fifteen of the seventeen elements of the College Master Plan 2008 – 2016 are now complete, and as planned we will now have a break from any major construction activity for at least two years. However planning for the next new building, the Ailsa Mackinnon Centre, will commence early in 2013. This centre will provide a large space for whole of College gatherings as well as indoor and roof-top sporting facilities. A combination of College funds and borrowings will contribute to the project and the College will also be seeking assistance from NSW and Australian Governments through capital grant applications.

The scope and design of the Ailsa Mackinnon Centre, and the timing of its construction will be impacted by:

- the abovementioned uncertainty of government funding,
- timing and success of capital grant applications,
- the need for thoughtful planning around existing heritage buildings.

The appointment of architects and other consultants will occur prior to the commencement of the 2013 school year with design and planning work continuing throughout 2013 and 2014 with the availability of funds and the final design being important considerations in determining whether construction will occur as staged works.

During 2012, focus was placed upon making use of available technologies in communicating with families. Our new website was launched for easy access to more comprehensive information and online transactions, and the College’s weekly “Parragraph” is now provided by email in e-news format. The student attendance management system provides enhanced safety and security for families by sending SMS alerts in the event of un-notified student absences, and email or SMS is now frequently used to inform families on important matters. During 2013, we will be exploring the use of social media to communicate with the College community in appropriate ways.

As advised earlier this year, the College Board had met to consider the 2013 budget and the tuition and other fees that would apply. We informed you that, prior to the NSW Government’s announcement of the funding freeze, the decision had been made to increase tuition fees by 5.5% for Years 7 to 10, and by 3.7% for Years 11 and 12, and the College is able to maintain these levels despite the loss of approximately $40,000 in funding for 2013. While savings have been made to offset this loss, these savings have been made in administrative areas so as not to impact services to students.
The Board is mindful of the important decision that you have made in choosing an education at OLMC Parramatta for your daughters and the cost that this entails. The College will therefore make every effort to keep any increases in fees for future years as low as possible. In doing so however, it is important that the College continues to offer quality services and facilities in ways that present value for families and it is hoped that the impacts upon fees of the NSW Government’s funding freeze and new Commonwealth funding arrangements arising from the Gonski review will be minimal.

The Mercy Tree has been an important new initiative at the College. It symbolises growth in the values held by Mercy girls and raises funds for worthwhile causes. Since its blessing during February 2012 when the fundraising appeal was launched, over $45,000 has been raised and the Mercy Tree features strongly in the life of OLMC Parramatta.

The Student Notebook Program has been in operation at the College since 2009 and is now central to learning at the College. Technology is developing rapidly and each year an assessment of the needs of students is made in deciding upon the types of devices to provide. While a range of tablet devices is available, the breadth of applications that are used at OLMC with a continued focus on students’ ability to create content makes the use of notebook computers most suitable.

During early 2013, a thorough evaluation of the outcomes of OLMC Parramatta Strategic Plan 2010-2012 will be carried out. Following this, work will continue on the planning to take us forward into the next stage of the College’s development. We look forward to reporting to you on the progress of this important work by the College Board and staff.

The recently announced Royal Commission into Child Sex Abuse in Australia has been the subject of much public interest and this will continue next year as its Terms of Reference are developed and it proceeds. The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, College Board and staff strongly condemn such abuse. Sister Catherine Ryan, Congregation Leader of the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta has prepared the enclosed message to the College community in relation to this important development.

2014 will be an important milestone in the life of the College as we celebrate 125 years since our founding. A committee has been established to work during 2013 in developing a range of celebration events and activities.

In closing we take the opportunity to wish you a joyous Christmas and hope that 2013 brings you every happiness.

With kind regards,

Kitty Guerin     Kerrie Walshaw
Principal     Chair