



From the Principal

Peter Clague



The Best Medicine

Although they didn't exactly become household names, Drew Weissman and Katalin Karikó gained global fame in the latter part of 2020. They were amongst a handful of the pioneering scientists whose endless late nights in laboratories ultimately concocted the first COVID-19 vaccines. The world applauded them, and rightly so, as they brought the disease to heel.

Yet equally heroic were countless ordinary doctors and nurses, busy healing those laid low by the illness. Local medical professionals who tended to the sick in their communities, treating symptoms and gradually nursing people back to full health. Whilst others worked to halt the spread of the virus, they were busy repairing the damage it had already caused.

I wonder whether we aren't facing a similar situation again, with respect to the pandemic as a whole. Just like the COVID-19 virus itself, the social and economic upheaval wrought by our responses to the pandemic has seemed like a different type of ailment in its own right. Social isolation, heightened anxiety, and disruption to the familiar routines of our lives have left scars of their own. Meaning that whilst world leaders and great scientific minds are now concentrating on preventing a reoccurrence in the face of future diseases, at the local level it is up to ordinary people to help one another heal from the unfortunate side-effects of the pandemic responses.

Humans are fundamentally social beings. We are hard-wired to commune, co-operate, and care for others. That was why most people readily accepted the need to abide by lockdowns or socially distance themselves from one another. Yet the unintended impacts of that commitment to the common good have been stark. Enforced separation has caused loneliness, a sense of dislocation, and a residual fear of contact in some people. Working from home may have been a good way to prevent transmission of the virus but, inadvertently, it was also a good way to prevent the transmission of fellowship and collegiality as well.

Likewise, the tyranny of mask-wearing. Empathy is a uniquely human trait. Our species has flourished because of our ability to understand how others feel. We even evolved a highly sophisticated (and completely subconscious) technique that fosters empathy. Whenever we meet another person, we instantly scan their face, reading subliminal cues about how they are feeling and what their disposition towards us might be. By putting a mask over the faces of nearly every human being on the planet, we lost our super-power of reading those around us. Unnerving during a trip to the shopping mall, utterly corrosive in highly social environments like schools.

Hence, my first priority in the term ahead is to do all I can to get this wonderful community back to full health, in head, heart, and soul. To focus upon healing any damage that two years of pandemic restrictions may have done. Repair any sense of dislocation. Reconnect relationships that have been too long apart. Restore communal activities that were always the reliably healthy pulse of the College life.

What might that look like? Here is my prescription for all in the student body:

- A large dose of encouragement to re-engage, to shake off any residual fear of interacting with other people and impel every student back into the myriad of activities on offer at every level of the College.
- A tall measure of optimism, followed by a good dash of gratitude. Reminding everyone of the great privilege they enjoy by attending a school like ours and reaffirming respect for its heritage and standards. That means wearing their uniform with pride, recognising that the way we present ourselves is symbol of the respect we have for ourselves and those with whom we share the St Leonard's crest.
- Regular exercise of brains and bodies as we exit the long hibernation. A return to routines; books read, balls bounced, friendships nourished. Not being a passenger in class or a bystander outside of it. It is time to get back on the horse.

The virus has taken a lasting physical toll on some people. We must make sure that a similar affliction of 'Long Covid' does not cast a shadow over our social and emotional wellbeing in the months to come. The best remedy? Medicines often bear Latin names, so I would prescribe our own motto. 'Nulla dies sine linea' Let's make sure that every child really does learn or do something new at St Leonard's every day this term.