

Aquinas College Gala Ball
Head of College's response, Toast to the College

Tonight we celebrate the greatest and rarest of privileges: in this room, we have every generation of Aquinians represented – from our first years who joined us seven months' ago, right back to Aquinians who were actually present at the College's Opening Service in 1950.

I have one word to describe the emotion this evokes: gratitude.
I'm so grateful in so many ways.

I'm grateful for our students, past and present. You are wonderful young people who are generous, who show up and get involved. You make my day every day – you bring the heart.

I'm grateful for our families: you entrust us with your children, sending them sometimes thousands of kilometres away from home, and you support the work of the College from all corners of Australia.

I'm grateful for our wider alumni network and the way you love Aquinas.
I once dropped my son off to a birthday party. I was wearing College merch and when the dad opened the door, he said "Do you work at Aquinas? I went to Aquinas! It was the best year of my life – I only went to uni once!"
Let me assure you that *that* has changed, and our students go to uni all the time now, but the enthusiasm and love of the College remains strong.

To see so many of our alumni travel from far and wide to be here, including one of our first Aquinians, Bernie Wadsworth from Boston who led the Grace tonight, is testament to the friendships and memories made, the connections our alumni make while here at Aquinas.

I'm grateful to the Jesuits and Marists, who led the College for nearly 70 years, doing everything from buying property to running tutorials. They did it all with great commitment. The term Rector means 'to keep straight', and when you read historical exploits of students blowing up other colleges' tennis courts, there is no question that they did a lot of 'keeping straight' over the years.

I'm grateful to our former leaders who are here tonight – Rectors, Professor Denis Ralph and Br Michael Green, and former Dean Carolyn Mee. You did so much to lead an intentional, positive culture so that Aquinas truly is a family.

I'm grateful to our current and former staff, including our House Coordinators, Student Clubs, Academic Teams – you lead from the front, making the memories and bringing the fun.

I'm grateful to all those Catholics, who as early as 1938 began raising funds for a Catholic Residential College. They knew they would never benefit from a university education, but they gave generously so that their kids and grandkids could be here.

This brings me to another thanks.

Looking through our archives, we found a newspaper clipping saying that Mrs K. Bardolph hosted a bridge afternoon in 1951 to raise funds for Aquinas College. Now, Mrs K. Bardolph is the grandmother of our very own, irreplaceable Registrar and Gala Ball organiser extraordinaire, Stephanie Hamra. It looks like gala events run in her genes. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Steph for the thousands of hours of planning, organising and chasing table captains that she has put into this event. Tonight has been an absolute triumph, and your grandmother would have been so proud.

Finally, I'd like to give thanks to God. Looking back over the story of Aquinas, we realise that we are part of something bigger than we are. We can honestly look back over the past 75 years and say we have been blessed; God has blessed Aquinas in so many ways.

But the story's not finished, and it's a story to which you all belong.

I invite you tonight to renew old connections, and make new ones. Tell your stories and share your memories. We are so grateful that you are connecting back with the College, because you are part of our story, and we need the help of our alumni in so many ways. Whether it's helping on academic panels, sharing your faculty expertise or sponsoring a student to continue at Aquinas, there are so many ways you can continue to be part of the work of Aquinas.

From the first seed planted in 1950, with 19 students in Montefiore House, an enormous family has branched and grown, to which you all belong.

Your names are in our heart, and in our cupboard doors.

Now: once an Aquinian, always an Aquinian, so I know it goes without saying that you *will* have a wonderful night.