

California

I spent the week before the Chinese New Year in California. The purpose of my visit was twofold: to attend meetings of the Board of Trustees of the International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) and to catch up with many SPC Old Boys who had made California their home.

The IBSC meetings were very productive with a large number of items discussed. There was one project, however, that really captured the imagination of the twenty four board members. Last year I told my fellow trustees that St. Paul's wished to invite other IBSC schools to participate in our 2012 China Community Service Project. At this meeting I reported that seven schools had expressed strong interest in participating: five schools from the United States and two schools from Australia. This news was well received and stimulated much discussion.

The SPC 2012 China Community Service Project will be conducted in Qinghai Province in the north west of China. This remote region of the nation provides an ideal setting for the important community service work that has traditionally been conducted by students at our College. Mr. Keith Wong, the Master in Charge of Other Learning Experiences (OLE), will once again make all the arrangements for this activity. It is Mr. Wong's wish to invite four boys and one teacher from each of the seven interested IBSC schools to join forces with the SPC team. If all goes according to plan, 35 boys and teachers from SPC plus 35 boys and teachers from overseas will make their way to Qinghai in the middle of July.

There is a great deal that needs to be done over the next five months to ensure that this year's project is not only meaningful but also highly successful. Our overseas friends will arrive in Hong Kong for four days of local community service training before embarking on the journey to Qinghai. A full debriefing and an opportunity to do some sightseeing will follow their return to Hong Kong.

The SPC 2012 China Community Service Project is the first such activity involving a group of IBSC schools. I am hopeful that in the future another school in another continent will take up the initiative and organise a similar project (for example Africa in 2013, South America in 2014 and so forth). There is no question that boys enjoy the camaraderie that develops within a team particularly when the focus is on helping others who are less fortunate.

The two other meetings I attended whilst in California were with Old Boys (plus a small number of former teachers) living in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas. The Old Boys came from a wide range of graduating year groups with some of the boys going back to the 1950s. What was ageless, however, was their devotion to the College. At the conclusion of each meeting the Old Boys in San Francisco and Los Angeles decided to form a branch so as to provide more structure to their gatherings and activities.

This was exciting news and takes the number of overseas branches to four: Ontario (Toronto), Vancouver, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Their activities will be publicised on the College website allowing Old Boys to remain in direct contact with the College. Furthermore, the local branches will be able to reach out to SPC boys and girls who may end up studying or working in their part of the world. There are few greater comforts than coming across a friendly face when overseas. I hope that in the future we shall see other branches in other parts of the world including New York, London, Melbourne and Sydney.

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