



ST. GILGEN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
AUSTRIA

“I believe that the very purpose of life is to be happy. From the very core of our being, we desire contentment...It is the principal source of success in life. Since we are not solely material creatures, it is a mistake to place all our hopes for happiness on external development alone. The key is to develop inner peace.”

Dalai Lama 1989 Nobel Peace Prize

10th December, 2009

Dear Parents,

Around the school campus I can hear talk about how fast the end of Term One is arriving; only one week to the Christmas Break. Outside my office and further along the main street we have the decorated, wooden huts of the traditional Wolfgangsee Advent Market with all of its seasonal delights, the symbolic *candles* which represent St. Gilgen have been placed throughout the village, and dare I say that even the winter is making an attempt to add the appropriate snowy backdrop to the location, occasion and time of year.

I am again pleased to provide you some personal impressions and insights into many of the moments we have shared within the school during the past weeks. First and foremost in the core business of the school it has been a very busy time of the term with the students preparing for and completing assessments in the different subject areas. This always brings to the fore concerns and tension as the skills of time management, study and organisation are tested, often to individual limits. Amongst the staff we have had weekly discussions about the students in the different year levels to see how we best support and guide them towards the goals of academic progress. Each student faces their own challenges, whether in direct learning or in the ‘soft’ skills and here teachers, house staff and Mentor Tutors have played a major role as we look to move each individual forward. It is important to understand that there needs to be a balance of structure and personal responsibility for each student as a reflection of expectations which are shared by a school and beyond the gates in the world. The end of Term One will again bring a progress report to indicate the current performance of each student. As in a previous letter, I encourage parents to have conversations with their children about areas of strength, development, realistic goals and strategies. These are the basis of learning and preparation for further academic challenge, which I am most happy to report again, will come in the form of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme which we are now authorised to offer.

Moving to other views of school life, as many of you were able to witness on the 21st November, we raised our voices in song with the inaugural performance of the St. Gilgen International School Choir under the directorship of Dr Justin Wildridge. Our participation and professionalism were applauded and I am still receiving congratulations and thanks on behalf of our students and staff. Not more than a week later we opened our school for another ‘first’ – our ‘Unexpected Solutions’ Student Conference Series. Our invitation (attached with my letter) was accepted by a number of International Schools representing Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia and Austria. We presented the students with a single question – “What is worth saving?”, mixed all the participants into teams and sent them out to various locations around the lake and mountains with a limited amount of time to return with a response which could take any shape. While some might have been a little sceptical about our open-ended structure, not providing the students with guidelines, fixed instructions or ideas, the result was a huge success. The participating Grade 8 to Grade 10 students chose different ways and places around the village to present their group decision to save, Self-Awareness, Quality of Life, Emotional

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Values, Childhood, Communication, Bees, and Memories. To briefly describe their original 'performances' would be doing injustice to the thought, effort and impact of these, so let me just say that the whole experience was wonderful and these visiting students and staff left us with the request to be allowed to come again next year and no doubt other schools will be asking for an invitation.

As the result of another invitation we sent out, Queens Elizabeth the First and Second, and Victoria came. So did Louis Braille, Mary Wollstonecraft, Amelia Earhart, Yuri Gagarin, Nannerl, John Nash, Frida Kahlo, Marie Curie and even Cristina Lara – a 16 year old who this year won the Brave Nation Young Activist Award. These were just some of the personalities who attended our Night of the Nobles. During a dinner together each person introduced one of the other personalities there and at the end of the evening I asked them all what their definitions of 'noble' were. We heard that it was about people of noble background, or those who demonstrated noble qualities such as courage, generosity or honour; those who stood/stand up for their beliefs, or who did/do something for the good of others, or contributed/contribute to humankind as a whole with their achievement/s. In the end I told them that being noble was something that is a possibility for each of us and that through the characters they portrayed they have the opportunity to learn about this element. All in all a very enjoyable evening.

When reflecting upon the words of the Dalai Lama I believe that it is through the many different experiences and the support and guidance of parents, friends, mentors, and teachers that our students learn about what it means to be happy. It is not about focusing on what we do every minute of every day and every week throughout the year, but developing a sense of overall perspective and a measure of 'how I feel' or 'self-awareness' as the one group put it at the conference. The end of Term One brings a well-deserved rest for all. We wish all families a safe and enjoyable holiday and look forward to seeing all students in January.

Yours Sincerely,



Christopher Greulich B.A., M.A.
Headmaster

