



Dear Friends and Members of the Celtic Club.

First and foremost, as he hands over the baton, I would like to formally acknowledge Brian Shanahan's huge contribution to the Celtic Club during good times and periods of crisis and uncertainty. He has always remained dedicated to the best interests of the club throughout several periods as President and he has played other key roles in the Irish Australian Community. He has been highly resilient and weathered recent criticism with dignity and, in initiating and guiding this transition, he has acted with an unselfishness that is admirable. We are all very grateful to you Brian. I will value your counsel as an elder statesman and mentor going forward.

It is a huge privilege to be asked to take on the role of President of the Celtic Club. When I joined in relatively recent times I merely wanted to be a member of the club and connect with other Irish Australians in a more meaningful way. However an opportunity presented itself to contribute at the Committee level, and I accepted the invitation because I thought during an extremely difficult time for the club, I believed that with my 20 years of experience in corporate governance and management of NGOs and NFPs that I might have something to contribute. The role on the Committee that was vacant was that of treasurer, which had been vacant for a while, and at the time, this was clearly a gap that the club could not afford, with the loss of the business, eroding assets and great uncertainty concerning the future. Over the past 9 months successful efforts have been made under challenging circumstances with the pandemic to stabilise the situation and plan for a new era post Queen St. I will return to this in a moment.

I personally feel incredibly fortunate, like all members of our club, to have been granted the identity of an Irish-Australian. These are among the most admired and inspirational nations in the world. It is often said that there are two kinds of people: The Irish and those who wish they were Irish. That was not always the case however and the experience of the Irish at home, Irish Australians in the past – those who pioneered and nurtured the club, and the worldwide diaspora has been one of struggle to overcome racism and



discrimination to reach the state that has been achieved today. While I was born in Dublin to a Catholic father and a Protestant mother (who had been born in Tasmania), I have spent most of my life in Australia, emigrating here in 1968 with my family. Over the past decade following a sabbatical back in Ireland, our family has reconnected strongly with our roots as a result of our son, Fionn, completing his secondary and tertiary education in Ireland, and hence many trips back to Dublin. I should add that my wife has two Irish convict ancestors from the 1840s.

The members of the club, through a myriad of variations and stories, all share this common bond. Indeed there are hundreds of thousands of Victorians and perhaps millions of Australians that also share it. I could sense this common bond and deep affection for the club at Celtic Club events including very recently. And much of the anxiety, distress and conflict that has been bubbling away during the ordeal and period of uncertainty that has beset the club in the past few years can be seen as a reflection of that commitment concern for the legacy and the future of the club. If we look beyond the tension, distrust and acrimony, the best way to understand this is that people really care. They love the club and feel protective of it. And quite rightly expect to be reassured about the future of the club and to be involved in shaping it.

The Celtic Club has a long and proud history dating back to the 19th Century when inner city clubs for men were a key focal point for social life. That era is no more. We must craft a vision and model for the present and the future which ensures that the club can reinvent itself, flourish and grow. This must be a future which is welcoming and inclusive, not factional. We are not a political party and division is death. We must revive and defend traditional Irish/Celtic values of respect, tolerance, and in particular the old Irish tradition of generosity. The word "Fáilte" really captures it. We need to welcome all elements of the Irish Australian community on board and connect up.

The Committee, which many talented and dedicated people have served on in the past, has indeed been strengthened in recent months in terms of its skill set, though there are still some gaps. The former management structure, no longer fit for purpose, has been replaced temporarily by Luminant to ensure that the financial status of the club was stabilised and turned around. This has



occurred. Thanks to Evans and Partners, we now have a clear and balanced investment strategy on the table for the future. We will move quickly now to complete a new business plan and we will also decide upon a new management structure to deliver on this plan, headed by a CEO. In the context of the new business plan we will explore as a matter of urgency a new venue and mother ship for the activities of the club which will feature all the cultural and heritage and social aspects. We will consult with the existing membership on these matters and I warmly welcome and encourage all members to write to me via email or snail mail to the club's address with ideas and views. I am very much aware that there is a great deal of expertise within the club to draw upon. We will also seek to make the club attractive and relevant to new members especially younger members since the club will not survive without the constant regeneration that new members will bring. They are essential to our future so that will mean the club will need to change while safeguarding the needs of longstanding members. Over the coming months great energy will also be devoted to a regular calendar of events as we emerge from COVID. Reconnection will help the club to heal and revive.

Finally, I would like to focus on culture and accountability. The crisis and the ordeal that the club has navigated, under the shadow of the pandemic, has placed the culture of the club under great pressure and we need to rebuild on the basis of our core values. One of these should be accountability. We must ensure that our decision making is transparent and accountable and in particular that our financial operations are carefully controlled and managed so that members have full confidence in the leadership of the club. The present Committee of Management seeks to be accountable and looks forward to the next AGM in late 2021 when new elections will be held and the members will have a chance to make their judgment on my and our performance in our roles as temporary servants of this precious and unique organisation.