

A Catholic educator's National Day wish

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For the past 35 years as an educator in both Primary and Secondary schools, I have celebrated National Day with my students. This year, as we celebrate Singapore's 55th birthday, I no longer work in a school setting. I had often wondered, and still wonder, what would become of my students - would they find success and happiness in life?

Archbishop William Goh's 2019 Scripture Reflection on the feast day of the Nativity of St John the Baptist (June 24) provided me the answer – and much consolation. "At the birth of every child, the question as to 'What will this child turn out to be?' would come to mind, just as it did to the townsfolk of John the Baptist... Indeed, the greatest joy and fulfilment of parents is to see their children succeed. How do we measure success? It is when our children realise their vocation in life... It is about serving humanity and God."

To love and dignify, serve and lead

In my 12 years as principal of CHIJ St Theresa's Convent (STC), I had always scheduled the Student Leaders' Investiture Ceremony to follow immediately after the National Day Observance Ceremony, during which we would revisit our country's struggle for independence and remember STC's founders' struggles to establish the school.

Then, during the Investiture Ceremony, I would take the opportunity to assure the girls that each and every one of them was a gift from God, not just to their family, but to



Theresian student leaders at the 2019 Leadership Investiture and National Day Observance Ceremony, pledging to serve the common good, committed to being a light to the nation. Photo: CHIJ St Theresa's Convent

the world. I would explain that a Theresian education sought to form the individual and develop the citizen by teaching them how to love, lead, serve and treat each other with dignity, so that they could go forth and do the same in the family and society at large.

STC is fondly remembered as the Light on the Hill. In the 1950s, when electricity was not a standard provision, the brightly-lit school building provided light to the villages on the slopes of Kampong Bahru

Hill at night. As the new student leaders were invested, I would remind them that every Theresian was called to continue the legacy of their school by bringing light to others and to the nation.

To be light to the world

Every person is, by nature, oriented to seek happiness. Formed in the image and likeness of God, we find true happiness only when we successfully discover and realise our own unique vocation in life. In

the eyes of the world, St John the Baptist led an obscure life and died a miserable death. But I believe he died happy in the realisation that, in the eyes of God, he had fulfilled his unique vocation in life, which was to prepare the way for the Lord.

My wish as a Catholic educator this National Day is for each and every one of us, young or old, to find our true vocation in life. Then, we will truly shine as bright lights for the nation, and help our nation be a light to the world. □



It is critical for each of us to seek the primary purpose or vocation in our life. God has planted a vocation in our heart. A vocation is something that we do in life which commands our entire mind, soul and body. We give our entire being to this calling in our heart. As the Archbishop, my one and only purpose until my death is to help to build a vibrant, evangelizing and missionary church. Anything that does not serve this purpose is a distraction, and is not deserving of my attention. Singularity of purpose is the key.

What is it that we would like to give our whole life to so that we can live passionately and meaningfully? The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl instruct us to seek something that makes our life worth living. This something that we find, if it is truly life-giving and enriching, will consume our entire mind, soul and strength. We know that this is what the Lord is asking of us if we find that we are ready to pour all our resources and energy into it. Otherwise, it cannot be considered the treasure and pearl of our lives.

– Archbishop William Goh
(26 July 2020, Sunday, 17th Week, Ordinary Time)

