

From Boys To Men For Others

Wilbur Wong

“Give me the love to be a caring person, helpful to all, especially the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged”. Such is the daily prayer of the boys at Montfort Junior School (MJS) imploring the intercession of their school’s founder, St Louis Marie de Montfort, whose charism still lives on in the vision of MJS – A Man For Others.

In the once rustic, now highly urbanised neighbourhood of Hougang, affectionately nicknamed ‘Seng Hoo Tee’ or ‘land of priests’ in the Teochew dialect, the Montfort Brothers of St Gabriel imbued both MJS and Montfort Secondary School with the Catholic ethos of putting others before self. MJS’ alumni include no less than Archbishop-Emeritus Nicholas Chia and Archbishop William Goh!

MJS’ values of compassion, humility, respect, integrity, service, team spirit and excellence all find their inspiration in the life and witness of St Louis Marie de Montfort. Stories of how he took up a collection to clothe a ragged schoolmate who was bullied and gave away his possessions to beggars continue to inspire staff and students to this day.

Every Lent, MJS boys are encouraged to imitate their founder by supporting Caritas’ annual Charities Week campaign by giving up treats throughout the month. The boys do so gladly, knowing that the desire in their hearts to help others in need is worth far more than the money dropped into the box.

And on Holy Thursday every year, all Catholic boys are reminded of Jesus’ humility and service when they wash each other’s feet. Of course, when given basins of water, boys will be boys and have more fun than befits the decorum of the occasion, but the concept of



Being Christ to each other every holy Thursday.

servant leadership does take root in a memorable way!

Indeed, engaging and empowering boys to become men for others in a world of materialism and instant gratification is an arduous journey that takes patience and consistency from their teachers. Discipline and rigour must be carefully balanced by compassion so that every Montfortian might learn to serve and grow to become a beacon of hope for others.

There is a gallery that all students walk past on their way into school named The Avenue Of Stars which features students who live out MJS values; there would be no such students without the dedicated Catholic staff who tirelessly and passionately inspire in every student an awe and sense of God’s presence, and love for Him. They are the spiritual engine of the school, not only sparking and driving its Catholic programmes on top of their already heavy workloads, but more importantly, interceding for the school and

its students – every week, they gather for an hour in the Prayer Room to pray as a community of faith to seek God’s grace and to renew their strength as shepherds of Jesus’ young flock.

Their prayers have borne much fruit. As Timothy Abaoag, a Primary 6 student, shares: “The Catholic programmes in my school, such as the yearly retreat and monthly masses and the Prayer Room, help me connect to Christ’s love always, especially as school is always busy and tough. When facing challenges, going to the Prayer Room helps me to calm down.”

In MJS, it is not just the staff and the students who walk in the footsteps of St Louis Marie de Montfort and those of Christ; MJS is also blessed with a group of immensely supportive parents. The MJS family clearly exemplifies how “it takes a village to raise a child.” When Palu province in Indonesia was devastated by a tsunami, parents and teachers organised a two-day jumble sale in school to raise

funds for the survivors – student buskers entertained the many supporters who came to browse and buy, and roving student reporters interviewed their schoolmates on “the importance of helping our neighbours” and “being A Man For Others.”

Even in this time of Covid-19, the MJS community spirit is as strong as ever. Serena Lee, the mother of a Primary 2 student, enthuses: “MJS is a great school to be in! The available channels of communication with the school during this current pandemic testify to the values that the school upholds – to stay virtually connected with the boys to ensure their wellbeing, and not just to set their academic targets for the term. Prayers for an end to this current pandemic also teach the boys to lift up all their worries and fears to the Almighty. By God’s grace, I believe MJS will continue their mission of preparing the boys to serve and lead, and to be Men for Others. Age Quod Agis – Do Well In Whatever You Do.” □



Milestones:

- 1916 Holy Innocents’ English School (HIES) begins as a parish school under the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 1936 The Brothers of St Gabriel take over the running of HIES from the parish
- 1960 HIES is renamed Montfort School in honour of St Louis Marie de Montfort, the founder of the Gabrielite Brothers
- 1974 Montfort School, which had been functioning as a full school, separates into Montfort Junior School (MJS) and Montfort Secondary School
- 1989 Archbishop Gregory Yong officiates at the ground-breaking ceremony of MJS’ new premises on Hougang Avenue 8
- 1992 MJS moves into its new premises
- 2003 MJS’ upgrading under the MOE’s Programme for Rebuilding And Improving Existing Schools (PRIME) is completed
- 2019 MJS’ upgrading under MOE’s Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) programme is completed



Bringing hope to tsunami survivors by busking to raise funds. Photos: Montfort Junior School