

**ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE CHIJ 170th ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS @ NATIONAL STADIUM
MONDAY 20 MAY 2024**

Your Eminence William Cardinal Goh, Reverend Fathers, IJ Sisters, Board & representatives of the IJ Homes and Children Centres, School leaders and staff of all our 11 CHIJ schools, supportive parents, esteemed guests, and dear IJ girls (both past and present).

Thank you, Sister Elizabeth, for expressing our collective heartfelt gratitude to the army of people for putting this memorable and mammoth event together. Today we have close to 20,000 people, right here in this stadium! I know the celebrations today will be core memory for many of our girls for many years to come.

I just want to add my personal word of thanks to His Eminence Cardinal William Goh, and all the Reverend Fathers with us today. Not just for today but for each of your tireless and continuous support of the IJ schools over the years partnering with our schools and constantly being just one call away in meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of our schools. For each of our schools is first and foremost, a Catholic mission school and we are grateful for your support in keeping our Catholic mission burning.

I also want to take a moment to express our Board's gratitude to the Organising Committee led by Dr Margaret Lee (Director of IJ Missions and Formation), Mrs Fiona Tan (Principal of CHIJ St Nicholas Girls School), and comprising all our other CHIJ Principals (namely, Mrs Rachel Lee [CHIJ Secondary], Ms Judina Cheong [CHIJ Primary], Ms Chen Mei Chuen [CHIJ Katong Convent], Mrs Mischa Simon [CHIJ Katong Primary], Mrs Jenny Leong [CHIJ St Theresa's Convent], Mrs Valerie Pinto [CHIJ St Joseph's Convent], Ms Karen Albuquerque [CHIJ Our Lady Queen of Peace], Ms Christina Teo [CHIJ Our Lady of the Nativity], Ms Grace Tan [CHIJ Our Lady of Good Counsel], and Mrs Shanthi Nair [CHIJ Kellock]). They are in turn supported by their respective dedicated Vice-Principals, Operation and Administrative Managers, teachers and staff, who have all worked very very hard, on top of their usual school workload, in order to pull off this incredibly massive event.

Again, beyond just today, we are immensely grateful for our school leaders (past and present) for stewarding our IJ schools, for their love for our girls, and for their commitment towards our IJ Mission of building Christ-centred school communities, where all work together for the promotion of truth, justice, freedom and love, with special reference to the needs of persons who are disadvantaged in any way.

As we celebrate our Founder's Day, we reflect on a legacy that began with our Founder, Blessed Nicolas Barre. His dream was simple yet profound: to provide an education rooted in love and faith, empowering girls to discover and harness their unique gifts. This dream was embraced by Mother Mathilde Raclot, a trailblazer whose journey across seas and cultures reshaped the future of education in Asia. 170 years ago, the idea of female education was not just revolutionary, it was practically unheard of in many parts of the world. Yet, Mother Mathilde, together with Mother St Appolinaire, Mother St Gaetan, and Sr St Gregory Connolly, inspired by the teachings of Fr Nicolas Barre, saw education not just as a right but as a transformational force for good. Thanks to their audacious dream, girls who would have been overlooked by society were instead uplifted by knowledge. They were taught to think critically, and to challenge the boundaries set before them. Mother Mathilde's vision was clear: *empower women, and you transform society.*

The IJ mission was blessed with the support of successive Bishops of the day, and the MEP fathers also believed in the mission and supported the growth at different levels. The mission was also built upon with the continued zeal, passion and commitment of subsequent generations of IJ Sisters, including the Irish Sisters who played a large part in the education and formation of our girls.

Today, I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the IJ Sisters in Singapore (represented by Sr Elizabeth Moey) and the many IJ sisters who journeyed from other countries to attend this celebration [they are seated at] and also many who are attending online like Mother General Sr Bridgette Florette and Sr Maria Lau.

With the commitment and contributions of the many successive generations of dedicated school leaders, educators, boards, alumni and well-wishers, the IJ Community in Singapore has grown to encompass the IJ Homes and Children's Centres, and 11 CHIJ schools all over Singapore, having educated easily more than 200,000 girls in Singapore, many of whom have gone on to make an impact in the lives of many others in society, in the workplace, and at home with their families. A great number of IJ educated girls have broken glass ceilings, taken the path less travelled, advocated for the voiceless, and dedicated their lives in the service of others (especially the marginalized). Many of our alumnae are here with us today (their exuberant IJ spirit and infamous IJ girl's 4 lungs still perfectly intact) - thank you ladies for joining our celebration today and for spreading the legacy that is CHIJ.

Today, as we look back with gratitude, we must also look forward with intention. Our world is rapidly changing, facing unprecedented challenges from increased conflict between countries and within societies, to moral relativism, to environmental crises. It is in these times that our IJ mission becomes even more relevant and urgent.

Even as we continue to form our girls with timeless values of truth, justice, freedom and love, and to lead lives using their gifts and talents in service to others (especially to the disadvantaged),

Even as we continue to equip our girls with the skills and competencies that they will need for vocations of the future,

Even as we continue to build upon our collective efforts and strides we have made to get our girls to be climate change advocates and to care for our environment, our common home,

Our Call To Action today: is for each and every one of our IJ girls to be Peacemakers and Bridge-Builders.

In the spirit of Mother Mathilde, whose pioneering efforts bridged cultures and communities, we call on every IJ girl to be architects of peace and unity. Now more than ever, there is a need to speak words of peace, to seek to understand one another even if our opinions or beliefs differ, to choose love instead of hatred, to build bridges instead of walls. In a divided world, we recognize the unique attributes and qualities that women are blessed with, and want all IJ girls to embrace a role as promoters of peace. Peace, emanating from within themselves, to their homes, to the school, to their workplaces, to the world stage. It is our hope, and our prayer, that we instill in every IJ girl the willingness, the courage, and the voice to be bridge builders, beacons of hope, and promoters of peace.

Today, as we celebrate our storied past, let us also ignite a new passion for our IJ Dream. Look around you at this sea of blue, and remember this moment! Alone we may only be able to do so much (and the dream may look like an impossible dream), but collectively, we can make a difference!

May the flame of the IJ spirit burn ever brighter in every heart here, inspiring more generations of women to rise, to lead and to make a difference in our world.

Thank you all for being part of this amazing journey, and may you always remain Simple in your virtues, Steadfast in your duties.

Thank you.