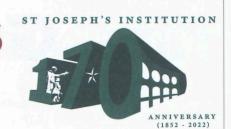
SJI rallies behind students with health concerns



Victoria Lim

Founded in Singapore in 1852 by six De La Salle brothers, St Joseph's Institution (SJI) celebrates 170 years of imparting Lasallian education and values of faith, community and service this year. These values were especially exemplified by the educators and Class of 2021 in helping a few students with medical conditions attain exceptional results at the recent International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) Nov 2021 examinations. Two young men who received such love and support from the SJI community were Nicholas Ee Chun Huang, 19 and Wen Yankai, 20.

Faith and community

In 2021, Nicholas was diagnosed with pneumothorax, a condition where air leaks out of the lung causing it to collapse. After being hospitalised, he thought his ordeal was over. However, the condition recurred again in late Feb and he had to undergo an operation during the March school holidays. The weeks in hospital and recovery disrupted his studies and drained him physically, mentally and emotionally as he had to finish all his coursework and sit for the IB exams that same year. Nevertheless, Nicholas remained positive and focussed, and achieved good results at his IB examinations.

Recounting the experience, Nicholas said he could not have done it without seeking God daily. He added that the daily prayers in school gave him the discipline to look for Jesus before he started each day. He said, "I believe that God's plan for me is perfect, and amidst all the emotion of having to deal with these things, there was also joy in having to face such trials (James 1:2-3). Having faith that nothing God ordains for us is ever wasted, I took it as an opportunity to wait on His promises and this gave me great hope to strive onwards."

He appreciated how the actions of his family, teachers and classmates cheered him up in times of distress and made him recognise just how much difference community support could make.

Service

Yankai was another student who did well through the encouragement of the SJI family. He was diagnosed with leukaemia while in Secondary Two in 2016. When treatments proved effective, he was able to return to normal life. However, by the end of his Secondary Four year in 2018, Yankai's condition worsened and he had to undergo a stem cell transplant. Due to its severe side effects, he had to take a break from school in 2019 to recover.

Returning to school in 2020 a year older than everyone else was particularly difficult for him. Yankai credits the SJI friends and teachers who reassured and



During Secondary Four, Wen Yankai (extreme right) and his friends donated to the Children's Cancer Foundation the money they had raised through SJI PRISM, a Social Enterprise Club. Photo: Wen Yankai.

looked out for him on his journey for having helped him regain the confidence to come back. "Just before my transplant, I was surprised to see my teachers who came to see me at the hospital; they even made me a card where all my teachers wrote messages to cheer me on!" He continued, "I was deeply moved by my SJI friends who proactively visited and called me during my year away from school in 2019. They had all moved to Year 1 of the IBDP and were juggling heavier workloads, yet they visited and called me. They made me feel beloved and less isolated."

Encouragement

Nicholas saw Yankai as a role model and felt comforted to have found a friend he could confide in. "He has a special ability to accept circumstances outside one's control and to focus on what one can control. This ability is also something that I slowly picked up when I was dealing with my own medical condition." Nicholas' advice to those taking major exams whilst facing health challenges is: acknowledge any feelings of shock, guilt, shame, self-pity and sense of unfairness, then sit with those feelings. "Most importantly, recognise that there are still things you can change and try to do your best in."

Yankai, a non-Christian, said that the SJI Catholic ethos and spirit of always 'helping one another' and being thankful for the little things in life have really rubbed off on him. "I hope other students in a similar situation as me will be able to go through their



Nicholas Ee at SJI in 2020. Photo: Nicholas Ee.

experiences looking at people and things that they can be grateful for and focus on that. Finally, be happy and always look forward to the next thing that comes. Life is full of opportunity and possibility: don't give up!"

It is obedience to God's word that makes a man, especially a leader, Godly. This explains why David instructed his son to walk in God's ways which are found in "His laws, His commandments, His customs and His decrees, as it stands written in the Law of Moses." It is not wrong for a leader to be ambitious but a leader must put all his pursuits in the right perspective. This is why a leader must be connected with God, always inquiring from Him the decisions that He is making.

We, too, as leaders must be guided by God's word at every step in our leadership. This is the surest way to know that we are ruling with wisdom, in truth and in compassion. It does not mean we will not suffer but we will experience His blessings in other ways, empowering us, enriching us and helping us to be fruitful in our vocation. The Lord Himself has assured us, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock". (Matthew 7:24)



February 3, 2022, Thursday, Week 4 in Ordinary Time

