

TO SERVE THE COMING DAYS

**SPEECH BY VALECTORIAN NATHANIEL LOH AT ST
ANDREW'S JUNIOR COLLEGE 37TH COLLEGE DAY**

Good evening

Mr Ching Wei Heng, Chief Operating Officer, OCBC

Mr Tan Soo Kiang, Chairman BOG

Members of the Board of Governors,

Mrs Lee Bee Yann, Principal SAJC

Deputy principals,

Invited guests, parents, teachers,

and Saints,

Wow, let me just say it's so good to be back home in SAJC, and I think I also speak especially for the class of 2013 seated here today.

It is an honour to receive the Valedictorian Award this year. On behalf of all the students of the class of 2013 here today, I would like to acknowledge all our parents and teachers for their work in our lives. You were our vital pillars of strength and counsel. We owe a large part of our success to you. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

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Saints, will you join me now showing our appreciation for our parents and teachers.

The theme for this year's College Day is "to serve the coming days" – a hopeful and humble vow that we sing in our College hymn. Indeed, after spending two years as a Saint, I have learnt that a heart of service is one of the most important things that we take away from SAJC – the reason being that it is the foundation of our philosophy of being "One Family Unbroken". Many turn away immediately after hearing the word "service" because it requires sacrifice; a certain responsibility seems to be attached to "service". While this may be true, who is to say that you lose out while serving others, or are short-changed in a process of sacrificing your time and energy for others?

On the contrary, I am here to tell you in serving others you actually benefit yourself. As a Student Councillor, I was constantly expected to serve as a bridge between the student population and the College. Often, I was involved in catering to the needs of the students whilst also

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managing their requests within the College's expectations. Sometimes, sorting out the multitude of requests in meetings seemed like an unending job for my councillors and I.

However, during those countless late night meetings after long school days, it became clear that each and every piece of feedback and request that the students made was precious in its own way. Without it, we would have been oblivious to the various concerns on the ground. In fact, many of their suggestions have come to pass and will benefit many cohorts of students. Some of the suggestions that we successfully passed included dress-down days for entire months during particularly warm periods of the year as well as an umbrella loan service for students on rainy days.

My service in the Student Council has not only led me to understand that being the steward for others can benefit a much larger population of students than my own peers, it has also ingrained in me an attitude of service. Best put in

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the words of Mary Angelou, “when we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed”.

In any form of service, what I’ve noticed is that it always starts from within yourself – a consensus you make between your heart and mind to be open to new ideas and be part of something bigger. For myself, this challenge first emerged in my junior year in College. Stepping into a new environment and making new friends was especially difficult for me – someone who is actually extremely shy inside. It was hard enough trying to adapt to a new culture. The notion of serving others was honestly at the back of my mind.

Seeing that it was impractical to keep to myself and wait for others to initiate a conversation, I decided to adopt a new approach and be the initiator. It was only then when my heart opened up to let myself know and understand others instead of keeping them out that I also became more willing to serve others in any way I could.

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Presently as I serve my National Service, I recall my experience in SA and have adopted the same approach in my service to others. As a weapons engineer, it is my job to inspect and repair armaments for the entire Singapore. I come into contact with individuals from different backgrounds from all around Singapore. Instead of conducting my inspections mundanely, I seize the opportunity to make new friends in the process of explaining the technicalities of the weapons to my counterparts. Besides widening my network, this approach has made me see the meaning and importance of stepping out of my comfort zone. Today, I have learnt to serve my nation wholeheartedly because I changed my perspective of service while I was in SA.

Love is another important aspect of service. During my days here, I had the privilege of being nurtured by a group extraordinarily selfless individuals, and they are none other than our teachers sitting here today.

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In literature class, I recall Ms K and Mr Chee Kam scrutinising my essays and gloriously decorating my submissions with bold red ink. Sometimes, their handwriting made up a string of comments such as: “why?” “analyse!” and an occasional “IRREVELENT”, spelt out in jarring capital letters, as if not already making their point. Although they were stern and expectant of us students to give our best, they practised what they preached. More than often, their daily schedules were filled with student consultations, in an effort to give us the individual attention and answers to our incessant questions. They expressed love daily through actions and not words, always ensuring that we had no question or doubts unanswered.

In the Student Council, my teachers would stay till unearthly hours to run through rehearsals, camps and meetings every single day. While it was up to us councillors to put up a good show, it was their leadership and sacrifice that steered our growth through these activities. I was truly amazed at how they could be so devoted to the Council and yet balance their time with their work, and let’s not

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even get started on their personal lives! Their willingness to sacrifice their time has allowed us to grow and learn through our mistakes and their advice and solutions, grooming us into leaders who can think critically in all situations.

Outside of the curriculum, I had teachers such as Ms Caroline Sin, who was the cheerful, encouraging mentor who always pulled me back on my feet. Her frequent emails and text messages before exams and during intensive revision periods always spurred me on and never failed to paint a smile on my face. Till today, she's one of the few teachers who have left an indelible mark in my life. While she did not teach me in any of my subjects in College, she was able to exemplify love and care through her mentorship.

Essentially, without love, their service would not have been as impactful as it was. From the influence of my teachers, I can say that I have learnt a great deal of how to make your service memorable for not only yourself, but for

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others as well. Indeed, I am reaping the seeds that they sowed in me since the start of my journey.

As our College Hymn goes, “Our harvest may be garnered, by ages yet unknown”. Even as we commemorate our achievements today, let us remember that we could not have succeeded on our own. As those before us had faithfully sown the seeds of the harvest today, we should do the same for our next generation and the generations to come.

To conclude, I would like to once again thank the teachers for their time, efforts and sacrifice in moulding us into better people through your teaching and guidance. I want to thank again our parents who have supported us unconditionally through the ups and downs of College life. Let me not forget also, the non-teaching staff for your dedication in providing for us students the best possible environment for learning. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Board of Governors for their unwavering support for the College in tangible and

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intangible ways. We could not have done this without all of you.

To the Class of 2014, I leave you with these words as you climb towards the impending A-Level Examinations: In everything, remember that pain is temporary, but regret is forever. Your attitude is the determinant of your success, so take every setback as an opportunity to learn, and every success as an affirmation of your hard work. In the process, understand that this trying period will mould you to be ready to serve the days to come.

I wish you all a memorable 37th College Day.

Thank you!