

Celebrating the inspiring life of Sister Deirdre O'Loan



Mission in Singapore as an Educator in Catholic Junior College (CJC)

On arrival in Singapore in June 1974, Sister was asked to take temporary classes in Katong Convent. She taught English, Literature and General Paper. This was to initiate her into the ways of the Singapore education system.

In January 1975, CJC began. It was an extremely difficult beginning because the building was incomplete and classes were held in four different schools. Despite the incomplete facilities, the resourceful and resilient students were focussed in their studies and there were no complaints. The new Junior College system with lectures and tutorials prepared them for University studies.

Sister worked collaboratively with the Principal, Bro Patrick, and other key personnel to lay the foundation of the ethos of CJC with its emphasis on character formation and academic excellence and at the same time to build a community of caring persons. She was instrumental in setting up the library as the nerve centre that promoted additional resources to widen the perspective of the students in their learning.

Starting as a teacher in the General Paper, Sister moved on to be the Head of the English Department, Vice-Principal in 1986 and Principal of the College from 1988 to 1994. She loved the Junior College age group and encouraged growth in both the staff and the students. As a person, Sister felt strongly that people needed to be affirmed in their strengths and appreciated for who they are. She gave scope and encouraged initiatives from the students and was there supporting their games and competitions.

Students fondly remember her for always willing to give them a second chance to prove themselves.

Mrs Sng Mee Lian, a colleague in the English Department, recalls her time with Sister in CJC. Her article is found in the Catholic News.

Much loved former CJC principal called to the Lord

By Sng Mee Lian

Sr Deirdre O'Loan was a much loved and inspiring principal who was always concerned about the welfare of the students and staff of Catholic Junior College.

Her students in her home tutorial group, A5 of 1975/76, treasure her as a great teacher who loved her students and inspired them to excel, and they continued to meet her regularly throughout the years.

Mr Augustine Tan, chairman of the Archdiocesan Land and Properties Singapore, said, "She helped mould me into what I am today. She inspired me to love English literature and her greatest asset is to help you believe in yourself and your abilities. Her spirit of being truly caring for others will forever stay with us."

The staff of CJC loved and respected her as well. To Mr Louis Lim, our first Head of PE, she was "a gracious and inspiring colleague and administrator who always had a heart for everyone". In particular, she believed in the importance of the family and the staff having time for their families in the midst of working hard for their students.

She showed a keen interest in the welfare of the families of staff members and was always ready to assist them in family matters even when she was no longer principal.

Her personal touch was evident in small yet important gestures such as sitting down in the canteen with the teachers to have her morning cup of coffee.

Mrs Mary Gan (retired Economics teacher) remembers vividly Sister D (as she is fondly referred to) making her a cup of coffee during a long evening counting money from the CJC Carnival! Madam Sa'diah, a pioneer executive officer, recounted how Sr D manned the General Office in the evening



Sr Deirdre O'Loan passed away on Aug 13.

so that staff members could go for their regular jog at 5.30 pm.

Mr Gerard Lee, chairman of our School Management Committee, found her to be a most kind and considerate person and was deeply impressed by the respect she accorded him as they worked together for the good of CJC. Mr David Fahy (a Literature teacher) remembers Sister D with "affection and admiration as a very eloquent and erudite lady richly complemented by wit and wisdom".

Sr Deirdre was one of CJC's pioneers who created its infrastructure. The CJC library was Sister D's creation and she was a pioneer in the setting up of school libraries in Singapore.



Sister Deirdre seen here with former students of her tutorial group, A5 of 1975/76, in 2015.

She chose the Dewey Classification System because it is used in many university libraries globally and she believed in the importance of reading beyond the syllabus to develop critical thinking and achieve academic excellence.

Mrs Ng Kee Luan (retired librarian) and Madam Jalikha, a library support officer, developed their love of being librarians under the guidance of Sr Deirdre, who was a professional librarian.

She also loved Literature and

always supported CJC's events in the performing and literary arts long after she retired. A favourite line of hers from the poet Robert Browning was: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp."

Sr Deirdre's strong convictions included a belief in an inclusive society. Hence she was always conscious of the necessity to respect all faiths within a Catholic environment. This is a belief that continues to exist in CJC today.

Masses are held regularly every

week in the Chapel for Catholics outside curriculum time and non-Catholics are welcome to attend if they wish.

Another of her fundamental beliefs was that inclusivity meant that all our students must be given equal opportunities and support to develop their potential to the fullest, and become young people of integrity, as well as leaders in society working for the greater good.

One indelible memory I have of Sister D is seeing her looking after the sick elderly in the convent she lived in after a long day as a principal! She was always cheerful, witty, vibrant and full of energy in everything that she did and she contributed much to Singapore as a pioneer educator.

She was working for the convents that she supervised right up to the few days before her death.

We have indeed lost a wonderful teacher, leader, mentor, colleague and friend!

The writer is a teacher at Catholic Junior College. □

Sr Deirdre O'Loan: life and times

Sr Deirdre O'Loan of the Infant Jesus Sisters in Singapore passed away at 83 years old on Aug 13. She had pancreatic cancer.

Sr Deirdre came to Singapore in 1974. She was with Catholic Junior College (CJC) from its establishment, first as a General Paper teacher and later as head of the English department. She was CJC's vice-principal in 1986 and principal from 1988 to 1994.

From 1994, she served as the supervisor of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) schools. In 2014, Sr Deirdre was recognised as an inspiring leader in the

field of education and received the Public Service Star for her contributions.

Her wake was held in the CHIJ Convent at 4A Chestnut Drive with Mass and prayers every night at 7 pm. Her funeral was held on Aug 17 at 10.15 am at the Church of St Joseph (Bukit Timah). Cremation followed at Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 at 12.30 pm.

We invite you to remember her in your Masses and prayers. Submitted by CHANCERY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SINGAPORE



Photo 1 At CJC Carnival, Photo 2 with students and staff, Photo 3 with some staff