



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67602461

website: www.chij-sisters.org

Catholic Education Summit 2025

A Report for Our CHIJ Community

The inaugural Catholic Education Summit, organised by the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools, gathered educators, leaders, and mission partners across Singapore to reflect on a question that has shaped our schools for more than a century: What makes a Catholic school authentically Catholic?

At a time when Singapore's education system is internationally acclaimed, and when fewer Catholic students are enrolled in our mission schools, this conversation has never been more important. The Summit invited participants to examine not only our history but also our future as bearers of a distinctive educational mission.

Revisiting Our Roots to Renew Our Identity

The Summit reminded us that Catholic education in Singapore began not as a search for academic prestige but as an expression of charity and evangelising passion. Missionaries such as Fr Jean-Marie Beurel, together with the De La Salle Brothers and the Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus, founded schools to uplift poor children and to offer them both learning and moral formation.

Their conviction was simple yet profound: education becomes transformative when it touches both the mind and the heart.

Across the decades, Catholic schools have remained places where values, faith, and human dignity are cherished, whether or not if the student is Catholic. This inclusive heritage continues to shape the way our schools nurture the young today.

A Distinctive Contribution in a Secular Society

Speakers at the Summit highlighted a truth at the core of Catholic education: while national schools aim to equip students for success and responsible citizenship, Catholic schools aim for something more - formation for life, meaning, and purpose.

Drawing on Church teaching, the Summit affirmed that the mission of Catholic education is to help each young person grow in wisdom, compassion, and a sense of their deeper calling.

Academic achievement matters, but it is never the final goal. Every subject studied, every relationship built, and every act of service offered is part of shaping a person ready to contribute to society and to journey towards God.

A Mission That Welcomes All

A key message of the Summit is that Catholic schools in Singapore have always served a dual role:



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- nurturing the faith of Catholic students, and
- offering a place of encounter, respect, and moral formation for students of all faiths.

This inclusive mission remains unchanged. In a multicultural society, Catholic schools become spaces where values such as compassion, justice, integrity, and hope are not only taught but lived.

Looking Ahead With Courage and Purpose

The Summit closed with a renewed call: Catholic education must continue to be a courageous witness of God's love in the world. Our schools thrive not because of numbers, but because of vision. They remain committed to forming young people who will shape society with moral strength and a generous heart.

For our CHIJ community, this Summit serves as a reminder of why our Convent schools began, and why they continue to matter. Guided by the spirit of Blessed Nicolas Barré and Mother Mathilde Raclot, we strive to offer an education that uplifts the poor, honours the dignity of every student, and leads each child toward truth, love, and hope.

What makes a Catholic School Catholic? By Fr Gerard Louis CSsR

Fr Louis was the keynote speaker at the inaugural Catholic Education Summit held on Nov 7, 2025.

What can a Catholic school offer a country with a world-class education system that already gives every child the opportunity to succeed in life, and that has successfully built the nation's economy?

The numbers can be discouraging. According to the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools, between 2011 and 2025, the proportion of Catholics in Catholic primary schools fell from 31% to 21%.

Some ask if our Catholic schools have any Catholic ethos left.

Others question their purpose and relevance in secular society: do Catholic schools exist to form young Catholics in the faith, or to evangelise those of other faiths?

Serving the poor

Perhaps the history of Catholic schools in Singapore can give us some answers.

The religious orders, when they founded schools, did so to serve four areas of the Church's mission: charitable work, evangelisation, faith formation, and educating young people to build the Kingdom of God.



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Catholic education in Singapore owes much to the vision of Paris Foreign Missions Society priest Father Jean-Marie Beurel who arrived on the island in 1839.

As leader of the French Catholic mission, Fr Beurel was determined to establish Catholic schools, convinced they were a necessity for the evangelisation of Singapore.

At the same time, the British East India Company which administered the colony saw in Christian missionaries partners who would take on the responsibility of educating the population.

It was a win-win partnership for the Church and the government of the day.

Fr Beurel also understood that if there were no Catholic schools, children would be forced to attend schools of other Christian denominations.

With this in mind, he wrote to the Superior General of the De La Salle brothers; and separately, on a visit to Paris, secured the services of four sisters from the Congregation of the Charitable Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus.

In 1852 and 1854 respectively, the two religious congregations opened some of the first Catholic schools in Singapore – St Joseph’s Institution and Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus.

Other congregations such as the Canossian Daughters of Charity, the Montfort Brothers of St Gabriel, and the Marist Brothers of the Schools followed over the next hundred years.

The founders of these congregations – John Baptist de La Salle, Nicolas Barré, Magdalene of Canossa, Louis-Marie de Montfort, and Marcellin Champagnat –previously established schools for poor children, many of whom were vagrants and delinquents.

These founders believed education would give the children the necessary skills to make an honest living, while religious instruction would provide moral formation for them.

It must be noted that these religious orders established schools as a charitable work, responding to the needs of the poor at a time when states did not see it as their role to provide education to the masses.

This need became even more urgent when the Church expanded its mission to the new world.

Today, schools also serve the mission of evangelisation, which is how they became known as “mission schools.” Indeed, many Catholic children received their formation in the faith in these schools, while many children of other faiths were converted and baptised there.

A supernatural vision

Since independence in 1965, Singapore’s investment in education as well as its commitment to secularism has led some to ask: what can Catholic schools offer that is different from secular schools?



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A balance has been found, based on two principles – first, that religious education is good for moral development, and second, that mission schools must be open to all.

According to the 2007 mission and vision statement of Singapore’s Ministry of Education, the aim of education is to “acquire the skills and knowledge, as well as the right values and attitude to assure the survival and success of the individual and country.”

Catholic education, on the other hand, offers a vision that is supernatural and sees a reality beyond the success of individual and country.

The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*) declares that while the state has its legitimate purposes and objectives, the Church has the mandate of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all people.

“The Church must be concerned with the whole of a man’s life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on one’s heavenly calling. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education” (GE, 4).

Catholic education aims not only to form persons to attain success in this life and to serve society, but it “aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his or her ultimate end” (GE, 6).

The Church’s fundamental mission is proclaiming the Kingdom of God and shaping secular society according to its values – a Kingdom that has begun on earth but finds its ultimate fulfilment only in the transcendent and eternal.

Hence, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, explains that the Church works to establish the Kingdom by engaging in temporal affairs, directing them to God’s will, and thereby sanctifying the world.

So, do Catholic schools exist to form young Catholics in the faith or to evangelise people of other faiths? In Singapore, they have always done both.

Today, Catholic schools not only provide quality education but also holistic development, educating people of all faiths to serve their nation and humanity, and ultimately God and God’s Kingdom.

(Courtesy of the Catholic News)



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The Goal of Catholic Education

By Archbishop William Goh

A Catholic school has the mission to be a communion of persons that seeks to give a sacred gift.

Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone summarized our Catholic vision in this way:

“In Catholic schools we teach virtue and truth, and we hold out holiness as the Christian vocation of all students. The core mission of the Catholic Church is to provide an integrated education to young men and women, that is, knowledge and virtue combined. The connections between the two are provided by Catholic practice and teachings. We believe this is the formula for forming outstanding disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Catholic schools aim to develop an understanding of this mission in light of the critical role of each teacher, since, “The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behaviour. This is what makes the difference between a school whose education is permeated by the Christian spirit and one in which religion is only regarded as an academic subject like any other”. (The Catholic School, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 43).

Religious Education in our IJ Schools

Religious Education and Chaplaincy

RE – Walk with Jesus Series: This is the current which we suggest to do the following-

- a. Align with new MOE CCE curriculum to avoid duplication of work for the teachers in their teaching.
- b. Incorporate lessons on N Barre (his life, works, inspirational quotes, video clips of NBarre)

Incorporate in RE classes

- a. Every level has lessons on “The Legacy of N Barre”
- b. They include
 - i. History of France (economic & political situation of his times)
 - ii. His childhood & growth to bring Christ to others
 - iii. His life as a minim, as a theologian, philosopher, librarian, sacristan
 - iv. His encounter with God
 - v. Formation of charitable mistresses
 - vi. His maxims (Foundational documents)
- c. End lesson with prayer to N Barre (graces to his sainthood)
- d. Include students’ contribution in terms of prayers & intercessions.
- e. Nine days novena to N Barre.



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“Train the teachers” programme

There should be a training programme for those teaching RE classes as well learning about Fr Barre.

Enlist teachers from each IJ school to write out the “The Legacy of N Barre”

Chaplaincy

Help can be given to prepare “The Intercessory Prayers” (for the church, leaders of nation, particular group and community. The introduction and conclusion are based on the feast day or the readings of the day)

Annual Meet of Chaplains

Retreat for chaplaincy team of schools (yearly)

Each CHIJ Secondary School shares

- (a) the framework, programmes and practices in the school that reflect the living out of the IJ Mission and the Catholic formation given to the pupils
- (b) how the school inspires our Catholic students to mature in their faith and develop their leadership to serve in the community now and in the future.

Here’s the sharing by each of the five schools!

[CHIJ St Joseph’s Convent](#)

[CHIJ Katong Convent](#)

[CHIJ St Nicholas’ Girls](#)

[CHIJ St Theresa’s Convent](#)

[CHIJ Secondary](#)

- We have a responsibility towards all pupils in giving them a holistic formation especially in their spiritual and moral formation. We have a special responsibility for the Catholics, to help them deepen their relationship with Jesus, know their faith, contribute to building community and be formed to be leaders in the Church at different levels.
 - Personal witness to share the Good News with all.
 - Ongoing Formation for RE Coordinators



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The person of Jesus Christ is at the centre of an IJ Catholic School

The person of Jesus Christ is presented to pupils and to staff.

The values and attitudes of Christ are modelled by the adults of the school community.

Pupils are encouraged to make the values and attitudes of Jesus Christ their own. This is expressed in their behaviour, practices and actions especially in the choices they make and in their respect for the dignity of the other person.

The Hallmarks of a Catholic School

Inspired by a Supernatural Vision	Founded on a Christian Anthropology	Animated by Communion and Community	Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout its Curriculum	Sustained by Gospel Witness
the formation of young men and women to be good citizens in the world as well as persons who love God and neighbour. Transcendence Prepare them for heaven	concept of the human person created and loved by the Creator has dignity and is to be respected	Catholic schools build inclusive and life-giving communities where every person appreciate that each has something to give and something to receive	Our faith is not to be restricted to our Religious Studies classes only the core values of our faith should be seen in the Curriculum Faith and Culture What is good beautiful and true Catholic Social Teaching The Common Good	Catholic educators are expected to be models for their students by bearing transparent witness to Christ and to the beauty of the gospel”

The Mission of an IJ Catholic School

To build a Christ-centred school community where all work together for the promotion of truth, justice, freedom and love, with special reference to the needs of the persons who are disadvantaged in any way



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<p><u>Christ-centred Community</u> The IJ community rests on the central Christian belief of the worth and dignity of each person. It therefore demands a continuing effort by all in the development of an inclusive “community” anchored on the example of Christ as revealed in the Gospels. The driving force of this community is therefore inspirational. Students who join a CHIJ School are welcomed into a faith-based community where growth and formation flow from the Christian values that underpin the efforts of the school.</p>	<p>The IJ <u>community</u> rests on the central Christian belief of the worth and dignity of each person. It therefore demands a continuing effort by all in the development of an inclusive “community” anchored on the example of Christ as revealed in the Gospels. The driving force of this community is therefore inspirational. Students who join a CHIJ School are welcomed into a faith-based community where growth and formation flow from the Christian values that underpin the efforts of the school.</p>	<p>Working Together It is a collaborative, integrated relationship where all persons who form the school community give generously of themselves and receive likewise. It provides the element which encourages a harmonious atmosphere and provides that extra support in times of need. A culture of encounter and dialogue is promoted</p>	<p><u>With special reference to the needs of the disadvantaged in any way:</u> This requires a sensitive alertness to identify students who are not coping with school life and to offer or seek out the assistance that will help each better handle the situations which burden them. This sensitive helping disposition is not meant to be restricted to the school situation but to be extended to the wider community, wherever one encounters the weak or the burdened</p>
<p><u>Promotion of Truth</u> It is an honest and genuine quest in the pursuit of knowledge; it is the art of guiding students to become</p>	<p><u>Promotion of Justice</u> It is to be witness to the living out of justice in all school relationships and transactions to ensure</p>	<p><u>Promotion of Freedom</u> It is the ‘freeing of oneself’ from self-interest, from selfishness, from captive addiction to</p>	<p><u>Promotion of Love</u> It is the all-embracing virtue which binds and integrates everything – the ultimate glue! It is the underlying</p>



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<p>critical thinkers by rejecting the trivial in order to focus on things that are worthwhile. It is the cultivation of an attitude that appreciates the value of learning, conveys the excitement that learning brings and fosters the desire for its pursuit. It is the application of resources in the stimulation of intellectual curiosity.</p>	<p>that the conditions for learning are conducive to the development of every person fully according to her ability. It is to foster in the students a sense of fairness, a compassion for the weak and the less endowed, so that students also participate in each other's growth and well-being.</p>	<p>the shallow and inconsequential – so as to be free to make discerning choices and to reach out in sincerity and honesty to others. It is the cultivation of a personal disposition which will 'free oneself' to be of genuine service in the development and growth of others, particularly the less able and more vulnerable.</p>	<p>inspiration that prompts students and the school community to rise above themselves and to reach out in compassion to the wider community. St Paul – "Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not jealous; it does not put on airs. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger, neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to Love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails" {St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians 13:4- 8</p>
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Simple Dans Ma Vertu, Forte Dans Mon Devoir (French version)
Simple in Virtue, Steadfast in Duty (English version)

This motto is easy to remember but requires a lifetime of practice.

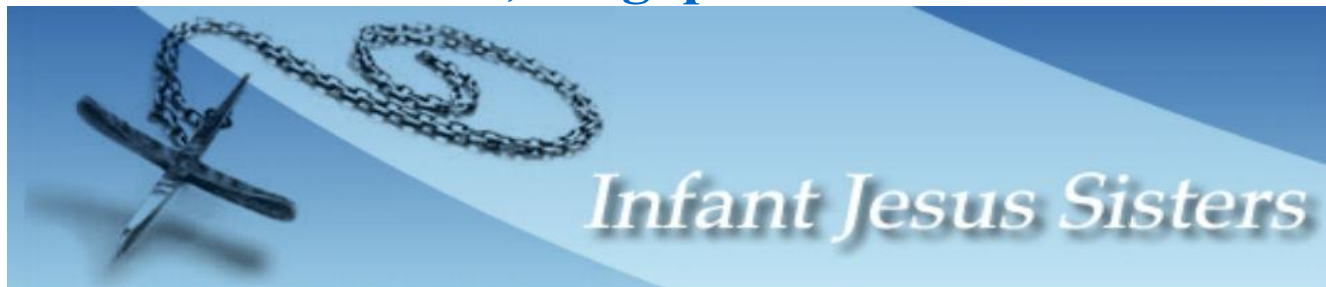
Simple in Virtue

This translates into the cultivation of a personal honesty that frees us to relate to others with respect, openness and sincerity, and to become disinterested seekers of truth, wisdom and all that is good. It is the core from which we operate.

Steadfast in Duty

This translates into the strength of character necessary to commit oneself to a goal. It embraces the capacity to rise above the difficulties and obstacles encountered in the execution and completion of any task or duty undertaken in the service of others.

Religious Education and Ethical Formation – helping pupils have a moral compass and a



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spiritual anchor.

A religious dimension permeates the entire education. Since every programme in the school can be a means to discover God, all teachers share a responsibility for the religious dimension of the school. However, the integrating factor in the process of discovering God and understanding the true meaning of human life is theology as presented through religious and spiritual education.

Religious and spiritual formation is integral to IJ education especially for Catholic pupils; it is not added to, or separate from, the educational process.

An IJ Catholic education tries to foster the creative Spirit at work in each person, offering the opportunity for a faith response to God while at the same time recognizing that faith cannot be imposed. In all classes, in the climate of the school, and most especially in formal classes in religion, every attempt is made to present the possibility of a faith response to God as something truly human and not opposed to reason, as well as to develop those values which are able to resist the secularism of modern life.

An IJ school does everything it can to respond to the mission given to the IJ Sisters and the Associates. Every

aspect of the educational process can lead, ultimately, to worship of God present and at work in creation, and to reverence for creation as it mirrors God. Worship and reverence are parts of the life of the school community; they are expressed in personal prayer and in appropriate community forms of worship. The intellectual, the imaginative and affective, the creative, and the physical development of each student, along with the sense of wonder that is an aspect of every course and of the life of the school as a whole; all can help students to discover God active in history and in creation.

Formal religious education needs to be given to Catholic girls especially and Ethics to the other pupils – this should be rigorous and intellectual in its content. IJ schools are to prepare Catholic leaders for the Church and society.

Chaplaincy Team and Religious Education

Areas of Chaplaincy Activity	Characteristics of Catholic IJ Education	Some questions which may help
Encounter with Jesus Christ	Christ is proposed as the model of human life. Everyone can draw inspiration and learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Jesus Christ presented in the school? • Could it be said that the



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	about commitment from the life and teaching of Jesus, who witnesses to the love and forgiveness of God, lives in solidarity with all who suffer, and pours out his life in the service of others	<p>presentation has a high impact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the various aspects of the witness of Christ's life get told? • Is the presentation of Jesus perceived as 'good news'?
Personal Philosophy of Life	The educational process has one common goal: the formation of a balanced person with a personally developed philosophy of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are pupils encouraged to form their own philosophy of life? • Are role models put before them in a regular and attractive way? • How does the school educate its pupils emotionally?
. Prayer	IJ education offers a progressive initiation to prayer, following the example of Christ who prayed regularly to his Father. All are encouraged to praise and thank God, to pray for one another, and to ask God's help in meeting the needs of the larger human community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is the school a 'school of prayer', instructing pupils and staff how to prayer and affording opportunities and encouragement to do so? -Are prayers used in more than a routine way in the school day? - Are the students taught the prayer of the heart as advocated by our founder, Blessed Nicolas Barre?
Worship A priest is invited to be the chaplain for the Sacraments	A CHIJ School is a community of faith which expresses this faith through appropriate religious or spiritual celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the school have a planned calendar of liturgical celebrations which reflect the great seasons and feasts of the Church's year and also the feast days of the IJ tradition? • Are many pupils and staff involved in a variety of ways in school liturgy (choir, altar servers) Does the school plan spiritual celebrations outside



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		<p>the liturgy (at assemblies, on special occasions)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talents are gifts to be developed for the good of the human community through social outreach
Social Outreach IJHCC (including IJ Youth Mission)	<p>Talents are gifts to be developed for the good of the human community. All IJ pupils and staff are to be helped to develop their consciousness for the disadvantaged in any way and to be inducted to know the social arm of the IJ mission in Singapore – IJHCC. There are opportunities in IJ education for actual contact with the world of the disadvantaged and for them to put their compassion in action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the school have a clear focus on and engagement with service of others? • Are there many and varied opportunities for pupils to contribute to the common good? • In its outreach to the poor and disadvantaged, are the pupils conscious of the mission of the IJs throughout the world and especially in Singapore and Asia?
Leadership	<p>The goal of IJ education today is to educate leaders in service and work for the common good, respecting the dignity of each person, speaking up for the disadvantaged, and doing the “more” for the good of others and the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities are given to pupils to fulfil leadership roles? • Does the school specifically aim to form “leaders in service”? • Are there opportunities for religious, spiritual and liturgical leadership? • Does the chaplaincy team provide formation for leadership?
Involvement in the Life of the Church	<p>In ways proper to a school, concrete experiences of church life are available to all students through participation in church projects and activities. E.g. Catholic Education Week, Catholic Education conference</p>	<p>Does the school deliberately make experiences of church available to pupils and ensure a majority are involved in them?</p> <p>How does the school ensure it is not an isolated island but engaged with the activity of the wider church?</p> <p>How does the school join in programmes and activities for the school?</p>



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Pastoral Care in the school - Structures, Approaches and Policies

Growth in the responsible use of freedom is facilitated by the personal relationship between student and teacher. Teachers and administrators, both IJs and lay, are more than academic guides. They are involved in the lives of the students, taking a personal interest in the intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual development of every student, helping each one to develop a sense of self-worth and to become a responsible individual within the community. While they respect the privacy of students, they are ready to listen to their cares and concerns about the meaning of life, to share their joys and sorrows, to help them with personal growth and interpersonal relationships. In these and other ways, the adult members of the educational community guide pupils in their development with a set of values leading to life decisions that go beyond self: that include a concern for the needs of others. They try to live in a way that offers an example to the students, and they are willing to share their own life experiences. The concern for total human development as a creature of God which is the 'Christian humanism' of an IJ education emphasises the happiness in life that is the result of a responsible use of freedom, but it also recognizes the reality of sin and its effects in the life of each person. It therefore tries to encourage each student to confront this obstacle to freedom honestly, in a growing self-awareness and a growing realisation that forgiveness and conversion are possible through the redemptive love and the help of God. Teachers and administrators assist students in this growth by being ready to challenge them, helping students to reflect on personal experiences so that they can understand their own experience of God; while they accept their gifts and develop them, they also accept limitations and overcome these as far as possible. The educational programme, in bringing students into realistic contact with themselves, tries to help them recognize these various influences and to develop a critical faculty that goes beyond the simple recognition of true and false, good and evil. At least, one teacher is a point of reference for each pupil. Every pupil is known by at least one teacher in the school, a mentor-mentee relationship.

Our Founder, Blessed Nicolas Barre

It was Father Nicolas Barre's experience of God's magnanimous and abundant love for him and the people that inspired him to respond to God's call to be the instrument in founding the Infant Jesus Sisters. As he grew closer to God, he became more aware of the plight of the poor and decided to act in providing education for children and young people especially girls. He felt strongly that a holistic education was the way to lift them from poverty and give them self-esteem, dignity and meaning in life. His love for God influenced his way of thinking and acting. Although he experienced misunderstanding, rejection and difficulties in his life and work, he was so secure in God's unconditional love for him that he was able to surmount all the challenges with courage to fulfil his mission and purpose in life. His deepest aspiration was to help all children and persons to know that God loves each of them and that He sent His only son, Jesus, to show them the way to salvation.

Prayer of an IJ girl (true blue)

O God, like Blessed Nicolas Barre, may I also believe that you truly love me. Help me dwell in the sunshine of your great love, O Lord, so that whatever I may go through in my life, studies, work and relationships, at home, in school and in society, I may have complete trust in your love and

Infant Jesus Sisters, Singapore (founded in France, 1662, established in Singapore 1854)



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providence. Help me to hold firm to your unconditional and excessive love for me and grant me your peace as I face the challenges on my journey as a citizen of the world. Teach me to be generous in using my gifts, talents, expertise and experience in serving others especially the disadvantaged, the last, the least and the lost, without counting the cost. Help me always to respect the dignity of each person I encounter and to work for the common good. Amen