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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Mr Lim Boon Heng, 21 May 99, 7.30pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LIM BOON HENG,

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

AT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF

CATHOLIC JUNIOR COLLEGE ON 21 MAY 1999

AT 7.30 P.M. AT MANDARIN HOTEL

Mr Bernard Chen, Chairman, CJC Management Committee

Members of the MC

Sister Maria, Principal of CJC

Distinguished Guests, Staff and collegians:

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Let me extend my heartiest congratulations to Catholic Junior College on its 25th Anniversary. This silver anniversary is an appropriate time for us to examine how the college has measured up to the hopes and aspirations of the Catholic community for Catholic education a quarter century ago.

Even though Catholics formed a very significant percentage of the population a quarter century ago, it was not easy to raise funds for the building of the College. I am told that all Catholic churches set aside one Sunday collection a month for quite some time as part of the fund-raising effort. This was so that there would be a Catholic Junior College.

Historically the Catholic community has played a major role in education. Many primary and secondary schools were set up. When 'A' level education was introduced, the secondary schools provided classes. Then Government decided to centralise 'A' level education in junior colleges. The Catholic community rose to the challenge, so that it would continue to provide 'A' level education.

Why has the Catholic community played a part in education? Not only a part, but a very large part. It is to provide the people with the means to seek a better life, in economic, social and spiritual terms.

Every school equips students with knowledge to raise their economic status. In this, Catholic schools are no different from secular schools. Catholic schools compete with all schools in academic excellence, and in value-adding. They hold their own.

However, what is more important is the values Catholic schools impart. This must be the factor that distinguishes Catholic schools from other schools. It should be this unmeasured value-adding that rank top-most in our priorities. Schooling is not just about acquiring knowledge to earn better incomes. It is about developing upright people who know how to put the money they earn to good use. Money, after all, is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Our Catholic schools are open to students of all races and religions. So while Catholic schools impart values, these are values common to all, and non-divisive.

I believe the MC Chairman, Mr Bernard Chen, ranks the family uppermost in his set of core values. I say so because he suggested to me that I speak on family values tonight. I agree with him. Without strong families, no society can survive. Therefore our Catholic schools and the Catholic Church should continue to work closely together for a co-ordinated effort to foster family ties.

Most other values spring from the family. Just as family members take care of each other, so also should each of us in the wider community, support each other. Just as we must ourselves must work for what we want our families to be, so also must we work for what we want our community, our country, to be.

Recently we have been debating Singapore 21. One underlying trend in our society

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is a desire for a greater say in how we manage our society. People want to see a more active citizenry. This desire is a healthy one. But we must know what it means. If it is a no action, talk only citizenry, then it is not an active citizenry. An active citizenry is one where people not only talk, but also do.

If we want better schools, then we must also work to bring it about. If we want good Catholic schools, then good Catholics must actively make it happen. In the old days, Catholic priests and religious led the community effort to raise the funds, build the schools and find the staff. Today we have more Catholics but fewer priests and religious. It is quite clear to me that we cannot expect the Catholic priests and religious to continue to shoulder the same burden, more so when we have many more educated and able Catholics in the laity.

Again I am sure Mr Bernard Chen will agree with me that we can do with more Catholics stepping forward to play a part in Catholic education. As the landscape changes, with new towns built in different parts of the island, there should be at least one Catholic primary school and one Catholic secondary school in each major housing estate. And as schools are upgraded to meet the needs of the times, so also must Catholic schools be upgraded. It is a continuing effort, requiring a continuing flow of younger volunteers to take over the burden from the old.

Catholic schools should imbibe the right attitude to change and upgrading. It means reviving the school physically by renovation and also reviving the school spiritually by new programmes. An active citizenry is one where Catholics contribute both time and money to these two tasks.

As one who has been involved with many fund-raising projects, I detect a hesitancy on the part of some of our schools to involve students in such efforts. I attended a Catholic school where fund-raising was a normal part of school life. As one who also believes in a more active citizenry, I think we should make it clear that fund-raising for the maintenance and continuing improvement of the schools will be part of life for the students and their parents. We should not expect to enjoy the splendid facilities of Catholic Junior College without playing a part in its maintenance and continuing upgrading.

National Archives of Singapore

Twenty-five cohorts of students have passed through the doors of CJC. These are the CJCians. They number several tens of thousands. I hope many of them will be active citizens playing their part in maintaining the college for future generations.
