

# ACS OLDHAM HALL THANKSGIVING DINNER

19 September 2009

## Chairman's Address

1           The year has passed quickly, and in a matter of weeks, this academic year will end. For the majority of our boarders doing their 'A' or 'O' Levels, as well as for those graduating from the international schools, this will be their final weeks with us. So this is a bittersweet moment, not just for the boarders concerned, but also for the Staff and Asst House Masters/Mistresses who have looked after the boarders over the course of the year. As much as they look forward to the opportunity to sit back and put their legs up to enjoy some respite, I know they'll also be missing the boarders they have been taking care of.... and wondering what the next batch of boarders will be like.

2           So it is fitting that around this time of the year, we hold our annual Thanksgiving Dinner for everyone involved in Oldham Hall, whether as a boarder or staff, or volunteer, to gather as one body to share a good meal, enjoy each other's company, and to reflect on the year, like the new friends we have made, the difficulties we faced down, the unforgettable moments that make us laugh and feel so good about ourselves and those around us.

3           Similarly, as a community here at Oldham Hall, it is also important to take a pause and reflect on the happenings of this year, and to rejoice and give thanks for the blessings that have come our way, as well as to pray for the strength, courage, and conviction to serve and to do our part for another year.

4           I do a lot of looking back – you get this way when you are ageing! But as I considered the challenges of 2009, and how Oldham Hall as a whole had responded, I am convinced that we have received more than our fair share of blessings from God.

5           Who can forget the dreaded INFLUENZA A (H1N1) threat that arrived in Singapore in late April? Caring for those who exhibited flu-like symptoms, and making sure they received medical attention required our Staff and AHMs to work longer hours and pull extra shifts. With the mid-year school holidays coming up, many of our boarders were already making plans to return home to be with their families. This was worrying as we were required to put in place measures to quarantine those who return from affected countries.

6           Sure enough, when our boarders returned from the holidays, a large number had to be monitored for symptoms, and suspected cases had to be quarantined. Special screening procedures were put in place. At the peak of this H1N1 crisis, we had 53 boarders in quarantine. Over the next 3 to 4 months, more than 90 of our boarders had to be isolated. During this period, our Staff and AHMs

had to bring food, water and other necessities to those undergoing quarantine. This was risky business, as there was always a possibility that if one wasn't careful enough, one could catch the virus as well. But as far as I know, everyone did their part, and they did it willingly.

7 But there was another group of "heroes" doing their work, though mostly out of sight. With the H1N1 threat looming, I invited a member of our Management Committee, Dr Miriam Tao, to head a small group of medical practitioners and staff from within our community to provide advice on complex cases, our screening procedures and quarantine protocol. Miriam took on the challenge without hesitation, and for the next few months she and her Medical Advisory Panel (MAP) were able to interpret medical terms, explain the implications of this or that step, and over all, provided invaluable advice and guidance to our Staff and AHMs. Other members of MAP were our very own Peter Tan, David Chua, Dr Ting Teck Wah (a former boarder and now among the longest serving AHMs in our midst), and Dr Noemi (Pastor Jun's wife). Supporting MAP were our former IT & Ops Manager, Kwee Hong, and our HM and Dy HM.

8 I would like in particular to acknowledge Miriam's very significant contributions. Despite her senior position and heavy responsibilities at the National Cancer Centre, she invariably found time to respond to our queries and request for advice, even if it was late into the evening. She was a calming influence and was able to explain medical terms/procedures very clearly to laymen like us. She also showed deep interest in particular cases.

9 I also want to thank our boarders for their cooperation during those difficult months. I am aware that they went through a fair amount of inconvenience. Those found to be in contact with suspected cases or who have just returned from affected countries, had to be quarantined. Many had to shift rooms to allow a floor to be cleared for use as a quarantine area. But despite the hardship, everyone played their part. When I made a surprise inspection late one afternoon, I expected to find a group of what some would call "unhappy campers". Instead, as I look through the glass doors to see how these boarders were doing, they smiled and waved back. Obviously they were making the best of a difficult situation and doing their best to lift their spirits. I was touched.

10 Everyone wants to have a good time. And there's nothing wrong in that. But having a good time is only one aspect of Hall life. What matters is how we respond to challenges and trials which come our way. Difficulties in life can help build resilience and character. Well done, everyone, for rising to the occasion and helping each other out.

11 I conclude by reminding all of you of Oldham Hall's mission, which is to strive to become a "home away from home" for the boarders, to help our boarders to interact and bond with each other, and to have the opportunities to develop

character and to imbibe good values. The measure of our success is in the quality of the boarders who graduate and leave us every year, and in how they live their lives and try each day to make a difference in whatever capacity they may be in.

12 I wish everyone a very pleasant and memorable evening!

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