

20 May 2013 • 99



Br. Matthew Liew Diamond Jubilee. Br. Matthew Liew celebrated his Diamond Jubilee in front of family, friends, Brothers and other religious on the Feast of the Founder, 15 May 2013. The eucharist took place in the school hall of St. John's Institution officiated by Archbishop Murphy Pakiam. It was followed by a simple dinner.

Aside from the Brothers and Br. Matthew's close friends, a number of IJ Sisters were in attendance. Also present were former Brothers, Juniors and Scholastics, who were under Br. Matthew in formation. Thanks for Br. Andrew Loke for organizing the event and to Br. Matthew Bay for sending pictures.



Founder's Day. LEAD joined the rest of the Lasallian Family in commemorating the Feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle last 15 May 2013. Known as "Founder's Day" to many schools in LEAD, various activities were held some days prior to the feast day itself. Some of our schools held a special assembly and a Celebration of the Holy Eucharist with Brothers leading the programme. 15 May 2013 also marks the 2nd Anniversary of the establishment of the Lasallian East Asia District.

Br. Ignaci Heri Renewal of Vows.

Br. Ignaci Heri renewed his vows in very simple ceremonies at Benildus House in Kota Kinabalu, Tanjung Aru, Malaysia. Present were Br. Anthony Rogers, Sector Leader, and most of the Sabah Brothers. Fr. Kellers, a Mill Hill priest based in Uganda, officiated the mass.

Aside from the five Sabah Brothers and myself, the boarders of Benildus House were present to witness Ignaci's renewal. A simple dinner followed. Br. Ignaci is assigned to Asrama Butitin in Nabawan and he does part time work in an Indonesian school nearby. Let us keep Br. Ignaci in our prayers.



Br. Arian at SJII, Singapore



Br. Sayam at La Salle Chanthaburi, Thailand



Br. Jeffrey at La Salle College, Hong Kong



Our Lasallian Mission in Japan. In many occasions we are asked about our role as Brothers working in our mission in Japan; a country considered to be based on reason, pragmatism and common sense and where religion is not very important; a country that persecuted Christianity in the past; a country that in the past tried to dominate Asia, sometimes committing atrocities beyond any moral standards. A country where the brothers had also suffered confinement, confiscation of their properties and who were forcefully repatriated during the war.



Why the Brothers, who had suffered in this country had the courage to come back a few years after the war and started our mission from scratch all over again? No doubt they were called by God in mysterious ways, as He usually does. To begin with, the Brothers who had been in Japan and came back, were in love with this country and its people. They felt the urgent need to help and bring hope to a country that was devastated by the war.

So that's what they did when they reopened the community they had in Sendai City (600 km north of Tokyo) starting a facility for the orphans of war. They didn't have much but they all had a heart on fire and they showered the children with kindness and shared with them the little means they have to live. They also shared what they did have in abundance, hope.

Soon after, they opened a school in the south of the country, Kagoshima, a poor city devastated by the war, and where they lacked a catholic school for boys. The place where 400 hundred years earlier, Saint Francis Xavier had landed in its shores with a dream, to give Christian education to the children there. The school was opened to celebrate the 400th anniversary of his landing in the city, and thus the brothers made reality Saint Francis Xavier's dream.

Five years later the Brothers opened a new school, now in the north of the country, Hakodate, where they had had a property that had been confiscated before the war. The Brothers got back the property with the help of very committed people in the city who wanted to have a catholic school there.

The Institute flourished in Japan. God blessed the brothers for so much hardship with vocations. In addition to our Canadian pioneer brothers, we had now our Japanese gifted and committed Brothers. Our three institutions in the country flourished together with the Brothers. Both schools' reputation started to be known across the country for the seriousness of their formation. The institution that started as an orphanage adapted to the social changes in the country transforming itself into a welfare institution for children with low resources or with dysfunctional families.



As anywhere in the world, and with the advances of technology, the population started aging and so did the Brothers. In this post-modern times the Brothers also had difficulties in having new vocations. But hope has always been our strength, and this time God intervened again, in a very mysterious way, bringing brothers from the two Mexican Districts to help in the mission in this country.



At present we continue having three communities with an attached institution each and where the Brothers do their ministries. We have two Canadian Brothers, three Japanese Brothers, and eight Mexican Brothers, making a total of thirteen Brothers. One Brother's ministry is in Rome as a General Councillor, leaving 12 brothers; and like the 12 apostles, trying to spread the Good News in Japan.

But, how can 12 Brothers spread the Good News in a country where less than 0.5% of the population are Catholics? How can they spread the Good News in their educational institutions when the Catholics can be counted with your fingers? Is it possible to give

a vision based in our Lasallian principles of faith, fraternity and service?

Yes, it is possible, just like the first Christian Community in the Acts of the Apostles, with the activity of the Holy Spirit, who comes with power upon us and guide and strengthen us throughout the events and activities we are engaged every day in our ministries. We are witnesses of the Gospel Values incarnated in this Far East culture of Japan. We are witnesses of communion and service among our international communities, witnesses whose hearts have been set afire from the moment we responded to God's call to become a contribution to this country.

There's a story that you may have already read that graphically shows what we are doing:

Strolling along the edge of the sea, a man catches sight of a young woman who appears to be engaged in a ritual dance. She stoops down, then straightens to her full height, casting her arm out in arc. Drawing closer, he sees that the beach around her is littered with starfish, and she is throwing them one by one into the sea. He lightly mock her: "There are stranded starfish as far as the eye can see, for miles up the beach. What difference can saving a few of them possibly make?" Smiling, she bends down and once more tosses a starfish out over the water, saying: "It certainly makes a difference to this one." (The Art of Possibility; Zander, Rosamund Stone)

Everyone knows, everyone understands that there are tasks ahead of us to accomplish and landmarks to achieve. Life often looks like an obstacle course. In order to maximize success, we spend a good deal of time discussing what stands in the way of it. The man in the story sees only obstacles when he speaks of the countless starfish. He warns the young woman that her gestures are futile. Too many starfish, not enough time, not enough staff or resources, results too difficult to track...

The story reveals nothing about "success" or "failure" of the rescue mission, or what proportion of the starfish survived or perished. It does not describe the past, nor foretell the future. All we hear is that the young woman was smiling and serene and that she moved in the pattern of a dance. Absent are the familiar measurements of progress. Instead, life is revealed as a place to contribute, giving the starfish a hope for life.



LEAD Reflections from IA13. “The Mission Assembly came to a close on Thursday 16th May. This was both an end and a beginning as it also marked the first day of “summer” in the seasonal metaphor being used for IA13. We had begun ten days earlier in the Autumn of reality, hearing regional reports, then moved into a ‘winter of discontent’ brainstorming challenges, took a break in Assisi or Orvieto and returned to a springtime of new (and not so new) visioning. PARC oiled the latter transition process last Monday by breaking with custom and holding its social on the rooftop of the Motherhouse. Older Brothers will remember Br Charles Everard and his Asian Ristorante on the roof and I am sure his spirit was keeping a watchful eye that night. It was a great success if a little bracing at times and everyone went away happily wearing a white satin PARC scarf compliments of Br David and Br John. During most of the second week we met in our thematic groups of Pedagogy, Evangelization and Community to formulate responses to the ‘winter’ challenges. Despite the separate challenge of three languages (and for some the novelty of being ‘paperless!’) the results were very impressive and produced a formidable body of proposals covering virtually all aspects of our Lasallian Mission. As a reward for all this hard work, PARC members took ourselves to a nearby Chinese Restaurant on Wednesday evening. With Nicholas Ng and Francis Loh taking over as maître d’ we were assured of five star service. The General Councillor for PARC graciously picked up the tab.

“On the final morning we put the finishing touches to the ‘responses’ and in the afternoon we all trooped out of the Aula Magna to register our vote for a priority ranking of five of these ‘lines of action’. Each Region was given different color dots to mark their choices and no doubt variations between regions will also send a strong message to the 45th General Chapter. At time of writing we do not have the outcome of the voting but hopefully we can communicate this to you soon. The final document is now in the hands of the Writing Committee under the direction of Mr Greg Kopra, San Francisco District. As for all such events, evaluation is important and we gathered in Regional Groups to do this. The liturgies, the general organization/process and the socials received strong kudos as did the warm fraternal interaction between delegates throughout the Assembly. If there was a reservation it would perhaps centre on how best to use the time available.

“Br Alvaro’s concluding address was passionate and moving and he got a prolonged ovation from delegates. I was particularly touched by his call at one point to us to recognize the invaluable service of (non-teaching) staff who take care of our material needs in communities and educational works: “Often times these people are almost imperceptible but I believe they should have a place of honour in our hearts....Many of them have worked with us for many years.....They are very important in our association and they are also called to live it out.” His parting challenge to the delegates was “We will only have a future if we are able not to close in on ourselves and our daily problems, and If we are continually open to the needs of the young, especially the most vulnerable, in order to respond to them in the light of the Gospel with boldness and creativity, aware of our limits and of a possible accident.”



“Following this we moved in silence two by two to the Chapel for a very symbolic closing ceremony. The high quality of the liturgical celebrations, mainly organized by Bro Charles Kitson and Br Michael French has been a memorable feature of this Assembly. It has been a great privilege to be part of IA13 and we are very grateful for the participation and contribution of our LEAD delegates: Br JJ, Br Rodrigo, Sr Sunantha, Ms Fritzie De Vera, Mr Javier Ramelle, Mr Ronnie Holmes, Mr Nicholas Ng and Mr Francis Loh. ONE FAMILY ONE MISSION!” (Br. Tom Lavin)

Week 1:

“The opening of the International Assembly inspired us to return to the roots of our mission and that is young people. Young children from our Lasallian school in Rome were on hand to lead all the delegates in procession into the sanctuary. It is, I think, a symbolic act reminding us that all our mission is about being sensitive to and being led by the situation in which young people live. All our efforts to be excellent will be misplaced if it did not respond to young people, who are always in our midst as most vulnerable.

“Br. Alvaro in his opening address, reminded us of this most important aspect of our Lasallian vocation to be connected always to the situation of young people. His address recalls that we conduct our mission today in multi-cultural, multi-religious and non-religious environments. In this environment, the crisis of values renders young people vulnerable. The poor and migrants more so. Finally, Br. Alvaro challenges us Lasallians to be innovative as the situation requires a new and bold response rather than an extension or duplication of existing structures.” *(Br. Jose Mari Jimenez)*



“‘Change your words, change your world.’ This was the message in a video shared by Tracy Adams, CEO of the Lasallian ministry, Boystown: <http://youtu.be/HX5aRzXUzJo> This message was a powerful reminder that as we work zealously for and on our Mission, the messages we convey to those that we seek to serve, the youth, and the many that we elicit support from, should inspire their involvement in securing their own growth as individuals.

“For the young in our schools, the way we communicate with them will make a big difference in keeping them actively engaged in their own learning. Our language should be welcoming and enabling. The way we speak and what we say will eventually be the tone and content of our learner’s own communication. If we are curt, unimaginative, or worse, rude, our learners will equally become uncommunicative and brash. If our message teems with hope or when we correct in constructive ways, the young entrusted to our care will know that they do have someone willing to accompany them, listen to them as they face difficulties in realizing their full potential.

“To our partners and all those willing to contribute to our mission, our messages should be equally forceful, enough to drive a teacher, staff, alumnus, parent, benefactor, and external partner, to be with us as we continue to pursue what has already been powerfully captured in the Philippine sector’s original reformulation of the Lasallian mission—to “teach minds, touch hearts, and transform lives.” What we seek from our partners is their volitional and deeper involvement in the integral formation of our youth, not one shot contributions, definitely not alms. *(Mr. Ronnie Holmes)*

“Today we were told to be still and silent. It was also a day of transition and movement from Autumn to Winter - from richness to poverty. This was a process of the assembly that allows the participants to recognize the journey of being part of the Lasallian mission as it goes through different “seasons”.

“I was particularly moved by the statement of Albert Camus that says “In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer”. We all have our winters. Our winters may speak of deaths and challenges. Those things that might keep us from moving forward. It is indeed true that as we recognize our own winters and allow ourselves to accept its chilling, depressing and bitter realities we will discover our own yearning for spring. We learn to patiently wait during our winters and know that in time flowers will come out and the colors of spring and summer will prevail. This further affirms my own understanding of faith and hope.



“Faith can be the invincible summer. We experience a lot of bitterness brought about by deaths and challenges but faith will bring warm and assurance that it is all in God's plan of bringing hope and happiness.

“It was quite interesting that this particular reflection connects with the parable of fig tree (Luke 13 6-9). Both the image of winter and the parable speak of the need to learn to wait – perhaps to wait on the Lord, whose presence makes all things bear fruit in due season. The gardener reminds us to be patient and allow him to cultivate and nourish the fig tree in soil with fertilizer. Give it a year, he says, and it may bear fruit.

“This is so much related with the work that we do as Lasallian educators for the Mission. We are in the ministry of trying to create that ground that will hopefully nurture the students' skills and values. Understanding the learner is very important for us to know the type of guidance that will facilitate learning and the right amount of affirmation the person needs to flourish in an educational community.” (Ms. Fritzie de Vera)

Week 2:

“It is quite providential that the assigned day for my reflection coincided with the last retreat day of the Assembly. For this second retreat we were given the parable of the mustard seed as well as a parable of a Zen master who asked a novice what he saw when he cut the apple. In both parables, what is emphasized is not the tiny mustard seed nor the few seeds in the apple but the bounty that comes when such seeds are planted. The last reading was Br. Alvaro's pastoral letter of December 25, 2012. In this pastoral letter, Br. Alvaro posed a question, why can't our Districts and communities think about buying some “territory” at this time of uncertainty? Enumerating a number of examples as to what he meant by “territory,” Br. Alvaro actually puts forward a challenge, that in our work we need to address reality but also not lose our sense of hope as he quotes Romans 8:24, “for in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. **For who hopes for what one sees?** (emphasis ours).

“These readings allow one to realize that in imagining what is possible we are constrained by the “ideals” that we see at present, those that we do not possess but others do. We fail to heed the truth that in our work, it is not important to count just how much we have put in; what worth, merit or gains we have; the number of Brothers or lay partners that are Association for Mission. It is imperative that we cling on to the truth that in all that we do, in spite of all the uncertainties and tribulations, there is an end that we do pursue, salvation. If this is the end, then we should not in anyway be constrained to enter into new territory. Believing is seeing.” (Mr. Ronnie Holmes)

Fraternally,

Br. Edmundo L. Fernandez FSC
Hong Kong

