

THE GATEWAY



The Gateway

Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin

November 2008

Eighth Issue

Welcome

In good Chinese tradition this issue of The Gateway has got to be a lucky one. Eight is a very lucky number. The sound in Chinese is similar to that for prosperity and blessings. One well-known Hong Kong tycoon has even bought a car number plate 8888 for a cool million dollars



In good Christian tradition the month of November is a time for remembering our departed brothers and sisters. In this issue we remember particularly Brother Michael Curtin who passed away in November 1983.

In good Hong Kong school tradition, November is associated with Speech Days and Sports Days. These celebrations bring joy and colour into our school lives. School holidays on the days following do not go amiss either.

We thank the many readers of The Gateway who send us words of encouragement and suggestions for improvement. If you happen to possess any material or photos that may be of use to us, we would be delighted to receive copies.

Good luck, good health, God bless you.



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Brother of the Month

Brother Michael Curtin (1908-1983)



Brother Michael was a big man in many senses of the word. He made his presence felt physically and mentally. But it was his bigness of heart that was most endearing. One sign of this was his inimitable laugh, a silent laugh that shook his whole body. This would happen every time he became amused at what he took to be the vagaries of life.

He was born in North London but his parents hailed from County Cork, Ireland. There were seven children in the family and Michael showed early signs of a spiritual bent. When he was almost fourteen years old, a De La Salle Brother recruiter visited his school and Michael was impressed both by the recruiter and by the way of life of the Brothers.

And so it was that on July 12th 1922 we find Michael leaving home and heading for the Brothers Juniorate on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands. Although the islands were English speaking, the Juniorate, for historical reasons, was staffed mainly by French speaking Brothers. No wonder, in later years, we find Brother Michael heavily involved in Hong Kong with the promotion of French and modern languages.

After two years initial training and studies in Guernsey, Michael was on his way to the Brother's Novitiate in Dover, England. On October 7th 1924, he took the religious habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, formally began his spiritual year of training at the Novitiate, and was called "Brother." The Novitiate year was followed by a year's study for the Senior Oxford examination, success at which made Brother Michael eligible for University studies. A three-month teaching practice ensued at St John's College, Southsea, where he performed admirably.

Brother Michael did not take up his university studies at this point. In the middle of his year's study an Assistant to the Superior General had visited and sought volunteers for the Lasallian mission fields. Brother Michael volunteered and on November 20th 1926, together with five companions, he embarked for the Far East and was assigned to St Paul's College, Rangoon, Burma. This school was probably the largest at the time in the Institute, with about 4,200 pupils.



Brother Michael in 1933

Six years in various Lasallian schools in Burma was followed in quick succession by short one year terms in Singapore and Hong Kong where he opened the first Matriculation class at La Salle College, Kowloon. This enabled the boys to obtain entrance to the University of Hong Kong and many scholarships were gained. He also taught a wide range of subjects including English, Religion, Mathematics, Geography, Literature and History. He was also appointed the first Sports-master of the College. Michael seems to have liked what he saw in Hong Kong for he was destined to spend over thirty years there.

The six years prior to World War 2 were spent teaching in De La Salle College, Manila, and it was here that Brother Michael built up a reputation as Sportsmaster, achieving great success with the football and basketball teams. He himself was no mean cricketer. He taught English and Literature and was also put in charge of the Debating and Oratorical Clubs “which in my innocence I gladly accepted. I had not been warned that all Filipinos are born with a silver tongue in their mouths. I gazed in wild surmise at the flood of silver eloquence and never have I recovered from the shock.” It was in Manila that he was awarded both the MA and MS degrees and he retained very warm memories of his time in the Philippines.



Young Brother Michael in Manila: back row 4th from the right

But the clouds of war were gathering. To make room for over a dozen German Brothers who were teaching in Malaysia and Singapore, Brother Michael was transferred to Hong Kong. (It was thought that these German Brothers would be safer in neutral Philippines. Sad to relate, nearly all were bayoneted to death during the retreat of the Japanese soldiers in 1945.) Brother Michael arrived in Hong Kong on the 29th October 1940 and was appointed to St Joseph's College. His period of teaching only lasted until December 8th when Japanese planes bombarded the colony and pupils had to be sent home. Since teaching was now out of the question, many Brothers looked for a place where they could contribute more directly to the Lasallian mission. Brothers Felix Sheehan and Michael decided to try China and in January 1942 set sail on an extremely crowded ship first for Macau and then to China. Lack of funds persuaded them to change plans and

head for Indo-China instead where there would be a number of Brothers' communities and schools. Brother Felix happened to meet a Norwegian captain who was kind enough to offer the two Brothers free passage to Haiphong, a port in the Gulf of Tongking, where they were warmly received by the Brothers.

Brother Michael was assigned to the Brothers' school in Hue, the old capital of Vietnam. His knowledge of French now proved very useful and he was able to teach English through the medium of French, a language understood by all his pupils. After the war he was keen to return to England. After all he had not been home for twenty years. He was fortunate to get a place on a crowded troop ship returning to England in the early days of 1946. His family, who had had no contact with him during the war years, was delighted to see him again.

But what seemed to be a disaster suddenly struck. Brother Michael had become quite deaf. In the days before sophisticated hearing aids, this affliction seemed to spell the death knell for a professional teacher. He was transferred to Ireland to teach the young Brothers in formation. Despite his deafness, his students thought highly of him: " He was an excellent teacher, brilliant in mathematics, exacting and demanding of us but also of himself." Even amidst the dryness of calculus he could crack or enjoy a joke. And Brother Michael himself says of his pupils: "They gave me a new lease of life. I forgot about my affliction and have never looked back since." However, his partial deafness continued to challenge him for the rest of his life.



With Brothers he taught

In 1949 he was transferred back to England, to Kintbury in Berkshire, to teach students who were thinking of joining the Brothers. One of them recalls: " He taught us mathematics and geography and taught them well. He enjoyed teaching and his blackboard work was a work of art." In fact he was very good at drawing, penmanship and lettering. It was here, in the quiet countryside of Berkshire, that he received the unexpected but welcome summons to return to the East, to Hong Kong, where he was to spend the rest of his life, all of thirty one years.

It was 1952 and Brother Raphael Egan, Director of St Joseph's College, was the welcome summoner. In a cable that must rank high in the world of précis he wrote: " Take plane, forget boat." The call was to take over the Matriculation class in St Joseph's College, situated on Hong Kong Island. Brother Michael always referred to this second call as his

“Second Spring.” He was to retain a soft spot both for Brother Raphael and St Joseph’s College ever after.

He continued to teach mathematics, geography and religion, mainly to the upper forms. He also involved himself in educational endeavours outside the school. He was a founder member of the Catholic Education Council, became its Vice chairman and undertook the arduous task of redrafting the Council Constitution to make it acceptable to the Registrar of Societies. He was also a founder member of the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and built up a marvelous careers and guidance team in La Salle College, recognized as perhaps the best in the territory. On top of that he was the Chair for specified modern languages for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination for twenty-seven years and served on the Advanced Level Board of Hong Kong University for

French. Little wonder he was awarded the MBE in the Queen’s Birthday list of 1975. The award was presented to him by Sir Murray MacLehose, Governor of Hong Kong at the time.



Sporting his MBE

As if all this was not enough, Brother Michael kept up a voluminous correspondence, was the editor or moderator of the school annual magazine and the Guest Master for visitors to the school and the Brothers. When interviewed by the magazine editorial board in 1983 he was asked what message he would like to send to the students. He replied:” You can’t leave footprints in the sands of time by sitting down; be active, be just, be human and above all be cheerful.” These were the values that he himself tried to live.

Yet, Brother Michael at the time was either sitting down or lying on his back in bed. His health problems surfaced in 1980 when he suffered from bleeding of the bladder. Surgery indicated that there was a malignant growth and blood transfusions were necessary. He recovered rather well from this operation and continued to work like a Trojan. However, towards the end of 1982 the bleeding recurred and another operation had to be undergone. He returned to La Salle much weakened and nurses had to be employed to attend him. He was largely confined to his room. During 1983 he gradually grew weaker. At no time did he complain but, faithful to his own principles, remained cheerful and calm and received many visitors.



He died on the 25th November 1983. His Director and old friend, Brother Raphael, describes his last hours: "In the quiet of the morning of November 25th Brother Michael died. He was expected to last until morning but true to form he slipped away in a matter of seconds, causing no upset or inconvenience to anyone. Never had he the slightest fear of death. No wonder he faced the unknown with equanimity."

At the funeral Mass in St Teresa's Church, Brother Raphael again spoke movingly of his old friend and revealed a little known side of Brother Michael's character. "His true greatness was in evidence at Christmas and Chinese New Year when he made it a point never to forget giving a present to all the ancillary staff- the cook, table server, house cleaner, washer woman, one and all were the recipients of a present. The monetary value wasn't great but the love that went with each gift enhanced its value tenfold."

Brother Michael was laid to rest in the Brothers' plot at Happy Valley on Hong Kong Island on the 28th November 1983. The many friends who followed his coffin to the grave were eloquent testimony of what they thought of him. One obituary notice put it well: "We are the poorer for his going but the richer for having known him."



Much of this richness had to do with Brother Michael's cheerfulness and sense of humour. The Brothers would tease him sometimes about never having been appointed Director or Principal, knowing full well what his response would be: "Always the bridegroom, never the bride, you know!" Or when asked about his teaching; "Usually traveling in realms of gold, seeking magic casements, occasionally ending up in faery lands forlorn." Sometimes he would ask an apparently simple question like: "Which County do you come from?" Only to discover he wanted to talk about his own upbringing. For some years he befriended dogs and would happily chant: "Love me, love my dogs!" Lucky dogs!

Brother Michael was fond of quoting a Chinese poet who said: "If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come." Brother Michael kept a green bough in his heart and many birds sang.



Oriental Flavour

Li Bai (Li Po) 701-762



The period 713-756AD saw the Tang Dynasty at its height. It was also China's golden age of poetry. It is hardly surprising that the era produced two of China's greatest poets, Du Fu (杜甫) and Li Bai (李白). The former was particularly taken by Li Bai's poetic genius.

Approximately 1,100 of Li Bai's poems remain today. He is best known for his extravagant imagination and striking Taoist imagery, as well as for his great love for liquor. Like Du Fu, he spent much of his life travelling, although in his case it was because his wealth allowed him to, rather than being forced by poverty. For whatever reason he did not sit for the Imperial examinations but lived a carefree life, not at all in line with the prevailing idea of living like a gentleman.

In his travels he met many renowned scholars, gave away much of his wealth to needy friends and made quite a name for himself. His personality fascinated rich and poor alike. His poetry shone with clarity of vision and a beguiling simplicity.

Li Bai tried a few times to secure government position but it never worked out. His free and fanciful disposition did not sit easy with government expectations. Thereafter he wandered throughout China for the rest of his life. He became involved in a subsidiary revolt against the Emperor, although the extent to which this was voluntary is unclear. The failure of the rebellion resulted in exile. He was pardoned before the exile journey was complete.

Legend has it that Li Bai came to an unusual end. When trying to scoop up the reflection of the moon in the water, he fell in and was drowned. One thing for sure: he wrote very poetically of both the moon and of water.



The poem featured here is perhaps not as well known as some others by Li Bai. Yet it is a thing of beauty. A liberal English translation of the title might be “The Dawning of the Day” or perhaps “Morning Glory.” The dawn is a time of fresh hope. Since the beginning of time people have looked east and waited for the dawn. They wait for the early mist and cloud to blow away.

Clearing at Dawn

The fields are chill, the sparse rain has stopped;

The colours of Spring teem on every side.

With leaping fish the blue pond is full;

With singing thrushes the green boughs droop.

*The flowers of the field have dabbled their
powdered cheeks;*

The mountain grasses are bent level at the waist.

By the bamboo stream the last fragment of cloud

Blown by the wind slowly scatters away.

(tr. Waley)



曉晴

野涼疏雨歇，春色遍萋萋。

魚躍青池滿，鶯吟綠樹低。

野花妝面濕，山草紐斜齊。

零落殘雲片，風吹掛竹谿。

Family News

Our sympathies

We offered our sincere sympathy to Brother Thomas Lavin and the Lavin family on the death of their father, Joseph, who was called to the Lord on 28th October 2008. May his soul rest in His peace.

Visit of students from St. Patrick's School, Singapore

La Salle College was happy to welcome 30 students and 3 teachers from our Lasallian St. Patrick's School, Singapore on 28th October 2008. They attended classes and joined some extra-curricula activities and had a school tour. We think this is a meaningful form of Lasallian solidarity.



Visit of two Singaporean Principals

We were also happy to welcome Mr. Benjamin Lui of St. Joseph's Institution and Mrs. Regina Lee of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus Secondary School who visited St. Joseph's College and La Salle College with a view to closer collaboration.



Speech Days

November is the month for Speech Days when student academic achievements are formally recognized. Schools put on their best display in colourful ceremonies.



This Sporting Life

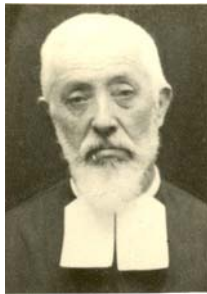
November is also a month for Sports because the weather is at its best.



In Remembrance

We pray for the repose of the souls of our departed Brothers

Our Brothers	Service Periods in Hong Kong	Date of Death	Place of Burial
Aimar Sauron	1914-1921,1923-1942	05-11-1945	Hong Kong
Andrew Bergin	1887-1896	13-11-1919	Ireland
Cronan Curran	1934-1980	03-11-1980	Hong Kong
Dositheus Le Du	1908-1913	23-11-1952	Singapore
Michael Curtin	1933-35&1952-83	25-11-1983	Hong Kong
Paul O'Connell	1907-1979	06-11-1979	Hong Kong
Remigius Blake	1926-	29-11-1961	Singapore
Viateur Fillion	1904-1906	30-11-1947	France



Brother Aimar Sauron



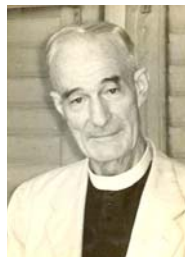
Brother Cronan Curran



Brother Dositheus Le Du



Brother Michael Curan



Brother Paul O'Connell



Brother Remigius Blake

Reflection

A Chinese proverb expresses this truth:

"If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come."

Here are five "green boughs" we should strive to keep in our hearts:



1. The green bough of *Enthusiasm*. Enthusiasm is not only contagious, it is attractive. The singing bird of success is drawn toward the green bough of enthusiasm. Where there is enthusiasm, there is excitement, and where there is positive excitement, there is more joy in the job, more sparkle in the eye, and more zest in living.

2. The green bough of *Kindness*. Kindness is the Golden Rule in action. Surely what the world needs now is more kindness. The green boughs of kindness grow from the tree of love, and when we truly love others, kindness is natural and instinctive. We should remember the little girl's prayer: "God, help the bad people be good...and please help the good people to be nice."

3. The green bough of *Generosity*. Our lives sing with joy when we generously share ourselves, our talents and resources in loving service to others. Generosity is the secret of happiness; it is the golden key that unlocks the gates of joy, fulfillment and life more abundant.

4. The green bough of *Humor*. It has been said that if we learn to laugh at ourselves we will always be amused. The green bough of humor helps us to laugh at ourselves even when we make a faux pas, when we goof up, when we trip over our tongues...



5. The green bough of *Gratitude*. Green boughs of gratitude provide the perfect home for the bluebirds of happiness. With gratitude in our hearts, there can be no room for self-pity, resentment or bitterness. Gratitude attracts more blessings—especially when we humbly and joyfully express our thanksgiving to our God and to those who have encouraged and inspired us.

(Adapted from William Arthur Ward, appleseeds.com)

Generosity : the 12th virtue of a good teacher

Perhaps Love

Perhaps Love is a resting place, a shelter from the storm.

It exists to give you comfort, it is there to keep you warm.

And in those times of trouble, when you are all alone,

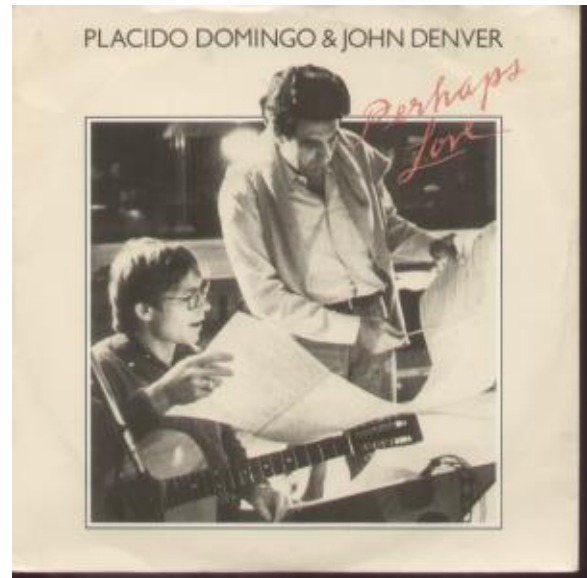
The memory of Love will bring you home.

Perhaps Love is like a window, perhaps an open door,

It invites you to come closer, it wants to show you more,

And even if you lose yourself and don't know what to do,

The memory of Love will see you through.



Last year we had a very difficult boy in P.4. Apparently, he was the kind of boy who created all sorts of troubles in class: bullying classmates, disturbing lessons and not willing to obey class and school regulations. He was so clever that he would argue with the teachers and even the discipline master for being unfair to him, with his own way of reasoning. Punishment did not mean much to him for he simply did not care. He was often full of anger and did not trust others easily. The headmistress received complaints about this boy from students, teachers and also some angry parents almost every day. People believed that this boy would probably be asked to leave the school or at least, be given a serious warning letter. However, at the end of the school term, our headmistress decided to make the best arrangement we could at that moment, though with lots of limitations and sacrifice, for the benefit of this poor soul.

At the beginning of the new school term, I was told by some parents that they were quite surprised to see that the boy was still in the school and was allocated to a class that seemed to suit him well. Some parents think that we are lenient while some think we are too generous. Actually, we are confident that we are doing the right thing and most importantly, the boy, though he still causes trouble at times, is behaving in a more appropriate way. The teachers can see that he is putting in effort by himself and his academic results are also improving. He knows that we have not given him up.

Of course, some parents, or even teachers, may not agree with what we are doing and they may even think that the arrangement is unfair to other students and teachers teaching the class. Maybe we are not doing well enough to convince them and we should let time speak for us. St. John Baptist de La Salle believes that every child is unique and valuable, as they are the children of God. The school is trying to sow a seed in the heart of this boy, the seed of acceptance and love. We hope that the seed can grow steadily and healthily

and perhaps this memory of Love will be with him for the rest of his life.

As one of the teachers of this boy's class, I could sometimes, through the jokes, games and class discussions, see a happy and lovely boy in him. To me, it is no doubt the wonder of God.

In a Lasallian school, giving the best to every child entrusted to us by God, especially those who are disadvantaged, is a very common practice, and it is the mission of every Lasallian teacher. We are, on the contrary, afraid that we are not generous enough. Our founder wants his teachers to be generous, gentle and firm, as the salvation of every individual child is our major concern, the center of our mission. Touching their hearts is the miracle the teachers can do and we shall do it with a generous heart.



***Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to seek reward,
except that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.***

St. Ignatius Loyola



