



The Gateway

Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin

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Sixteenth Issue

Welcome

In Hong Kong, August is a hot and humid month and it is in the midst of the typhoon season. It is hard to imagine the days of yore, without air conditioning at home or school.

Our senior form students tend to associate August with the release of public examination results and afterwards with the scramble for places in Form 6. On the other hand, those fresh faces entering Secondary One usually have to go through some form of bridging or orientation programmes. Teachers are kept busy and have to try and “squeeze” in a short summer break.

I suspect we do not have many headmaster saints, unless we go back into the mists of time. Why that should be so is another question. Saint Brother Benildus has shown the way, even for headmasters.

Our Brother of the Month hailed from Monaghan, a county in Northern Ireland that is not under British jurisdiction. Its famous poet, Patrick Kavanagh, wrote of its “stony grey soil” and “hungry hills” but for Brother Meldan it was an enchanted place.



Our Lasallian Formation endeavours have got a boost recently when we were able to send two groups of teachers on courses. Their reflections are encouraging.



Oriental Flavour introduces the crow, that black, noisy fellow, most unbeloved. Yet, the famous Chinese poet, Bai Juyi, shows us another angle. Even the crow has a heart. We may have something to learn from that.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, Pray for us,
St. Benildus, Pray for us.

Brother of the Month

Brother Meldan Treanor 1915-1995

Ireland is divided into four provinces namely, Munster, Leinster, Connaught and Ulster. The province of Ulster, in the north, is special in the sense that six of its nine counties are under British jurisdiction. Brother Meldan was born in County Monaghan, one of the three counties in the Republic of Ireland. He remained a staunch Ulster man and Monaghan man all his life.



He was born on the 5th January 1915 in the well-kept, picturesque village of Emyvale, the sixth in a family of seven, six boys and one girl. He was called James Myles at baptism. His mother died when he was three and his father when he was eleven, leaving the eldest brother, Johnny, then twenty-six, to look after the family.

The young James did well at school and he had high regard for his teachers. Nationalist feelings ran high at the time and James was happy to join a local band which played Irish traditional music. He played the flute and it became a constant companion throughout his life.

One day his school had a visit from the McKenna brothers, three of whom were De La Salle Brothers. They opened up the prospect of a career as a teaching Brother. James felt inspired to volunteer and he left home in August 1930 to join the Brothers' formation school in Castletown, County Laois. He had little interest in games preferring instead to delve into history, politics and mathematics as well as playing the flute at concerts.

On the 13th June 1931, he entered the Novitiate for a year's training in the spiritual way of life at the end of which he took his first vows, received the religious name of Meldan and then left for Kilmacow for further studies with a view to admission to Teacher Training College.

Suddenly the even tenor of life was broken with the visit of Brother Marcian Cullen who made an urgent appeal for volunteers for the missions. Brother Meldan was one of those who volunteered and was accepted. At the age of eighteen he, together with other missionary volunteers, was on his way to Paris and then Marseilles. He wrote to his family back home: "We had a lovely time



in France and were treated very kindly by the Brothers everywhere we went". He was not to see his family again for another thirteen years. The group boarded a ship on the 24th May 1933. After a long, hot, steamy passage the ship eventually docked at Penang on the 26th June. A few days later Brother Meldan was assigned to Burma and arrived in Rangoon on the 11th July.

In Burma he was first assigned to St Patrick's High School, Moulmein and he was to do two terms there. Like all young Brothers, Meldan from the first moment was in love with Burma and its people, the land of pagodas and saffron-robed monks. At first all went well but shortly the dreaded TB virus struck and, after medical checks, he was sent to St Peter's High School, Mandalay.



Here the climate was much more conducive, and together with the help of a dozen raw eggs daily, prescribed by the doctor, he gradually shook off the virus. He himself was convinced that it was playing the flute that cured him, as this entailed a lot of deep breathing. He loved the city of Mandalay, with its rich history, and was happy with his teaching duties. The brush with TB, however, made him very conscious of his health and the threat of TB would always be with him.



In 1937 Japan invaded China and in moving westwards Burma felt threatened. Brother Visitor felt that the young Brothers in Burma were at risk. In 1940 Meldan was transferred to Malaysia. He did not like leaving Burma and was not long teaching in his new environment in St Xavier's Penang when he was found to be suffering again from TB. He had to leave class and was confined to a secluded room for six months.

The Japanese invasion of Malaysia began on the 8th December 1941 and in late November 1942 Meldan moved to St Paul's Seremban. The school had reopened as a Japanese technical school and Meldan joined the other Brothers in learning

Japanese. A competence in the language meant an increase in salary beyond the pitiful living allowance of \$80.00 a month. In January 1944 a Japanese headmaster took over and non-Asians were removed from the staff. Five Brothers, including Meldan, had little choice but to join the Singapore Brothers in the jungle settlement at Bahau, some thirty miles away. This would be Meldan's "home" for the next 20 months.

And what a home it proved to be. Life was tough and food scarce and residents were cut off from news of the outside world. Brother Meldan joined the workforce, growing tobacco, peanuts and pumpkins as well as doing some cooking. But the soil was giving out and there was a poor return for their labour. Worst of all, a virulent strain of the dreaded malaria struck.



Decades later survivors happily pose with: front row (l-r) Charles, William, Brendan and Tomasino. 2nd row; Philip, Christopher, Meldan, Alban, Patricius. At back: Herman

Brother Philip O'Callaghan wrote: "Every single Brother was laid low with malaria except Meldan. In spite of the tropical heat and hard work he always wore football socks into which he tucked his trousers. Similarly his arms were wrapped in old stockings and he wore a baraclava type covering on his head. Mosquitoes could never

penetrate such defences". As an added precaution he smoked whatever was available, from cigarettes to Indian cheroots. Two Brothers, however, close friends of Brother Meldan, succumbed to the disease and died. They had contracted cerebral malaria. Their deaths greatly upset all the Brothers and Brother Meldan would often recall those tragic events.

When the war ended he was recalled to his Community in Seremban where normal schooling was resumed as quickly as possible. He was allowed a much-appreciated home visit in 1947, his first since 1933, and then he proceeded to University College Dublin where he took an Honours BA in History and Political Theory, his favourite subjects. Following a holiday home he was happy to be on his way once again to Singapore, arriving there in December 1950.

He was given a Pre-University class at the well-known St Joseph's Institution and was assigned to teach Economics, General Paper and Geography. He taught his charges thoroughly and well. He helped order a whole new arts library, one of the best in Singapore. He was also asked and agreed to teach English in the Teachers' Training College and did so with much success.



After two years in Singapore Brother Meldan was transferred to St Michael's Institution, Ipoh. The school was about to open a new sixth form and Brother Meldan was the man for the job. Here he laid the foundations for an excellent tradition. In Ipoh he also found time to indulge one of his favourite hobbies, walking, especially along the banks of

the Kinta river which flowed by the school.

Meldan's call to St Joseph's College, Hong Kong, took place in 1956 and, apart from a brief interlude in Sabah, he was to stay there for almost thirty years. Again he set about organizing the Form 6 Arts Stream, which was then only in its infancy. This involved a lot of hard work and he was teaching subjects like Economics, Geography, History and Literature practically on his own, an almost impossible workload. After two or three years he opted to teach in the lower forms and made Form 3 in particular his stamping ground.



Three stalwarts of St. Joseph's in the 50s.
Brothers Peter, Raphael and Meldan

Meldan was terrific in school. Every lesson was prepared assiduously. Everything was thoroughly researched and written up before entering any class. He insisted on full attention and the students took their cue. Indeed, on his way to class, he could be heard intoning "In the name of the Father..." before he even reached the door. This was probably to ensure quiet before his actual arrival. He detested bullies. Once he told us how he picked out one such, 'the biggest fellow sitting at the back of the class,' and had him on his knees crying for mercy! While the students had a healthy respect for his insistence on discipline, they thrived in the learning atmosphere he created and, not infrequently, succeeded in bringing out his human and humorous side.

For recreation he indulged in his great hobby, walking and collecting orchids along the streams of the Hong Kong and Kowloon hills. He knew the correct botanical name for each one. On occasions he would take a camera to photograph an exotic find. His faithful companion on these hikes was Brother Patricius O'Donovan who had also borne the burden of the heat and the day in the jungle at Bahau.



Throughout much of his life Brother Meldan was plagued with sickness of one kind or another. He would often refer to himself as "a sick man". He had more or less weathered the TB storm and malaria. But now two new monsters raised their ugly heads in the forms of pernicious anaemia, an enervating ailment, and insomnia, which, he admitted, almost drove him mad. In 1967, a short stint in hot and humid Sabah did not help matters. He returned to Hong Kong in November of the same year, looking as white as a sheet. This was followed by hospitalization, the opening of a hole in his throat, medication and injections for nerves and anaemia.

Sometimes his sickness complaints had a humorous side. There was the occasion of a visit by a priest. When the priest shook his hand and remarked: "Hello Meldan, your hands are lovely and warm"! Back came the response: "They're warm on the outside but cold inside"!

In retirement he was not at all idle. He kept himself busy checking District records and updating information on the lives of deceased Brothers associated with the District of Penang. He read a lot and gathered a goodly collection of books and Lasallian heritage materials in his room.

Although he visited Ireland and home a few times, it was not until June 1985 that he eventually decided to settle into the Holy Family Community in Castletown. Here he improved a lot and enjoyed many years of reasonably good health. One of his Directors at the time, Brother Albert Tierney, had this to say: "Meldan was a great conversationalist, great raconteur. He had an encyclopaedic memory for Northern Ireland. Truly he loved his native land". He



was able to visit his family about once a year. He would also recall stories of his youthful days in Burma, the place where he made his final profession in 1938.

Although keeping reasonably well health-wise, a serious attack of shingles at Easter 1993 greatly weakened him and he admitted it shook him to his foundations. He began to decline after that and by 1995 was confined to a wheelchair and paralysed from the waist down. Brother Patrick Tierney writes: "I visited him twice just before his death.



Meeting old friends in Castletown.

The first visit, about a week before the end, was sad because he was in and out of

Brothers James, Lawrence, Meldan, Patrick and Francis

awareness. But at least he recognized me and spoke a little about Hong Kong. At the second visit a few days before the end, he was unaware of his surroundings.

He passed away on the 16th August 1995 at Miguel House, Castletown. Brother James Dooley gave the homily and spoke of "a man who deeply loved his family and friends and country, a man of great loyalty to his Institute, and with a deep love of God and his Blessed Mother". The funeral was large, attended by the Brothers, relatives and a huge contingent of neighbours.

Brother Philip O'Callaghan, an old friend of Meldan, paid tribute to him in a poem entitled 'Remembering Meldan':

*Death did smile - an incongruous thing!
Yet death did smile!
For here was a soul crossing the Styx
With wealth aplenty and more the while
Leaving behind a legacy - a matrix
Of memories in kindly words, concerns, fidelities - a profile
Insuring death hath lost its sting -
E'en more - more to pay the crossing toll
And jump the queue at heaven's gate.
For he hath brought through earthly fires - gold
Purified by suffering kindled - prayer intense;
Myrrhed humility - an approaching state
To Godhead, imaged in human experience.*

Others had this to say:

“In his best teaching days few equaled him for excellence and perfection in detail; everything was thoroughly researched and written up before entering any class. He always insisted on full attention from the students and in the interests of their survival they soon learned to co-operate”. (Brother Alphonsus Breen)

“I think of Meldan the religious; his strong faith; at prayer remembering family and friends who were sick, dying or dead. His family was never far from his thoughts. I think of a truly colourful personality.” (Brother Patrick Tierney)



“He was very close to nature and adored flowers. His life was a continuous celebration of God’s gifts and he asked during his final illness that there be no crying or mourning at his death, rather merriment and celebration. This attitude to life and death sums up the character of Brother Meldan who lived so close to God, in the midst of all that’s ordinary and worldly.” (Emyvale scribe)

Brother Meldan’s CV:

St Patrick’s High School, Moulmein, Burma	1933/34
St Peter’s High School, Mandalay, Burma	1934/37
St Patrick’s High School, Moulmein, Burma	1937/40
St Xavier’s Institution, Penang, Malaysia	1940/42
St Paul’s Institution, Seremban, Malaysia	1942/44
In Bahau, Malaysian jungle	1944/45
St Paul’s Institution, Seremban, Malaysia	1945/47
University College Dublin, Ireland BA (Hons)	1947/50
St Joseph’s Institution, Singapore	1950/52
St Michael’s Institution, Ipoh, Malaysia	1952/56
St Joseph’s College, Hong Kong	1956/67
La Salle School, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	1967
St Joseph’s College, Hong Kong	1967/84
De La Salle Castletown, Ireland	1984/95

Lasallian Saint St. Benildus 1805-1862

It must be particularly hard for school principals to become Saints! After all, they are expected to inspire respect and even a degree of fear in both staff and students. Brother Benildus fell into this category and yet became a Saint in the process.



When the future Brother Benildus first tried to join the Brothers' novitiate in 1819 he was rejected because he was so short. His father was delighted that the Brothers would not take him, since it meant an extra hand on his small farm. Finally, however, after several insistent letters from the priests who knew him, the master of novices and the Provincial agreed to take the undersized postulant.



Brother Benildus spent most of his teaching life in the then backward village of Saugues, tucked away in the hills above the Loire. When he arrived with the other Brothers in 1836 the place was a mess, school-wise.

The students in the so-called school had gone wild. The mayor had already written: 'There are 200 children abandoned to the care of a teacher without religion, principles, education or aptitude'. But the most revealing comment on the school is made by Brother Benildus himself, writing to a friend two years after he arrived. 'It is the most Blessed Virgin who prevents me from murdering some of my flock'!

Though short in stature Brother Benildus could be firm, even using the strap when necessary. With a delicate mix of kindness and firmness, he gradually gained an ascendancy over the students, transforming not only the boys themselves, but influencing their homes also. He even learned the sign language for the deaf and dumb in order to help prepare a young man to receive First Communion. The pupils grew to love him and he loved to be with them, knowing each one by name. He spent twenty-six years in Saugues, most of them as head of the school and the Brothers' Community. He visited each class every day, never leaving without praying with the students. His religion classes were never dull. He taught the subject so well that his pupils were spellbound. He paid particular attention to the least able. He never forgot to visit the sick. Statistics compiled after his death in

1862 show that hundreds of religious vocations came from that school in the hills during his twenty-six years there. A remarkable record.

He always seemed to be aware of the presence of God, a very Lasallian trait. His companions frequently referred to his cheerfulness. Not that of the high-spirited, back-slapping variety, but somehow cheerful. He was a charming host too, but always within the limits of his Rule. The woman who washed his clothes reveals the tough quality of the man, especially what lay beneath the external gaiety: "Often I washed the blood from his linen where he had scourged himself with the discipline, and mended his shirt-sleeves torn by an iron bracelet."



His patron saint (Benildus) was a Spaniard who had been martyred by the Moors, back in 853. Brother Benildus was not to be a martyr in that sense of the word. In the Collect prayer of the Mass for Blessed Benildus we read of his 'fidelity to daily duty', what Pius XI in a happy phrase called the 'Terribile Quotidianum'. Martyrdom by blood as a rule is swift, often sudden. But to steel the spirit and the body, day after day over a period of many years, to the positive acceptance of duty, is another form of martyrdom of the self. During the last twenty years of his life Brother Benildus was almost crippled by rheumatism, and his final two years were plagued by a painful cancer of the liver. Yet, even then he remained cheerful.

Benildus died on August 12, 1862, surrounded by his fellow Brothers. From the hour of his burial, his tomb became a centre of pilgrimage.

Pope Pius XI said of him that "sanctity does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well". He was Beatified on the 4th April 1948 and declared a Saint on the 29th October 1967. St. Benildus' Feast Day falls on the 13th of August.

Prayer

Lord, you set before us the example of St. Benildus. Through his intercession may we grow in awareness of your presence, and live joyfully in your love each day. Inspire us to transform ordinary life, and bring out the best in those you entrust to us. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen

The Crows

They are not a pretty sight, have a harsh, raucous squawk, eat the grain of crops and raid trash boxes. No wonder they get a bad press, at least in the western world. Some people believe they are the harbingers of bad luck or even death. They are pests and scarecrows are often erected to ward them off.



However, few will deny that crows are also among the most intelligent animals in the world. More than 1,000 years ago, Aesop, in his fable 'The Crow and the Pitcher' demonstrated how clever the birds are.

One BBC study in 2008 found that a crow called Betty bent an iron wire into a hook in order to get food! They also have the ability to recognize human faces and can take revenge on individuals who have the temerity to abuse them.



Crows may have a rather negative image in western culture but they may be treated quite differently in the east. Japanese people, steeped in the old legends, believe crows will bring them good luck. The Japanese Football Association even uses the crow as its official symbol.



According to Chinese mythology, the world at one time had 10 suns that were caused by 10 crows. Since the world was burning up, the greatest archer, Houyi, was despatched to shoot down 9 crows and so save the world. The last crow is now the Sun. It may be interesting to read Ted Hughes' poem, Crow's Fall, in the light of this story.



Chinese poets also found a virtue in the crows that is often overlooked by people, the virtue of filial piety. A famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, Bai Juyi (772-84) 白居易, composed a poem which may help change our perceptions of the crow.



慈烏夜啼

白居易

The Weeping of a Miserable Crow

By Bai Juyi

慈烏失其母，啞啞吐哀音，

A crow lost its mother and cried out in deep sorrow,

晝夜不飛去，經年守故林。

Day and night, anchored to its branch, it waited for her return.

夜夜夜半啼，聞者為沾襟；

All who heard its midnight cries wept in sympathy.

聲中如告訴，未盡反哺心。

As it bemoaned its lost opportunity to repay its mother's love.

百鳥豈無母，爾獨哀怨深，

All birds have mothers, why should your grief be so deep?

應是母慈重，使爾悲不任。

Does your sorrow come from the tenderness of her love?

昔有吳起者，母歿喪不臨，

There was Wu Qi¹, who did not return to mourn his mother,

嗟哉斯徒輩，其心不如禽。

Such men hardly have the heart even of a bird.

慈烏復慈烏，鳥中之曾參。

Beloved crow, to us you are comparable to Zeng Shen².

Teachers are well aware that sometimes black may be white and white black. In Lasallian terms, they are to touch the hearts of the children whatever their appearance or status.

1. Wu Qi: a Chinese military leader and politician in the Warring States period. His book Wu Qi, *The Art of War*, is a Chinese classic on military strategies. He was also known for not returning to mourn when his mother died in order to gain the trust of the ruler of the state of Lu.

2. Zeng Shen: also known as Zeng Zi, a famous disciple of Confucius, is believed to have been among the most important compilers of the *Analects*. He became the symbol of filial piety, holding his parents in the highest esteem into old age.

Lasallian Formation Programmes

Some teachers from our various Lasallian schools had the opportunity to take part in two Formation Programmes recently.

The first group went to Manila from the 4th to the 13th July 2009 for the PARC programme entitled 'Preparing Future Leaders for the Lasallian Mission'.

The second group went to Ipoh from 14th to 16th August 2009 for a Lasallian Formation Programme organized by the Penang District Formation Team.

What follows is the initial reflection by each group.

The Manila Group:

In Hong Kong, we are so engrossed with our own teaching and school duties that we do not often remember ourselves as members of a very big family - beyond our own school, beyond the Hong Kong city, beyond Asia - the world Lasallian family of over 6,000 brothers, 100,000 lay partners and 1,000,000 students. It is often when we join Lasallians from other Lasallian institutions that we get the pleasant reminder of our identity that we are Lasallians. One of these occasions was the Pacific Asia Regional Conference of Preparing Future Leaders for the Lasallian Mission, held in the first week of July 2009 at Tagaytay City, Philippines.

Amidst the commotion of the H1N1 'flu threat, the word 'quarantine' came to our mind when we first learned that the participants would have to stay in the Phimna Centre for 10 days. But then we were also hopeful that this would offer a great opportunity for focused and fruitful learning at a quiet place. We were NOT to be disappointed at all.

The topics covered in our programme included the **I**nternalizing of Leadership power, **L**asallian Leadership styles, **P**ersonal Leadership styles, **D**iversity within the Lasallian mission, recognizing and handling **C**hange, the **S**pirituality of the mission, actual **E**xposure to the mission and **I**ntegration of all with the view to practical project work. Brother John summed up what we had been through very nicely with the word **D-I-S-C-I-P-L-E**.

We have had a rewarding and gratifying experience, which made it difficult to bid farewell to the thirty-five other participants from countries on the last day.

However, we missed home too; with a lot of hugging, we said goodbyes and "till we meet again".

It must be highlighted that we have learned so much from not only the speakers of the programmes but also participants from different sectors - their experience in education, their insights in the Lasallian mission, their prayers, and their versatility in organizing fun as well as meaningful games.

It is in the plan of the programme that the participants would all return to Pinma next July to report on the projects we have pledged to undertake. Thanks to Brother John, mentor of our group, we have already agreed on a list of objectives and a schedule to complete our project by June 2010.



Left to Right:

Terence Poon, De La Salle

Hesione Leung, La Salle

Edith Loong, La Salle

Brother Victor Franco

Wallace Wong, Chan Sui Ki,

Mandy Catlin, La Salle Primary

Alice Lau, Chan Sui Ki Primary

The Ipoh Group:

About 40 participants attended the first weekend course of this formation program. The course actually consists of 4 plenary weekends, homework off and online and project work, extending over 2 years. The aim of the course is to train Lasallian staff to be formators so that they can facilitate formation programs in their own areas.

As Lasallians, we are always expected to put our mission as top priority. Brother John challenged the participants on what and how they would do better than heretofore. Participants were grouped according to their regions to think and plan on how they could implement what they had learnt in this course. They are expected to develop some formation materials and programs for their fellow Lasallians in their own area.

We know that being a teacher is no easy task. We have much to prepare, to correct and after all, plenty of meetings. We have tried to do our job well. However, after the first weekend of the course, we understand better that we are not just simply doing a job but have the greater aim of serving others, be they poor financially or spiritually. We are not merely teachers but educators, who will put "touching hearts and changing minds" as our ultimate goal.

Sometimes, as part of the reality in the world, we meet obstacles in our work. But we will not give up easily but have faith in God and faith in our students and the meaning of our work, as in the case of St. La Salle. Having faith is one of the utmost important characteristics of Lasallians. By being faithful, we can overcome all difficulties. Moreover, after the sharing by other participants, we are pleased to see that we are not alone. Actually, there are plenty of fellow Lasallians doing the same work in different parts of the world. The same spirit connects us together even though we come from different cultures and may be meeting each other for the first time.

On the other hand, we were shown a very good model of formation program. Brother John is a very good facilitator, facilitating us to discover our own lives. The questions put by Brother John were really inspirational and to the point. Sharing sessions were a good chance for us to learn from other participants.

To preview the work of the next plenary weekend, Brother Vincent Cockery was invited to give a talk on the spirituality of St. La Salle. Participants were given the book "The Work Is Yours" by Brother Luke Salm. It is to be read in preparation for the next plenary gathering.

Lastly, we would like to thank Brother Patrick for nominating us for the program, Brother Thomas for driving us to and from Ipoh and Mr. Paul Tam for coordination.



Left to Right:
Tong Wun Sing, La Salle,
Christopher Lo, St. Joseph's
Samson Tang, Chong Gene Hang
Brother John D'Cruz
Edith Ng, De La Salle,
Timmy Lo, De La Salle

We really look forward to these teachers helping us develop our Lasallian Formation Programmes at local level.