



## **The Gateway**

**Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin**

**September 2009**

**Seventeenth Issue**

## Welcome

Back to school they came. For most, the enforced long holiday brought about by H1N1 fears, had come to a welcome end. The young people are happy to be back among their own. Precautions against a recurrence of the swine flu have to be taken however, especially as a



certain degree of 'flu fatigue' has taken hold. So far 18 people have died of this disease in Hong Kong.

Brother Patricius O'Donovan, our Brother of the Month, was a larger than life character who came through the rigors of World War 11. We loved him as a brother and as a dear friend.

Our Oriental Flavour piece is a story that is well known to Chinese people. The moral of the story is timeless. St La Salle himself had to move many mountains, and the story goes on.



It's now official. We have topped the 7 million population mark. That means 6338 per km<sup>2</sup>. Compare that with Ireland's 73 per km<sup>2</sup>! This makes for quite a crowded and vibrant city and for intense living. Even the city trams have their work cut out. Of course it is

all very relative compared with the 1.3 billion people in mainland China.

## Brother of the Month

### Brother Patricius O'Donovan 1911-2002

A fine teacher, a bewitching storyteller, an intrepid hiker and collector of flowers, a skilled sportsman, a gardener, a musician, singer, poet, and artist. A pretty impressive list you might agree. Such was Brother Patricius.



He was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1911 and the place of his birth may hold the key to some traits of his character. Young Patrick hailed from the glen of Aherlow, one of Ireland's most scenic with fertile land and stunning views of not so distant mountains. Such a pleasant prospect was enough to stir the young artistic spirit.



His mother seems to have had a profound influence on him. Years later he wrote a poem entitled "Mum's Rosary" which helps to capture some of the life and spirituality of family and home. Two of the verses go as follows:

'She handed down our rosaries  
And waved us to our knees,  
And Heaven itself drew closer still  
Above the wind-stirred trees.

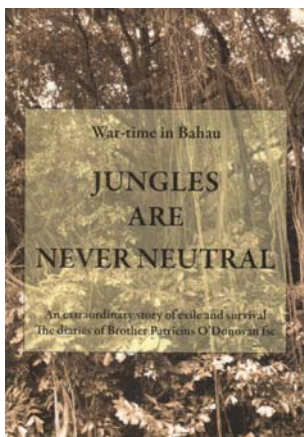
Great was her faith in things divine,  
Hell's fires she did not fear;  
For with her hand she could touch God's sky,  
He was, she said, so near'.

No doubt his mother was instrumental in his decision to join the Brothers. But so too was his primary school teacher who knew the La Salle Brothers well and recommended Patrick to them. He left home in 1926, first for the Juniorate, then the Novitiate in 1928/29, followed by the Scholasticate. The somewhat strict formation process was tempered with picnics, games, swims and farm-work. Patrick's interest in poetry began in the Juniorate while 'fooling in the back row composing funny rimes' about his companions. He found this most entertaining. Later, he would receive a more formal training with the help of fellow poet, Brother Hugh Bates.

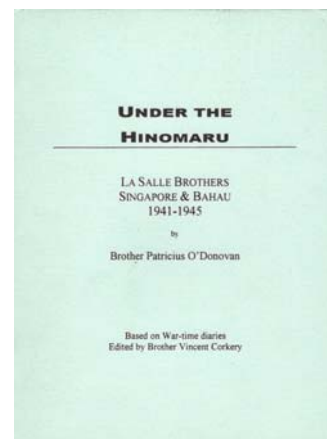
The call to the missions came early and in 1931, at the age of twenty, he was on his way in a group of four young Brothers, accompanied by Brother John Lynam. One of the young Brothers was called Hubert O'Leary and he and Patricius were posted to Hong Kong, the former to La Salle College and the latter to St Joseph's College. Patricius became a good friend of Hubert, not least because 'he had a lovely voice, and when he sang solo during midnight mass at Christmas, people kept looking back to see who was singing'.

At that time Brothers were frequently moved from one school to another and in 1933 Patricius was transferred to St Xavier's Institution In Penang. Right from the start in Hong Kong he had displayed fine teaching qualities, including artistic blackboard work. In Penang he also loved to head for the hills and hike and swim. Penang hill in particular attracted him and he reveled in the jungle walks.

In 1937 he was transferred to Singapore, to the newly opened St Patrick's School in Katong by the sea. He continued to enjoy his teaching as well as swims in the sea before another transfer across the city to the famed St Joseph's Institution. Since the school was in the heart of the city, there was no shortage of heat, dust and noise. Rumours of a possible Japanese invasion were in full circulation and tension was rising. People wanted to believe that the British Empire could withstand all attacks and that "Fortress Singapore" was impregnable.



Brother Patricius kept a careful diary of events from 1940 to the end of the war. He describes in some detail the military preparations of the British, the daily propaganda through newspapers and radio, the surprise first air attack on Singapore which made short work of British delusions, the Japanese occupation, the decision of the Brothers to follow



the Catholic bishop and community to the jungles of Malaya and what transpired there. These diaries were first written up using the title: "Under the Hinomaru" and more recently published in book form with the title: "Jungles are Never Neutral". Although in many ways a harrowing tale, Brother Patricius was able to temper danger and death with light and laughter.



During the Japanese occupation of Singapore the work of the Brothers was badly disrupted. Those who were British citizens were interned in Changi Prison for the duration of the war. The others were asked to reopen St Joseph's but to teach through Japanese which necessitated attending lessons in the afternoons. However, there was little stress on academic education and instead drills, singing Japanese songs and gardening were the order of the day. Then came the Japanese persuasion to move the Catholic population to a jungle clearing called Bahau in Malaya and the Bishop's and Brothers' decision to go there.

The jungle settlement had been painted in idyllic terms. A desolate wilderness of uprooted trees, surrounded by jungle, infested by mosquitoes and other pests, was the reality. Nevertheless, the Bishop and Brothers put heart into the weary settlers and they set to with a will, clearing the jungle bit by bit and planting vegetables. Brother Patricius of course put it all into verse. Here is a sample of what was endured:

With axe and parang, midst flame and smoke,  
With muscle and brawn and blade,  
Thro' jungle and wood we hacked and hewed,  
But the price supreme we paid.  
All battered and bent, all tattered and rent,  
All grimy and grim yet gay,  
We sweated and slogged, we sweltered and sogged,  
In the jungles of far Malaya.



The price paid was to their health. Malnutrition brought on dysentery, diarrhoea, beri-beri, tuberculosis etc...and the coffin makers and cemetery workers were kept busy. Two Brothers died of cerebral malaria while the rest emerged from the jungle looking like skeletons. Home leave and a good rest should have been the priority. Instead they focused on the

school and the children and did Trojan work to get everything shipshape again. Fortunately, in 1947, the superiors insisted that home leave must be taken and Brother Patricius was at last able to renew acquaintance with his family and with the beautiful glen of Aherlow after an absence of sixteen years. He treasured that visit in his heart. On his return later in 1947 he was posted to St Francis' Institution, Malacca, where he

served for some seven years. It was love at first sight. One of his students at the time gives us a good picture of the man and his times:

“He taught Scripture, English and Literature in the upper forms and adopted several ingenious methods of teaching never taught at teacher training colleges. His daily Literature lessons were unique, almost like getting a real stage performance, and he was able to rattle off by heart the lines of any of the characters. Brother Patricius was meticulous to the point of utter perfection as far as English Grammar was concerned.

He was a brilliant basketball player and coach and, in spite of his generous proportions, he was ‘Mr Twinkletoes’ on the court. He was also versatile enough to be able to strum a mandolin and on many an occasion he entertained the boarders to a tune or two in his own individual style”.



With his old friend, Brother Hugh Bates

Brother Patricius’ next assignment was to St John’s Institution, Kuala Lumpur where he taught from 1955 to 1959 before been posted to Kota Kinabalu as headmaster of Sacred Heart Primary School. Never before had he been in charge of a school and he made sure it never happened again. School administration and especially the bureaucracy entailed drove him up the wall. His heart was in the classroom and he had little patience with “filling forms”.

He was the first De La Salle Brother to climb to the top of Mount Kinabalu which stands at 12,000 feet. Brother Frederick Lynch and himself made this four to five days trek and climb, staying in rock caves overnight in the freezing cold and in the company of rats that nibbled their ears.



How happy he was early in 1965 to be able to shake off the shackles of administration and return to the classroom, this time in St Joseph’s College, Hong Kong. And it was in Hong Kong that he would see out the rest of his years, thirty-seven in all. Apart from a few years in Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College Community, he would be attached to St Joseph’s College in the heart of Hong Kong Island.

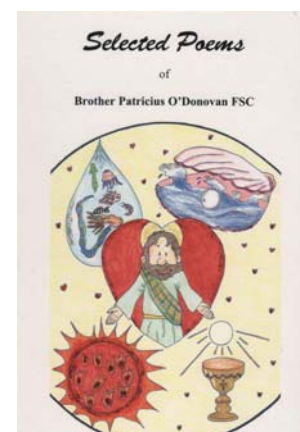
His final ten years of teaching in St Joseph's were full of interest and colour. As Brother Patrick Tierney recalls: "He taught English, Religious Studies and PE. His PE lessons were conducted from a chair in the yard! He used to bring his English compositions up to the roof garden in St Joseph's. He would write STOP after the first paragraph either because the boy had made the wrong kind of mistakes or because he was itching to get at the flowers and plants. He did not have green fingers but the roof garden was his pride and joy. It was somewhat untamed and wild, a reflection perhaps of his personality. He was normally jolly and good-humoured, but if he thought a person or situation had gone too far, he could make his feelings known in no uncertain terms. Fortunately this happened rarely!"



Weekends and long holidays saw Patricius and his old companion of Bahau days, Brother Meldan, heading for the outdoors and tramping the hills and valleys of Hong Kong, on the lookout for unusual flora and fauna. On one walk they came across a dead man hanging from a tree. And of course they had numerous encounters with snakes.

Patricius was now in the twilight of his teaching career and official retirement came in 1975 when he was sixty-four. He was to have a long retirement of twenty-seven years but had no problem putting his time to good use. Outdoors it would be either hiking or gardening; indoors it would be either artwork or composing poems. He had a passion for Celtic art and design and completed hundreds of sheets of illuminated manuscript of religious texts. The Brothers quietly lamented that such beautiful work was being done on less than quality paper. His magnum opus is entitled 'Laudate Dominum'- Praise the Lord, a massive, illustrated tome containing the Mass Liturgy, Psalms and Canticles and other religious prayers. At times the hand is shaky but overall it's a lovely piece of work by a man in his eighties.

He also wrote hundreds of poems at this time of his life, many deeply spiritual, many in praise of nature and several recalling old times. In a nice touch, students from all Lasallian schools in Hong Kong illustrated selected poems as a tribute to the poet and an inspiration to readers. Brother Patricius himself once wrote to a fellow poet: 'Strange! Strange! How a poem can show a different face when read at different times.' Poetry lovers will know how to relate to this judgment.



As a member of St Joseph's Brother's Community, Patricius was the unofficial guest-master. He was very welcoming and entertaining. As his Director, Brother Alphonsus Breen, recalls: 'He had a fund of stories and a great memory for songs and recitations of bygone days and he could render these in fine style to the admiration and appreciation of his audience'.

The Brothers hardly noticed that age was creeping up on him. Apart from some trouble with one leg, he had always enjoyed robust health and loved mountain climbing. It came as somewhat of a shock, therefore, when he suffered two strokes in the year 2000. He soon lost the ability to walk or talk and became bedridden. The old leg complaint came against him and amputation followed. It



was sad to see him so helpless, he who always had been so lively. Most of the last two years of his life was spent in the St Joseph's Home for the Aged, run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, in Kowloon. Here he was treated like one of the family.

Brother Patricius died peacefully on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> September and the funeral Mass was held on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Patrick Sun, an old boy of St Joseph's, together with Bishop Joseph Zen and Fr Garaventa, PIME. Students from St Joseph's College took care of the choir and serving. Brother Thomas Favier welcomed the congregation and Brother Patrick Tierney gave the homily. Brother Patricius was laid to rest in St Michael's Cemetery, Happy Valley, where a large number of students and friends paid their respects.



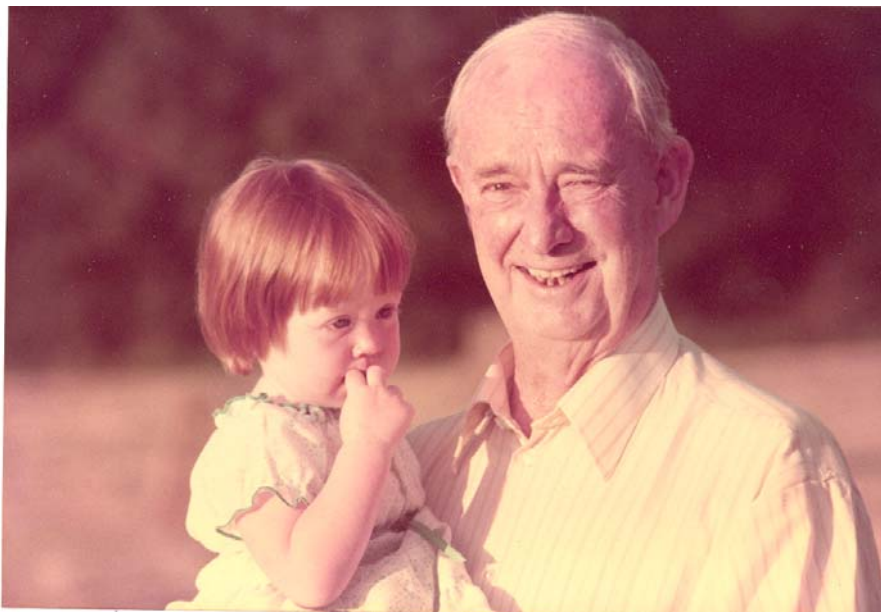


We can leave the final words to Brother Thomas Favier who had lived in community with Pat since his arrival in 1985:

'Brother Pat's life was long, blessed and fruitful. Those privileged to know him will appreciate his many natural talents, his devotion to God and to Mary, his love of nature, his single-minded dedication to his work and interests, his love of life and his cheerful smiling welcome. Above all we appreciate his ever-present optimism and the respect that was part of his nature. We pray in the language that he loved 'Go ndeana Dia trocaire ar a anam'.

### **Brother Patricius' Postings**

St. Joseph's College, Hong Kong	1931-33
St. Xavier's Institution, Penang	1933-37
St. Patrick's School, Singapore	1937-39
St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore	1940-43
Bahau Jungle	1943-45
St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore	1945-47
St. Francis' Institution, Malacca	1947-54
Ireland	1954-55
St. John's Institution, K. Lumpur	1955-59
La Salle School, Kinta Kinabalu, Sabah	1959-65
St. Joseph's College, Hong Kong	1965-80
Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College, Hong Kong	1980-85
St. Joseph's College, Hong Kong	1985-2002



## Oriental Flavour

### Moving Mountains 愚公移山

The following is a fable, well-known to almost every Chinese. It was written by Li Yukou (about 300 BC) in his book Lie Zi 列子.



There were two high mountains between Jizhou in the south and Heyang in the north. One was called Taihang Mountain and the other Wangwu Mountain. Just to the north of the mountains lived an old man called Yu Gong (foolish old man) and he was nearly 90 years old. Because the two high mountains were just in front of his house, he and his family had to walk a long way around the mountains whenever they had something to do on the other side.

One day, Yu Gong called all his family together to talk about how to move the two mountains elsewhere. His wife said, "An old man like you cannot even move a small hill, not to mention two high mountains. Even if you can, where can you throw so much earth and stone?"

"The Bohai Sea is big enough to contain all the earth and stone," Yu Gong said. So it was decided. His children started to dig the mountains, led by their father

A man named Zhi Sou (clever man) saw Yu Gong working and tried to stop him, saying, "You are so silly! You're so old and weak that you can't even remove the grass and trees. How can you move such high mountains?"

"You're wrong," Yu Gong said with a sigh. "Look, my sons will continue my work after my death. When my sons die, my grandchildren will continue. And so on from generation to generation. There's no end. After all, the mountains can't grow higher. Do you still say I can't remove them?"

The Lord of Heaven, upon learning of Yu Gong's story, was greatly moved. He decided to help Yu Gong and his family and ordered another god to go down and take the two high mountains away. And so it was done.

The story tells us that so long as one is determined and sticks to it long enough, anything can be done, no matter how difficult it is. There is no such thing as mission impossible.



太行、王屋二山，方七百里，高萬仞。本在冀州之南，河陽之北

北山愚公者，年且九十，面山而居。懲山北之塞，出入之迂也，聚室而謀曰：“吾與汝畢力平險，指通豫南，達于漢陰，可乎？”雜然相許。其妻獻疑曰：“以君之力，曾不能損魁父之丘，如太行、王屋何？且焉置土石？”雜曰：“投諸渤海之尾，隱土之北。”遂率子孫荷擔者三夫，叩石墾壤，箕畚運於渤海之尾。鄰人京城氏之孀妻有遺男，始齠，跳往助之。寒暑易節，始一反焉。

河曲智叟笑而止之曰：“甚矣，汝之不惠！以殘年餘力，曾不能毀山之一毛，其如土石何？”北山愚公長息曰：“汝心之固，固不可徹，曾不若孀妻弱子。雖我之死，有子存焉；子又生孫，孫又生子；子又有子，子又有孫；子子孫孫無窮匱也，而山不加增，何苦而不平？”河曲智叟亡以應。



操蛇之神聞之，懼其不已也，告之於帝。帝感其誠，命誇娥氏二子負二山，一厓朔東，一厓雍南。自此，冀之南，漢之陰，無隴斷焉。

The Gospel puts it this way: “I say to you: if only you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell that mountain to move from here to there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impossible to you”. (Matthew 17:20-21)

As Lasallians, we learn how St. La Salle and the early Brothers managed to move the mountains of darkness and ignorance and bring the children into the light of day. They did this by touching the hearts of the children. We believe that this mission is still vital today. As with Yu Gong, the carrying out of the mission often requires perseverance and courage. Generations of Lasallians are called to follow this noble cause.



## Family Updates

### Back To School

The new academic school year started on the first of September and still in the blaze of summer. August had already been the second hottest recorded. Classroom air-conditioners are going full blast. We believe that the students are happy to be back among their own. As usual, the beginning of the school year was marked by school opening Masses and Assemblies.



### Gala Days

Another feature of the month of September is the holding of school Swimming Galas. We are fortunate indeed in Hong Kong to have access to so many public 50m swimming pools, complete with ancillary facilities. For some of our schools these galas are partly used as preparation for the Inter-School swimming competition held in October. This competition is keenly contested and standards are high.





## Lasallian Family Website [www.lasalle.org.hk](http://www.lasalle.org.hk)

Upon David Cheng's retirement, after years of devoted service as web-master, the baton has been passed to Louis Chen. Louis is a Vice-Principal of Chong Gene Hang College and he has taken on the web-master post with a sense of commitment and cheerfulness. Like all new brooms, he will try some new approaches.

Louis will be more than pleased if readers will take time out to browse the website and give suggestions towards improvement. Just send him an email at [louisyau17e@gmail.com](mailto:louisyau17e@gmail.com)



## Opening Masses/Prayer Services

It is to be expected that at the beginning of the school year, we call upon our Heavenly Father to guide and protect us. This is the reflection of the opening prayer service in Chong Gene Hang College.



Father Dossi encouraged us to love each other as God loves us. He also reminded us that love is the foundation of both work and studies. The whole school was impressed by his sermon. The prayer service ended with the reciting of psalms. We all felt God's peace was with us.

## Blessed Brother Solomon 1745-1792



Nicholas Leclercq, the future Brother Solomon was born at Boulogne, France, in 1745 and was martyred in 1792 during the French Revolution.

He was born into a family of the professional class, his father being a wine merchant. His parents were good religious people and his mother in particular loved the Church and had a great devotion to Our Lady. Young Nicholas attended the school run by the De La Salle Brothers in the town. He was a studious pupil and showed early signs of a preference for the quiet life of study and reading. He was expected to follow in his father's footsteps.

It came as a surprise to his father, therefore, when Nicholas declared he wanted to join a religious congregation, and even more so when he heard his stated preference for the Brothers of the Christian Schools. After all, there would be no chance of worldly style promotion with the Brothers. His mother, however, was delighted and encouraged her son in every way. Indeed he was to write after her death that 'it is to her, after God, that I owe the happiness of having left the world to serve the Lord more faithfully'. He remained close to his parents and family all his life and wrote numerous letters to them.

In the Novitiate he was given the name Brother Solomon. After the peace and quiet of the Novitiate, his first teaching assignment was in Rennes and with a class of no less than 120 boys! He was then transferred to a school in Paris where his class had only 100 boys! He was not left teaching for long because he was sent for further studies and soon appointed Master of Novices. Here the emphasis on spiritual development suited him perfectly until he was also appointed Bursar, which meant he had to attend to many worldly matters, which did not suit him at all. There were other trials, especially the deaths in quick succession of his eldest brother, his mother and younger brother.

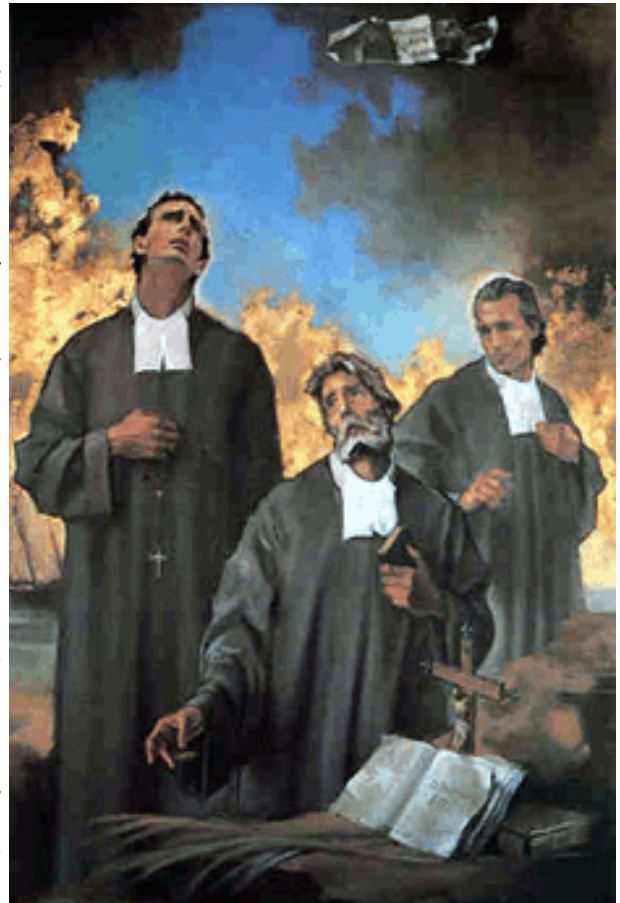
He was relieved, though surprised, when he was suddenly called to be the Secretary of the Superior General. Besides secretarial work, he had to travel with the Superior visiting schools and communities. On these travels he noticed that the state of the

country, and especially of the peasants, was deteriorating badly. The poor were almost destitute or even starving and they were gradually stirred up to attack the nobility and the clergy who were accused of ignoring their plight. Gradually the whole country slid into chaos and anarchy. The French revolution had arrived.

Once the monarchy had been overthrown early in the French Revolution, the next target was the Church. In 1790 the Civil Constitution of the Clergy gave the State complete control over the Church. Priests and religious were forced to take an oath to support the Constitution. Most of the priests and Brothers refused. Brother Solomon was staying quietly in Paris but on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1792 was discovered, arrested and imprisoned in the Carmelite Convent.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, that Carmelite Convent became the site of one of the most atrocious massacres of the French Revolution. Almost all the prisoners, amounting to nearly 190 bishops, priests and religious were killed by the sword or bludgeoned to death in the convent garden. Carts were piled high with naked bodies, their clothes having been removed and auctioned after death as part payment to the assassins. Remaining bodies were thrown down a well in the grounds.

Brother Solomon was 46 years old. He was the first of our Brother martyrs and the first to be beatified by Pope Pius XI on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1926. His feast is celebrated on September 2<sup>nd</sup> along with 3 other Brother martyrs (Blessed Brothers Roger, Leon, Uldaric) who died two years later.



“Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”. (Matthew 5:10)

**Blessed Brother Solomon and the Brother Martyrs of the French Revolution, Pray for us.**





In keeping with tradition, our Lasallian Day of Prayer for Peace is the 21<sup>st</sup> of October. Our Superior General encourages all of us to prepare for this day both at personal and school levels. Therefore, this year we are calling on you to spread the word that starting on September 21, 2009 - the United Nations' sanctioned International Day of Peace - and ending on October 21<sup>st</sup>, we as Lasallians will be fostering peace in our world through prayer, study and action.

The initiatives in the different Districts and Regions could take the form of, but are not limited to, the following:

- Voluntary work experiences both within and outside your own district
- Commitment to live a simpler, less consumeristic life-style
- Assembly activities in schools
- Prayer services
- Workshops / Campaigns / Art Exhibitions
- Peaceful marches
- Sending of letters to local authorities calling for Peace in specific areas of conflict
- Intercultural or Inter-religious activities



**Let there be peace on Earth,**

**And let it begin with me.**