

The

April 2015

# gateway



LASALLIAN EAST ASIA DISTRICT

issue

# 57

HONG KONG LASALLIAN FAMILY BULLETIN

April 2015



(Cover) This painting of St. John Baptist de La Salle is located near the entrance of De La Salle Secondary School.

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# The gateway

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issue

# 57

## Welcome

The Easter season is upon us and as we go to print the sun shines gloriously in Hong Kong. Lest we get too carried away, we are constantly reminded of the high levels of pollution. But the sun shines.



The Gateway 57 features a little of the history of our school in the country, De La Salle Secondary School. In weather like this, a visit to De La Salle is a tonic. The hustle and bustle of urban Hong Kong is left behind for the peace and tranquility of a rural village setting. There are mighty trees on the grounds and the school field is kept green.

The late Brother James Dooley continues with his experiences in Malaysia during World War II. Brother James writes well and tells a gripping tale.

Our schools were in active mode both before and after Easter. There are so many activities we can only choose a few. They will give the reader a taste of vibrant school life.

The Brothers, too, have been busy. The first part of the District Chapter has been held and we congratulate Brother Edmundo Fernandez on his Re-appointment as Brother Visitor for another term. The second part of the Chapter will be held in early May, this time in Hong Kong, and we hope all delegates will enjoy their stay here.

May the Risen Lord be with us. ■

**The Gateway  
Hong Kong  
Lasallian Family  
Bulletin  
April 2015  
Fifty Seventh Issue**



# Our Pathways

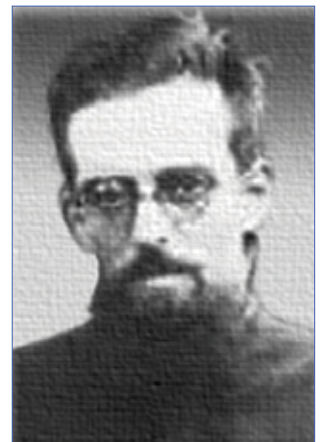
## De La Salle Secondary School, N.T.

This year, 2015, marks the Golden Jubilee of De La Salle Secondary School, N.T. For the sake of our overseas readers it is best to clear up the 'N.T.' puzzle first. It stands for the New Territories of Hong Kong, leased by China in 1898 to the British government. Small villages and small farms dotted the countryside and the New Territories 'bordered' China at many points.



Our story begins near one such village and farmland. The name of the village is Kam Tsin and it was part of the wider and bigger village area called Fanling. When people visited the area they would say they were going to Fanling, the more well-known name.

An extraordinary Catholic priest worked in the Fanling area from the 1950's onwards. His name was Father Poletti and he belonged to the Pontifical Foreign Missions Institute, abbreviated to PIME. Father Poletti had already endured hardship in the China mission and had also been struck down by a severe bout of typhoid fever. But nothing could stop this fiery ball of energy. He was a familiar sight shooting around the New Territories on his motor bike, always on some errand of charity or mercy.



There were other points of interest which made Father Poletti even better known. One was his love of animals and birds and especially his talking minah bird which could both pray and curse in equal abundance. But perhaps Father Poletti's greatest claim to fame was his almost daily attendance at the Lo Wu Bridge, the main crossing point from China. His purpose was to greet the refugees and foreign missionaries expelled from China and this mission gave him the nickname "China doorkeeper." He would greet the refugees warmly, sometimes with coffee and chocolate, a right royal welcome. He knew what they had suffered.

Father Poletti's main task was to build up the church in the Fanling area, so he first concentrated on constructing a church. He managed to do this around the mid 50's, calling the church after his patron, St. Joseph. He knew the importance of education and began to look around for religious congregations to run Catholic schools. By 1961 he had managed to obtain the services of the Sisters of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. That took care of the girls. Now for the boys.



by Brother Lawrence O'Toole, Assistant Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers. Among the over three hundred guests were Brother Michael, Provincial of the La Salle Brothers in Malaysia and Hong Kong; Brother Augustus Philip, Provincial of the Brothers in the Philippines; Mr. Kell, the Assistant Director of Education; Father Poletti, the Parish Priest of Fanling; Mr. Cheung Yan Lung, Chairman of the Heung Yee Kuk, N.T. (Civic Council N.T.), a loyal Old La Salle Boy; representatives from the clergy and the religious congregations; members of the 17<sup>th</sup> La Salle College Scout Group Committee; council members of the Old Boys' Association; parents of pupils; benefactors, and prominent figures of the New Territories.

Mr. Yuen Wui Ping, Senior Chinese Master of La Salle College, acted as Master of Ceremony on this occasion and performed this task most efficiently. He said, in part, "Gentlemen, today is the 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1964, and Brother Director after having done everything perfectly at Boundary Street, turned his eyes on expansion, expansion of Lasallian education, an education all of us are so proud of. It is a great pleasure for us to be present here at this ceremony. Brother Assistant Superior General has graciously consented to lay the Foundation of future greatness of our Kam Tsin School. In years to come when the new school grows in size and greatness and fame, all of us will have a nostalgic reminiscence of today's ceremony. On behalf of the secular staff of La Salle College and La Salle Primary School, we wish the new school success and prosperity."

Brother Felix, Principal of La Salle College, thanked everyone who had anything to do with the project

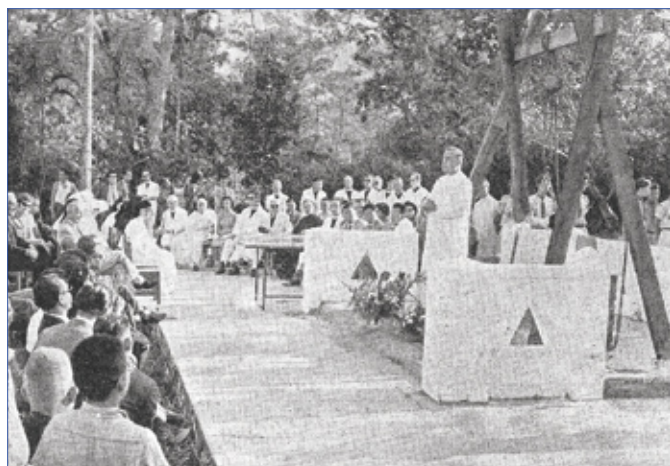
and in particular he thanked Mr. Cheung Yan Lung and Mr. Joseph Fung who had worked so hard in this venture. Brother Felix then expressed his debt of gratitude to those who gave so much financial help: parents, Old Boys, friends and well-wishers of La Salle. He also thanked the elders of Kam Tsin village for their co-operation. He expressed the hope that they would continue their support and make the school prosper and that there may always exist a friendly and co-operating spirit between the school and the village.

Brother Lawrence O'Toole then addressed the gathering. Among other things he said that one of the most pleasing gifts a Superior of a Teaching Order could receive is a new school. To be called upon to open such a new school was one of his greatest joys. Brother Lawrence said that this was his last visit to Hong Kong and he would carry away very pleasant memories — all the more enduring since they would be enshrined in the joyful memory of the opening of this new school. He then laid the Foundation Stone.



Our old friend, Father Poletti performed the blessing. Immediately after the blessing, a long string of what is known as "200,000 Bangs" of fire crackers, hanging from one of the tallest trees (which was really not tall enough, for the long string of crackers was hanging in several loops) was set off, to the delight of everyone, the villagers in particular.

Refreshments were served to the three hundred or so guests on the lawn in front of the Brother's bungalow which would serve as the Brothers' quarters when school began in September 1965. As yet there was no building in sight because land technicalities and 'Fung Shui' difficulties were causing unforeseen delays.





Construction did begin, however, in 1965 and moved at such a pace that all was in readiness for the official opening on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1966. The school was opened by Sir Albert Rodrigues and blessed by Bishop Bianchi.

You might recall that Father Poletti used to meet expelled missionaries from China at the Lo Wu Bridge border crossing. One day a small, emaciated and bedraggled man struggled across. He greeted the Hong Kong policemen on duty and simply said, "I'm Bishop Bianchi." The police contacted Father Poletti

by phone and he immediately shot out to the border where he identified and greeted his Bishop. Father Poletti lost no time in driving the Bishop on the back of his motor cycle to Taipo railway station where they took a train to Kowloon Station. Word had spread and a huge crowd waited at the Station to welcome their Bishop — still wearing coolie clothes. The opening of De La Salle Secondary School provided a much more pleasant reunion of old friends.

The school building was a triumph for the architect, Mr. Jackson Wong, of Wong Ng Ouyang and



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Associates, Architects and Engineers and a credit to the contractor Mr. Chui of Hip Lee Construction Company. Mr. Cheung Yan Lung, J. P., Chairman of Heung Yee Kuk and Mr. Hau Sau Tak welcomed the idea of a modern secondary school in Kam Tsin and smoothed out some awkward traditional objections.

The powerful heavenly patron of Father Poletti must not be forgotten; but only Father Poletti himself could recount all that St. Joseph has done for De La Salle Secondary School, Fanling.

The three pioneering Brothers of the new school were the Director Felix, Paul O'Connell and Pius Kelly. They would shortly be joined by Brother Hubert Pilz.

Brother Felix, as founding Principal and Director, was well known, having been Principal of La Salle College. He was also well known for his fighting spirit which stood him in good stead when facing challenges, none bigger than his efforts to wrest back the La Salle College building from the hands of the British Army.

Brother Paul O'Connell seemed to be around forever. In fact he had arrived in Hong Kong in 1907. He was a lover of nature and of animals and the surrounds of the house and school suited him perfectly.

Brother Pius Kelly had spent much of his educational career in Malaysia. He was quiet-spoken and related well with staff and students. Brother Hubert Pilz hailed from Germany. He had spent many years in Burma (Myanmar) where he ran the great St. Paul's High School. He would later become Supervisor of De La Salle School, N.T. When the school adopted the House System it called the 'Four Houses' after those pioneering Brothers.

Brother Felix takes up the story:

"The Community took up residence in an old type of colonial bungalow and their first objective was to make the place a fit habitation, as the house had been unoccupied for several years. We opened school on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1965 in an old Chinese school building which was rented for the purpose. We were helped by a lay staff of eight, mostly former pupils of La Salle College. Only Forms 1 and 2 were opened



as the building could not accommodate more than 200 pupils. Pupils came from the surrounding villages, attracted by the name La Salle as well as by the low cost of schooling; 40% of the pupils have free places. The pupils are the sons of very small farmers and artisans." The farmers mainly grew rice and vegetables and reared poultry and pigs.

When De La Salle Secondary School got off the ground in mid-1960, there was not a high-rise building in sight. Gradually, the larger villages became new towns. The two nearest to the school are Sheung Shui and Fanling. Together, they have a population of over half a million. Even the local small village of Kam Tsin has grown, with numerous three storey houses. Still, some farms survive and thrive.

De La Salle Secondary School has always been blessed with a nature-friendly environment. The campus contains many tall, stately old trees as well as a grass field. The relatively low-level school buildings blend in well with the natural environment. To this day, from the school roof, there is a fine view of the mountains and the high-rise buildings of neighbouring Shenzhen, a big city in mainland China.

In keeping with its closeness to nature, the school successfully applied to host a weather station. It is looked after by a teacher and a group of students and weather data is regularly fed into the central Hong Kong observatory. The weather station is a little oasis within the school grounds.





One special feature of the school, at least in our Hong Kong Lasallian world, is that it gradually became fully co-educational. It is the only Lasallian co-educational secondary school, out of five, in Hong Kong.

Another special feature, especially in more recent years, is the number of cross-border students as well as the number of recently arrived immigrants. The cross-border students live in Mainland China and cross the border every day for their education. That is a lot of commuting but the Chinese people will make big sacrifices for the sake of education. The cross-border students are well cared for. They also give a higher profile to the speaking of Putonghua or Mandarin. ■



... ONE FAMILY



# In Our Hearts Forever

## Community Life in a P.O.W. Camp

— by Brother James Dooley

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This is the 8<sup>th</sup> part of the 'In Our Hearts Forever' series first started in *The Gateway Issue 50*.

It traces the experiences of Brother James Dooley and his Community during the World War II Japanese occupation in Malaysia.

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The Camp was more silent and depressed following the terrifying "Operation Clean-up" spectacle. The kindly Captain Hanada was transferred and his replacement was a diminutive, excitable, dancing-master type, who had to stand on a table to harangue the forcibly assembled prisoners ... And he just loved haranguing people. Our bread ration, our beloved 'cobs', was withdrawn except for the sick, who usually got them when they were too ill to eat them.

We depended on the Working Parties to smuggle in food from our friends outside. They also brought in fantastic items of news which we knew we could not believe but which we loved to hear. Once on a working party, they found bales of British army uniforms all brand new. So prisoners left for work in tatters and returned in resplendent regimentals with spares for the rest. The place looked like Aldershot until the Guards caught on and announced a raid on the cells to recover 'enemy properties'. The uniforms tied in a bundle with strings were pushed through the cell bars and left dangling on the outside. A few uniforms were left lying around and these with the old rags were burned in public and 'face was saved' all round.

### PRAYER IN PRISON



As far as was feasible, we carried out our regular Community prayer life in prison. The Guards had left us our Manuals of Prayer, the Institute Prayer book at that time. In fact, one Guard collected a few prayer books from other prisoners and gave them to us saying it was our job to do the praying. We were able to return them.

Christy Lynch, our man from Sligo, used my profession crucifix and Manual of Prayer to have the Way of the Cross every evening in his Block. Soldiers thirsted for God and we had many visitors to our cells discussing religion for hours on end. One among them, nineteen

years old Bobby Warick, was instructed in the faith by Brother Austin from Burma and received into the Church in prison. He had been shot through the shoulder and his arm, for want of medical attention, hung useless by his side. A serious handicap in our condition; I do not know if he survived the war.

It was about this time we had our first Mass in prison. Father Aloysius heard Confessions and the whole ceremony took about two hours. He said a few words of prudent

encouragement as there was always an English speaking soldier present. One Guard, who used to come along was, he told us, a Marist Brother.

Even our prayer life could have its lighter moments. One evening, as was our practice, we were reciting the rosary packed into one cell in complete darkness as black-out regulations at the time were very strict. During our prayer, Brother Thomas O'Brien fainted and collapsed in a confusion of legs and robes. Gaston, who had not as yet mastered the niceties of English idiom, braced himself against the cell wall and grabbed Thomas by the shoulders. I stooped down and searched around for his legs but in the darkness, it was Gaston's legs I grasped and pulled hard. Gaston objected.

"There's somebody pulling my legs," he exclaimed.

Denis Hyland intervened, "This is no time for joking, Gaston. Get Thomas out of the cell."

"I am not joking," Gaston protested, "There is somebody pulling my legs and I am going to fall."

That was the end of the rosary but we did manage to manoeuvre Thomas out on the narrow corridor and revive him with a dash of cold water. Sadly for Tom and the rest of us, there was nothing stronger.



Brother Denis

## **SEVEN YEARS FOR APPROPRIATING A STUFFED MONKEY**

One of the cage-like Blocks was now being used as a 'civilian' prison and this section was cruelly overcrowded. Our situation as POWs was debasing enough, but the "bad elements" were much worse off — no privacy, no toilet facilities, wretched food and long hours locked up. Mr. Rasiah, a local hospital attendant, used to visit them with a quantity of Japanese army pills, maybe a little iodine and a measure of bran — the bran to treat beri-beri, a swelling of the limbs and sometimes of the trunk, brought on by eating only highly polished white rice with its lack of vitamin B. "Doc", as we called him, helped the POWs too, at considerable risk to himself. He was remembered after the war for his help, his encouragement and for the snippets of news from outside.

We used to walk around the civilian Block when the coast was clear and chat with the inmates, most of them old lags from British times. I spoke with one man sitting very disconsolately beside a large stuffed monkey he had 'appropriated not stolen' he insisted, from the local museum.

"I was brought up before the Japanese Chief of Police, who beat me and said "... This monkey belongs to the Nipponese Imperial Forces and you stole it. Seven years in jail!"

"Consider my fate," a Chinese gentleman nodded sympathetically, "here I am seated on a sack of rice which I 'found' and I starve."

Seven years seemed to be a flat-rate sentence; most offenders had their incriminating evidence there in the Block with them.

An elderly Malay (Muslim) beckoned me over one evening and asked if I could get him the water of a fresh coconut for ... and he pointed to a young man beside him,

who was dying. I managed to get some in the kitchen. He tried to entice the sinking youth to sip some but it was too late.

A few soldiers had gathered outside the bars with me, while some of their own fellow prisoners were huddled on the inside. There we all remained till he died — war prisoners and civilian prisoners, Christian and Muslim, praying together for the repose of the young man's soul.

## THE SICK

Diseases and sicknesses in prison were mostly those the prisoners brought in with them aggravated and spread as time went on by neglect on the part of the jail authorities, lack of medicines and food shortages. There was malaria, dysentery, beri-beri, war wounds and jungle sores.



There was an Australian doctor in the Camp who had no medicine whatsoever except a small quantity of Epsom salts which he used liberally to purge dysentery cases.

There the sick lay, brave young men robbed of their lives, lying motionless in filthy blankets, grossly swollen with beri-beri, racked with malarial fever, tortured with suppurating war wounds and jungle sores ... and when they died as many did in the early days, buried with scant ceremony or respect; for the Japanese army, life, even for their own,

was very, very cheap. "ESCAPE!" was every prisoner's dream. It kept us alive. This smiling skeleton escaped from the notorious 'Death Railway'. He was tortured and put in solitary confinement. But he grinned through it all as did so many of his fellow prisoners. Many of them, not far from death, would respond to, "How are you today?" with, "Getting better, Brother."

## MOVING CAMP



More and more "bad elements" were being brought into the prison and so the Japanese decided to concentrate all POWs in Malaya in one centre — Pudu Jail in Kuala Lumpur — the Federal Capital ... a forbidding looking building we had often seen from the outside.

It was announced the prisoners would move in two batches. The 'healthy' ones — you qualified if you could stand up — and the sick ... the Brothers would be scattered among the sick since we helped to look after them. We left Taiping jail at 6 a.m., on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1942.

## Pudu Jail, Kuala Lumpur, 1942

We were up at 3:30 a.m., on the morning of our departure from Taiping jail. After a goaded-on breakfast of rice and vegetables, we were given three cobs and a bottle of black coffee each, told to pick up our baggage and march! Guards ran up and down the pitiable rag-tag procession, screaming, "Hayaku!, Hayaku (早く, quick!),

Speedo!" we were propelled into the goods yard of the local railway station. Our "military train" turned out to be steel wagons where we squatted on the metal floor with our miserable belongings. The wagons became oven-hot in the tropical sun and some of the sick were already drained and prostrate. Fortunately, our guard left the wagon door open.

Stops were made haphazardly along the way for reasons of convenience. At one such stop outside Ipoh railway station, a frail little Indian boy came running towards the train with a tiny tray of cakes on his head. He stopped short when he saw who the 'passengers' were, Brothers Patrick, Edmund and Thomas from Ipoh itself, among all the rest of us.

"Good morning, Brothers," he greeted us as casually as he might do in the school yard. The train gave a vicious jerk and moved. The boy upended the tray in among the prisoners and scurried away. That boy had given, "all he had" braving the wrath of the guards and the possible anger of his parents. I have often wondered if he survived the war; he would be in his sixties now.

Shortly before our arrest and imprisonment, I had undergone an operation and conditions in the Camp were such that the wound gave me a lot of trouble. And now, the heat of the wagon, the shunting and banging on and off sidings, had caused great discomfort. A journey that should have taken about four hours had endured fourteen hours and it was 2 a.m. when we reached Kuala Lumpur station.

We were bundled out of the wagons, ordered to throw our things into a waiting military truck and shuffle along the one and a half hours march to Pudu jail. The train ordeal had made me violently sick and I knew I just could not make that journey to the jail. I prayed, approached the lorry driver, bowed, and in my halting Japanese, I told him I was very sick. He looked at me, then all around him, perhaps to see if the Kenpeitai were watching and motioned me into the back of the lorry among the paltry bits of baggage.

I record this rather personal experience — there were those among my Brothers and other prisoners who suffered much more than I did — to indicate that not all Japanese army personnel were as cruel and perverse as the Kenpeitai. There were kind and humane men like Captain Hanada our Commandant in Taiping Jail and there were ordinary servicemen like this "unknown soldier", who treated people with compassion and understanding.

*(To be continued)*



Brother Patrick

Brother James Dooley was Principal of St. Joseph's College, Hong Kong, from 1964 to 1970 after which he taught in La Salle College until called to Rome in 1977.

For more about Brother James, please read our Issue 6 at <http://www.lasalle.org.hk/pages/docs/TheGateway06.pdf>

# Family Updates

## WORLDDIDAC



Worlddidac brings together Government Ministers, Universities, international speakers, school leaders and teachers, and educational product and service providers. La Salle College and the Lasallian East Asia District were represented at Forum level with Brother Steve Hogan and alumnus Erwin Huang chairing seasons and presenting. Brother Steve gave the welcome speech introducing keynote speaker, former prime Minister of Australia, Ms. Julia Gillard. The Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD) also had a booth promoting the Lasallian mission of formal and non-formal education across Asia. The Worlddidac Expo is held annually at Basel, Switzerland, but has come to Asia for the first time.

# Patrick's Day Parade

A first for Hong Kong! Can you believe it! Cities all over the world host St. Patrick's Day Parades but the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 witnessed the first such in Hong Kong. Well, it's better late than never. The inspiration behind the initiative came from our new Consul General, Mr. Peter Ryan. As he put it himself, "we will make a little bit of history when we walk in Tamar Park to celebrate not only Ireland and Irish culture, but also the strong links of friendship that connect Hong Kong and Ireland." Our Hong Kong Lasallian community was well represented by Brothers and Lasallian partners. On top



of that, the boys of La Salle College put on a much appreciated jazz dance and played a piece of Chinese orchestral music, while a famous old boy entertainer, Philip Chan, sang a glorious Danny Boy. The Parade and performances made for a lovely family day.

# Primary Sports Day

St. Joseph's Primary School held its 44<sup>th</sup> sports day on the day after St. Patrick's Day and on the eve of the feast of St. Joseph. The day was cloudy but dry and mild, ideal for athletics. The sports day took place in Wanchai Stadium and it took a whole day. The boys enjoyed the competitions very much. Besides cheering for their own class, they also found it a good time to spend the day with their schoolmates and snacks.



# Senior Choir Champions



La Salle College Senior Choir won the Championship in the Hong Kong Music Festival Boys Choir (Senior Division) on Monday night, the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, and was awarded the Dr. Mok Hing Yiu trophy. The conductor was Mr Ronald Lam and the boys sang 'Embraceable You' by George and Ira Gershwin, arranged by Jay Althouse (set piece), and 'Danza!' by Linda Spevacek. The adjudicator liked the boys balance and harmonies throughout, and the joy and enthusiasm they showed in singing and encouraged them to continue singing.

# Chinese Orchestra Champs

It was an emotional moment for the La Salle College Chinese Orchestra when the results were announced as the piece of music was very difficult and the team's expectations, hopes, and desires, very high, after hard training in recent weeks. The announcement that they were the champions in the Hong Kong Music Festival unleashed tears of joy. The adjudicators praised the boys for a near perfect performance of the piece. Congratulations to the members, trainers and teachers of the Chinese Orchestra.



# Have a Break



Brother Steve was inspired to invite students from an American University for a lunch-time concert at La Salle College on the 24<sup>th</sup> March. The performers were an a cappella group from Brown University and they call themselves 'Jabberwocks.' The group has performed extensively throughout the USA and internationally. The all-male group rendered mainly contemporary pieces and their timing, movement and harmony were a joy to behold. It was a lunch-break with a difference in the garden setting of La Salle.



# Games or Apps

The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers organizes “The HKIE Mobile Game Apps Competition 2015” which aims at promoting the engineering profession and facilitating the sharing of engineering knowledge with the public in an interesting way. Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College



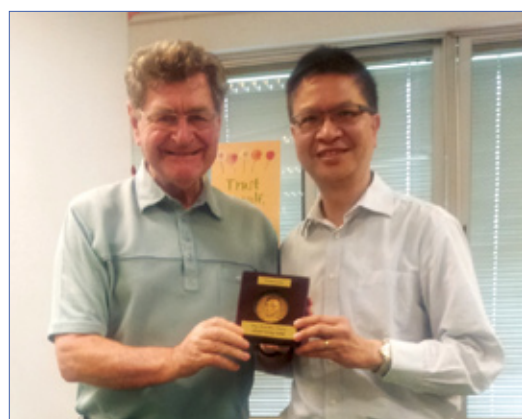
S5 student, Wong Kin Fai was the Champion of the Secondary Schools Category in this competition. His app, named “Gravity Trip”,



makes use of the theorem of gravitational force and allows the user experience the movement of a rocket in space. Kin Fai’s app was also displayed at the exhibition of the “Engineering and You” Programme 2015 at the Hong Kong Science Museum from the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

# In Their Good Hands

**APLEC** Hong Kong refers to a sizable group of school administrators and teachers who have attended various forms of Lasallian formation programmes. This group of between 40 to 50 educators seeks to deepen their understanding of the mission and spread it in their schools. There are at least two plenary gatherings each year, incorporating some formation as well as updating. The most recent gathering



was on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2015. A formation power-point entitled “*In Your Hands*” emphasized how important each one of us is in the carrying out of our Lasallian mission. There was also input on the priorities identified by our recent General Chapter and how we might apply them in Hong Kong. A long-standing member of APLEC Hong Kong, Mr. Wong Kwok Chuen, Wallace, was presented with an appropriate award for years of devoted service.

# Celebrations

## 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### St. Joseph's College

#### THANKSGIVING MASS

The Brothers arrived in Hong Kong 140 years ago and took over a school they named St. Joseph's College, after the patron of their Institute. To celebrate the anniversary, the College organized a lovely Thanksgiving Mass in the Cathedral on the appropriate day, the feast day of St. Joseph.

The chief celebrant, Cardinal John Tong, emphasized the way of silent service of St. Joseph and thanked all such who contributed to the life of the Lasallian mission in Hong Kong. He also hoped we would all imitate St. Joseph and strive to be upright persons.

Among the Brothers attending was Brother Thomas Favier, recently returned from Ireland. May St. Joseph's continue to thrive for many years to come. ■



Cardinal John Tong



Miss Caroline Chan and guests



Brother Thomas Favier



Brother Patrick Tierney, Thomas Lavin, David Liao and Cardinal John



Father Patrick Sun, Edward Khong and Joey Mandia



Brother Jeffrey Chan



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