

The Gateway



Issue 85
June 2020



‘All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.’

Pope Francis

(These small wild flowers grew humbly at the corner of the school
yard and were all cleared as weed after the day the picture was
taken.)

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June 2020

First published in 2008

Published by
The Hong Kong Lasallian Family
18, La Salle Road,
Hong Kong

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Welcome

This is our summer issue of The Gateway and we hope to be back again after the summer break.

The summer break is not like any other. First of all, it is shortened to roughly one month because of the necessity of making up classes. Classes have to be made up because schools were closed for quite some time due to the Covid-19 virus. On top of that, travel is much restricted and, in some cases, out of the question.

Having said that, we were very relieved at the resumption of school in early June. The somewhat eerie silence of the schools once again echoed to the sounds of youth.

We have also to be grateful for the way in which the virus has been controlled in our territory. The number of deaths is four and, while it is four too many, it is relatively fewer than elsewhere. The same goes for the number of infected cases.

In this issue we have featured a former teacher, long since passed to his reward, who gave his heart and soul to teaching and interacting with his students.

We have also featured two of our former pupils who have become priests. Each of them, in quite different ways, have been making a difference for good in the lives of many.

Nature continues to beat its regular rhythm and we have enjoyed viewing the flames of the forest, the African tulips, the Yellow Shower trees and many more.

Keep safe and well.



Chan Ah Fatt - Teacher of Faith and Zeal



Good teachers in the 30's were hard to get in Hong Kong. Teachers were poorly paid: they were not paid directly by the Education Department, as they are now, but by the school authorities. The Grant-in-Aid Code, as it stands today, was not implemented until after the War. No opportunities for the training of teachers existed as the Colleges of Education only came into being after the War. The La Salle Brothers of Hong Kong (St. Joseph's and La Salle College) owed a special debt to Brother James, Visitor of the Penang District, for recruiting well-formed teachers trained in the schools of the Brothers in Malaya, Singapore and the Philippines. He persuaded them to leave their own country and "seek fresh fields and pastures new" to take up a teaching career in Hong Kong. To Brother James' consolation, these teachers not only showed that they were competent teachers but they also contributed to the society of Hong Kong in various fields.

One of this band of teachers from Malaya was called Chan Ah Fatt, Francis. He started in the junior branch school of St. Joseph's located in Chatham Road and then moved with the boys to La Salle College when it opened in January 1932. He was to remain there for the rest of his career.

After his death in 1958, the following beautiful tributes, very slightly edited, were paid and appeared in the Lasallite school magazine of 1959. They are testimony to a truly lovable and extraordinary teacher. The first tribute was signed by YML.

"Over the grave, a deep silence prevailed. Everything was motionless. The dreary sky shed a faint drizzle over the place that added to the melancholy of the atmosphere. Sad thoughts crept into my mind as I stood there watching the coffin being lowered slowly...ever so slowly.

Death had visited our school and taken away from us our dear Brother Cassian; now, scarcely a year later, as if to satiate its quest for acquaintanceship, it again snatched from us another beloved friend and teacher, Mr. Francis Chan Ah Fatt. But who can fathom the wisdom of God? His ways are not our ways. It is only a question of time before death steals over our limbs and we can only pray that he who toiled so diligently, so faithfully, so incessantly here below has found eternal peace with his Father.

As I stood there by his grave, the cloud of doubt and regret gradually lifted. I recognized then what a man he was – loyal to his friends and loving to those under his care. He was a man of



St. Joseph's Branch School
Chatham Road.

intelligence, experience and knowledge; and to us, his colleagues, a model of tenacious adherence to duty. He has left a place that cannot easily be filled. We shall miss him very much but we take consolation in the knowledge that he has left behind him a rich patrimony of sterling qualities which we can admire and try to imitate.

I met him 30 years ago in St. Joseph's Branch School, Chatham Road, and which later expanded into La Salle College. What struck me most in the course of our acquaintance was his reticence. He was a silent man, yet his silence was blended with charm and cheerfulness, and no one passed him by without receiving from him a heart-warming smile. Behind his reserve was hidden his true personality – patient, diligent, encouraging, loving, forgiving. In dealing with his students, he manifested some of his greatest qualities. To all of them he was father, teacher, friend.



Sitting by the left-hand side of Brother Cassian, Mr. Chan Ah Fatt, in this picture taken in the 30s with a group of newly baptized students

His patience was legendary. He was meticulous to a fault. Never was a vituperative remark known to have passed his lips. He would go to any length to instill understanding into his students and help them surmount any possible obstacle to their progress. He understood them. He understood their weaknesses and fought hard to help his boys combat apathy that is bound to steal over them sometimes. He would devote much of his free time to giving special tuition to those who were slow in class.

The funeral service was held on New Year's Day with almost puritanical simplicity. This was in keeping with his way of life. He died as he had lived – a humble, ordinary man. No matter what the occasion, whether before superiors, friends or students, he never cared to be in the limelight and was visibly ill at ease when circumstances brought him into it.

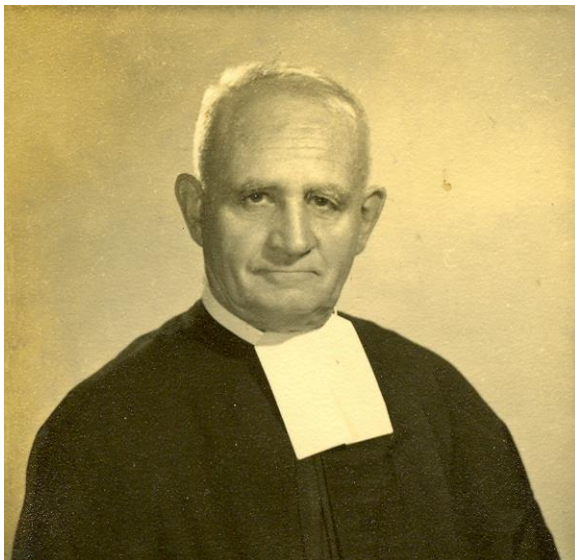
To him no obstacle was insurmountable. Diligence formed the rule of his conduct and his mode of existence. He took what came his way, never complaining, never grudging. He was a man who liked on life as it really is, transient and insignificant but for the glory of God. Imbued with that spirit of Love, he lived and taught. By Love he was guided and for that Love he yielded his soul to the Almighty.”

*“No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose,
The bosom of his Father and his God.”*

YML

The second tribute was by his colleague and friend, Mr. W.P.Yuen (Yuen Wui Ping) who entitled it: ‘A Tribute to a Veteran Teacher who remained Loyal to his Profession to the Last.’

“Francis, like his namesake, the gentle St Francis of Assisi, was a simple man in life. In my caption I avoid the use of the word ‘Great’ for fear of irreverence towards such great thinkers as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius and the like; likewise, I avoid the lavish and indiscriminate use of such elegant attributes as ‘Ideal, Noble, Exalted...’ which words might sound too exuberant, too rhetorical, too fanciful, for our endeared friend, the late Mr. Chan Ah Fatt – for he was a simple man.



Unassuming and unobtrusive, like the man himself, I could not pen them without emotion. I hesitated and put them down only after prolonged reflection. As a justification, I quote the beloved Brother Cassian who once passed a casual remark about our esteemed colleague some years ago. ‘He is a coach,’ said the Brother. He meant, of course, that Francis thoroughly mastered his subjects and knew how to impart them to his pupils. Should you approach any of his past pupils invariably they would gladly confirm the truth of this. ‘Uncle Faat,’ he would say, ‘could tell you blindfolded the correct answer to any sum, the page and the number of the problem in the book.’

Again, his old pals would grin broadly in recounting how creditably Ah Fatt did his ‘Demonstration Lessons’ in the presence of education inspectors who were assessing the proficiency of the staff before La Salle got her Government Grant.

I cannot tell you how shocked I was when Brother Theodore broke to me the sad news while I was visiting the Hong Kong Products Exhibition. And right away I taxied back to school to find out more about the report. I was shocked because we had left him hale and hearty only a few days before when the school broke up for Christmas. A couple of days prior to the holidays he still taught me some correct methods of relaxation, telling me that he had long suspected my complaint of hypertension was due to faulty relaxation.

I still fancy Francis telling his boys in class: ‘All right, now? Do you understand, now?’ These incessant repetitions are ringing in my ears. I still fancy him looking at his boys lined up in front of the classroom before the bell; I still fancy him enjoying, at recess time, his steaming hot coffee while munching, off and on, a hot dog or a sandwich; and I still fancy him stooped over his desk in the Common Room, supporting his head in his hands to snatch forty winks, one of his favourite forms of relaxation.

That is the impression that has lingered in my mind since he breathed his last. I think with pride of one who remained loyal to La Salle till the end and died with his boots on.”

The burial took place on New Year’s Day 1959 at the Catholic Cemetery Cheung Sha Wan. Despite the holidays, a large number of Brothers, teachers, pupils and old boys attended the funeral.

Notes: The original staff in December 1931 consisted of 5 Brothers and 4 lay staff, one of whom was Francis Chan Ah Fatt.



Teachers of La Salle College, taken after the war with Brothers Wilfrid, Cassian and Casimir. Mr. Chan Ah Faat, 1st row, extreme right.

Father Francis Ching Ming Chung

We had been well aware that a number of old boys of both St. Joseph's College and La Salle College had become Catholic priests. We were not aware that an old boy of Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) Primary school had also become a priest and came to this knowledge only recently. Not only that. We discovered that this was a very special priest, spreading the love of God in Canada.

His name is Ching Ming Chung, Francis and he is legally blind. Here are a few of his memories as well as his personal spiritual testimony. He has kindly allowed us to share these with our Lasallian Family.



I, Fr. Francis Ming Chung Ching, was born in HK in 1972 into a Catholic family. My family immigrated to Toronto in 1986. During my undergraduate studies in Waterloo, I experienced a personal conversion to Jesus and became very active in my faith through involvement with Waterloo Chinese Catholic Community. Shortly after, people began to notice in me a possible vocation to the priesthood and encouraged me to pursue it. A confirming sign came in 1997 at WYD and I decided to begin seminary preparation in 1998.

“I am not sure what I can contribute regarding my Primary school years in Hong Kong. I was in the graduation class of Chan Sui Ki Primary School 1985. And after one year in Chan Sui Ki College, my family and I immigrated to Toronto, Canada. Back then I was a very different person, kind of a smart Alex: proud, arrogant, boastful, egotistical, incorrigible, a nerd and a pain in the backside. Academically I was among the top students, but I have to say I was not a very good person — moral, yes, but not very friendly or charitable. I did not have many deep friendships, and sincerely I was surprised that three of them considered me to be real friends when I left Hong Kong. This may seem that I am a bit harsh on myself, but ask any of my friends who knew me before 1999, and they will tell you the same.



P.6 Graduation photo.
Fr Ching, extreme left, last row.

So what's my testimony? The miracle is that God would choose someone like me, and make me into a priest. The Lord let me know how broken a person I was, how I was gripped by insecurities and shame. Yet instead of judgement and rejection, which I fully expected from God, I discovered unconditional love, forgiveness, and an invitation to bring love and healing to others. I realized that yes I am a sinful and broken person, but I am a redeemed and loved sinner.

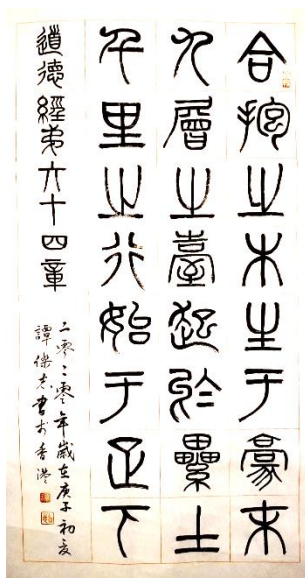
I was born with glaucoma and was diagnosed legally blind. My eye condition was severely worsened four years into my first assignment at St. Timothy Parish in Toronto due to complications. The condition was stabilized after two surgeries and losing the ability to read. Starting in July, 2015, I am full-time doing evangelization work: half of my time I help providing formation and training for the Fountain of Love and Life, a Chinese media evangelization charitable organization that produces a weekly TV and radio program and web content; the rest of my time I give retreats, parish missions, and workshops wherever I'm called to serve.

Priesthood has been wonderful for me. I love being a priest, for I can daily see God continue to work His miracle of love and healing among His people.

I pray that these words will bring you encouragement. If God can make good out of me, He can make good out of you too."

Father Joseph Tham

Father Tham is a graduate of St. Joseph's Primary school and St. Joseph's College. He furthered his studies in Canada where he became a medical doctor. Still keen to learn more, he took a doctorate in Bio-Ethics. A spiritual longing took him to the priesthood and he joined the Legionaries of Christ. Father Tham has become an expert in bio-ethics and is a professor at a university in Rome. He also travels widely to give presentations. While in Hong Kong recently, he visited his former school principal Brother Patrick, and our Lasallian Family archivist, Paul Tam. They were able to view the relevant school magazines and also discovered that Father Tham has artistic talent, especially in Chinese calligraphy and painting – multi-talented at the service of the Lord.



Some of the work of Fr Tham

In the front line



Many Hong Kong Lasallians are in the front line in the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. Quite a number of them are in the medical profession. One of them is Dr. Raymond Liu, a graduate of St. Joseph's College. The following is, in part, taken from the daily newspaper, the South China Morning Post:

When Dr. Raymond Liu Wai To received five Covid-19 patients from the same family one night in February, he feared what might come next.

“I thought Hong Kong could be on the cusp of a large community outbreak, which would overwhelm the public health care system and have disastrous consequences,” said the infectious disease specialist and chief of Ruttonjee Hospital's isolation ward.

His anxiety deepened when the father in the family of patients became so ill he was coughing blood. This was even before his positive result for the coronavirus had been confirmed.

Liu knew he had to make a call.

“His symptoms were in line with that of a coronavirus infection. So I decided to wait no more and gave him a cocktail therapy of drugs.”

The strategy worked and the man's respiratory symptoms subsided.

Affectionately known to colleagues as the “old general” who has steered the hospital through the treacherous waters of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and swine flu outbreaks, Liu, a senior medical officer in the department of medicine and geriatrics, put his hand up early in January to lead the medical team in the isolation ward for Covid-19 patients.

For the next 1½ months, Liu slept only two to three hours on average a day, and toiled to supervise every aspect of the medical effort, from receiving and screening patients, to their diagnosis and treatment. To save precious time and avoid passing the virus to his family, Liu stayed in a hotel that was a 10-minute walk from his work.

“I have not gone back home and seen my family since the beginning of this pandemic,” the father of one said.

To inspire confidence, Liu took a hands-on approach and emphasised team-work. “We would watch each other putting on and taking off our gowns even when we were not going in, just to make sure we completed every step and as a way to cheer each other on,” he said.

Dr. Raymond is one more Lasallian fulfilling the motto: ‘Enter to learn, leave to serve.’

Zooming



The use of Zoom has become widespread because of the Covid 19 pandemic outbreak. With class suspensions, all our Lasallian schools in Hong Kong are using Zoom or its equivalent for online teaching. It then entered a new domain with a first ever Zoom Lasallian Education Council (LEC) meeting which took place on the 1st May 2020. All members showed up despite the fact that it was a public holiday. Thanks to the IT expertise of Brother Dennis and Paul Tam, the meeting went

smoothly. The agenda included meaty topics such as follow-ups on our School Viability and Vitality reports, the formation of a LEAD Mission Council, our Hong Kong Lasallian Mission Fund and Raffle and ending up with individual School Reports. Although we were all happy that we managed to negotiate Zoom, we look forward to our regular face-to-face meeting next time.

Hong Kong Alumni Gathering

Chairpersons of our Alumni Associations together with some Lasallian Education Council members met on the 26th of May 2020 to discuss common projects and directions for the future. In particular, they talked about how to support and develop our mission in Hong Kong, especially in these troubled times. In addition, since we are not able to hold our annual raffle in aid of our Lasallian Mission Fund, participants discussed possible alternatives. They were also appreciative of the presence and pastoral work of the Brothers newly assigned to Hong Kong.



Helping the Poor

On 14 April, Easter Tuesday, some Brothers and Hong Kong Lasallian Volunteers formed a small group to visit the homeless in Shum Shui Po. Shum Shui Po is one of the poorest areas in Hong Kong and many homeless and down-at-heel congregate there. The Hong Kong Lasallian Family Office, coordinated by Nikki Chan, were fortunately able to receive donations of hygiene products, mainly sanitizers and masks. And this at a time when such products were selling at a high price. Thanks to the Brothers and Lasallian Volunteers, the products were efficiently repacked for distribution. Through the activity the homeless and the scavengers were reached. They have been suffering from social inequality for some time. This has been a meaningful project for our young Lasallians.



Lasallian Educational Outreach (LEO)

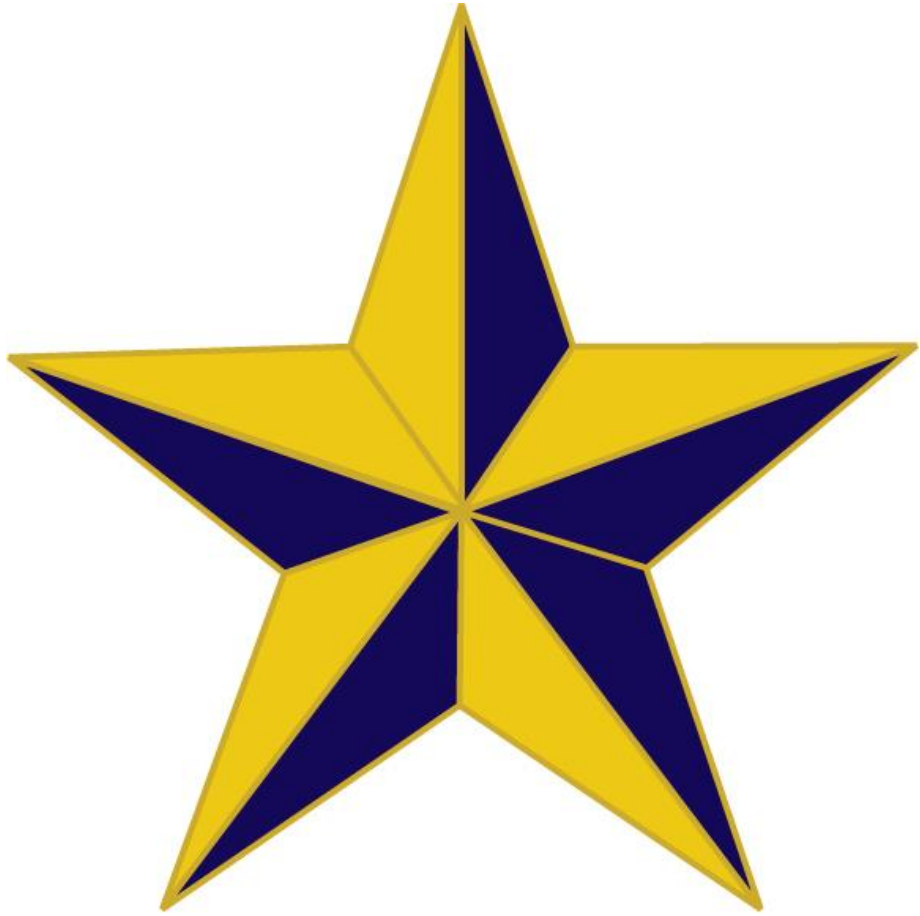
After a long lapse, mainly caused by the social unrest and by the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, we were happy to resume our educational outreach project in early June 2020. This project mainly consists in the teaching of English to newly arrived students from mainland China and from low-income families. The teachers come from our different Lasallian schools in Hong Kong. There are three groups of students, ranging from Primary 5 to Secondary 5. Although many of the students are weak, with little foundation in English, our teachers are happy because the students are hungry to learn and treasure the chance they are given.



Visit to Chong Gene Hang College

Our Lasallian Chong Gene Hang College is situated at the far eastern end of Hong Kong Island. Recently the school was happy to greet visitors Brother Dennis and Paul Tam. Brother Dennis plans to visit the school more frequently and to help it in any way he can. The visitors were especially introduced to the Principal and Vice Principals elect and engaged in a fruitful discussion of school matters.







We are one, and we are many.....