

The

April 2015

# gateway



LASALLIAN EAST ASIA DISTRICT

issue

57

April 2015



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

---

# The gateway

First published in 2008

**Published by**

The Lasallian Family Hong Kong

**Solely distributed by**

The Hong Kong Lasallian Resource Centre  
La Salle College, 18 La Salle Road  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

**Concept by**

Brother Patrick Tierney  
Mr. Paul K. K. Tam

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.



We do not exactly know how or why Father Poletti was led to the right man in the person of Brother Felix Sheehan, a member of the De La Salle Brothers. As early as 1958, he had approached Brother Felix, then Principal of La Salle College, Kowloon, on the question of a secondary

school for boys in the Fanling area. At the time, La Salle College was still in temporary quarters in Perth Street. Brother Felix had more than enough on his plate, so the idea was postponed until the Army had derequisitioned La Salle College proper. But the seeds had been sown.

On the occasion of the visit of Brother Nicet Joseph, Superior General of the Brothers, and Brother Lawrence O'Toole, Assistant Superior General, to Hong Kong in 1962, Father Poletti made sure to repeat his request to both Superiors. He also placed great faith in the intercession of St. Joseph, his favourite Saint.

Meanwhile La Salle College had been derequisitioned and Brother Felix set out to make good on his promise.

In the early 60's, steps were taken to procure a site for a school in Fanling. Through the hard work of Mr. Joseph Fung Hon, a land broker, a splendid location was procured on the 19<sup>th</sup> March, the feast of St. Joseph, 1963. The Hon. Dr. A.M. Rodrigues, a Legislative and Executive Council member of the Hong Kong government and a loyal son of St. Joseph's College, was instrumental in obtaining a full subsidy from government for the proposed school. The school site was not far distant from the China border.



The 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1964 will always be a historic day in the annals of De La Salle Secondary School. On that day there was a distinguished gathering in the recently acquired property of the Brothers to witness the laying of the Foundation Stone of the new School



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

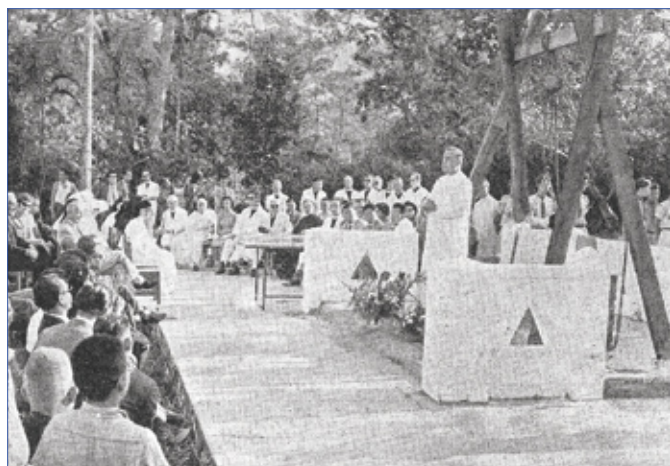
and in particular he thanked Mr. Cheung Yan Lung and Mr. Joseph Fung who had worked so hard in this venture. Brother Felix then expressed his debt of gratitude to those who gave so much financial help: parents, Old Boys, friends and well-wishers of La Salle. He also thanked the elders of Kam Tsin village 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



April 2015

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

