

# LASALLIANS WEST

MAY 2008

*A newsletter of the  
De La Salle Christian Brothers • District of San Francisco*



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## NEWS from AROUND THE WORLD

### Devastation in Myanmar: The Lasallian Presence

The world's eyes are on Myanmar as it tries to recover from cyclone "Nargis" and the monsoon rains that have followed that massive storm. Brother Mark Murphy, FSC, former Visitor of this District, who was recently appointed Director of Lasallian Services for the Pacific-Asia Regional Conference, works in Myanmar. Below is his first e-mailed message, received May 12:

MYANMAR  
Monday after Pentecost

Dear Brothers, Family and Friends,

A blessed and hope-filled Pentecost to all of you. Apologies that it has taken me some time to get word direct to you but I hope many of you did receive messages from Brothers David Hawke, Edmundo Fernandez and Stephen Touhy as well as other sources. On the third day after the storm I was able to make a phone call to Singapore and they relayed the news to others. On that same day, I had to leave Yangon to accompany a Filipino Brother to one of our mountain communities, Kalaw, since he is here to assist us for a month. Since there are no e-mail facilities there, I have not been in contact till coming back here to Yangon on Saturday.

The death tolls are not yet official nor completely accurate, but seem to be around 100,000 with several thousands still missing. The area south of us, known as the Delta, was the hardest hit and has had the most difficulty with the disease and pollution that has resulted from not being able to dispose of the decomposing bodies. Here in Yangon, the damage has been wide-spread and knocked out electricity and water supplies. We only yesterday got back limited water but still do not have electricity.

Fortunately, no Brothers or their families have been lost but again property damage has been extensive and operating with any sense of normalcy is still coming slowly. We are most fortunate in that the Brothers in Rome are coordinating relief funds for us and we will have sufficient to cover our repairs. It will be some time before we can actually get the workmen and materials to complete everything, but we are trying to get the roof work done before the monsoon rains get any worse. Getting the funds to us will be a

challenge – as it is to the whole country – but we will be fine. We are looking for ways to share with others wherever we see desperate needs.

The clearing of debris – on our property and around the city – will take about another week at least to get the roads completely clear and services restored, especially telephone and electricity. The government is using the army (including the soldiers who have been living on our compound for several months due to security reasons surrounding the vote on the referendum) to help clear the fallen trees, telephone poles, billboards, sections of roofing and other debris that is everywhere. The soldiers have been friendly and helpful. But the official reactions to offers of help from outside agencies and other governments has slowed the assistance needed by those hardest hit. We hope they will take a different approach soon. This is the monsoon season and we are anticipating heavy rains. People need to have repairs in place prior to that time or it will simply increase the damage and disaster.

As is often the case, the response of the local people has been a source of great encouragement and admiration. Close to home, our 15 boarders have been terrific in their work since the time of the storm, cleaning up the mess within the houses on the compound and the debris on the grounds. They kept up a sense of humor and great energy, despite no clean water, no electricity and limited food supplies.

Some of these boarders are brand new to the city and had only been here 2-3 days before Nargis hit. So you can imagine their own added anxiety about being in a strange place - all come from far away villages and this is the first time for them to live in a city. The separation from family and the terror of the cyclone itself with the impact of all the resulting consequences could have been quite devastating. But the original 7 boarders joined us in creating a great spirit of getting to work immediately and made all the others feel quite safe and secure. And going to bed by 8:30 p.m. exhausted and with only candles and flashlights to get you there, does have some advantages!

God's Providence was much in evidence in the reactions of caring for one another and the neighbors, and in the prayers we offered for a faith-filled response to the disaster. For myself, this has been one of the few tragedies I have been involved in directly. My experience in India of the tsunami was from a distance as it did not hit our area. But I surely now understand the impact of something like Katrina in a whole new way. Watching and reacting to news reports on TV of similar natural catastrophes will have a whole new depth of understanding as to what people suffer. But the considerateness and concern and generous spirit of helping is a great source of encouragement as to what we are capable of doing during times of real need.

Much appreciation again to those of you who sent notes and expressions of concern. We are OK and hope to be in much better condition by next week. If you can find ways to assist those most strongly affected, I encourage you but it will be difficult. As I indicated earlier, we are unable to assist in this way from within but hope that avenues will open. Do keep us in your prayers – as we do all of you.

Fondly,

Brother Mark - for all the Brothers of Myanmar

## The Feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle

May 15 is the Feast of John Baptist de La Salle as patron saint of teachers (declared in 1950).

May 24 is the anniversary of his canonization as a saint (declared in 1900).

These anniversaries are celebrated all over the world. You may find interesting this report from the island of Malta, published on the Founder's feast day.

### From *The Malta Independent Daily*

By *Kenneth Vella*

Today the Lasallian Schools in Malta (De La Salle College, Stella Maris College and St Benilde School) are celebrating the feast of their Founder, St John Baptist de La Salle, who is also the Patron Saint of Christian Teachers.

De La Salle was born in Reims, France on 30 April 1651, into a world very different from that of today. He was the first son of wealthy parents and received the tonsure when he was 11 years old. When he was 16 years old De La Salle was named Canon of the Reims Cathedral. Though he had to assume the administration of family affairs after the death of his parents, he completed his theological studies and was ordained priest on 9 April 1678 and received a doctorate in theology two years later.

At that time few people lived in luxury, and most were extremely poor. The French society was also made up of peasants in the country and slum dwellers living in the towns. Few could send their children to school and most children had little hope for the future.

De La Salle was very worried about the situation of the children of the poor who seemed so "far from salvation" either in this world or the next. Because of this he was determined to put his own talents and advanced education at the service of the children who according to him "often were left to themselves and badly brought up." To be more effective in his initiative, De La Salle abandoned his family home, moved in with the teachers, renounced his position as Canon and his wealth, and so formed the community that became known later on as the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

His enterprise met opposition from the ecclesiastical authorities who resisted the creation of a new form of religious life, a community of consecrated laymen to conduct gratuitous schools "together and by association." The educational establishment resented his innovative methods and his insistence on gratuity for all, regardless of whether they could afford to pay.

Nevertheless De La Salle and his Brothers succeeded in creating a network of quality schools throughout France that featured instruction in the vernacular, students grouped according to ability and achievement, integration of religious instruction with secular subjects, well-prepared teachers with a sense of vocation and mission, and the involvement of parents. In addition, De La Salle pioneered in programmes for training lay teachers, Sunday courses for working young men, and one of the first institutions in France for the care of delinquents.

Worn out by austerities and exhausting labours, St John Baptist de La Salle died at Saint Yon near Rouen on 7 April 1719 on Good Friday, only weeks before his 68th birthday.

John Baptist de La Salle was a pioneer in founding training colleges for teachers, reform schools for delinquents, technical schools, and secondary schools for modern languages, arts, and sciences. His work quickly spread through France and, after his death, continued to spread across the globe.

On 24 May 1900 John Baptist de La Salle was declared a Saint and on 15 May 1950, because of his life and inspirational writings, he was made Patron Saint of all those who work in the field of education. John Baptist de La Salle inspired others to teach and care for young people and showed them how to meet failure and frailty with compassion, how to affirm, strengthen and heal.

At the present time, Lasallian Schools can be found in 80 countries. In Malta, the Brothers of the Christian Schools (Freres) led by their sector coordinator Brother Martin Borg, FSC, are doing impeccable work not only in the field of education, but also in other areas, such as the integration of children with special needs in society, the publication of books through the De La Salle Brothers Publications, and also in missionary work.

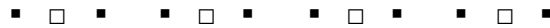
The De La Salle Brothers Community in Malta and the students of De La Salle College, Stella Maris College, and St, Benilde School are celebrating today's event with a special activity at the MFCC Conference Centre in Ta' Qali. More than 3,000 people, consisting of Brothers, teachers and students will be attending this event.

*Kenneth Vella is Assistant Head, Senior School, De La Salle College  
[This article was excerpted from the Malta Independent Daily of May 15, 2008.]*

## **Video on the Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is online – in English, French, Italian, and Spanish.**

The web site of the International Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools offers an excellent short video on the life and achievements of John Baptist de La Salle. Go to [www.lasalle.org](http://www.lasalle.org). Choose your preferred language -- and on the left side navigation bar click on HISTORY.

□ *Teachers of languages and cultures: The Web site of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is multi-lingual and multi-cultural, with publications and postings in Spanish, Italian, and French, as well as English. It's a gateway to the wider Lasallian world.* □



## **NEWS of the U.S./TORONTO REGION**

### **New Jersey Lasallian School In Danger of Closing Elicits Testimonials and Support**

Hudson Catholic Regional High School in Jersey City, New Jersey, has been in the news during the past few weeks, since the Archdiocese of Newark announced its intention to close the school. The announcement – and the ensuing lightning campaign to try to keep the school open – inspired many news reports and opinion columns. Among them are these two letters to the editor of The Jersey Journal:

*Letters to the Editor  
The Jersey Journal*

#### **This Alumnus Is Shocked and Saddened**

I was shocked and saddened to read in the pages of The Jersey Journal that Hudson Catholic High School will close its doors this year. As a 1992 graduate of the De La Salle Christian Brothers School, I have carried with me the many tools the Brothers and lay teachers of the school instilled in me in my four years at 790 Bergen Ave.

A desire for knowledge, a commitment to service in one's community, and an abiding sense of the role God plays in our world are just some of the rewards for Hudson Catholic alumni. The building at the corner of Mercer and Bergen has been a beacon of hope and education for more than 40 years.

The list of things taught to me there seems too long to be contained in this page. Putting others before yourself leads to greater self-fulfillment and personal contentment. Knowledge is the greatest good, and apathy and ignorance the greatest evil. Friendships made and honored are the fibers of our life. Wisdom only comes through courage. Compassion is the basis of morality.

These are the teachings of great minds passed on to the students of Hudson Catholic for the past four decades. Its loss will truly impact the fiber and character of Jersey City, Hudson County, and every alumnus who holds the traditions of Hudson Catholic close to his heart.

While I would like to use this space to spur some drive for last-minute funding and appeals to politicians to save Hudson, I realize that would probably be an exercise in futility. The recent spurt of closings of Catholic schools in our area has shown this to be true. Instead, I will pass on a few things to those currently enrolled who may fear an uncertain future.

Cherish the time you have left with you friends. Recognize the vast wealth of knowledge and experience your teachers represent and draw from it all you may. Thank your family for the sacrifices they make to send you to school every day. Finally, for all of the teachers who have made education at Hudson Catholic their life mission, all of the alumni who have gone forth in the world, and all those students who will be the last class of Hudson men, I remind you of the words of Lord Alfred Tennyson: "I am a part of all that I have met."

Certainly the Hudson Catholic Family will be part of all those who crossed its path. Farewell, Hudson Catholic, and thank you.

*Robert Hennigar, Hudson Class of 1992,  
Cliffside Park (April 18, 2008)*

### **School's Legacy Is Compassion**

When you read the letter to The Jersey Journal dated April 18, from Robert Hennigar, a graduate of Hudson Catholic High School, you realize all the good that this school has done for the past 40 years. A better letter would be hard to compose and you come away with an understanding of just how great this school is.

His command of the English language, his thoughts so beautifully expressed, his insight into human nature and "how important it is to put others before yourself, so a greater self-fulfillment and inner peace can be achieved are the teachings that all of us should live by."

His realization of the role that God plays in our lives and "how knowledge is the greatest good and apathy and ignorance are the greatest evils," shows how much of an impact the De La Salle Christian Brothers and faculty have had on his life. How thankful he is to all those who changed his life and who have made all this possible. He is aware of the sacrifices his parents made to give him this opportunity. All this he feels was what he learned from his days at Hudson Catholic, and from his family.

We, the Bragen and Beebe families, feel the same way for our son, Kenneth, who will be graduating from Hudson Catholic this coming June. He has shown us the same compassion for life and for his fellow man. (The same love for his teachers and coaches who took the time to instill in him the values that count in life.) We must find a way to keep the school open so there will be future Hawks like Robert Henagar, and all the other graduates who have gone on to achieve great things in life.

*Thomas J. Bragen*  
North Bergen (May 15, 2008)

The latest news is that thanks to an energetic campaign spearheaded by Hudson alumni the school will remain open. For complete information, visit Hudson at <http://www.hudsoncatholic.org/>

## **New web site for Christian Brothers Conference**

The new web site of the Christian Brothers Conference, the Regional office in Washington, DC, is [www.lasallian.info](http://www.lasallian.info). Put it in your favorites and check out all the news and resources available. Note: The former domain name [www.cbconf.org](http://www.cbconf.org) is pointed at the new address and will deliver you there automatically if you use it.



## **NEWS of the DISTRICT OF SAN FRANCISCO**

### **Saint Mary's College of California Honors Lasallian Education Pioneer**

Brother Jose Cervantes, FSC, is a dreamer, but his half-century of Lasallian educational initiatives have shown him to be far from quixotic. At an April 30 convocation in the College Chapel, Saint Mary's College of California granted an honorary doctorate to Brother Jose, who has established Brothers' colleges in Mexico and helped create the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU). The convocation came during the middle of De La Salle Week, the College's celebration of Christian Brothers founder Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

"In the spirit of de La Salle, Brother Jose is a founder — a founder of three universities in Mexico," SMC Brother President Brother Ronald Gallagher told an audience of more than 200 faculty, students and guests. In addition to the campus community, eight presidents of Christian Brothers' universities in Mexico were also on campus to honor their colleague. The ceremony featured an academic procession and included music from the College's Sacred Music Choir and NightinGael.

In his address to the Saint Mary's community, Brother Jose focused on the opportunities that exist within international Lasallian educational network, which includes more than 900,000 students in 80 countries. "The university is the ideal place to find and talk to foreigners," said Brother Jose. "Meeting different people might be a moment of fear, but also a moment of recognition, understanding and gratification."

Brother Jose also suggested that the university community can help serve as society's critical conscience, skeptically evaluating the "temptation to find refuge in a single story" of fascism, communism or market capitalism. He pointed to Nazi Germany and the Soviet gulag as obvious examples of dangerous totalitarian visions, but also cited Karl Polanyi's notion that market capitalism can become a "religion of economy" where "human conscience is pushed aside."

“At the center of this concept lies the fiction that everything — absolutely everything — can be treated like a commodity that can be marketed and sold,” Brother Jose warned. “But we know that what is fiction is also a lie.”

- John Grennan, Office of College Communications, Saint Mary’s College of California

## Good News of All Sorts on the District Web Site

Visit [www.delasalle.org](http://www.delasalle.org) regularly to see what’s happening. The latest stories posted are these

The Christian Brothers greet thousands of Catholic educators at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress....

De Marillac Academy in San Francisco says farewell to its founding president - -and watches its inaugural class of sixth-graders graduate from high school....

History is made in Tucson, Arizona, as the first-ever graduating class from San Miguel High School steps up to receive diplomas....

For the stories and photos, visit [www.delasalle.org](http://www.delasalle.org).



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For information, contact  
J. A. Gray  
Director, Office of Communication  
De La Salle Institute, Napa, California  
707-252-3739