

# Bridging the Gap

by Brother George Van Grieken, FSC

The re-opening of Saint Joseph School in Sunnyside, Washington was a media event in the small, largely Hispanic community and followed an earlier decision that the De La Salle Christian Brothers would sponsor La Salle High School in Yakima. The area had not had a Catholic high school since 1986.

At the end of the news conference announcing the arrival of the Brothers, Brother Robb Wallace, FSC, newly-appointed principal of St. Joseph, noticed an elderly sister sitting in a wheelchair, crying. Concerned, he asked her if she was okay. She nodded, then she told him this story in Spanish-accented English:

“I want you to know that I am personally responsible for you coming here. I prayed you here. I am a member of the founding community of sisters who started Saint Joseph 35 years ago. When we heard the announcement that the school would be closed, we prayed and prayed for a miracle...for a miracle that the school would re-open. When we heard during breakfast this morning that the Christian Brothers were going to re-open the school, we danced.”

La Salle High School in Yakima opened last September with 54 students, one Brother administrator, one religious Sister, other faculty members, and a host of people working in the background. Two years from now, when they move from their four rented classrooms of Holy Family Parish in Yakima to their permanent site in Union Gap, they will have completed a process that began in 1994 when

From the beginning, Bishop George and the Brothers were committed to the long-term viability of the school and to its accessibility to all the families of the Diocese of Yakima, a diocese that is over 65% Hispanic, including many farm workers. The project moved forward because there was clear agreement on these principles and because the needed school touched the mission of the Brothers – to give a human

He called on the people of the diocese to serve as bridges between the various economic groups, cultural groups, and social groups; to become a single family, to form one community.

The Board of Trustees, the school administration, and the larger community have taken the expectations of Bishop George and Bishop Sevilla, along with the mission of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, very seriously. The permanent site for the school is in the nearby town of Union Gap, situated between the upper valley and the lower valley, home for many economically disadvantaged farm workers and next to the Yakima Indian Reservation. The \$7.5 million capital campaign for purchasing the property and building the school is called “Bridging the Gap,” a phrase deliberately chosen to represent the school’s efforts to bridge the racial, ethnic, and economic gaps between peoples, the geographic gaps between the upper and the lower valley, and the educational gap between Catholic elementary schools and Catholic colleges and universities.

With faith, zeal, and the leadership of the De La Salle Christian Brothers and other Lasallian educators, the gaps in the Yakima Valley are slowly being bridged.



The selection of the permanent site for La Salle High School in Union Gap, has been carefully studied and planned to express the mission of the school.

the then-Bishop of Yakima, Francis George, approached the De La Salle Christian Brothers of the San Francisco District to help establish a Catholic high school for the Yakima Valley.

and Christian education to the young, especially the poor.

When Bishop Sevilla was installed as the new Bishop of Yakima in 1997, he described the work of the Church in the Yakima Valley in terms of its many bridges.

**June, 1997**  
Three Brothers are assigned to the new community in Yakima. A two-year lease agreement is reached with Holy Family Parish.



**June, 1998**  
The District of San Francisco offers to assume responsibility for St. Joseph School. Upon a positive response from Bishop Sevilla, Br. Robb Wallace, FSC, is appointed principal of the school.

**September, 1998**  
St. Joseph School in Sunnyside re-opens with 110 students, kindergarten through eighth grade.

**November, 1997**  
A permanent site for the new school is found in Union Gap.

**May, 1998**  
It is announced that St. Joseph School in Sunnyside (K-8) will close at the end of the current school year.

**May, 1998**  
The District of San Francisco sends representatives to St. Joseph School to investigate its circumstances and condition.



**September, 1998**  
La Salle High School opens with 43 freshmen and 11 sophomores.

**December, 1994**  
Bishop Francis George, OMI, Bishop of Yakima, contacts Br. Mark Murphy, FSC, Provincial of the San Francisco District of the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

**July, 1995**  
Meetings between representatives from the District of San Francisco and the Diocese of Yakima show both groups thinking along the same lines in terms of principles and goals.

**March, 1996**  
The Provincial of the District of San Francisco meets with Bishop George, parents, and priests of the diocese. A \$2 million endowment goal is targeted before the opening. A Board of Trustees is formed.

**May, 1997**  
Br. Daniel Morgan, FSC, is appointed CEO of the new La Salle High School in Yakima, Washington, effective July 1, 1997.

**March, 1995**  
The District Council of the District of San Francisco endorses further investigation of Bishop George’s proposal regarding a Catholic high school for Yakima Valley.

**February, 1996**  
Based on its feasibility study, the Diocese of Yakima requests the District of San Francisco to sponsor the new high school.



**May, 1997**  
Br. David Brennan, FSC, Provincial of the District of San Francisco, requests approval from the new Bishop of Yakima, Bishop Carlos Sevilla, to establish a community of Brothers in the Diocese of Yakima.