

Taking a Risk for Youth at Risk

BAHAY PAG-ASA YOUTH CENTER – “HOUSE OF HOPE” – OPENS IN BACOLOD CITY, PHILIPPINES

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At Saint Yon, De La Salle started a school specifically for difficult and delinquent boys. So good were the results that De La Salle, at the request of the President of the regional judicial court, opened a similar facility for adults ordered confined by the courts. These effective programs of rehabilitation through education were, as one historian puts it, “two centuries ahead of their time.”

On July 5, 2001, Brother Stanislaus Campbell, FSC, Auxiliary Visitor, and Brother Thomas Jones, FSC, Coordinator of Continuing Formation, represented the San Francisco District at an event that marked the beginning of an historic new ministry of the De La Salle Brothers in the Philippine District, when the Bahay Pag-asa Youth Center was dedicated on the Granada campus of the University of St. La Salle in Bacolod City.

Before Bahay Pag-asa, which means “House of Hope,” a fifteen-year-old University ministry to youth offenders imprisoned with hardened adult criminals in one of the overcrowded city jails had been

the only outreach of its kind, generally limited to an hour visit with the boys each Sunday. The University established the new center to provide residential and recreational facilities, education, spiritual formation, skills training, and a critical follow-up support program after release. The District of San Francisco was specially honored at the July 5 event as a major benefactor of the center when the new chapel was dedicated in its name.

University of St. La Salle

La Salle College, Bacolod, was established in 1952, and became the University of St. La Salle in 1988. It serves 7,800 co-ed students in six colleges, and more

than 2,000 boys and girls in its elementary and secondary departments. Balayan, the University’s Community Development and Volunteer Formation Office, offers educational programs in direct service of Bacolod’s poor, including the Business Resource Center for Poor Families, the La Salle Street Children Program, and the Fisherfolk Program, three programs also supported by the San Francisco District.

The history between the Philippine and San Francisco Districts reaches back to 1936, when seven American Brothers sailed from San Francisco to serve in Manila. Since then, 23



San Francisco District Brothers have served in the Philippines, and Filipino Brothers continue to come to California to pursue advanced education. From 1945 until 1966, the Philippines was a sub-District of San Francisco, and in 1970, the new Philippine District was created and today serves nearly 93,000 students.

Reading the Signs of the Times

A unique response of the District and the University to the Filipino Lasallian Family’s challenge to “meet the demands of this moment in history,” has been its ministry to young people whose extreme poverty, dysfunctional family environments, vulnerability



“We, the members of the Lasallian Family in the Philippines, commit ourselves to the mission of becoming good news for youth at risk, and we shall discover and initiate ways to make the benefits of a human and Christian education more accessible...” Philippine District Mission Statement

Bacolod averages between 13 and 21 boys in detention, with others in various jails throughout the Province of Negros Occidental, which Bahay Pag-asa will serve. Above, right, Brothers Thomas Jones and Stanislaus Campbell join Brothers Kenneth Martinez (in background) and Vince Fernandez (seated) visiting one of Bacolod’s city jails.

to peer pressure, substance abuse, and rebellion against societal and parental norms have resulted in criminal behavior.

Given a lack of resources, youth offenders in Bacolod, mostly males under age 17, are housed at one of the city jails in the quarters for adult female prisoners, which includes some adult male prisoners,



and have no structured formative or intervention program. Such an environment has exposed these young offenders to further injury, offering nothing more than punitive judicial intervention.

In the 1998 concept paper for establishing a "Center for Youth Rehabilitation," Brother Gus Boquer, FSC, Ed.D., President of

University of St. La Salle, stressed that "human society depends upon the ability of the present generation to nurture and form our young children...as the older generation passes." According to Brother Gus, an "intensive intervention program was urgently needed if rehabilitation of the youth offenders, whose cases included robbery, rape, assault,

and homicide, was to be achieved." The new center, the first of its kind in the Philippines, would draw inspiration from similar Christian Brothers' ministries in the United States, including the St. Gabriel System in Philadelphia and Ocean Tides in Providence, Rhode Island.

July 5, 2001 – Dedication of Bahay Pag-asa Youth Center

More than 150 Brothers, colleagues, dignitaries, and friends gathered for the dedication of House of Hope. Brother Gus, Brother

proved in his lifetime his extraordinary passion to improve and uplift social and moral conditions through education, and showed that no life is wasted with the right attitude, a chance of learning, and proper guidance."

Bahay Pag-asa includes administrative offices, six dormitories for sixty residents, a Brothers' residence, dining area, kitchen, staff quarters, and lounge. A future expansion program will provide for sixty more students. Classroom education and job skills training are provided. Areas for recreation and

boys have and need. The maximum allowable two-year stay will be followed by a critical post-release program to assist the boys as they transition back into society, families, jobs, or further schooling. The Brothers are optimistic that in a caring, healthy, and structured environment the boys will be open



"You have given full meaning to the Christian value of the good neighbor. This House of Hope is proof that, as long as we live up to the Christian virtue of carrying one another's burden, God's love will never fail.

We must strive to be like Saint John Baptist de La Salle . . . on whom was bestowed the gift of seeing Christ in others."

Honorable Hilario Davide, Jr., Chief Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court

Armin Luistro, FSC, Philippine Provincial, Brother Stanislaus, and Honorable Hilario Davide, Jr., Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, addressed the guests following a ceremonial ribbon cutting and house blessing.

Brother Stanislaus praised the future staff of the new ministry as people who would have to be "extraordinarily committed, willing to risk their lives for youth who have already failed or who have been thought to have failed by societal standards, and remain at great risk for further failure."

Justice Davide commended the De La Salle Brothers as valuable partners of the State in its obligation to protect the rights and welfare of children. He remarked, "Saint John Baptist de La Salle

spiritual reflection complete the center. Volunteer foster parents, physicians, dentists, legal counsel, psychologists/psychiatrists, social workers, and skills trainers will join instructors, administrators, and staff. In the facility, there will be a security guard in the central lobby, one at the main gate, and a roving guard in the house. The boys may freely move around the house, with some restrictions outside, but always with proper chaperoning.

A willingness to learn is key to the admission criteria for the resident students – boys between ages 9 and 17 – who are selected by the courts and Brothers together. Formal classes will begin on October 8, 2001. Small-group class sessions will accommodate whatever level of education the

to learning, to self-improvement through education and spirituality, and to new possibilities and alternatives in their lives. Says Brother Gus, "We expect strong support from the external community, and we expect the boys to be properly motivated to turn their lives around."

Brother Stanislaus summed up the hopefulness shared by all at the event: "May the Bahay Pag-asa Youth Center return to society young people whose wounds have been healed and whose hearts have been touched by Lasallian educators who have risked their lives for youth at risk in this House of Hope." ❁

Visit the Philippine District Web site at lsg.edu.ph/~fsc/

*Photos, top left: Scenes at the new facility.
Center photo: Joseph Marañon (at left) Governor of the Province of Negros Occidental, joins guests on a tour of House of Hope.
Drawing, at right: Architect's rendering of Bahay Pag-asa.
Photos, bottom left: Brothers Thomas and Stanislaus at the chapel plaque honoring the San Francisco District, and speaking at the blessing ceremony.*