

A life of Lasallian dedication

95-year-old Brother Gregory Thomas shares about life as an educator

Patricia Ang

De La Salle Brother Gregory Thomas Lim is currently the oldest Lasallian Brother in Singapore.

A big part of his vocation has seen Br Gregory serve as an educator, something he has taken great pride and joy in.

“One of the Lasallian vocations is to teach. We must be patient, kind and understanding. We must also be able to work with people,” he said.

Br Gregory’s long history as an educator has seen him teach in many schools in Singapore as well as Japan and Hong Kong.

And as in any journey in life, he faced challenges that tested his faith and vocation.

“My life as a brother has not been smooth sailing. There were days of pain and sorrow when I was tempted to leave the brotherhood,” he told Catholic News during the launch of the SJI heritage gallery to mark the 300th death anniversary of St John Baptist De La Salle, founder of the Lasallians.

There were days during his formation years when he was discouraged by his superior’s comments and criticism about his teaching practices, prayer, and catechism.

It was by prayer and faith that I persevered in my journey,” said Br Gregory with a smile, adding that the chapel has become a place of solace for him.

Br Gregory retired in 1984 but continued teaching Moral Instruction and Bible Knowledge for several years at Saint Joseph’s Institution (SJI), as well as taking charge of the Legion of Mary in St Patrick’s School and SJI. His unwavering love for teaching and serving the community continued as he volunteered



Brother Gregory Thomas (centre) with fellow De La Salle Brothers Paul Ho and (left) and Michael Broughton. Photo: PATRICIA ANG

to teach English in Kagoshima, Japan. He later travelled to Papua New Guinea where he taught English, this time to postulants and novices for two years.

There are currently only three

local De La Salle Brothers living in the Singapore community. Br Gregory said parents have high expectations for their children and are reluctant to give them to be priests.

“In our vocation, we are looking for men who have some work experience and are serious in becoming a Brother. We can only pray and trust God to provide.”

Reflecting on his life dedicated to God and education, Br Gregory said he hopes to live to a 100 years old before returning to the Lord.

Br Michael Broughton, a former student of Br Gregory at SJI, remembers his former teacher as “a gentleman and a humble Brother. He never raises his voice. He is flexible; whatever you want him to do, he will do it. The students love him.”

Br Gregory comes from a devout Catholic family of four brothers and four sisters. Three of his sisters joined Religious congregations – two of whom are Canossian Sisters and the other a Little Sister of the Poor.

In 1940, at the age of 16, Br Gregory joined the De La Salle Brothers and studied at St Joseph’s College, Pulau Tikus, Penang. He officially became a Brother in 1944.

After the Japanese occupation, he was posted to St Xavier’s primary school, which was housed in a temporary building made of wood on stilts. Later on, he was posted to St Xavier’s Branch School and to St Xavier’s Institution where he taught until 1954.

He was transferred to St Michael’s School in Singapore for six years and later to La Salle Primary School in Kowloon, Hong Kong where he became the Headmaster. In Hong Kong, he managed a large group of Portuguese boys and was successful in helping them to be better Catholics through preparation of the sacraments.

He is currently retired in Singapore at the St Patrick’s Community. □

SJI heritage gallery

Named Missio 1852, the gallery showcases 167 years of Josephian history and Lasallian heritage, tradition and community in Singapore. It celebrates the contributions and achievements of the school and of the alumni who have served society in different ways throughout the century.

“Missio is the Latin word for ‘mission’. Being the first Catholic school founded in Singapore, we have chosen this name to remember our beginnings, to celebrate our school and to continue believing in the Catholic, Lasallian education that SJI provides for all Josephians to become people of integrity and people for others,” said Principal Father Adrian Danker, an alumnus from the class of 1981.

The highlights of the gallery include:

- Profiles of distinguished Josephians including former President Dr Tony Tan.

- The Brothers’ Logbook – The La Salle Brothers meticulously kept annual logbooks detailing notable events like inter-school competitions, important visitors to the school, spiritual bouquets and civics group meetings.

- The Founder’s Banner – As part of the school’s emphasis on rituals and symbolism, this banner was frequently used in events like the celebration of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima in the 1950s.

- The grandfather clock that survived the Japanese Occupation – during World War II, shrapnel damaged the clock and the marks have been preserved in its restoration. □



A look inside Missio 1852, the SJI heritage gallery launched to mark the 300th death anniversary of St John Baptist De La Salle. Photo: SJI