

"SHARING OUR MISSION - ALIVE IN HOPE"

**Lasallian Assembly – Australia
July, 4th - 6th 1994**

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On Tuesday July 5th, thirty lay men and women working in the Lasallian Apostolate in the Australian-Pacific Province joined ninety Brothers for the 1994 Lasallian Assembly at St Bede's College in Mentone, Victoria.

This truly was a significant occasion. Whilst the Brothers have involved the laity in all dimensions of their mission for many years, this Assembly was to be the first in this Province to invite lay people to participate. To further reinforce the close relationship between the Brothers and their lay associates who share in their mission, the new title "Lasallian Partner" would now be used instead of the term "laity", since the Brothers too, correctly speaking, are also members of the laity albeit as Consecrated Religious.

The first gathering of the Lasallian Partners took place on Monday evening July 4th, where we gathered together for informal introductions over drinks, a meal and a viewing of a video of the 42nd International Assembly conducted in Rome in 1993. For many of us, this was also a first re-union of "Narooma Participants"; familiar faces from New Zealand, Queensland, New South Wales, Papua-New Guinea and Victoria.

Nothing however, can describe the feeling of pride, joy and sense of anticipation that welled over as we assembled with the Brothers in "the tent" formed inside the theatriette at St Bede's College. Brothers who had moved interstate and overseas had come together for the Assembly. More re-unions, more wonderful warm and familiar faces; yes! it was a great sense of "being at home with family".

If, in the recent past, the Brothers had ever wondered about their purpose and relevance in an ever

more complicated and materialistic world, they must have taken great heart from the extraordinary responses from each of the Lasallian Partners to Br Tony Clark's question, "How do you feel about being invited to this Assembly?" Apart from feeling privileged and delighted, there was so much more we wanted the Brothers to know and there was also much more we wanted from our already close working relationship with them. I wonder, did they really know that before this Assembly? Just as we shared our mutual desire to "touch the hearts" of the young, it became increasingly evident, that our own hearts had already been touched by so many of the Brothers with whom we had worked and to whom we had become closely bonded.

We had frequently experienced their hospitality and professional leadership, we had been inspired by their zeal and Christian Faith and we were eager to share **more fully** with them their Lasallian Spirituality which had left its mark on our lives. Some of us had been educated by the Lasalles and others had first met them "in the mission" later in adult life, yet each of us seemed to know that we "truly belonged" in this very special family. Yes! We knew well why we had come.

With the Brothers, we felt the struggle of an aging community that seeks to be revitalised. So many of the Brothers present had been on a long journey and were showing the signs of fatigue one expects after so many years of generous and dedicated service; and yet, we their partners, wanted them to know that redundancy is **not** the next phase of the journey. We need to draw from their wellsprings; as we continue to work with their younger Brothers in the Mission. Consider those "retired" Brothers who formed the first Lasallian Community at Haiti. Imagine the lost opportunity had these men taken retirement as "the end?"

Perhaps, we the Lasallian Partners recognize now, more than we had previously, that **we must be more up front** in fostering religious vocations amongst the youth with whom we work. Has **our silence, in fact, contributed to a decline in their numbers?** On the one hand we each have voiced our personal appreciation for these dedicated men and we clearly recognize the on-going need our youth have for Brothers of the Christian Schools yet, I wonder, how many of us have **actively initiated** class discussions and sessions on Religious Life as one very real option for a chosen way of life for our young people? How many of us have considered assisting the Brothers in implementing short term commitment/vocational programmes to assist in various expressions of the Lasallian Mission?

It struck me as this assembly continued to unfold, that the Brothers would **welcome initiatives** from their lay partners. In true Lasallian style, as expressed by Br John Johnston (Superior General), their way is to "**propose**" and not to "impose". Maybe then, we their partners, need to be more active and innovative in our workplaces in proclaiming and implementing the values and goals of John Baptist de La Salle. To do this however, we very much feel the need to draw on the

Lasallian knowledge and experience **of all Brothers**, young and not so young.

Whilst the Lasallian Partners clearly recognized their need to become more conversant in the "way" of the Founder, we still very much need the modelling-presence and expertise of the Brothers **amongst us, in every Lasallian workplace**, if at all possible. **We are very eager for the Brothers to realize this!**

Throughout the Assembly we shared prayer and Liturgy, stories, meals and laughter. Have you ever heard such laughter and great one-liners? Like all families, so too with this one, there is nothing like the direct honest and sharp humour of a family member who really knows you and thus ensures one's self-image is both realistic and kept in focus. Have you ever heard such strong, faith-filled voices singing praises to God? (Funny how they become "shy" and more reticent back in the workplace!) And what about the Assembly Facilitator? Br Tony Clark fms. Thank God he had good class management skills; he certainly needed them, not to mention his sensitive and diplomatic manner that guided us through many long and powerful sessions. "Facilitator of the Year" goes to you, Br Tony.

The presence of the Superior General, Br John Johnston and the General Councillor, Br Ray Suplido, brought home to us the universal dimension of the mission we share. Br Johnston's obvious personal conviction, zeal and enthusiasm for on-going renewal and commitment to the mission were both challenging and inspiring. Personally, I recognized that any ideas I may have of "slowing down" may have to be "shelved"; the harvest is indeed great and the labourers (seem) too few and many have been hard at it for close to fifty years, which makes my thirty or so look more like the half way mark! (I keep thinking of those "retired Brothers" who went to Haiti and about whom Br Johnston had spoken with a great sense of appreciation. I must keep them in mind when I think I can't keep this life style up for much longer!)

One thing that became very clear at the Assembly was the recognition that, whilst the bond between the Lasallian Brothers and Partners is indeed close and the mission is certainly shared, we are however, **different**. Religious Consecration for the Brothers commits them **firstly** to their Community and the Institute. We,

their partners in mission, **firstly** must recognize our commitment to our marriage, family or single life. **The challenge for all of us is to ensure that we each honour our own chosen vocation** as our first priority.

As the Assembly drew to a close for the invited Partners, the Brothers and the partners formed two independent responses as to the future steps for our shared mission. It was apparent that the Brothers and the Lasallian Partners indeed have a **shared vision** for this shared mission, the basis of which was the **expressed desire and need** to work even more closely together in a genuine partnership, a partnership that seeks to be formally recognized within the structures of the Institute. Br Kevin Moloney (Provincial) assured the Assembly that such a partnership was both welcomed and endorsed by the Lasallian Institute.

THANK YOU, Br Kevin for your most welcome invitation to participate in this Assembly on behalf of our many lay colleagues.

TO THE BROTHERS who so warmly and enthusiastically welcomed us into this **gathering, even if some** were a little apprehensive about our participation, we trust that our presence has meant as much to you as you must now know your presence and vocation mean to us. We are indeed honoured and grateful to be called your partners, for that is truly what we are and wish to be.

In closing this report on the 1994 Lasallian Assembly as seen through the eyes of one Lasallian Partner, may I draw on the Book of Ruth to express my sentiments and, I suspect, the sentiments of many of the lay partners who had the good fortune to participate in this Assembly:

"Wherever you go, I shall go
Wherever you live so shall I live
Your people will be my people,
And your God will be my God too."

Ruth 2: 15.

and **thank you Br James Taylor** for introducing me to the Lasallian Community for the first time when our son commenced his Secondary Education at De La Salle Malvern in 1981.

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever! ●