

Eulogy at the funeral of Bro. Albinus M. O'Flaherty F.S.C. (1930 – 2013)
Bro. Charles M. O' Leary F.S.C.
At St. Joseph's Cathedral, 8 August 2013

Dear relatives, Josephians, Sacred Heart Old Boys past and present, friends, benefactors of the late Bro. Albinus Michael O' Flaherty, I have been asked as a confrere and a close friend of him for over 60 years to share with you something of his life and work. It gives me pleasure to do so. First of all I would like to offer my sincere and deep condolences to his nephew, Adrian Pink who has come all the way from England to represent the family at his uncle's funeral and to the other members of the Flaherty family. It is easy for me to tell the truth about Bro. Albinus for I don't have to make up anything about him. He lived what he was, an open book, with nothing hidden and I wish that could be said about most of us then the job of the homeliest or eulogist at our funerals would have an easier job.

We are gathered here this morning to celebrate the life and death of our beloved and much revered Bro. Albinus Michael O'Flaherty. We are united in grief, yes, at the passing to a better world of a great man, a great committed La Salle Brother, a man of great passion for promoting education especially of the poor and deprived and a teacher and administrator of unsurpassing dedication and ability, but we are united above all in our thanksgiving for the gift of this great person who came to our shores some fifty + years ago. When we think of Bro Albinus and recall his many gifts we cannot but praise God for who else could have thought up, called into being and created a person like Bro Albinus. And who, like him could have cooperated, deepened and developed those gifts of grace and nature with which he was so richly endowed.

Our Brother was born into a devout Christian family of Morgan Flaherty and Hannah Fitzgerald on the 23 May 1930 at Ballyhoneen, Cloghane, County Kerry in the south of Ireland.

He joined the La Salle Order of teaching Brothers in 1944 and it was then we met for the first time in our long career of over 60 years of Brotherhood in the Religious life. We have met many times since then, the last being in May this year with another Irish Brother, Bro Felix Donohue, when we holidayed together for a few days at Sematan, a Sarawak seaside resort. Though we come from rival, neighbouring countries in the Gaelic games of football and hurling we rarely disagreed except over matches and over which countries the better players and teams had. After his scholastic and religious formation of some 7 years and his professional training as a teacher at St. Mary's Training College, Strawberry Hill, London, he volunteered in 1950 to go as missionary La Salle Brother to teach in the Order's many schools in the Far East. He was posted to St. Joseph's Institution, in Singapore and taught there with distinction. Among his many distinguished students at St. Joseph's were the present Governor of Singapore and the present Singapore ambassador to the Vatican.

In 1957, he returned to Ireland to read for an Arts Degree at the National University of Ireland majoring in English and Latin. On his return he was posted to teach at St. Joseph's secondary school Kuching, the very school where I began my teaching career and where I spent the 7 best years of my life from 1951 – 1957. By 1960 when Albinus came to Kuching I had moved on to British N. Borneo, what is now Sabah.

Bro Albinus later became Principal of St. Joseph's Kuching, then Principal of Sacred Heart School, Sibuluan and from 1992 – 1997 Principal of St. Joseph's Parish tuition centre. For the past fifty + years he gave of his best to the people of Kuching, Sibuluan and to Sarawak as a whole and I'm sure there are many here today who will bear testimony to that. In all, he stood for excellence, for perfection whether in the classroom, the sporting tracks or on the rugby and football fields. And as he lies here before us in death I think in his heart of hearts he couldn't ask for a better place to be honoured, revered and respected. The large crowds that have turned up today and yesterday speaks loud and clear of the affection and respect you bear for this great man. In death as in life he would, I believe, have wished to be among the people he loved, taught and befriended. I was told that even as he struggled in pain and isolation in a Kuala Lumpur hospital his thoughts and concern were with the pupils of his tuition classes.

Bro Albinus loved too his native country, Ireland, and his people back home in his native County Kerry with its beautiful and almost breath-taking scenic mountains and hills, its lakes and fells, its simmering waterfall, winding rivers and streams and indented shorelines. He loved especially his native Ballyhoneen, Cloghane and other places in and around Castlegregory. He enjoyed and always looked forward to meeting his relatives and neighbours during his periodic visits. He was planning to be with them again this October but God had other plans for him. Last Sunday morning his Lord and Master called him to a better home saying to him "I will come back and take you to myself so that where I am you also may be." "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter now into the joys of the Lord."

You know far better than I all the good that Bro Albinus has done for education in Sarawak, for the poor, for the marginalized. His work, his service will long be remembered. He was an intelligent, well read man. Rarely would you find him without a book in his hands and he often read late into the night. He loved English Literature and he loved to teach it to others something which he did right up to his last illness. He was too, a man of faith, a spiritual, prayerful person though he never paraded this before others. Though sometimes he was dubbed a workaholic he never neglected his spiritual life. He balanced well his spiritual life as a consecrated person with his professional career. He was a man who put others before self. He liked company, liked a social drink with others and was always an interesting and engaging conversationalist. He took little care of his own ease and comfort. He lived a simple life, almost frugal at times. He took to himself the words of the Irish poet, Brendan Kennelly, in his poem 'Connections' **'self knows that self is not enough'** – it is self- connected with others that matters. It was that otherness, inclusiveness, that connectedness that urged him and other like-minded SHOB and Josephians to set up Lasallian Foundation so that the children in the kampungs (villages) where the Learning and Tuitions Centres were set up would have a better chance to improve themselves and do better in their lives. The setting up of the Kuching Lasallian Foundation and the Learning Centres gave him great satisfaction and sense of fulfilment for he saw that through the Foundation and the centres the poor and less privileged could be helped and reached – that was, in his mind, in keeping with the charisma of The Founder of The Brothers, St. John Baptist de la Salle which was to impart a holistic education to all but with an option for the poor. He had a passion to promote education for all but especially the more deprived in our societies. As with all good educators he felt his job was to touch hearts, to transform lives and to teach minds. He had a purpose in life and he wanted his pupils to have such likewise for having a purpose in life they would know where they were going. As Nietzsche, an 18th century German philosopher puts it "he who has a 'why' to live can bear with almost any 'how'".

Dear friends, pain, suffering, doubt, loneliness and eventually death are part of every person's rhythm of life. We all want to live longer and so did Albinus but it is not the length of our lives that matter; it is the quality that matters and we have some control of that. Bro. Albinus lived life to the full and for those of us who knew him well his life was 'a benediction.' So now we should not mourn unduly his passing but let him go where he truly belongs. In the words of an unknown poet he would say to us 'Please release me and let me go'

Brother is now in God's hands and in the words of St. Paul, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord." In our grieving for him let us also rejoice that he has reached his goal and let us bury our sorrow in doing good just as he did.

It would indeed be a sad day if with the passing of Bro. Albinus O' Flaherty that would bring about the end of the presence of the La Salle Brothers works and presence in Sarawak after more than 60 years of their dedicated and devoted service to our Catholic schools and our Christian communities. May the example and dedication that Bro. Albinus and other La Salle Brothers like Bro. Hilary, Bro. Henry, Bro. Patrick, Robert, Theodore, Peter Phelan of Sabah to name but a few who have also gone to their reward, gave to promote the human, spiritual, moral education of youth, inspire our youth in Sarawak and Sabah to follow the call of God to join the Brotherhood and follow in their footsteps in the apostolate that they cherished and promoted. Bro. Albinus' passion must continue within the Lasallian family of Josephians and Heartians in Sarawak.

Bro. Albinus, may your dear soul rest in peace. Amen.