

Eulogy By Datuk Christopher Sim  
@ Wake Mass for Bro Albinus  
Auditorium Tan Sri William Tan, SMK St Joseph  
7<sup>th</sup> August 2013

Brother Albinus, or Michael O'Flaherty, was a great teacher of men. He was one of the most outstanding characters any of us will ever meet in all our lives.

He was born with the spirit to serve others throughout his life. He did this single-mindedly, without complaining, and without claiming credit for himself. He did it out of ultimate concern for humanity. He exemplified the Christian spirit of universal love.

Throughout his 53 years in Sarawak, if ever anyone wished to look for a living example of a loving Christian, he came to mind.

He was born in Ballyhoneen, County Kerry, Ireland on 23 May 1930, the youngest of eight siblings in a family of farmers. He joined the De Lasalle Brothers in Castletown at 14, and left Ireland at the age of 21.

He set sail for Singapore 62 years ago, in September 1951, arriving on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, and started teaching at St. Joseph's Institute. In 1958, he returned to Ireland to read an English Literature degree.

In 1960, he came to teach at St Joseph's, Kuching, for ten years. He then served Sacred Heart, Sibuluan, for 17 years. He retired as principal in 1987, but then took up the post of Director at St Patrick's School, Director of St. Joseph's Parish Tuition Centre, and Lecturer in World Religious Studies at INTI College, all in Kuching.

In 2002, Brother Albinus founded the Yayasan LaSallian Kuching, turning disused rural buildings into village tuition centres, giving hope to poor students.

Brother Albinus dedicated himself to educating the young, irrespective of class, colour or religion. He believed in discipline. This

did not mean just following rules, but also adopting the right attitude in studies, in sports, in manners, and in moral values.

He was a leader when managing projects, and a tough taskmaster. He was a firm believer in “actions speak louder than words”. He was a “Let’s do it” man.

As a young man, he played football and rugby. In later years, he enjoyed books and nature. His greatest pleasure was to spend a couple of days by the seaside, with an armful of books.

St John Baptist De Lasalle said, in his 18<sup>th</sup> century Meditations, that “young people need good teachers, like visible angels”. Brother Albinus was an excellent and tireless teacher.

He worked hard all his life. On June 26, he was briefing the visiting Assistant Brother General of the Asia-Pacific Region, on the LaSallian work in Sarawak. A week before he was admitted to hospital, he had been giving tutorials in English and scripture studies to secondary school students at the Brothers’ House as he had been diligently doing since his retirement in 1987. His weekly schedule of teaching work was so full that we needed to make an appointment with him for any meetings or informal discussion,

Even from his sick bed in hospital, he was asking for the latest Yayasan LaSallian Kuching newsletter. In his last remaining days, Brother Albinus wanted to spend as little time in hospital as possible, to save on costs.

Jesus said, in Matthew, Chapter 25, verse 35, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.”

I myself was one of his students. Like many Sarawakians of my generation, I was poor, and hungry for knowledge, and Brother Albinus gave me learning. I lacked understanding, and Brother taught me how to live. Many students after me were educated and guided in similar manner as can be seen by the outpouring of love of the old

students who visited him in the hospital and the endless stream of old and present students coming into the Auditorium to pay their last respect .

I must confess too, that in recent years, when my brother Kwang Yang and I were thirsty, Brother Albinus gave us drink. He was always generous when dispensing beer. He also shared with us good humour and Irish craic, as well as sharp social and political observations. He remembered countless students by name, and stories spanning more than half a century. Roland Ling, a past president of Sacred Heart Alumni Association recalled that sitting down with Bro. Albinus when he was outside the classroom was a delightful and educational experience. He was always pleasant, warm, quick witted, open and engaging. Many others saw the soft and caring side of him and drew inspiration to do even better in their study.

A niece, Eileen who recently toured Europe where she learned of the sad news of the uncle's passing wrote from Paris, "Please share with others the love and respect the family had for Michael. Our thoughts and prayers are being sent."

In the words of his other niece Joanne, "although he only saw his family every few years, he was a great communicator with letters, phone calls, and he even got quite good on the internet! His nieces and nephews always admired the love, dedication and loyalty he showed his family and friends. He enriched our lives, and we were blessed and honoured to call him uncle."

We Sarawakians were blessed and honoured to call him Brother. Those of us touched by his contributions are more determined than ever, to serve the students closest to Brother Albinus's heart – the poorest, the shyest, the weakest, the slowest learners. Tributes from those who have been touched by him, inspired by him have come flooding in.

Chris Chua from St Joseph's Private School considers their School "a legacy handed to us by the Christian Brothers. Their philosophy reflects what Bro. Albinus' life long work, namely 'To help every

child develop a spirit of love, service and respect; to fully respond to his/her God given potential to learn and excel in all undertakings'.”

Eunice Chew, the current Principal of St. Joseph's Parish Tuition Centre where Bro Albinus served as Director from 1992 to 1997 wrote that Brother's motto “ make the best of everyday and celebrate all that you are” which still adorns a shelf in the principal's room to this day sums up all that he had done and achieved for the past years. Eunice concludes that the Tuition Centre is what it is today because of him and she wants to uphold the legacy he has left behind. In a more reflective mood she quoted William Wordsworth:

Though nothing can bring back the hour splendour in the grass, glory in the flowers: we will grieve not, rather find strength in what remains behind.

Roland Ling writing on behalf of students of Sacred Heart recalled how they were converted to Brother's followers:

You came to Sibiu in 1970, A towering figure in white,  
You became our teacher, our coach, our mentor, our father figure, our role model, our beloved Brother for 17 years and more. “  
Your students first feared you, were awed by you then understood you, then respected you, and finally all loved you.  
You have touched the lives of thousands, you lived by your principles you were resolute and faithful to the end. You have instilled the LaSallian spirit in us all.

He was a man of God, strong and constant in his faith. He never wavered from his principles. He was a teacher, a leader, a friend , a mentor and above all a true follower of Christ His long years of service must be a benchmark for those who wish to strive for a more meaningful life.

Knowing many of us would be saddened by our loss, Bro. Columba wrote to us on 5<sup>th</sup> August “We are deeply grateful to all of you, especially Xavier for keeping us here in Castletown and also Bro Albinus' relatives updated on the developments of the past week, ....all deeply appreciated

Our thoughts and prayers will be very much with all of you over the next few days as you prepare to lay him to rest.... the only Irish La Salle Brother to leave his bones in Sarawak.”

Before I conclude I would convey the wish of Bro. Albinus’ nephews and nieces from US and Europe to share this old poem with you all:

When I come to the end of the road

And the sun has set on me

I want no rites in a gloom-filled room

Why cry for soul set free

Miss me a little but not too long

And not with your head bowed low

Remember the love we once shared

Miss me , but let me go

For this is a journey we must take

And each must go it alone

It ‘s all part of the Master's plan

A step on the road to home

When you are lonely and sick of heart,

Go to the friends we know

And bury your sorrows in doing good deeds

Miss me but let me go.

Let us celebrate his life and his spirit of love and service.. ....May he rest in peace.