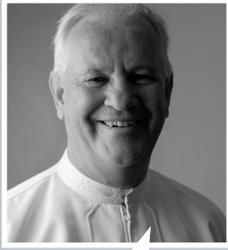


FROM SEVEN TO ONE

BY BR DAVID HAWKE FSC



with the regional conference of Visitors, Auxiliary Visitors, Delegates and Presidents upon the conclusion of Brother Superior's visit to the region in 2003. The meeting was held in Bacolod in the now legacy District of the Philippines. This meeting initiated the process of restructuring in PARC with the key factors of vitality, viability, leadership and more recently solidarity underpinning the process. While this particular meeting examined briefly some possible reconfigurations in PARC, these were based solely on geography with the conference soon realising that a study on the "Vitality and Viability" of the PARC Region needed to be undertaken and hence a detailed questionnaire was developed and circulated to all countries of the vast region. This valuable instrument focused not only on the life and mission of the Brothers but covered also the role of Lasallian Partners including the issue of "Association for Mission" and leadership requirements for the future.

The journey towards LEAD was a very enriching exercise of collaboration firstly among the District, Sub – District and Delegation leadership and over time their Councils and an increasing number of Brothers. Initially the countries of Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia were involved and after local consultations on the process, Japan becoming involved at a later stage (2008) to make the seven countries that would journey together to form the new District.

A PARC workshop on restructuring was held in Madurai, India and facilitated by Maureen Cleary from Australia paved the way for a year of consultation in the countries that now constitute LEAD. The formation of the PARC Alliance Group, which became the Alliance Council in 2008, assembled regularly the Sectors destined to form LEAD. A key assembly in February 2008 of Brothers representatives of the Councils of the Districts of Penang, the Philippines, the Sub – District of Myanmar and the Delegation of Thailand looked at the realities of each, did some dreaming towards the future and considered a number of priority issues, namely: Brothers' formation, vocations, leadership, differing country systems, Partner/Associate formation and the sharing of resources.

The inaugural meeting of the Alliance Council took place on the Feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle at the Provincialate of the District of Penang, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Present were Brothers Edmundo Fernandez, Francis Chaochaiyapat, Raymundo Suplido, Thomas Lavin, Anthony Rogers, David Hawke and Vincent Corkery. Subsequent meetings of the Alliance Council were held in various locations in the seven countries with "Think Tanks" on particular issues meeting occasionally and inclusive of Brothers and Lasallian Partners. The Alliance Council

The 43rd General Chapter meeting in the year 2000 provides the launching pad from which to take a look at the evolution of the Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD). However the 42nd General Chapter focused also on this issue in Proposition 19. The 43rd General Chapter reminds us in Proposition 27:

THAT BROTHER SUPERIOR AND HIS COUNCIL PURSUE AND SUPERVISE THE PROCESS OF REORGANIZING DISTRICTS, SUB-DISTRICTS AND DELEGATIONS SO AS TO STRENGTHEN THE VITALITY OF THOSE SECTORS THAT ARE IN NEED (CF PROPOSITION 19, 42ND GENERAL CHAPTER)

One could say that the Brother Superior and his Council "pursued" the Pacific Asia Regional Conference (PARC) when the General Council met

established among its volumes of business a timeline towards the foundation of the new District.

“Journeying Together Towards the Promised Land” was the ideal theme which gathered for the first time a significant number of Brothers from all the sectors for the “Alliance Forum and Retreat” in April 2009. The forum did some “dreaming” of the new District, considered issues, concerns and challenges and determined a way forward related to the priorities determined earlier. During the forum Brothers began to surface possible names for the emerging District. A subsequent sondage settled on the name: Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD) out of four possible proposed names. Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General presented the retreat linking restructuring and spirituality. One could not help but sense a spirit of hope and anticipation among the Brothers present.



One of the most significant events, which progressed the move towards LEAD, was the Alliance Council meeting held in Yangon, Myanmar in August 2009. As with any process of restructuring, there is significant progress but also challenges along the way. Some members of the Council were eager to see the birth of the new District while others were advising caution on the proposed timeline. It was decided that the Yangon meeting should include a facilitator who would not tell the Alliance Council what to do but would ask the right questions in order to assist the Brothers to determine the way forward and to develop a timeline acceptable to all. This meeting decided that the new District would be inaugurated on 15 May 2011 in Singapore, the place of the origin of the Institute in Asia and chosen as a fitting place for the inauguration. This meeting decided also to convene a Constitutive Assembly for April 2010.

The Constitutive Assembly took place in Manila and considered all the determinations including Statutes necessary to acquire the appropriate approvals for the new District from the Brother Superior and General Council. After a process of consultation among the Brothers, Brother Edmundo Fernandez was appointed as first Visitor of LEAD and Brother Thomas Lavin, Auxiliary Visitor.

In his pastoral letter upon the inauguration of LEAD, Brother Edmundo Fernandez, Visitor described this new endeavour as a “leap of faith”. The seven countries took this “leap of faith” on 15th May, 2011 when representatives of Lasallians from each country gathered in Saint Joseph’s Institution, Singapore for the inauguration ceremony. Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General officiated at the ceremony in the presence of Archbishop Chia and other dignitaries.

The Inauguration of LEAD on 15 May 2011 at St. Joseph’s Institution in Singapore



What has been the impact of LEAD these past couple of years? Many who attended the December 2011 Assembly of the Brothers held in Tagaytay City, Philippines would say that “LEAD really took off” at this time. All the Brothers were invited to participate with 106 accepting the invitation. For many, this was the first time that people put faces to names so to speak. The Brother Visitor challenged the Brothers to form a District community and not merely a federation of Sectors. A sense of District community was so evident at this key gathering.

In a very short period of time, the District has seen the movement of Brothers across Sectors with some taking up appointments beyond their Sector of origin. There has been a conscious effort on the part of the District’s leadership to have, at this stage, the Brothers deepening their familiarity with other sectors with exchange visits, exposure programmes, workshops and retreats. All of this has served to create a tangible sign of the District community. And while the Lasallian Partners are very much aware of the existence of LEAD it will take time for them to identify fully with this infant District.

The 1st LEAD assembly held at PHINMA Training Center in Tagaytay City, Philippines

The District Council meeting in various Sectors for the first two years has not only familiarised the Brothers with the diversity of Lasallian ministries and various cultures, faiths, education and political systems but has encouraged also a cross fertilisation of ideas. LEAD through its membership testifies to the internationality of the Institute and affirms that to be Lasallian is to be inclusive of all.

One of the blessings of LEAD is the growth of Brothers and other Lasallian vocations evident in several sectors. The District has a number of young men at various stages of being formed as Brothers and the growth of the Young Lasallians movement through volunteer programmes, youth programmes, etc. is indeed a sign of the vitality of the District.

The seven countries of LEAD have indeed opened their borders and recommitted themselves to re-founding the presence of the Institute in Asia building on the firm foundations laid by the first Brothers who came to Singapore and Penang in 1852. ✨