

La Salle Brother reaches out to needy and homeless boys

By Jared Ng

It was an unusual experience to say the least, visiting a boy at a dump site in Singapore.

“His father and mother had abandoned him and he found a place to temporarily sleep at the rubbish dump,” recalled La Salle Br Collin Wee, 58.

“We eventually got him to stay at HopeHouse where he finished his N-levels and ITE education. He is now serving in the police force.”

That was a few years ago.

As a La Salle Religious, part of Br Collin’s work is ministering to delinquent youth. Most of his work is done in HopeHouse, a shelter for boys who are homeless, abandoned by their families or without a family. It is located on the grounds of St Patrick’s School on East Coast Road.

It is this desire to serve the less fortunate in Singapore that prompted Br Collin to join the La Salle Brothers.

After finishing National Ser-

vice in 1978, he joined the Ministry of Social Affairs, now known as the Ministry of Social and Family Development, as a volunteer probation officer working with youth.

Later in his career, Br Collin felt he “could do more in working with the youth as a full-time Brother.”

“I knew about the La Salle Brothers when I was studying in St Patrick’s school and St Stephen’s School. There was one Brother – Br William Muir – who used to talk to my friends and I about the poor living around our school. So we as students noticed his love for the needy and poor. That attracted me to the La Salle community.”

Joining the Religious had its challenges. Being the only son in his family, “my sisters helped me to look after my parents while I left for my formation”, he said. “It wasn’t easy for me or my sisters, but coming from a Catholic family, I believe it was their belief in the faith that allowed me to go.”

Br Collin had his formative



‘When I’m able to re-integrate my boys back into society or with their families, that’s reward in itself,’ says Br Collin Wee, seen here cutting the hair of a HopeHouse resident in this file photo.

training in Penang from 1982-1984 before returning to Singapore for his first profession in St Patrick’s School chapel. He took his final vows in 1996.

“There is no perfect Religious life, we have to make it happen ... there are ups and downs in any lifestyle,” he said. “Even in family life, there is no perfect marriage.”

He added, “We are called to live as a community and to look at the positives of our vocation.”

One such “positive” is working with the poor and needy. “When I’m able to re-integrate my boys back into society or with their families, that’s reward in itself,” he said.

He shared how he even oversaw the marriage of one of the boys in HopeHouse.

“He was 23 years old and had met someone ... I went to meet his girlfriend and interviewed her like a parent would. Eventually they were both ready for the commitment and they got married here in HopeHouse. Our other boys served them as waiters during the buffet party!” said Br Collin with a laugh.

To those thinking of taking up a Religious vocation, Br Collin gave this advice: “Search carefully, don’t be drawn or pulled into one particular vocation for the wrong reasons. Especially now

when there is a vocation crisis, Religious orders will be trying to pull in their candidates ... and they end up discouraging people from joining other congregations. That is not the right way.”

He said, “You must come to terms with yourself and go through a serious discernment process,” adding that people should not feel pressured to join a particular Religious congregation or superficially attracted by their outward lifestyle, such as the kind of habits they wear or the way they appear in public. □

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