



The Order



Newsletter team from L-R:
Greg, Edward, Johnny, Andrew & Donald

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From The Editor's Desk

Since the formation of the Order of Malta in Singapore a decade ago, the number of members and associates has increased. This growth engenders the need for a newsletter which is the most common media form National Associations around the world communicate through. Newsletters foster better communication within our membership. In addition to providing updates on the Order's activities, they serve as a record of the historical events of the Order. It is also a forum for sharing personal prayerful reflections and spiritual experiences. This newsletter will complement our website. The Newsletter Team hopes that this inaugural issue will prove to be an informative and interesting read for all of us.

Outreach To St. Theresa's Home

SMOM Singapore brought food and entertainment to St Theresa's Home at Thomson Road on 27th October 2013. The day started with morning Mass at 10 am, celebrated by His Grace, Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia. His Grace in his homily reminded all that suffering is part and parcel of life on earth. He told residents of the home that they are not alone as they have God as well as others who care about them. Thereafter, a sumptuous lunch was served by volunteers and members of SMOM Singapore to the 250 residents and staff while a group of talented musicians entertained them with a spritely repertoire of songs.

Farewell Dinner for Knight Umberto

A farewell dinner was organised by SMOM for Umberto Dente Scrovegni who was with us since our inception. Twenty four members, associates and spouses were at the Trattoria Lafiandra Restaurant on 9th November to bid him farewell. He is an Italian Knight; he and his wife Winnie had participated in many of our activities. The older members especially will miss his charming smile and humour. The couple will be relocating to Taiwan for the next few years. Ciao for now, Umberto.



Umberto & Winnie

900th Anniversary of Pope Paschal II's Papal Bull

Gazing Into The Pope's Smiling Blue Eyes

The Order of Malta celebrated the 900th anniversary of the papal bull issued by Pope Paschal II in February 1113 to recognise and establish the Order's sovereignty. The Order's Heads of Government, Ambassadors, International Organisations, and representatives of National Associations from around the world participated in the week-long celebration in Rome. President Michael Khoo, Mrs Josephine Khoo, Hospitaller Isaac Krishnamoorthy, Mrs Jenny Krishnamoorthy, Dame Rita Tan-Yeoh, Dame Elizabeth Soh, Mr Terentius Loh and Chancellor Rose Lu represented Singapore. A limited number of countries were chosen to have their members pay homage to the Pope. Dames Rita Tan-Yeoh and Elizabeth Soh who were selected to represent Singapore in this privileged audience with the Pope shared their experience with us. Dame Rita Tan-Yeoh who selflessly became immersed in charitable works tending to those who are sick and marginalised for the greater part of two decades was inspired by a moment of epiphany in 1991 when she was seriously ill. She prayed earnestly to our Mother Mary for intercession to heal her and her prayers were answered. From that moment, she knew that the Lord had a mission for her - she was to be His instrument for the greater good.

When asked what prompted her to participate in the 900th anniversary of the papal bull in Rome, Dame Rita replied that it was spiritually driven besides being privileged to travel with the Knights Of Malta as they take their mission seriously. She added, "It is also God's gift to be there and I am happy to have witnessed this wonderful and meaningful celebration in Rome. Besides, the Knights and Dames do not do much shopping, thus we are able to concentrate on more prayerful activities!" Dame Rita affirmed that she was driven towards faith formation and this very focused Christian living



**Dame Rita & Pope Benedict XVI with the Grandmaster
Fra Matthew Festing**

stems from carrying out the Order's work through action in prayer.

Dame Elizabeth who could not refuse such an opportunity to accompany Dame Rita on this pilgrimage felt the abundant evidence of God's love and blessings in Rome. Dame Elizabeth enthused, "I was enriched by the celebration, the people attending it and those serving. Our own office bearers who carried out their duties with such love and dedication were also a great witness to God's

love." Both Dames said it was unimaginable and a dream come true to be one of the 25 nominated to meet the Pope out of 4500 people attending the anniversary celebrations. Dame Elizabeth recounted, "The Pope and I held hands. The music was rather loud. Although Dame Rita heard what he said, I couldn't hear him. It was a great moment when our smiling eyes met. He has the bluest set of eyes!" Dame Rita reported, "I introduced myself as Rita from Singapore. After a slight pause, he said 'Singapore', and he said something else, which I could not make out. He must have seen my puzzled look for he then said very clearly - 'I bless you and I bless Singapore'. I replied thank you. All the while our

hands were clasped together. When I felt the usher tugging at my elbows to indicate the end of my allotted time, I bowed, wished him well, and walked away." When asked if they had any inkling Pope Benedict XVI was going to resign at that point, Dame Rita said in jest, "I told him I am older than he and I can walk straight without assistance to see him but he needed the popemobile to move around. I said it's time for him to call it a day. Guess what? He took it seriously!" Unbeknown to



Dame Elizabeth & Pope Benedict XVI

her, the decision was already made prior to their meeting. Dame Elizabeth who viewed the Pope's resignation as one of the wisest and most humble decisions made by any figurehead, added jokingly, "I said that he had my permission to resign!" It was indeed a very special moment for both Dames and it will be firmly etched in the deep recesses of their memory forever.

Up Close And Personal with Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia

This interview was conducted with his Grace, Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia at his residence on 5th November 2013 for our inaugural issue of the newsletter.



Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia

Edward Low (EL): *Your Grace, what was most personally rewarding in your 12 years as Archbishop of Singapore?*

Archbishop Emeritus Chia (AEC): It was not something I asked for, but when I was appointed as Archbishop, I did what I could even if it meant being firm at times. Making changes in the archdiocese like improving on financial management was also important. The life of an Archbishop was quite different from a priest, as there was much paperwork. Propagating the faith was also very important and I also made it a point to keep in touch with the people.

EL: *The poor and marginalised always had a special place in your heart. In what way do you think we can reach out to them more effectively?*

AEC: The poor are always close to my heart. I try to visit them whenever I can at St. Theresa's Home, Missionary of Charities Home and others. I also try to reach out to them through SSV. I like to reach out to the poor who are home bound. However, it is not easy to meet the poor in their homes. I have also done mission trips to Calcutta, Sri Lanka, Kathmandu, Cambodia and other places. In these countries, extreme poverty is still very real and prevalent.

EL: *It seems that a big percentage of our youth today are not actively participating in church. What do you think is the root cause and what can we do about it?*

AEC: Priests in charge must reach out and inculcate fellowship among the youth. The world today is very involved in secular activities. The family unit has a key part to play and guidance from parents is paramount in ensuring our youth learn the right Christian values.

EL: *What is your advice for people trying to discern their vocation in life?*

AEC: They have to be faithful in prayer. They may approach their respective priests to have sessions on discernment. Ultimately, prayers are vital and most important.

EL: *You have been the Conventual Chaplain for SMOM (Singapore) since its inception some 10 years ago. What would you like the Order to achieve in 5 to 10 years from now?*

AEC: I am impressed by the dedication of the members in attending meetings, retreats, recollections and talks and also for their spiritual formation and growth. I am also impressed with the members' dedication to regional projects; they have supported the Bhakti Wara Hospital in Indonesia and the Laos Maternity clinics, among others. It is also important to take faith formation seriously through the regular monthly intercessory prayer meeting so that we can deepen our own faith and reach out to others. As members, it is also important to reach out to those who are poor not only in material things but poor in spirit in the way of Christ.



Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia in Lourdes, France

EL: *You have contributed so much to society and earned a well-deserved retirement, what are your plans for the future?*

AEC: My plan now is to spend more time in prayer and reach out to the poor, both in Singapore and abroad through mission trips. I believe in living a simple life supported by friends. Friendship is important to me. I am impressed with Pope Francis and would like to emulate his ways of a simple lifestyle by dressing simply, taking public transport and cooking for myself. In conclusion, I would like to add that we are one body in Christ and we must pray for one another and pray for Order of Malta worldwide.

The 2013 Pilgrimage to Lourdes

Forty-four pilgrims and *malades* embarked on our Order's pilgrimage to Lourdes from 2 – 8 May 2013. Our Conventual Chaplain, Emeritus Archbishop Nicholas Chia graciously blessed the pilgrimage with his presence. Four persons who were part of this pilgrimage shared their experience at Lourdes with us.

Seeing God

Leanne Elizabeth Tchea

Having married earlier in the year, my husband David and I were looking at honeymoon destinations. We decided to tour Europe. Coincidentally my parents-in-law mentioned they were going to Lourdes with the Order of Malta. Having heard stories of Mother Mary's apparitions to St Bernadette many years ago and the healing miracles, David and I felt it was a good opportunity for us to experience Lourdes before we continued with our honeymoon. Incidentally a month before our trip, a colleague of mine shared with me that she felt rather depressed by the sight of the gathering of malades of whom some were young and in despair at Lourdes. She hid in her hotel room while her mother who is Catholic and the rest of her companions continued with their pilgrimage program. This made me a little apprehensive about Lourdes.

When the day arrived, I was eager to see for myself if Lourdes was what I imagined it to be. I was amazed when I arrived in Lourdes to see so many shops selling candles, crucifixes, empty bottles and statues of Mother Mary in various forms and sizes. It felt like I was in a 'Catholic' shopping district. It didn't make much of an impression on me as I felt Lourdes was commercialised and unlike the tranquil peaceful village I thought it to be.

However, my feelings changed over the next five days. God was good to us and took care of us every step of the way. Upon arrival at our hotel, my god-mother was extremely disappointed to see that we were given a room with a small window facing another building wall as her request for a garden-facing room could not be

met during peak season. Relentlessly, she negotiated hard with the hotel staff and to our pleasant surprise, the hotel general manager gave us the VIP room at no extra cost. He even showed us to our new room personally and I was blown away by the stunning room view of the church where we could see a huge portrait of St Bernadette.

Before I slept, I began to see and feel the peace and tranquility of Lourdes as the clock struck 9 pm. Nightly, there was an evening Rosary Candle-light Procession when the masses gather with candles in hands walking the perimeters of the church fields singing 'Ave Maria'. It was a heart-warming and mesmerising sight; the melodious music continued playing in my ears long after the vigil has ended.

Over the next few days, I went for the holy bath, completed the Stations of the Cross, and attended the Order's private masses as well as the international masses, where people from all over the globe gathered to sing praises to God and pray for the malades. Far from what my colleague had experienced, I felt quite the contrary. I was happy and heartened to see what a joyful place Lourdes actually was. It was a place full of love, peace and hope. It was a place filled with humanity and compassion. Both young and old able-bodied volunteers willingly contributed their time and strength to help the sick and handicapped. No one was afraid or taken aback by the sad conditions afflicting the malades.

Though we didn't experience for ourselves the miracles of healing where the lame could walk, the deaf could hear or the blind could see, I personally felt the miracles didn't have to be visible to us, for the miracle was already in us. God, through His Church and His people, has given us a spirit of humility and compassion. He had shown me that I didn't have to see a miracle to believe in one, but rather, He filled me with a new knowledge that He loves all equally and have set aside a place

where the sick could seek respite. He empowered me with the faith to believe that He has a reason for everything and I concluded the trip as told in *Les Miserable*, 'to love another person is to see the face of God', as it was simply surmised by one respected priest, 'God is Love'.



David Lee & his wife Leanne

The Perfect Honeymoon

David Lee

My first journey to Lourdes has been one marked with great blessings and opportunities to open my mind to the tranquility of divine patience in the serenity of God's presence to experience God's love. All I have previously known about Lourdes has been from the sharing of my parents and family friends but nothing beats experiencing it first-hand. Words cannot express this personal experience, especially the peace it brings.

My Lourdes experience was a prelude to my one-month honeymoon with my wife, Leanne. The days leading up to our flight to Paris, I often joked with my family that our honeymoon encapsulates what I perceive as the 'Perfect Honeymoon'. We experienced the richness of scenic views and historical landmarks, splendid shopping and the joy of meeting up with friends all over Europe. Lourdes fulfilled the spiritual aspect of our trip, and it was truly an uplifting and humbling experience.

I came to Lourdes hoping to experience a miracle of some sort - to hear God, or to visualise Mary at the Grotto. I guess it was all due to the fact that I heard so much about people experiencing healing and having a life-changing experience when they went to Lourdes. But what I had gone through in Lourdes during the five days was entirely different from what I had expected or imagined it to be.

When we arrived, walking around the streets of Lourdes, my initial thoughts were: "This is so much like a Catholic shopping centre". Everything seemed so commercialised where stall vendors competed with one another for business. This misleading initial impression sets the stage for an amazing spiritual awakening for me which began on the night of the first day at 8.30 pm when the candle-light procession started. We were blessed to have a room overlooking the entire landscape where the procession was taking place. This night of light and singing enchanted us. With lighted candles in hand, we soon joined the thousands of people singing in one united voice "Ave Maria". My heart felt so moved by the lyrics that articulated so much love. Was this just the beginning of what was to come?

The following day I walked into the sacred grounds of Lourdes for the first time. In contrast to my initial impression of Lourdes, the peace of the vast open grounds greeted me with a sense of awe and spectacle. I followed my dad to the Holy Bath and passed the Grotto for the very first time. I wondered what it was like in the days when Mother Mary appeared to Bernadette at that very spot where the statue of our Lady stood. I prayed before entering the bath. Nothing miraculous happened to me at the bath. However, it was at the bath that I first saw the *malades* and was deeply touched by their determination to go for the bath. I admired the patience of the volunteers in helping them. It was a place filled with love.

The main highlight of the Lourdes event was the celebration of mass at the Basilica. It was a special mass for the *malades*. The hymns and liturgy were very captivating. When the *malades* presented, I was struck with sadness as I saw children, young adults and the elderly entering the Basilica in wheelchairs and trolleys. Each of them was prevented by their condition from living a full life. In this instance, memories from my younger days emerged. Sadly and regrettably, I reflected on those foolish and selfish comments I had made when I did not have my way. One by one, these frequent complaints rose and hit me like a tidal wave. There I was in the past complaining how life had treated me so unfairly under different circumstances; here I was looking at the *malades* who had no other choice but to accept their lot in life. The best part was they were so passionate during the mass celebration and their facial expressions showed how thankful they were for the opportunity to be present at this mass.

The personal message was to be always grateful for all that I have despite the circumstances. The *malades* may be handicapped, sick or disabled, but it brought me joy to see how they still continue to live in peace and faith. The passion of the volunteers gave a glimpse of how I may make use of my gifts and unique qualities to help people in need. Lourdes is a place filled with love, patience and hope. To experience its awe was a miracle in itself for me. The Lourdes experience taught me to make the best of my gifts from God. I participated in the Stations of the Cross twice, once with my wife Leanne and the other with the main group from the Singapore Order of Malta. I have attended many Good Friday Masses in Singapore and knew what the stations represented. But it was in Lourdes that this devotion became so real and alive. Humility and compassion hit me strongly as I moved from one station to another, as Jesus had staggered along to sacrifice His life to grant me forgiveness and salvation.

Though I did not experience any physical miracle in Lourdes, I realised I was given the miracle of life; miracles are constantly working and happening in my life even though I may not always see it or know that it is happening. Now I am certain when I open my heart to others, I can be the miracle to others and vice versa. In so doing, the future now may unlock hitherto unknown spiritual keys to the hidden mystery of my life – a life in Christ, which I must treasure.

In conclusion, I wish to testify that I have been healed by and through this experience at Lourdes for it allowed me to correct my faults through greater awareness as a stepping-stone, to living a life filled with a strong desire for true meaning and purpose. I believe the blessings I received ought to be shared with others, for I may not know who else will be similarly touched and blessed by God through my sharing.

A Most Speedy Recovery

Sr Rosalind Chan FMM

I will take this opportunity to thank Archbishop Emeritus Chia and all the Knights and Dames from the Order of Malta for sponsoring me on this trip. Thanks to all too who had been my wheelchair 'drivers' during my stay there. The event at Lourdes took place just 14 days before my bilateral knee replacement operation. I was very nervous and fearful as I was uncertain as to how was I going to walk on my own after the operation when both my legs were involved at the same time.

I prayed very hard during those few days and indeed Mother Mary really helped me to surrender everything to her Son. After that cold, cold bath at the Grotto in Lourdes, I really felt peace and serenity. Thereafter I faced the surgery with great hope, confidence and without further apprehension. Thank God and our Blessed Mother. The operation was a success. Three days after my operation, the surgeon was surprised to see me well and made a poignant remark, "Sister, you must be praying very hard, you recover so quickly! It is only a few days ago and you can walk on both legs with only a walking frame!" I told him, "God & Mary love me so much, and miracles do happen always."

Three months passed, I can walk without any analgesics and knee support. I am working full time again. I am now 75 years old and the surgeon told me that the titanium prostheses will last me another 15 quality years. What more can I ask from God? I can only praise Him for this great miracle!



Sister Rosalind Chan, FMM

He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father, He's My Brother.

Patricia Ang

It was not our first visit to Lourdes but certainly the first time dad and I were there in a different capacity. He is ill and required a wheelchair to get around as opposed to past visits there when he was freely mobile. This is a faith journey that will be etched in our hearts.

In March 2012, my 84 year old dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer in its advanced stage with bony metastases in the spine. The doctors strongly recommended that part of the tumour in his spine be removed and chemotherapy with radiotherapy be administered, otherwise paralysis will ensue. Dad being a man of faith reminded the family that in God we trust. If it is time to return to the Lord so be it. There will be no cutting him up and the increased risk of side effects from medical intervention at his age is undesirable.

So he began disposing most of his material belonging. However, he held onto a few things dear including caps which we had collected from previous pilgrimages, particularly the one from Compostella – St James. In November 2012, he misplaced the cap and was rather sad about it. I tried all means to retrace our steps but to no avail. In desperation, I contacted Angeline from Faith Tours and requested that should they go that way to please pick up one for dad. That was when I was introduced to Dame Rose Lu and how we embarked on this pilgrimage to Lourdes



Patricia with her father, Jacob

with The Singapore Association of the Order of Malta. Dad loves going on pilgrimages and when he was diagnosed with cancer he did not dream that he could be going on one. When we were accepted by the group for this trip, he was elated! What made the trip really special was how the knights acceded to his request of making the Way of the Cross on Mount Of Espelugues. Dad and I had made this journey up this hill several times before, even in the rain. There was something spiritual

about going up the hill and he really wanted to do it one last time.

Special thanks to our brothers Edward, Colin, Andrew and Gregory who with God's grace and generosity made my dad's dream come through. Dad talks about that Way of the Cross all the time till today. For me seeing my brothers exert and going in



L-R: Patricia, Edward, Colin, Jacob, Gregory, Wendy, with Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia coming down from Mount Of Espelugues after the Stations of the Cross

faith to help dad make that journey is something one cannot forget. I thank God for them.

Dad celebrated his 85th birthday in Lourdes and I thank Rose for going the extra mile to make his day with a celebration. Dad never failed to talk about the presence of Our Lady every time we were at the Grotto. For him the pilgrimage to Lourdes gave him the strength and the assurance that Our Lady is ever near to intercede for us.

For me, the journey shed light on God's grace and providence. It helped me to come to terms with dad's illness better and through looking at dad and his faith in our Lady and God, I too have learnt to rely and trust in God's faithfulness and providence.

The lost cap was never replaced but dad realised that he had to lose the cap to gain something more precious – a trip to Lourdes. For if I had not called Angeline from Faith Tours, I would not have known about the Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta and we would not have made the trip to Lourdes!

The Lord does have His ways and we have to learn to trust that all things happen for a reason. To all who have made this trip possible and special, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and may God bless all of you for all that you did.

The Immaculate Conception Mass the the Mount Alvernia chapel

A Mass was held at the Chapel of Mount Alvernia Hospital on Monday, 9 December 2013 at 6 p.m. to commemorate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.



Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia

Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Chia, who celebrated the mass, emphasised the importance of living and sharing our faith. He further encouraged us to have ears and eyes for other people just like Mary did at the wedding in Cana.

The Mass was also a prelude for the pilgrims to the Christmas Holy Land Pilgrimage from 18 to 27 December 2013, led by Dr Gabriel Oon and endorsed by the Singapore Order of Malta.

Christmas Pilgrimage to Holy Land 17 to 26 December, 2013.

Thirty pilgrims participated in this year's Christmas Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The group, led by Dr Gabriel Oon, included some members, associates and spouses of the Singapore Order of Malta.

One of the highlights of this Pilgrimage was the Consecration Mass of the Singapore Chapel at the Basilica of St. Mary Magdalene in Magdala, held on 20 December 2013 and celebrated by Rev Fr Juan Maria Solana, L.C., Pontifical Custodian of the Basilica. The Chapel is a gift by members, associates and friends of the Singapore SMOM and other Singapore benefactors. It is named "Jesus Walks On Water" and is one of the four Chapels in the basilica.

The pilgrims also visited our Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem, run jointly from the contributions by many SMOM Associations from different countries. We also spent time at the adjoining Orphanage, where we interacted with the young orphans.

We attended the Christmas Eve Mass at the Pontifical Centre where we stayed. Before mass, representatives from several countries were invited to contribute an item each. The Singapore Pilgrims presented two songs, Praise Her With A Flower, composed by a Singaporean, and Shalom. The presentation was well received.

We also visited the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Some years ago, the Singapore SMOM donated a mosaic painting of our Blessed Lady to the Basilica. The tiled mural was and still is being displayed in a prominent position within the Basilica.

The group returned spiritually charged with renewed faith and determination to do God's will.

Letter from A Grateful Beneficiary

29 October 2013

Dear Mr Michael Khoo
President Order of Malta Singapore

I just want to inform you and friends, that today is the first day a cataract operation was performed in the newly equipped operating room made possible through the donations by the Order of Malta, Singapore. I have taken pictures of the new operating room. I just want to thank the Order of Malta, Singapore for the donation on behalf of our 150 cataract patients who are on the waiting list, I hope God will always bless us all.

Dr Suryadi Halim
Director of Bhakti Wara Hospital



Picture of the new Operating room

**Interview with Dr. Michael Thio
President General
International Confederation of the
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Paris, France.**

Edward Low (EL): Michael, you took over the helm of SSVP, a well known UN-NGO and a world wide entity with more than 800,000 members in September 2010, what was then your priorities as elected International President General?

Michael Thio (MT): My manifesto, which was subsequently endorsed by the International SSVP Board as Strategic Goals, during the tenure of my office is to:

1. Enhance the Spiritual formation and development of our members which is fundamental to our Vincentian vocation and mission as we are a Catholic Lay Apostolate organisation involved in the apostolate of charity and humanitarian activities. We must maintain our Vincentian Spirituality in serving Christ in the poor and bear witness to Him through our good works for the greater glory of God.
2. Leadership and members formation, training and development to provide for quality and enlightened leaders and members. The quality of an organisation depends on the quality of its people.
3. To enhance the internationalisation of the Society, extend to new countries, expand the scope and quality of the Society's services and bring about systemic change in the lives of the poor for them to be self-reliant and self-sufficient wherever possible. The latter will eliminate begging and restore to the poor the dignity of the human person.
4. To develop effective communication and to promote better understanding and knowledge of the Society's global works and activities both internally and externally.
5. To better focus on Youth and Young Adults active involvement and to render them every opportunity for participation in the growth, leadership and well being of the Society.
6. To be involved in greater collaboration with other branches of the Vincentian Family in mutually beneficial projects and programs for the poor.
7. Consideration to collaborate with other Catholic and Christian organisations in works of Charity and Justice in the spirit of the Church's ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and activities.
8. Maintain a close and strong relationship with the Hierarchy as one mystical body of Christ in the Church.
9. Close adherence to sound governance practice, accountability and transparency of the Society throughout the world.

We are moving ahead well in all the areas as indicated above.

(EL): With several EU member countries going broke in recent years, will that affect funding and the financial position of SSVP and if so, how does SSVP intend to overcome this set back?

There has been some effect on our funding position but fortunately this is not significant so as to affect our operations. Praise God.

We are saddened by the economic and financial woes that beset many countries and have caused hardships to people and families. The emerging poor of joblessness, homelessness, addiction, loneliness etc. posed a serious problem. There are many countries that are addressing the plight of more people requiring assistance and the SSVP can only do so much within their humble means. We give whatever we can along with prayer, love and affection. Give them a listening ear with the person to person contact and it will mean so much to them and this is one of the ethos of the Society and because we care we made the difference in their lives.

(EL): In your opinion, what are the root causes of poverty and how can we end extreme poverty in the foreseeable future?

Political, Economic, Social and Environmental imbalances and irregularities issues contribute to the realm of poverty generally. Poverty has been around in time in memorial. There is no easy solution. Sadly poverty will continue to exist as there is too much inequalities and disparities currently prevailing in the world. The gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" are widening. It is a very sorrowful but real situation. I have visited many countries and this is a perennial problem and Governments need to be involved and act in a positive and decisive manner to resolve the situation. We do the best we can to alleviate poverty and we must continue to do so to lessen the sufferings of our brothers and sisters.

(EL): You mentioned before, that SSVP is involved in humanitarian work in Syria. Can you tell us some of the challenges your Society is facing in this war torn country?

Apart from the political upheaval and instability, security and safety of our members and people are problematical. Indiscriminate killing of innocent lives, deaths caused by explosion and cross fire and the continuous infighting that is persisting. We have lost a number of our members. People are fleeing the country and volunteers for our kind of work are decreasing. Too many people and issues to care for and with inadequate resources. This is a great calamity and the civil war has gone on far too long with little solution in sight. We need to continue to pray for God's compassionate love and healing for the people of Syria.

(EL): You are also a member of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, how is it like to work with so many religious people around you?

It is an inspiring experience and a God given one. There is a strong spirit of collegiality, oneness and solidarity among the members. We exchange views rather freely and in good faith and respect each other's opinions. Sometimes we are engaged in sound "intellectual debates" but it is enlightening. We share and learn from each other's experience and thoughts and we grow in the process. With members represented from a global perspective it is enriching in sharing knowledge and understanding people, concepts and perspectives. On the spiritual side, time is put aside for vespers, prayers, reflection and the Eucharist celebration. A holistic experience.

(EL): What is your personal experience working with the "New Holy Father" Pope Francis, did you enjoy his style of working?

My initial experience of him is that he is a practical and forthright person. He is also a very engaging person and you are drawn to him. He listens intensively. My overall impression of him is that he has the wisdom and intellect of a Jesuit (he is a Jesuit) and the humility and simplicity of a Franciscan (he took the name Francis) and also a Vincentian because he displays the five virtues of a Vincentian viz humility, simplicity, meekness (gentleness), holiness and zest. I like working with him.

(EL): Michael, you also chair and sit on many other welfare organisations and recently I saw you leading the 10.30am Sunday mass at the Church of the Sacred Heart, how did you find time and inspiration to do all these?

What I am and all that I am I owe it to God. He has been my guiding light since I was a child. My dear mother brought the family up, including me, in a true Catholic fashion and maintained our piety with special devotion to God, Mother Mary and the saints. I have been faithful to God and my Catholic Faith to this very day and I thank God for this.

Since my youth and throughout my adult life I have always been prayerful and active in so many organisations encompassing religious and others and in most cases in a leadership capacity. I believe that God has helped me through in all phases of my life and guided me to do the many things He has entrusted to me too. I'm able to do all the many things I have done and doing and do it well, if I may humbly say, because He made it possible. I believe that God made each of us different and unique and He gives each of us different talents to serve Him. For the many church and lay apostolate groups that I'm involved in, I was just shown the way and joined the group as if lead by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, when I take stock of what I'm doing, I just

cannot believe that I'm involved in so many groups and how on earth did I cope with all of them. I believe that God has a hand in all that I do and I believe and trust in Him – "He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing" – John 15:5.

I'm very thankful to God for what I am and for the many blessings He has bestowed on me. I share with you a very appropriate quote I personally received from Blessed Mother Teresa whom I had the opportunity to work with during her lifetime – "What you are is God's gift to you; What you make of yourself is your gift to God". I have decided to dedicate and present myself to God as He wants me to.

(EL): Are there plans or initiatives from the SSVP to officially push your principal founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam for canonisation to Sainthood in the near future?

The Society has established a "Commission for the cause of Canonisation of Blessed Frederic Ozanam" and is chaired by Amin de Tarrazi, who was the 12th President General of the Society. I'm the 15th President General. Amin de Tarrazi was very much involved in a Commission then for the cause of Beatification of Blessed Frederic but this has already been attained 16 years ago. Prayers and Programs have been engaged to further the cause of canonisation throughout the world through the SSVP. We need to promote for one more miracle to be presented to the Vatican. We pray that through God's grace He will grant us the miracle needed to proclaim Blessed Frederic Ozanam a saint.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

9 Jan (Thu)

New Year's SMOM Mass @Mt. Alvernia Chapel

24 Jan. (Fri)

Chinese New Year Outreach @Assisi Hospice

8 Feb. (Sat)

SMOM Retreat @FMM House of Prayer.

20 Mar. (Thu)

SMOM AGM @Assisi Hospice

26 Apr. (Sat)

Investiture of new members @The chapel of St. Joseph's International (TBC)

6 Dec 2014 (Sat)

3rd Lourdes experience event @ Singapore Indoor Stadium