Cambodia – Students of La Salle Pouthum return to school

La Salle Pouthum Schoolis a private school conducted by the De La Salle Brothers. It belongs to the worldwide system of Catholic education inspired by the charism of its Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle. It was started in 2012 and officially recognized by Cambodia Government in 2019. It's located at Pouthum, a very poor village beside Mekong River, about seven kilometers from Phnom Penh, capital city of Cambodia. All students are poor and they are unable to pay any school fees. The Brothers provide free educational opportunity for them. During the school year 2020-2021, there were around 460 students. It currently offers kindergarten and primary educational programs.

This year, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the school had to temporarily close for more than eight months, but on November 1, 2021 students returned to school. Brothers are happy to be able to welcome back their students. The school year, that had begun last November 2020, was interrupted last February, 2021.

For health reasons, student must wear masks and have a card or certificate of Covid-19 vaccination when passing the school gate. They have to wash their hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and have their temperature checked at the school gate as well.

Now the school has to follow the safety guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health of Cambodia. The school only allows students to study half a day instead of studying all day long. Only the main subjects are taught to complete the course of this school year for all students.

The Brothers and the La Salle Sisters now together serve in La Salle Pouthum School. Being there among the poor people in Pouthum Village, the Brothers try their best to help local people not only by teaching their children, but also by distributing food to those who are most in needs. They often welcome Lasallian students and volunteers from Vietnam, US, Singapore and Australia who come to help their pupils.

A brief history of the La Salle Brother in Cambodia

The De La Salle Brothers arrived in Cambodia on January 6, 1906. 3 French Brothers and 3 Vietnamese Brothers under the guidance of Brother Visitor Ivarch-Louis came and opened the first school in Battambang. They later opened Miche School, a famous school in Phnom Penh. However, because of the unstable political situation, the Brothers had to leave Cambodia in 1972.

The story revolves around La Salle's mission in the world, especially in Asian countries on the occasion of the meeting of the new Visitors of the world province in Rome in May 2004. After this meeting, Brother General Alvaro and his Council allowed the Vietnamese Brothers to consider a possible return to Cambodia.

On August 4, 2005, Brother John Baptist Tran Dinh Hiep went to Cambodia to open a community. The community house was built at Boueng Tum Pun, Phnom Penh, and was named Faith Community (Cong Doan Duc Tin). On January 6, 2006, exactly 100 years after the first La Salle Brothers arrived in Cambodia, Bishop Emile Destombes came to celebrate Mass and bless the community house.

After 5 years, La Salle's second campus in Cambodia was re-established in Pothum Village in early 2012, about 7km from Phnom Penh city. The new facility in Pothum has a community house and a school.

Reported by Brother Simon Thien and Brother Joseph Nguyen the Anh