LEAD: the heart of the mission beyond borders

It was in 2011 that LEAD (Lasallian East Asia District) officially came into being, bringing together seven countries and sectors in East and South-East Asia under a single broad geographical and spiritual horizon: **the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand**. What was described at the time as a true "act of faith" is now celebrating its fifteenth anniversary.

Recalling the origins of this journey is the District Visitor himself, Br. Jose Mari L. Jimenez, in his Pastoral Letter written on the occasion of the Feast of the Founder, which is celebrated every year on 15 May throughout the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools:

"The founding of LEAD was an 'act of faith' born of our shared hopes to live the Lasallian Mission with greater boldness in association, and to ensure the sustainability of our response to the emerging peripheries in this part of the Institute. Our rich heritage and our multicultural and multi-religious context have been at the heart of our identity as a District from the very beginning."

Over the past 15 years, the District has consolidated its position and now coordinates a dense network of **over 70 educational institutions** – ranging from primary schools to large university campuses – serving a catchment area of **over 150,000 students**.

A vocation for educational service

This enormous work of education and social redemption is made possible by the presence of some **140 Brothers** and, above all, by the extraordinary commitment of **more than 13,000 lay partners and collaborators**. A milestone that the Brother Visitor wished to acknowledge with gratitude, addressing the whole community: "LEAD has grown tremendously over the last fifteen years. We must thank each and every one of you for this. It has been your commitment to our shared vocation of educational service to young people, especially the poor, your creativity […] and your trust in being part of a global community of educators that has led us to where we are today."

One of the most significant achievements of LEAD is the genuine and deep collaboration between religious and lay people in the management of the works. This synergy has taken shape in cutting-edge *governance* structures, such as the establishment of *Rue Neuve 1852* in Malaysia and the *Lasallian Trust* in Singapore.

As highlighted by the Visitor, these bodies "provide spaces where Brothers and lay partners can collaborate at the governance level to sustain the Lasallian mission in these two Sectors", whilst new forms of community – such as the transnational collaboration between the Brothers of Hong Kong and Japan – "reveal potential new ways of being community".

Young people threatened by poverty and violence

The heart of LEAD's mission beats strongly, above all where young people are threatened by poverty, conflict and violence. The Brother Visitor did not hide the complexity of the current historical moment, explicitly citing "changes in the educational landscape, population displacements caused by unjustified conflicts and violence, the ever-evolving needs of young people – especially those on the margins – as well as the effects that the decline in interest in religious life has on the vitality of our mission".

However, the District is not giving up and sees these difficulties as an impetus to respond: "Although these are very real challenges, they also provide an incentive to reflect more boldly on what it means to be Lasallians today. Our charism has always guided us to be attentive and responsive to the signs of the times".

The practical responses on the ground in recent years have been extraordinary:

- **Myanmar (De La Salle Academy-Yangon):** In a dramatic geopolitical context, the academy offers a lifeline to the most vulnerable young people, *"opening up opportunities for young people in Myanmar to complete their GED (high school diploma) and find opportunities for higher education elsewhere*".
- **Thailand (La Salle Bamboo School):** Located on the border, it is a hub for international volunteering and the care of migrant and marginalised children.
- **Philippines (MILES Project** – *Project Ministry Innovations in Lasallian Education*): Originally launched under the technical name *Project 2022*,

> MILES is the Lasallians' response to the need to balance financial sustainability, pedagogical innovation and fidelity to the mission of social inclusion in order to serve the most vulnerable groups. The name evokes 'miles', the journey and constant progress, but the key word within the acronym is **Innovations**.

As the year of celebrations for the 15th anniversary of LEAD begins, coinciding with the feast of the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the District is preparing for the next decisive steps: the 4th District Mission Assembly and the 5th Brothers' Assembly in November 2026, which will guide the journey towards the 5th District Chapter in May 2027.

"We are being asked to renew our dedication to push beyond the boundaries of the Lasallian mission and our willingness to build a fraternal world that bears witness to faith and zeal," concluded the Brother Visitor. "Let us not only look back on our rich history and traditions, but also look forward to the future with the same hope we had when LEAD was founded in 2011."