

Bro. Manuel Olivé

Alfred Sant Fournier

Mr Alfred Sant Fournier is one of the first Signum Fidei members – they were four – who made their consecration in the presence of both Paul Adams and Manuel Olive', co-founders, in 1986.

Alfred is at present responsible for the junior Section of St Michael's Foundation.

I remember the first time I heard of Bro. Manuel Olivé was when I had finished Sixth Form at Stella Maris College and became a member of the Old Stelmarians Association – he was involved in promoting Lasallian Youth. In 1981, when Evan Caruana (now parish priest) and Angela Tortell (now Angela Micallef) came back from a European Lasallian Youth Meeting at Paderno del Grappa, they informed us that we were going to host the next youth meeting in August 1983 in Malta.

The Brothers' Communities in Malta, encouraged us to set up a strong committee (the Maltese Co-ordinating Group) made up of representatives from among the youths of both colleges to prepare for this historic event in 1982. Our work came together. Our contact with Bro. Olivé grew. He was one of the catalysts in passing on the vision of St. John Baptist de La Salle to young people.

I first met Bro. Olivé in the summer of 1983 when he came to Malta to discuss the final preparations with us. He struck me as a quiet man of prayer, a person who listened, encouraged, gave us young people the space to take initiative. He had a lot of inner strength. He saw that what was being done was fine. As was the custom when the participants from the other countries arrived - the Maltese focused on the logistics of the meeting whilst a new Co-ordinating group was set up made up of representatives from each country. Participants hailed from Spain, France, Belgium, England, Italy, Ireland, Lebanon, and Malta. Bro. Olivé joined us on this committee. He would listen, encourage and guide but never impose.

The theme chosen by us in Malta was "We are La Salle today!" Each day had a different theme and was organised by a different country. Topics included Faith, Fraternity, Action ... Bro. Olivé would give

his views during the many discussions that we had. His concern was always that we understood the vision of the Founder and applied it in our lives.

In 1984, the Lasallian Family organised a World Congress in Mexico. The Maltese De La Salle Province invited Angela Tortell (now Micallef) and myself to attend. We met Bro. Olivé there. During the World Confederation Meeting, there was a meeting for *Signum Fidei* members from all over the world which I attended out of interest. Of course Bro. Olivé was there. I do remember that among the very interesting discussions that we had – one was about whether a person could be a member of the *Signum Fidei* if s/he did not work in a school. There were some who disagreed. I had agreed with this. Bro. Olivé intervened: what is the most important is the interior life, the education project and the sense of community. This can be lived outside the school ... even in a factory!

Thanks to every one's help the Maltese Youth Meeting of 1983 was a success and the next meeting was planned for Ipswich in 1985. The Maltese group prepared for this occasion. The members who went up were Joseph Galea, Evan de Brincat, Maria Xerri (now Sant Fournier), Tristan Meadows, another young man and myself. We met Bro. Olivé there in Ipswich. The English had worked on the logistics - however they were quite new to the way of organising youth meetings. Bro. Olivé asked us to see to lead the co-ordinating group. As he did in Malta, he guided the youths through his advice. His interventions were never forceful but with a soft but persuading tone, he shared his experiences. I do recall the great devotion with which he received Holy Communion and also when he distributed Communion to the young people.

Bro. Olivé then invited me to the International Youth Meeting which took place in Parmenie, France in 1985. This youth meeting was organised by a different youth group within the Lasallian World made up of youths from Canada, Belgium, Italy and France among others. This does not mean that the organisations were rival groups. In fact when I attended the meeting there were youths and Brothers who I had met in Malta and in Ipswich. I travelled to

Parmenie with the Italian group. I flew to Rome where I spent a day or so at the Mother House before I went to Parmenie. Bro. Olivé was my host. He invited me to join him in all the activities at the Mother House. I recall we had many interesting conversations about life and the importance of prayer and communication with God. I slowly began to learn about the *Signum Fidei* movement of which Bro. Olivé was co-ordinator. He explained the style of life, the importance of fraternity and the commitment to others especially the young. He portrayed it as a gift within the Church following the invitation of Vatican Council II to lay persons to be witnesses in the Church and in the world.

I realised how from his office at the Mother House where he was co-ordinating youths and past student organisations, Bro. Olivé was in personal contact with so many people all over the Lasallian World. The amount of correspondence that he dealt with was amazing. I realised even from the letters that he sent to me, that they were always done with his personal touch ... he knew so many people well. Bro. Olivé also would tell me about the experiences of young people who are trying to love God more.

The Maltese Lasallians were invited to participate in Festa Zghazagh at Naxxar in 1985. We invited Bro. Olivé to participate in this activity. We had an exhibition stand there and also organised an event

on the main stand for all the participants there. We also had a meeting for Lasallians at the Provincialate in Sliema. Bro. Olivé's talk was about the human side of the Founder. In a talk which I still recall, Bro. Olivé spoke about how the Founder was very human and faced the normal difficulties that every person faces - the many stories that I had heard until then had focused on the saintly side of him. As young people, our admiration for the Founder grew.

When Bro. Olivé was in Malta, Bro. Louis invited him to address a group of teachers and past students about the *Signum Fidei* way of life at the De La Salle Provincialate in Sliema. This was the first meeting which practically launched the movement in Malta. After this meeting four of us Miriam Casar, Mary Puli, Maria Xerri and myself started on our formation programme with Bro. Louis.

We remained in touch for some years after that but unfortunately lost touch when he travelled to South America. Bro. Olivé will always be for me a man of inspiration, a man of prayer and a person who believed in young people and in doing so was young at heart! He was a true De La Salle Brother eager to love and support others. In life we come across a number of persons who have a lasting effect on our lives, Bro. Manuel Olivé was certainly one of these persons for me.