

# LAMB – A Personal Perspective

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When casually asked by the Deputy Provincial whether I would go to “the meeting” at Kintbury in April, my response was “What meeting?” Perhaps my ignorance of current things Lasallian comes from the frenetic pace of modern life; families, work (teaching in my case) and all manner of distractions both self-inflicted and society driven. The chance therefore to pause and reflect on the spiritual journey that the Lasallian Association for Mission in Bristol (LAMB) has undertaken, and even more so on my own involvement in that journey was one I was only too glad to take.

I experience LAMB in three different, if not independent, ways. Firstly I am a teacher in a school that the LAMB community minister within. Secondly I am a less than regular member of the LAMB “prayer group” on a Thursday evening. Thirdly I am a part of a wider LAMB family.

The most obvious work of LAMB is that undertaken in schools. Three, and in the past, four members of the community regularly come into my school of St Bernadette in Bristol on a Friday. I am sure the community themselves can and indeed have spoken of the work they do not only in my school but also in the other schools of the area; however I must mention the following. In addition to creative and prayerful workshops done during RE lessons they have been at the centre of chaplaincy activities at lunchtime. They have been involved in the planning, preparation and provision of school masses and services so much so that most of our celebrations and services, wherever possible, have been moved to Fridays to take advantage of them. They have provided one-to-one counselling, RE Days for Year 7, gardening expertise and time out for both students and teachers alike. It was only when the LAMB team could not be in school due to the retreat days for Year 7 that I began to really appreciate how much our chaplaincy depended upon them for much of the spiritual life of our school. I have also seen how much the pupils I teach both enjoy and respond to what LAMB offer us, and the team are very popular.

Perhaps it is this “LAMB” that people will concentrate upon because it is the most obvious expression of the community and is perhaps the most

obvious continuity with the work the Brothers did in their own schools. However there is another LAMB. At the Assembly meeting at St. Cassian's last weekend someone asked me if the “wider” LAMB community had “folded.” I guess I shouldn’t really have been surprised at this question, as the “other” LAMB does seem to be a little invisible at the moment and for reasons that will become apparent.

Part of the “wider” LAMB community meets on a Thursday evening at St James’ Priory in the heart of Bristol, next door to the bus station. This LAMB is not three or four strong but more often than not double or more, and in fact the majority of those present are not those who go into the schools. This number is growing as people become aware of us. We gather. We eat. We pray. We talk. There is no agenda and few, if any, decisions have been taken at our gatherings. And yet they have been powerful occasions. Even as I write these words I have in front of me a little spiritual booklet borrowed from a person at a past gathering. Just as the disciples recognised the risen Jesus only in the breaking and sharing of bread so we recognise Jesus in the meal and time spent with each other. Frequently these gatherings, prayer meetings if you like, have challenged me, if only because they recognise that Christ must be found in the everyday, on the street as well as “on the mountain”. I have to admit that in my busy life these gatherings have often provided the only spiritual input I have received in the week, despite going to mass, being an RE teacher, etc, etc.

Am I really alone in finding a dearth of Christian input in my life? Is there something wrong with me or my family or the life I lead? Possibly, but I have increasingly found it difficult to integrate some sort of spiritual life with my everyday life. How much more difficult is it for my wife with two young and demanding children or for others who find themselves in the same situation? What has LAMB to offer them, the modern “Spiritually Poor?” Since our beginning as a community in 2001 we have had to come to terms with the fact that most of us are parents, often working parents with very young children, and not a community of the retired or quasi-religious. Family life puts natural brakes on

what we can all do. It is difficult to run retreats, go to meetings or be involved in parish masses. And so LAMB has had to recognise this aspect of its community. We have had "Family Days" where partners and children have been encouraged to come along, sometimes in Clevedon or sometimes at the home of one of our community. The emphasis is on being together, sharing food and company, having prayer and celebrating mass "at our level". Mass is very child centred and in Fr Cosmas we have been blessed with a priest that recognises this need. As a community we went on holiday/retreat in the summer of 2007 to [Parmenie](#) and lived out our sense of being an extended family where each and every one of us was valued, appreciated and recognised, not least my two little children and their tired and very stressed parents. The retreat to Parmenie, because of the sense of family and community that it gave, will always be one of the highlights of my life.

Despite the temptation to do so LAMB should not be seen simply as a community of brothers and "team" who work in the schools of Bristol. This part of LAMB is important, very important, both spiritually and of course financially, but it does not define LAMB. Rather LAMB is a family, a large and **growing** family, that enjoys being together, eating together, praying together. And in ministering to each other we go beyond our family and have touched the community of Bristol, and, in fact, beyond Bristol the communities of Trowbridge, and possibly in the future in Bath, Cheltenham and perhaps even Gloucester or Cardiff. I believe this work is the work of Christ among us and should be continued and facilitated to the best of our Lasallian ability.

What then of the future? Like every good householder we should strive to produce from our larder things that are both old and new. Compared to our vision statement of July 2003 things have indeed moved on and there is much that is new. Nevertheless there is still much that we need to bring with us and develop. I would like to see LAMB become more Bristol centred providing a more centrally resourced location for prayer but above all for travel to the various schools that LAMB is involved with. The possibility of moving from Clevedon to Brislington near St Brendan's school is very exciting and can only improve the work of LAMB. Secondly, LAMB is beginning to grow not simply in the wider community but also, it seems, in the "inner community." The possibility of having a "team" of six or

seven is very exciting and if this is to happen then careful thought and planning needs to go into looking at how that community can function. Thirdly, as the wider community is still growing and taking shape more thought needs to go into facilitating this and plans for the wider community need to be discussed. It has taken a long time for the relationship between the "core" or "inner" community and the wider community to become clearer and to settle and it would be good to look at these issues again, especially if the "core" community is to grow considerably. How can LAMB better serve the wider community so that it can reach out to the poor in spirit who so desperately need the sense of community, family and belonging that LAMB can and does provide? There are also issues of how connected LAMB is with the rest of the Lasallian network. With an aging community of brothers, how reliant can LAMB be on the active participation of the brothers? What steps do LAMB need to start taking to preserve its "Lasallian-ness" if there is no active participation of the brothers and what input should the rest of the Lasallian family have on these decisions?

These words were intended to give the Chapter and Assembly something to think about. I have never believed that the Lasallian family would simply turn up its geriatric toes and shuffle off this mortal coil! Instead our family is simply changing, evolving if you will, just as LAMB has slowly changed and is continuing to grow. If being a part of LAMB has taught me anything then it is that, as a family, we must face up to new challenges and prepare for the future, because there is most certainly a future. Not perhaps the one we expected, but, nevertheless, something wonderful and important, if we are prepared to allow it to happen. To me it seems that, despite the challenges, LAMB goes from strength to strength. LAMB must build on those strengths and encourage the brothers, through the Chapter, to build with them. As a model for youth ministry LAMB has much to offer both the diocese here in Clifton but also the wider Church and if the young and the poor really are the brothers' "thing" then this is something the brothers really should be promoting and supporting, as indeed they always have. Community, fellowship and mission have always been at the heart of LAMB. They are at the heart of the brother's mission. I trust that they will continue to be at the heart of what it means to be a Lasallian.