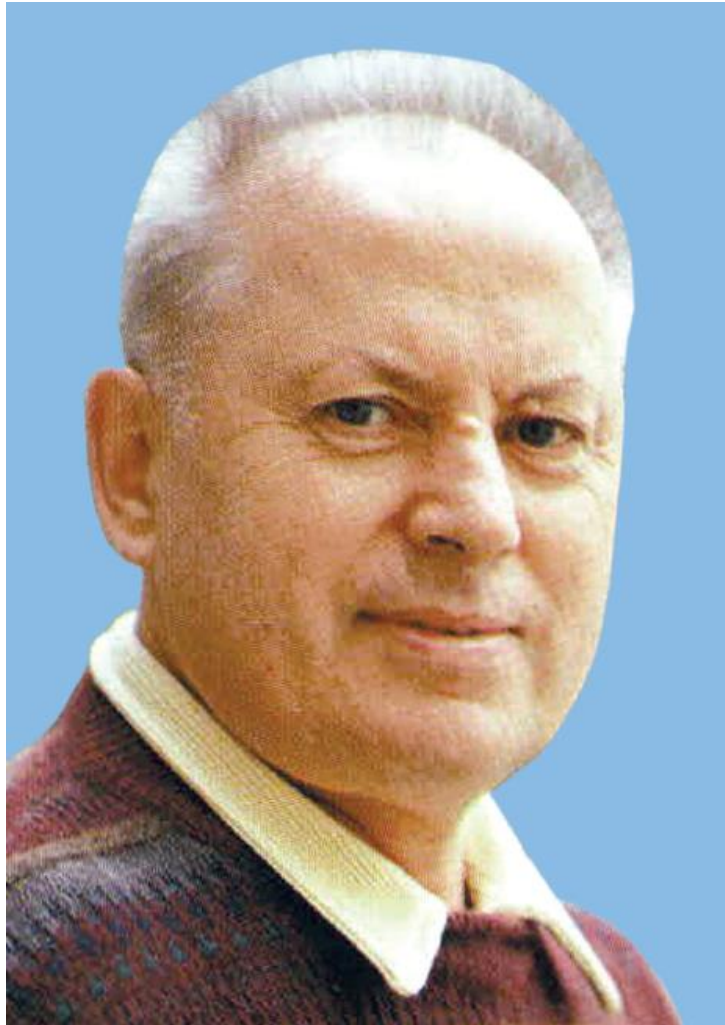


# Mortuary Letter of Br. Edward Kowala SDB



JMJ

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Hong Kong, Saturday, 18 February, 2017

Dear Confreres,

The peace of the Lord be with you always!

A greeting similar to this, but in Cantonese (Tin Jyu Bou Yao! May God bless you!) were the last words spoken to me by our beloved Czech Salesian Brother Edward Kowala who died, at the good old age of 90, in Canossa Hospital Hong Kong at 23:20 hours on Friday, 10 February, 2017.

## **1. Hospitalization, Funeral, and Burial**

As I am writing, I have just returned from the St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery in Happy Valley where Br. Edward Kowala's remains were buried before noon today, after the well-participated concelebrated Funeral Mass presided over by Fr. Provincial in our Salesian Parish, St. Anthony's Church. The last songs sung over his tomb were the School Anthem of St. Louis School where Br. Edward worked for 52 years and the Chinese "Giù dai colli" hymn to Don Bosco known by all in the CIN Province.

Yesterday evening, in St. Anthony's Church, Fr. Provincial also presided over the Vigil Requiem Mass concelebrated by many Salesian priests. This Vigil Requiem Mass saw a host of Past Pupils of Don Bosco from St. Louis School (members of the association known as SLOBA, St. Louis Old Boys Association) who had come to say good-bye to their beloved teacher and mentor. The Mass was attended also by members of the Czech Consulate in Hong Kong led by the Consul General.

As Br. Edward Kowala lay dying in his hospital bed, at his side were his Salesian Rector Fr. Matthew Chan Hung Kee and a dozen past pupils of Br. Edward's beloved St. Louis School. Br. Edward died amidst their prayers and songs. One of the past pupils present, the 1984 graduate Chan Tak Chun, tells us: "On the desk were the Rosary beads prepared by the Canossian Sister. After a while, Fr. Matthew Chan led us in the recitation of the Holy Rosary. We recited the Five Sorrowful Mysteries, a perfect match to our sorrowful heart. [...] At about 10:40 p.m. the nurse came in to take his blood pressure. It had fallen very low. Before leaving, the nurse asked us who would stay for the night. Since we did not respond, the nurse said: 'All of you wish to stay, right?' As the nurse left the room, we continued chatting. At about 11:00 p.m. Andrew Yuen suggested we sing 'Amazing Grace'. This is a song that I have sung a hundred times. But this was the first time for me to sing it at the bedside of a life-long servant of God, of an educator reaching the end of his life. What a deeply felt moment!... Then we sang the School Anthem [...] Br. Edward's heart stopped beating. [...] Thus, Br. Edward quietly left us, in his hands his much-used Rosary beads."

The School Anthem of St. Louis School sung by Fr. Matthew Chan and the St. Louis past pupils goes like this:

All hail! All Hail! Salesian School to thee  
By time endeared the more!  
Our hearts shall ever loyal be  
To thee and friends of yore.

And memories that shall never fade  
Wherever we may roam  
Shall rivet fast the friendships made  
In youth at boyhood's home.

Long live our Alma Mater!  
On thee may blessings rain!  
And may thy sons hereafter  
Bring honour to your name!

Saint Louis School  
Guide of our youth  
We're loyal to you  
In faith and truth.  
All Hail!

The music of this School Anthem is by Fr. Arnold Janssen, a German Salesian missionary to China. The words, except those of the last stanza, were those of the School Anthem of the Salesian School in Battersea, London, words written by the famous English Jesuit Fr. C. C. Martindale S.J. This School Anthem somehow reflects the two most important contacts Edward had with non-Czech realities in his early life. His first contacts with Germany date from his childhood. And the first contact Br. Edward had with Salesian England was precisely with the Salesians of Battersea.

Before being admitted to Canossa Hospital for his last sickness, on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2016, Br. Edward had celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday (falling on 13 October) in the Ibis Hotel with his confreres and a host of past pupils of St. Louis School, where he had lived uninterruptedly for the last 40 years of his life. Then, in early December 2016, he was admitted to the Little Sisters of the Poor St. Mary's Home for the Aged in Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen, Hong Kong. Br. Edward was attracted by the Sisters' exquisite loving kindness to accept their kind offer of bed and room in their Home. A few days before his death half-a-dozen Little Sisters surrounded his bed in hospital chatting with him and praying with him. Thank you from the heart, dear Little Sisters!

In Canossa Hospital, Br. Edward received more than once the Anointing of the Sick from his Rector Fr. Matthew Chan Hung Kee. The first time he did so was when he was hospitalized on 5 September last year. That night Fr. Rector and Fr. Provincial went to visit him together. The first thing Br. Edward said, seeing them, was: “You brought the Holy Oil, didn’t you?” When we said we did not, he said: “I thought you had come to give me the Anointing of the Sick”. Next day, Fr. Rector returned to the hospital and, with deep joy of Br. Edward, gave him the Anointing of the Sick. Every day, while in Canossa Hospital, he received Holy Communion from the hands of Daughter of Charity Sr. Mary Ho who took a sisterly, even motherly, care of Brother throughout his sickness. Thank you, dear Sr. Mary!

On 29 January, Fr. Edward was visited by his fellow-Czech Fr. Klement Václav who had just arrived from Rome to witness the birth of a new Delegation. Perhaps this was Br. Edward’s last meeting with a fellow-countryman. After the death of Br. Edward, Fr. Václav was also very helpful in facilitating our contacts with Br. Edward’s family. Thank you, dear Fr. Václav!

For the two nights of 3-4 February and 4-5 February, Fr. Provincial passed the night with Br. Edward in the hospital. In the morning of Saturday, 4 February, when asked about his relatives (9 siblings, but only three remaining), Br. Edward told Fr. Provincial that he had already informed his younger brother and younger sister Elizabeth of his hospitalization, thus coming to know that both of them were also in hospital. In the morning of Sunday, 5 February, Fr. Provincial celebrated the Sunday Mass by the side of Br. Edward who responded to all the prayers as he had done so faithfully for so many years in the St. Louis chapel during the daily Community Mass.

Having to leave for Taiwan on Tuesday, 7 February, Fr. Provincial visited Br. Edward for the last time on the night of Monday, 6 February, in the company of Salesian missionary Fr. Alain Pinet. We recited together a Hail Mary, we blessed him and he blessed us. As I just said, the last words we heard from Br. Edward, as we were leaving, were (spoken in Cantonese): “Tin Jyu Bou Yao!” (“May God bless you!”)

We may presume that Br. Edward remained conscious up to the end. We are grateful to the St. Louis Past Pupils who kept visiting him and arranging things for him. For example, it was they who found the way to make Br.

Edward communicate directly by phone with his younger brother and younger sister. This communication was kept up till the last days. Thank you, dear St. Louis past pupils! Special thanks go to Andrew Yuen, who has cared for Br. Edward as if he were his father. Most cordial thanks also to all other past pupils who kept visiting Br. Edward! Just to mention a few of them: Rocky, Ken, Kayson, Peter, Winson, Simon, Steven, and so on. I can mention so many names because Br. Edward kept careful note of them. After his surgical operation in September last year, Br. Edward had to undergo painful daily radiotherapy. The St. Louis past pupils took turns to drive him to Adventist Hospital every day for the radiotherapy. Br. Edward kept record of each day's driver, thus: 1. Paul Chan, 2. Andrew Yuen, 3. David & Tho. Leong, 4. Victor Ng, 5. Andrew Yuen, 6. Mr. Si (electrician), 7. Mar Wing Ling (music composer), 8. Andrew Yuen, 9. David & Tho. Leong, 10. Daniel Yuen & Joseph Ho Ting Wai, 11. Mr. Si, 12. Matthew Wing Ling (Mar), 13. Albert (Graduate 84), 14. David Leong, 15. Andrew Yuen... Let Andrew Yuen share with us the experience: "The car drive took just 20 minutes. On the way, Br. Edward would share with us his memories of life in Czechoslovakia. Even more frequently, he would discuss with us questions of faith. These discussions made us feel as if we were back in the classroom attending his Religious Knowledge classes. The only difference was that this time we need not worry about examinations..."

## **2. The Dramatic, Even Tragic, Early Life of Br. Edward Kowala**

The story of his early life, told by Edward himself, is as moving as it is disconcerting. Let us let Br. Edward Kowala speak for himself, interspersing his oral witness, given to Fr. Provincial during one of the Annual Canonical Visitations, with written documents relating to what he says.

"I, Edward Kowala (originally spelled Eduard Kovalá), was born on 13 October 1926 in Vendryne, Trinec, Frydek, Silesia region of the Czech Republic, the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 9 children of John Kovalá and Johanna Kotska. Six-year old, my family was reduced to extreme poverty by the Great Depression and by being cheated by unscrupulous speculators. Tricked into a fraudulent purchase of a new house, the whole family was thrown onto the street.

No regular schooling was possible. My mother first sent me to a Polish school for Primary One. Primary Two I studied in a Czech school. As the family kept moving, Primary 3 was again in a Polish school. There I failed

in my Maths. There was no order in class, we all were just waiting for the recess-bell to ring and rush out of the classroom. Later a better school was found. In it, once I got the second highest mark. Why not say the first highest? 'I do not say the first, because Superiors would not believe me.' Twelve-year old, in 1938, my motherland Silesia was carved up by Germany, Poland, and Hungary. So my further schooling, disturbed by rumours of war, was made in a German school. A general mobilization to build anti-aircraft bunkers put an end to even such an erratic schooling.

Fourteen-year old, in 1940, having no way to continue my schooling, began to work in Germany. My defective Mathematics prevented me from getting a good work in the railways. I worked at first as a waiter in a restaurant, happy because free. But after 10 months, I renounced this job, because the environment was corrupt with gambling etc. I worked for some time on the Polish boarder, but was badly hurt while working. In Dresden I was employed as a mechanic dedicated to filing. The money I got was enough only to buy some turnips with which to relieve my hunger. After some time, penniless, I returned home.

After 3 months, I was employed at Ludwigshafen as a "mechanical assistant" ("assistant" because not of pure German blood, but only a half-German...) Hurt again on the work, I lived in a lager, my health undermined by the air pollution caused by the pervading ammonia powder. A child-molester offered me a watch to entice me. As I stayed not far from the infamous Auschwitz Labour Death-Camp, I met some English and Canadian prisoners of war. From them I learnt my first English sentence: "Will you give me a cigarette, please?" There I was given by someone a new pair of shoes.

My next experience was forced Arbeitsdienst ("work-service"), done not with guns, but with shovels. We had to dig deep holes in the ground. The arrangements were slavish. We workers were not allowed to make water unless the work was finished. After a few months of such work, I was forcedly enlisted in the German army that was occupying Poland. While in training, an officer invited me to be his "assistant". Harrowing experiences were in store for me. For example, as we were working on a hill, planes flew very close overhead. One of the planes crashed into a group of soldiers. The pilot of the plane that had crashed was an Italian. His body was cut into half by the crash, and yet the Italian pilot, before expiring, could still speak a few words to those who rushed to his assistance.

After sometime we were deployed to West Germany, because our superiors were afraid that we would defect to the Russians who were advancing. We received training against gas warfare, against tanks on sand fields, hiding in holes dug by ourselves. The next deployment was as a messenger, having to move under American bombing. We young soldiers were very angry with the American airforce that bombed us with napalm bombs. One night I was woken up and commanded to transmit a message that I myself could not understand. Even though I transmitted the message successfully, the next day I was sent to the front line to fight. I was lucky not to get killed and not to kill anybody. We had the very dangerous task of digging trenches on the front line. Each day there was only one ration of food in the evening. Once, crawling out of my hole to take some peas from the fields, I was targeted by an American fighter plane. My helmet was destroyed, but I escaped unharmed.

I kept hiding in my hole with an old Polish soldier unarmed like me and a young German soldier armed with ammunition. Then one morning a gun appeared at the mouth of our hole. The gun was in the hands of an American soldier. Ordered out of our hole, we crawled out. We three were arrested, with the addition of a slap on the face for the young German soldier. I myself told the American soldier: "I want to join the Czech army." As prisoners of war, we were transported to Edinburgh, Scotland, Great Britain. For a few months we were held in a military prison. Finally, I was released wearing a British army uniform with Czech insignia. Next I was sent to France to work in a small workshop to repair tanks and armoured cars. Then, for about half a year, I kept moving between Dunkirk and Lille, living in a private house, being used as a dispatch-man, helping the officers, driving their cars.

At the end of the war, I went back home, serving 2 years in the Czech army in Ostrovačice, Brno, Olomouc. After half a year, we were sent to the Hungarian border to transport back home from Hungary, using American trucks, Czechs and Slovaks displaced by the war. Released from service in the army, I returned home. On the way I was horrified by the destruction done by the war in the Black Forest. For some time I worked as a driver with my brother. It was then that I began to think of entering a Religious Order."

### 3. Br. Edward Kowala's Religious and Salesian Vocation

“When in 1948 the Communists arrived and killed our Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk [son of the first Czech President Thomas Masaryk], I decided to escape. After passing a night in a hotel near the border, the next day I walked through the border into West Germany. For 3 months I was in a German refugee camp. Then I was asked: “Where would you like to go?” I answered: “England”. So I was sent to a refugee camp in England, more precisely in Bicester, near Oxford. While there, in a newspaper [the ‘Universe’], I read an advertisement placed by the Augustinian [Benedictine] monks who needed a factotum house worker. I applied and was accepted, working mainly as a waiter, and so being able to devote the rest of the time to self-study. I worked there for 4 years. I confessed regularly to the local Parish Priest. When I expressed my desire to join the Augustinians, my confessor (who was an ex-Salesian) said: “Why not join the Salesians?”

That is how I went to see the Salesian Provincial Fr. Thomas Hall in Battersea, London.” Related to this, we have two precious documents in our Provincial Archives. The first is the letter Edward wrote to the Salesian Provincial. Here it is, dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1953, written from The Abbey School, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon:

“Rev. and dear Father,

For a considerable time have I been desiring to devote my life to God, and would have done so already had I known English before.

I am twenty-seven years old, Czech nationality, and I came to England in 1948. In September 1949 I came to work in the above mentioned school, under St. Benedict Fathers, where I have been ever since.

Because of German occupation I had to leave school at fourteen and went to work in Germany where I learned trade as a mechanic. Later I became soldier and had been in the army three years.

During the time I have been working here, I learned some English and have read several books about the Saints. I have been recommended to apply to you by my confessor, Father Stephen Doupe.

Would it be possible for you to accept me into your order. I should like if possible study for the priesthood.

I should be very grateful if I could come sometimes to see you, and I would then tell you all details about myself.

Yours respectfully,  
Edward Kowala [*sic*”



The second precious document is a letter of information requested by Fr. Thomas Hall, through Edward Kowala himself, from the Benedictines [not Augustinians] who had employed him in The Abbey School, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon.

Here is the reply of Rev. Norbert F. Lapworth, OSB, dated 17<sup>th</sup> May 1955, written from St. Anne's Presbytery, Devonshire Gardens, Cliftonville, Kent:

“Reverend and dear Father,

I understand from Edward Kowala that you would like me to send you a reference concerning him and the four years he worked for us at Hemingford Grey, prior to his joining your Congregation. I do so with pleasure.

Edward Kowala came to me on his own initiative from a displaced persons' Camp near Oxford, in response to an advertisement in the 'Universe'. As procurator of our boarding school at Hemingford Grey, Hunt., I engaged him as handyman and he remained with us for four years. During that time I had unusual opportunity of getting to know him intimately, and I cannot speak too highly of his sustained industry and excellent moral character. He usually served my Mass daily and received Holy Communion, and he was very regular in his visits to the Blessed Sacrament. When free to do so he also usually attended Mass and evening Service at the nearest parish Church St. Ives, about 2 miles away from the School. I believe that Fr. [Stephen] Doupe, who is still P.P. at St. Ives (Hunt.) was his ordinary confessor, and I feel sure that he too could tell you what an exemplary Catholic young man Edward was in every respect.

He was always well liked by his fellow servants, though he kept himself somewhat aloof from them when off duty.

After he had been with us for a couple of years we allowed him to take books from our own library, and he invariably chose Lives of the Saints or books of a spiritual character. I am quite sure that he gave a good deal of his free time to spiritual reading during the last two years with us, and I should add that this was quite spontaneous on his part.

I was not at all surprised when he finally spoke to me of his desire for a life in religion, and I could only point out to him that the chief problem would be one of education.

So I was pleased indeed when I heard that the Sons of St. John Bosco were willing to give him a trial, and I rejoice indeed to know that he has persevered so far, and I hope he will continue to do so.

Whilst with us he consistently gave signs of a true vocation, and I can conscientiously recommend your giving him a further trial in your novitiate.

With best wishes,  
Yours sincerely in D.no,  
Norbert Fr. Lapworth, OSB.”

Let us let Br. Edward continue to talk to us about himself: “[The Salesian Provincial at Battersea Fr. Thomas Hall] told me: “Go to Beckford (Gloucestershire) and wait for a letter from me”. The letter never arrived. Was it perhaps withheld by the Augustinians [i.e. Benedictines, to whose address it may have been sent]? At that time, Fr. Martin McPake, Fr. Anthony Bogadek, Fr. Joseph Lee Hei Lung, and others were students of theology in Melchet Court. In fact, when the Rector Major Fr. Renato Ziggotti came visiting, he decided to transfer the students of theology from Beckford to Melchet Court. As they moved, I followed them. In Melchet Court the confreres were upset because the cook, a rough fellow, gave the meat to the dogs, with me helping out in the kitchen. In Melchet Court I also waited upon old Fr. Enea Tozzi, who had known Don Bosco as a boy in Valdocco. Fr. Candido Coppo taught me Italian once or twice a week. Then I asked to enter the Novitiate.”

In the Provincial Archives we have Edward Kowala’s letter of application for entrance into the novitiate as a cleric, dated June 5<sup>th</sup> 1955. It runs like this:

“Very Rev. and dear Fr. Rector,

As it is my sincere desire to become a member of the Salesian Congregation I wish now freely to be permitted to enter the novitiate.

I have spent two years as an aspirant, one at Beckford and one at Melchet Court and during that time I have endeavoured to cooperate with my Superiors’ efforts to prepare me.

Thank you, dear Father,

Yours respectfully,  
Edward Kovalá”

His application was accepted on June 18<sup>th</sup> 1955 with the following comments on the part of his Rector and of the House Council. Rector’s comments: “He has studied well and has adapted himself fully to the life of the House. He is refugee Czech and papers cannot be presented, at least for the present; reference to his home may probably result in danger and perhaps harm to relatives. He is well recommended by all who know him during his

stay in this country; ten years. He is a very good subject and should be a good Salesian.” House Council’s comments: “A natural student; gifted and painstaking. Obedient and careful about his work; rather retiring but very sincere. Pious, punctual and practical.”

At the end of the novitiate, Edward Kowala made his first profession as a Salesian cleric. His letter of application, dated 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1956, reads as follows:

“Very Rev. and Dear Father Rector,

The year of my second probation, which I have had the honour to spend under your wise and fatherly direction, is drawing to a close. During this period of my Novitiate, I have endeavoured with God’s assistance and our Lady’s blessing to learn and practise the Salesian mode of life and to become a worthy son of St. John Bosco.

With the permission of Very Rev. Fath. Simonetti and of Very Rev. Fath. Armspot, I beg you kindly to allow me to make my first profession. Although it is my firm desire to pass all the rest of my life in this Society, yet, in conformity with what our Constitutions prescribe, I now apply to make the triennial vows only.

Trusting that you will kindly decide in my favour and thanking you heartily for all the troubles and cares you have endured for me during the past year,

I remain,

Yours Respectfully,

Bro. Edward Kovala”

His application was accepted with the following comment: “Good late vocation, will need to watch his spirit of independence.” Now let Edward continue his self-witness: “I made my novitiate in Burwash, the philosophy studies in Beckford, but wasting time in the kitchen. I was nervous about this, because I had not received the same formal education as the others. [The Rector was a “pancake” speaker]. The games after lunch left me all in a sweat. As no showers were taken and no drying up made, so I got terribly sick. I was sent to teach in Shrigley [the Salesian Missionary Aspirantate]. The [new] Rector was Fr. George Williams who came into my classroom for an inspection. He said: “You will never be a good English teacher.” I asked to go to the missions. I was offered the choice of Germany, Malta, Hong Kong. I chose Hong Kong.

I arrived in Cheung Chau in November 1958 wearing a clerical cassock. There all philosophy classes were in Latin. The oral examination ‘De Universa [Philosophia]’ in 1960 was held in Latin, too. In the same year I sat for the GCE in Ordinary Level Religious Knowledge, Biology, Logic, English Language, German Language, and Advanced Level Latin. In Latin I got only an Ordinary Level pass. This was unexpected, but then I realized that I had answered the wrong questions.”

The Diploma in Philosophy and Education of the Academy of Philosophy for the Far East Salesians of St. John Bosco is dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1960. The GCE is dated June 1960. In Cheung Chau Br. Edward Kowala renewed his vows as a Salesian cleric. Here is his letter of application, dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 1959:

“Rev. and Dear Father Rector,

The period of my first profession of three years is drawing to a close. I beg you kindly, therefore, to consider my application for the renewal of my Temporary Vows for the period of another three years.

I have made my first profession in Burwash, England on Sept. the 8<sup>th</sup> 1956, into the hands of the Very Rev. Father W. Hall S.D.B. who was the Provincial of the English province during that time.

Since the time I have joined the Salesian Congregation, I have been trying to understand the Spirit of St. John Bosco and keep the rules accordingly.

Although I did not find obedience always a very easy matter, I have, nevertheless, been striving to subdue my self-will. With regard to poverty and chastity, I think as far as I could understand it, I did not find any great difficulty. For the future I will endeavour, with God’s grace and our Lady’s protection, to walk more closely in the footsteps of our Blessed Lord and according to the rules of our founder St. John Bosco.

Thank you Father for all your generosity and kindness towards me. Begging you kindly for your fatherly Blessing and direction,

I remain,

Yours affectionately in Jesus and Mary

Bro. Edward Kowala S.D.B.

Br. Edward continues his oral witness: “In those years I found myself to be good at playing chess and I like Mathematics. I had many chess-matches with Fr. Joseph Lee Hei Lung who protested my victories. My chronic rheumatism was cured in Cheung Chau, but as a balance to that I got prickly

heat (in those years we were not allowed to go swimming and had to wear long sleeves all the time). Luckily, [during my practical training in Aberdeen Technical School], Fr. Denis Martin asked me to assist the boys who were passing some days in Chung Hom Kok. By going swimming with them I was cured. During my 1<sup>st</sup> year of practical training, the Rector was Fr. Rudolf Haselsteiner. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, the Rector was Fr. Denis Martin. This new Rector was not happy with me. He sent me to Cheung Chau to Fr. Luigi Massimino, [Rector of the Studentate of Philosophy], with this message: “Brother Kowala wants to see you.” In ATS, I had asked to teach Algebra. Instead, I was assigned to teaching English. Once, when a grand British lady had come to visit and all confreres had lined up at the gate to welcome her, I, who had gone up to patrol the dormitories, was called down by a shouting Rector. No wonder at the renewal of vows I was told: “Either you join another Congregation, or you become a Lay Brother.”

The documents in the Provincial Archives bear witness to this crucial development in the Salesian life of Br. Edward. In 1962, he applied twice for perpetual profession. His first letter of application is dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 1962:

“Rev. and Dear Father Rector,

The period of my second triennial vows will expire on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September of this year, for this reason I beg you kindly to consider my application for the taking of my perpetual vows.

I am still of the same disposition as I was when I first took my triennial vows. During the past six years, in which I have had ample time to study my vocation, I have kept my resolution despite the fact that the path I have had to tread was not always strewn with roses. Whether I am a suitable candidate for the Salesian Congregation, I don't know. As far as I can remember I have neither felt nor nourished any other feeling for a change of vocation, though my striving after spiritual and secular improvements which were helping me to become a better Salesian, made me at times stray, or, perhaps, appear to stray from the Salesian path. Whatever the judgments of my superiors, in the past, might have been concerning my conduct, I am not quite certain, however I have been trying to keep the rules and to become a better son of Don Bosco.

My future, dear fathr, lies in your hands and in the hands of the others of my superiors. May Almighty God guide and bless you that your decision concerning me may be His Holy Will.

I remain, in Jesus and Mary, Yours Respectfully,  
Br. Edward Kowala”

Br. Edward's application for perpetual profession was accepted, but not as candidate to the Salesian Priesthood, but as candidate to the permanent Salesian Brotherhood. There is in the Archives a typewritten excerpt from a letter written from England to Hong Kong, but with the date, the addressee's name, and the writer's signature cut out. The last line of the excerpt shows that this letter was written in 1958-1959, that is, after the transfer of Br. Edward from the English Province to the Sino-Vietnamese Province (as the CIN Province was then called). The content of the excerpt shows that the letter was probably written by the Salesian Provincial in England (Fr. Thomas Hall) to the new Salesian Provincial in Hong Kong (Fr. Bernard Tohill). This excerpt explains, perhaps, what happened to the vocational discernment of Br. Edward. It runs like this:

“I do not know whether you have been informed of the exact position of Bro. Edward Kovala, he is at the moment a cleric, but he may have difficulty with his studies in philosophy, not because of lack of intelligence but because he gets exhausted and his health declines..... he has written a letter in which he says that should he have to give up studies for any reason, then he wants to remain in Hong Kong as a lay-brother. He is a very capable and good man..... as a lay-brother he could give you very valuable service..... and I am hoping that he will come to this conclusion himself. It would therefore be very unwise for the professors to be too indulgent in letting him through philosophy too easily. This is important. Bro. Edward would accept the guidance of his superiors in this matter, but the better way is for him to be completely persuaded that he is not made for the studies demanded for the priesthood. He will then have no regrets.

Have us all in your good prayers and may God give you all the blessings and graces necessary for the wonderful work you are doing for Him and for the Congregation. My very kindest regards to Father Alvin Fedrigotti when he comes to you.”

Making his perpetual profession as a Brother Salesian, Br. Edward had to write a second letter of application. This he wrote on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1962, one day before his perpetual profession on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1962. The letter this time is addressed not to the Rector, but to the Provincial. This letter is a splendid example of unconditional surrender to God's will. It goes like this:

“Rev. and Dear Father Provincial,

As it is not the will of my superiors that I should follow in the state of a cleric, I have decided to embrace the state of a lay brother, believing that such is the will of God.

It has been my ambition to study for the priesthood because I thought that by studying for the priesthood and later on by celebrating Mass, reciting the Divine Office, hearing confessions, and having to prepare sermons would keep me always united to God. However, I hope that with the grace of God I shall be able to serve Him and to sanctify my life in the Salesian Society also as a lay brother.

With this intention I renew my application begging you kindly to allow me to take my perpetual vows as a lay brother.

Yours affectionately, in Jesus and Mary,  
Bro. E. Kowala”

The last part of Br. Edward’s oral witness begins like this: “So in 1962 I was sent to St. Louis where I was asked to teach English in Form 3 and History in Form 4.”

#### **4. Br. Edward Kowala’s Educative-Pastoral Service in St. Louis School**

For the next 55 years, Br. Edward Kowala was an invaluable educative-pastoral presence in St. Louis School, first as a full-time teacher and then as a retired teacher still fully committed to the educative-pastoral formation of the young. There were only two short interruptions. Both interruptions, however, were motivated by the desire for a more effective educative-pastoral work. The first interruption was in 1971-1972, when Br. Edward took up a full-time two-year study of Chinese gaining a double Certificate in Chinese Language from the University of Hong Kong (Cantonese 1971, Mandarin 1972). The second interruption was in 1974-1977, when Br. Edward, to upgrade his teaching of Religious Knowledge in the school, took up a full course of theological studies in Mayooth, Ireland, obtaining a “Baccalaureum in Sacra Theologia” from the “Athenaeum S. Patritii apud Manutiam”, as his Bachelor in Divinity Degree reads in Latin. The Salesian Community in which he was residing in Dublin give this report about him: “Brother Edward makes a very valuable contribution to the life of the Studentate. He is observant as a religious, regular in his attendance at the Community Practices of Piety. He is generous with his time and talents for the Community. He is a diligent and dedicated student.” At that time, Br. Edward was already 50 years old...

Br. Edward's dramatic early life had equipped him for an outstanding work of education and pastoral care of the young. The languages he had studied and could manage were Czech, German, English, Italian, Latin, Cantonese, and Mandarin. The courses he taught in ATS and in SLS were English Language, History, Algebra, Biology, and Biblical Knowledge. His hobby was coaching the St. Louis boys in their soccer teams. But what he kept up to the very end of his life, was the caring contact with old and new boys he met in the school and in the Sunday Oratory. The present writer can bear witness that only one year before his death he accepted to give private English tuitions to a Sunday Oratory boy who had asked him for this service.

But let us give now the word to his past pupils. Paul Li (a 1990 graduate) writes:

“It's been almost 30 years since I first met Brother Edward Kowala, who was my Religious Studies instructor. I benefited immensely from his exemplary instruction of the Holy Writ in English [...]

Beyond classroom, I bumped into Uncle Teddy on the football pitch on Saturday afternoon. In fact, it's a weekly ritual between his former students and him. That dawns on me the crux of education. Like Don Bosco, Brother Edward spent time to walk along with his students even they no longer went to school on 179 Third Street. How far can we go on education? Is it a mere job, or holistic pastoral care?

Like most Aloysians, I stayed in touch with Brother Edward after graduation. Though this man was in his 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> decade, he had an incredibly sharp and rigorous mind, reflected on his incessant wise counsel on me, ranging from career to personal growth. For that I'm grateful. One thing in particular left me a profound impression: he cares.

I'm convinced that he's lived life to the hilt and harked back to what the late Václav Havel, another favorite son of Czechoslovakia, said: ‘The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and human responsibility’.”

Matthew Tam (formerly Callisthus), 1984 graduate, writes:

“Gentleman Brother Edward is a humble and meek servant of the Lord. His smile and kindness are always in my mind. He is a faithful and admirable teacher in my journey of growth at my St. Louis School.”

John Po, the present President of SLOBA, represents all the pupils of Br. Edward when he draws the following portrait of Br. Edward:



“Brother Edward has always been a real brother of us, across the decades of our St. Louis encounters. We could find him teaching in classes, joining school boys in the sports teams, cheering up football champion teams, showing skills in competitive games, talking to pupils in soft and comfortable tone... with his special European English accent we always remember. He is humorous, and very humble. Seldom takes a centre stage without a reason. Always a big supporter when needed.

The very last Birthday Party for Br. Edward was organized by the Friends of St. Louis when a few hundred old boys celebrated his Birthday on October 8, 2016. The sharing of the joy will be remembered by everyone.

And Edward Kowala will always be remembered as our brother.”

Truly, Br. Edward Kowala lived to the full the vocation of the Religious Brother. The most recent document of the Holy See regarding this vocation, entitled “Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church” (04-10-2015), quotes St. John Paul II saying: “Religious Brothers are a permanent reminder of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ [...]. These Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with Him, ‘the firstborn among many brothers’ (Rom 8:29); brothers to one another in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone in their witness to Christ’s love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church.” Is not this a picture of dear Br. Edward Kowala?

Now let us give the last word to Br. Edward himself, thus concluding his oral witness with some of the concerns that he nourished to the end, concerns deeply rooted in his early life:

“My travel documents have been defective until 1970. Then I have obtained a ‘British Overseas Passport’ valid until 2021. In 1990 I was given a Czech Passport which, however, now needs renewing.

My long life has been punctuated by family bereavements: besides the early death of two siblings, the death of my elder brother in 1938, of a younger sister in 1964, of my father in 1966 (he was born in 1902), of my mother in 1970 (she was born in 1900), of another brother in 2010, and of my eldest sister in 2015. Now only three of us are left: myself, a younger brother (born in 1944) and a younger sister (born in 1945).

My back-bone pain has been troubling me since I was studying theology in Ireland. This did not impede me from passing the exams! The cause of my poor health may have been the trauma of the family being thrown on the street in 1932 bankruptcy, or the exposure to the elements

during the war years, or the aftermath of the sweating games in Beckford, or the operation to the heart I underwent 12 years ago.

Now I am teaching a little Basic Cantonese to Fr. Bala Kishore Miriyala as I did before with Fr. Dolphie Casimir Sequeira.”

Brother to the young and brother to his Salesian brothers, to the end! Thank you, dear Br. Andrew! May God grant you eternal rest in the Salesian Garden! For your Memorial Card printed in Chinese and English, Rector Fr. Matthew Chan Hung Kee chose this scriptural text that, on the one hand, expresses the essence of your 50 years of educative pastoral service to the young of Hong Kong, your pastoral charity, your oratorian heart, and, on the other hand, reveals the source of all this, namely, the Sacred Heart of the Good Shepherd Jesus whom you adored and loved all your life: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather together the lambs with his arm, and shall take them up in his bosom, and he himself shall carry them that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11)

Dear all, let me conclude recommending to your prayer dear Br. Edward Kowala and our mission in this great motherland. In particular, please, pray for more vocations to the Salesian Brotherhood. Thank you! God bless!

In Jesus Mary Joseph DonBosco EdwardKowala, I am,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti SDB  
CIN Provincial

APPENDIX I

### **Biographical Data of Br. Edward Kowala SDB**

13-10-1926 Birth in Vendryne, Frydek, Czech Republic

31-10-1926 Baptism in Vendryne Parish Church

1940 Work as a mechanic in Germany

1941-1944 Forced Military Service in the German Army

02-08-1942 Confirmation at the hands of a German Bishop

1944-1945 Prisoner of War in Edinburgh, England, and in France

1945-1948 Work in Czech Republic

1948 Escape from Communist Czechoslovakia, Asylum in England

1949-1953 House Services for the Benedictines in The Abbey School, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, England

1953-1955 Aspirantate in Beckford and Melchet Court, England

1955-1956 Novitiate in Burwash with Legendary Fr. James Simonetti as Novice Master

08-09-1956 First Profession in Burwash, England

1956-1958 Study of Philosophy in Beckford, England

29-11-1958 Missionary Arrival in Hong Kong

1958-1960 Study of Philosophy in Cheung Chau, Hong Kong

June 1960 GCE (English, German, Latin, Logic)

1960-1962 Practical Training in Aberdeen Technical School

16-08-1962 Perpetual Profession in Hong Kong

1962-1974 Educative Pastoral Work in St. Louis School

1969-1971 Study of Cantonese and Mandarin in Hong Kong University

1974-1977 Study of Theology in Maynooth, Ireland (Bachelor in Divinity)

1977-2017 Educative-Pastoral Work in St. Louis School concluded with the two-month retirement in Little Sisters of the Poor St. Mary's Home for the Aged, Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen

10-02-2017 Death in Canossa Hospital, Hong Kong

## APPENDIX II

### Obituary Notice of Br. Edward Kowala

#### **Rev. Br. Edward KOWALA SDB**

#### **R.I.P.**

Rev. Br. Edward KOWALA SDB, a Salesian of Don Bosco for 60 years, died on Friday 10 February 2017 in Hong Kong's Canossa Hospital, aged 90. Born in what is now the Czech Republic, he did military service during WW II, ending up a prisoner of war in England. There he came to know the Salesian Society which he joined in 1956. In 1958 he volunteered to come to Hong Kong as a missionary. Br. Edward's educative pastoral service, after two years in Aberdeen Technical School (1960-1962), was offered mainly in St. Louis School, where he served for more than 50 years (1962-1974.1977-2017). The only interruption was a 3-year study period (1974-1977) for a Divinity Bachelor Degree in Maynooth, Ireland. This he undertook in view of his teaching of Biblical Knowledge in St. Louis School.

The Salesians of Don Bosco are grateful to the Don Bosco Past Pupils of St. Louis School, the Little Sisters of the Poor in Aberdeen, and the staff of Canossa Hospital, who all took loving care of Br. Edward in the last months of his long life. The Salesians and his past pupils remember Br. Edward as a beloved brother and loving father, a dedicated teacher, a jolly companion in soccer matches, a zealous educator and pastor of youth, a gentleman, and a friend.

There will be a Requiem Mass on Friday 17 February at 08:00 p.m. in St. Anthony's Church, 69A, Pokfulam Road, West Point, Hong Kong. The Funeral Mass will be held on Saturday 18 February at 10:00 a.m. in the same Church. Burial will follow in St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery in Happy Valley.

(Published in the Hong Kong English-language Daily *South China Morning Post* of Thursday, February 16, 2017; a similar obituary notice appeared in the Hong Kong Chinese-language Daily *Ming Pao* of the same day and in the Hong Kong Diocese Catholic Weekly English-language *Sunday Examiner* and Chinese Language *Kung Kao Po* of February 15, 2017)