



Our Lasallian Heritage

The Catholic Identity of Lasallian Schools

A school in the Lasallian tradition cannot be separated from a school in the Catholic tradition. The kind of educational community that characterizes a Lasallian school emerges *solely* with reference to the kind of faith community that characterizes the Body of Christ. The Lasallian heritage would be without substance outside the context of a vibrant Catholic heritage.

De La Salle became involved in establishing the "Christian Schools" ("Catholic Schools" in 17th century French terminology) and the "Brothers of the Christian Schools" because he became acutely aware of two realities: 1) God wanted everyone to be saved, and 2) children of the artisans and the poor were far from salvation and badly brought up. Now if you just stop and think about those two convictions for a minute, you may experience similar stirrings as those that led De La Salle to make one small commitment after another until he found himself involved in organizing teachers and schools for the young.

The primary task of these Christian Schools was to bring the young to understand and enter into the "principal Christian mysteries" – the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, and so on. In 17th century French spirituality, the Christian makes explicit acts of faith in such mysteries and incarnates the very being of Jesus by adopting actions and interior attitudes similar to those Christ first brought to reality by His every deed, His every feeling, His every outlook — in terms of their depth and effect, His every "mystery." By entering into Christ's dispositions, one enters into Christ's mystical reality of salvation and thereby comes to act, and to be, more and more like Him.

Reflection Questions

- 1) What do I do on a regular basis to personally learn more about my own faith tradition, and what do I do to engage more deeply in that tradition?
- 2) In my Lasallian institution, is there sufficient evidence to support its identity as a clear Catholic institution? What is that evidence?



De La Salle consistently turned others to Jesus Christ and to the Church, finding true life there.

The other task of the Christian Schools was to incarnate the real and practical concern of the Church for the poor and the marginalized, a Church that in the society of the time was the *de facto* social support system. The schools taught reading (using social politeness texts), writing (focusing on common contracts), and simple arithmetic (using French monetary units), along with direct and indirect religious instruction. Concern for "salvation" on the practical level went hand-in-hand with "salvation" on the spiritual level.

In recent years, Lasallian schools have seen a significant increase in their non-Catholic student population, reflecting a growing trend among all Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. Now, more than ever, the mission of the "Christian School" is critical. Our challenge will be to take to heart James Joyce's description of the Catholic Church—"Here comes everybody!"— and De La Salle's description of the Christian School: "Teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our faith and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education."



“The Brothers contribute in ensuring that Lasallian institutions make the means of salvation accessible to everyone. They do so by means of a quality education and, as far as possible, by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, while bearing in mind the cultural context. School curricula are marked by their concern for the promotion of justice and peace, and the integrity of creation.”

– *Rule*, Article 17.1

"In their contact with people with different religious traditions, or in highly pluralistic or secularized countries, the Brothers seek inventive ways to announce the Gospel; the witness of a Christian presence and fraternal relations, gratuitous service, the experience of prayer in common, interreligious dialogue, and sharing with one another the story of Jesus Christ. In their turn, the Brothers allow themselves to be questioned by these people.

When they work with Partners with different beliefs and religious traditions, the Brothers seek to establish common ground for cooperation on the basis of the promotion of human dignity, solidarity among all human beings, and the integral development of the individual, in line with the Lasallian tradition."

– *Rule*, Article 17.2

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De La Salle

In His providential care, God ... sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal to help children attain the knowledge of God and His mysteries. According to the grace of Jesus Christ given to them by God, they are like good master-builders who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian virtue in the hearts of these children, many of whom would otherwise be abandoned.

(*Meditation 193.2*)

Have you been careful, before undertaking such a holy ministry, to clothe yourselves with him so as to communicate this grace to them? For, says Saint Paul, no one knows who God is save the Spirit of God, and it is this Spirit of God who penetrates everything, even the deepest and most hidden mysteries in God. Pray, therefore, the Spirit of God to make known to you the gifts that God has given you, as Saint Paul says, so that you may announce them to those whom you are commissioned to instruct, not with the words of human wisdom, but with those that the Spirit of God inspires in his ministers.

(*Meditation 189.1*)



"In full respect for their freedom, we recognize the vast differences to be found among the young in their attitude toward religion and in their understanding of Christ. Yet we realize, too, how important it is to satisfy those who are starving for a more profound explanation of their faith and to give honest answers to the many questions they are asking about the meaning of their lives"

– Declaration, 39.4

“We can identify at least six ways in which we can engage our young people in dialogue — whether they are Christians, or non-Christians, believers or non-believers. 1) when we promote fraternal relations among our young people, regardless of their religious beliefs; 2) when we commit ourselves to the intellectual, moral, psychological, and physical development of those God confides to our care; 3) when we strive to sensitize our students and pupils to questions of social justice and encourage them to commit themselves to the construction of a more just society; 4) when we make possible and promote various forms and celebrations of religious expression and of prayer among our young people; 5) when we communicate with youth through the signs and symbols that identify the school as Catholic and when we share our faith with young people in informal conversation; 6) when we organize lectures, seminars, discussion groups on topic relating to our faith as Christians.” [Text Condensed]

– Br. John Johnston, FSC