



Our Lasallian Heritage

Trusting Providence in Discerning God's Will

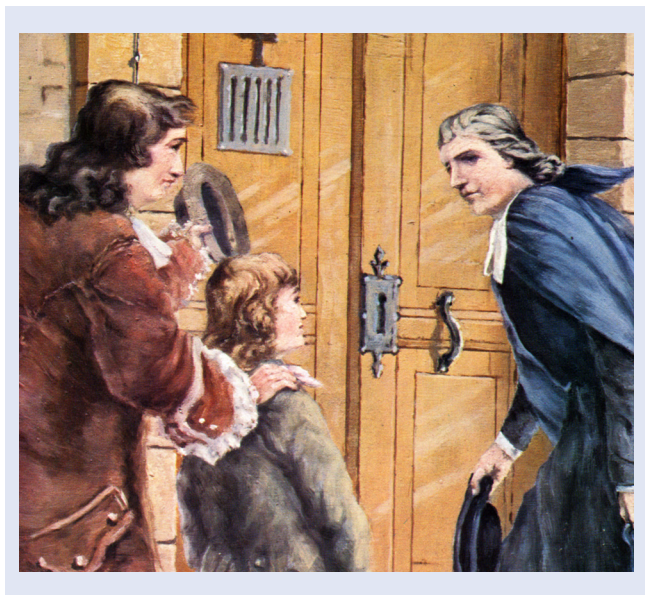
It would be hard for us to imagine the degree to which John Baptist de La Salle trusted in God's continual, loving care, and how much this providential sensitivity shaped the educational enterprise that he undertook. His deepest conviction and consistent prayer was "*Domine, opus tuum.*" [Lord, the work is yours.]

De La Salle lived his entire adult life in faithful surrender to the designs of God's Providence. This surrender increasingly became a conscious, continual decision on his part. The circumstances that he encountered each day manifested God's grace to him, bearing God's loving concern and communicating God's will. In this respect, his attitude was not unlike that of Mother Teresa, who, during a trip around the United States, was told each morning about the day's delays, problems, and changes by her traveling companion. She finally said: "These should not be seen as problems. We must look on them as God's gifts to us." (Of course, the next day her traveling companion told her: "Mother, this morning God gave us a very big gift!") De La Salle's attitude was very similar to Mother Teresa's. **When God is in the picture, God is the picture.**

This, however, does not mean that De La Salle was passive or submissive about the ways of the world. In one letter he writes, "Don't let slip opportunities that come your way, but don't be overeager." God remains in the lead: "I don't like to make the first move in any endeavor... I leave it to Divine Providence to make the first move and then I am satisfied." Virtually every educational project that he undertook was a practical response to a direct request from an individual or rep-

Reflection Questions

- 1) How has the road straightened out behind you in your life's vocation? What has been the providential history of your school or your Lasallian ministry?
- 3) Are you a means of God's providential care for someone else? How seriously do you take it? What would the next step look like?



As a young priest visiting a convent in 1679, De La Salle providentially meets Adrian Nyel. He offers to help him establish a school for poor boys in Rheims. So it begins...

resentative group. The Gospel came to life through real educational needs, real educational situations, and real educational responses. Instead of making a virtue out of necessity, De La Salle found virtue through necessity. **Events were calls from God.**

The schools themselves reflected God's radical providential care towards students who often had experienced little care in their lives. De La Salle's profound dependence on the graces hidden in day-to-day circumstances led to schools where young people could depend on teachers who shared such hidden graces in their day-to-day ministry.

In a contemporary world where self-sufficiency appears to outweigh any radical reliance on God's providence, the challenge of educators is to balance a good sense of self with a real sensitivity to God's loving voice—experienced in reflection, circumstances, and even suffering. When you pay attention to the voice of providence in your life, you cannot but exclaim: "**My God! It's been you all the time.**" Then discernment becomes a real possibility, God is revealed as a trustworthy friend or loving parent, and life bursts out all over with grace.



The spirit of this Institute is first, a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God, always entering into these sentiments of Job: “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; as it has pleased the Lord, so it is done”, and into other similar sentiments so often expressed in Holy Scripture and uttered by the Patriarchs of old.

– Rule of 1718, Art. 11

Deeply moved by the human and spiritual distress “of the children of artisans and of the poor,” and in response to the call of God, John Baptist de La Salle and his first Brothers made a lifelong commitment to God to provide these children with a human and Christian education, and so extend the glory of God on earth.

– Rule, Art. 1



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www.lasallianresources.org
 4401 Redwood Road
 Napa, CA 94558

De La Salle

When a person abandons himself to the Providence of God it is like a man who puts himself out to the high sea without either sails or oars.
(Meditations 134.1)

Be convinced that if you truly seek the kingdom of God and his justice, all these things will be given to you besides [Mt. 6:33], because it is God himself who takes responsibility for the care to provide for you. ...The more you abandon yourselves to God for what concerns your temporal needs, the more care he will take to provide for you. *(Meditations 67.3)*

From the letters to Br. Gabriel Drolin, working to start a school in Rome:

As for myself, I do not like to make the first move in any endeavor, and I will not do it in Rome any more than elsewhere. I leave it to Divine Providence to make the first move and then I am satisfied. When it is clear that I am acting only under the direction of Providence, I have nothing to reproach myself with. When I make the first move, it is only I myself who am active, so I don't expect to see much good result; neither does God usually give the action his special blessing. *(Letter 18)*

I know it is better to live in more difficult circumstances, withdrawn from worldly concerns, and I am glad that you are in such dispositions. Still, when you decide to do this, you must put yourself entirely in the hands of Divine Providence, or, if you have not enough virtue for that nor enough faith, then you must take the necessary means before you carry out your plan. If you do neither, you are not acting as a Christian nor as an intelligent man. *(Letter 19)*



Consequences for taking Providence seriously:

To Introduce – *Explicit*: include providential perspectives at faculty meetings and in personal evaluations. *Implicit*: accept things like "personal days" and provide missionary opportunities.

To Foster – *Explicit*: talk about what God is doing at the school. *Implicit*: maintain a calm demeanor during school crises.

To Enhance – *Explicit*: have board / faculty discussions about the past and future of the school. *Implicit*: look upon challenges as opportunities for finding God's guidance.