



Our Lasallian Heritage

Working in Association

The **commitment to association** is deeply ingrained in the fabric of the Lasallian heritage. From the very beginning, De La Salle came to realize that the schools would become successful and stable only to the extent that the teachers were united with a common **vision**, a shared **dedication**, and a supportive **community**. From the first retreat that he gave them in his house in 1681 to his last general assembly with them in 1717, he worked to knit his teachers into a religiously animated group of Christian educators who worked in, with, and through association.

The **idea of association** came to be applied in a variety of contexts. At first, the word described an effort to run each school with at least two teachers and not individually (as the Schoolmasters did). Policies and procedures were shared as a result, and resources such as *The Conduct of Schools* emerged out of the **common experience** of teaching.

When De La Salle and two Brothers took the "**heroic vow**" in 1691 to "associate" for the establishment of the Institute even if they had to live on bread alone, "association" was not so much for the work of education as it was for seeing that the group survived and became established. Three years later, when twelve Brothers and De La Salle took perpetual vows, one of the vows was that of "association" to **keep gratuitous schools**. This last understanding of association is echoed in the Brothers vow formula of today.



The **experience of association** is also found on many levels. The early Brothers lived in a **common house** centrally situated among several schools, and established practices that would deepen their association (monthly letter to De La Salle, "Visitors" to groups of houses in one region, a yearly **retreat**). Classes in the schools were taught as an entire group, with appropriate structures to address individual abilities and with subject-specific advancement. Students found that they all had the **same expectations** placed on them, regardless of their social status. They worked together, prayed together, and grew into Christian maturity together. In the school, education happened together.

The **future of association** among Lasallian institutions is vibrant and strong. The global, multi-national nature of this "**education without borders**" is enhanced every day by advancing technology. Brothers and Partners find their association strengthened in their **common pursuit** of educating the young, especially the poor and marginalized. And Brothers communities increasingly realize the animation role that arises out of their own **unique life** of consecrated association.

Association **is not** something that any of us may take for granted; it **is** something that each of us may take for real. All it takes is a decision to see that, for us, others do have a **real voice**, and those voices together make a **real difference** in what we do.

Reflection Questions

- 1) How would you describe your experience of association in your present ministry? Might this be something that could or should be shared and discussed?
- 2) Much has been written about "association" in Lasallian ministries. Could you read one of those sources and discuss it together?

Consequences for taking "association" seriously:

To Introduce – *Explicit*: provide regular social events for faculty and staff, including their families. *Implicit*: include faculty room bulletin board space for each school subject and area.

To Foster – *Explicit*: provide structures for inter-departmental discussions at faculty meetings. *Implicit*: support teacher attendance at local conferences in their subject areas.

To Enhance – *Explicit*: invite coaches to attend / critique classes of teachers and vice-versa. *Implicit*: make the faculty lounge a hospitable place to relax, read, and converse.



Association, such as it was lived by the Brothers, had a deep impact on the organization and functioning of their schools. It was a decisive factor in helping their cohesion, efficiency and creativity. Today, under new forms still to be invented, the same spirit of association should continue to inspire and give life to the Lasallian Schools where Lasallian partners are the great majority. The challenge now is for the Brothers and all other Lasallian educators to discover together in open dialogue how to found and promote in new foundations the associative dimensions of their commitment on behalf of the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor.

– *A Shared Mission: 3.31*

The Brothers strive to promote the spirit of association in educational communities. They are at pains to make the Lasallian message known to all their members; to invite those who so wish, to share Lasallian spirituality and to strengthen their apostolic commitment; and to share in the creation and animation of intentional Lasallian communities.

– *Rule, Art. 19.1*



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De La Salle

Statements applying to the Brothers community, but also very applicable to any form of association:

Union in a community is a precious gem, which is why Our Lord so often recommended it to his disciples before he died. If we lose this, we lose everything. Preserve it with care, therefore, if you want your community to survive. (*Meditations, 91.2*)

A community without charity and union is a hell: one grumbles, another slanders his Brother because of the ill-will he feels toward him, another gets angry because someone has irritated him, another complains to his superior about what one of his Brothers has done to him. In short, all one hears is accusations, murmuring, and backbiting, which of course cause much irritation and disquiet.

The only remedy for all these disorders is union and charity, because, as Saint Paul says, charity is patient. This holy apostle even desires that the patience which is the result of charity should go so far as to endure all things. Whoever says all does not except anything.

If, then, we have charity and union with our Brothers, and since we should endure all things from everyone, we can no longer say: I cannot put up with this from that person; I cannot stand such a defect in this other one; he will have to give in to my whims or my weakness in something. To speak like this is not to endure all things from everyone. Think carefully over this maxim and practice it exactly. (*Meditations, 65.1*)