

Our Founder: Understanding the Life and Legacy of St. John Baptist de La Salle



This painting of St. John Baptist de La Salle was donated to the Vatican Archives, where it is still found today.

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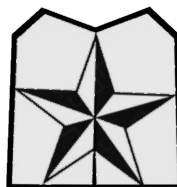
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Introduction

“Let Us Remember That We Are in The Holy Presence of God.”



In 17th century France, our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle, and the original Christian Brothers used this prayer hourly in their classrooms.

Today, this prayer calls over one million Lasallian students and educators around the world to pause regularly throughout the day and think about the presence of God in their daily lives.

Despite different cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, all Lasallians around the globe are united in this reminder: *LET US REMEMBER*. Though we pray this as a classroom or school community each day, it also connects us with all Lasallians who have said it for over 300 years: *WE ARE*. We come together as a community willing to acknowledge God’s loving presence in our own lives and our school community: *IN THE HOLY PRESENCE OF GOD*.

Prayer

De La Salle defined prayer as “the application of our mind and the elevation of our heart to God to give him due reverence and to ask for everything we need for our salvation.”

(The *Duties of a Christian to God*, Part 2, Treatise 2, Chapter 1)

Chapter 1: Background

Section 1: Religious Background

To fully understand St. John Baptist de La Salle we must first understand his relationship with God and the Catholic Church. Being raised Catholic, De La Salle would have believed, like all Christians, that God, the Creator of all, amazingly sent His divine son to become a human being named Jesus.

Jesus came to teach us about holiness, to show us how to be in a loving relationship with God and one another, and to make our eternal salvation possible. During his life, Jesus gained numerous followers who had profound experiences of him not only during his lifetime, but also in his resurrected self after his death.

Christ

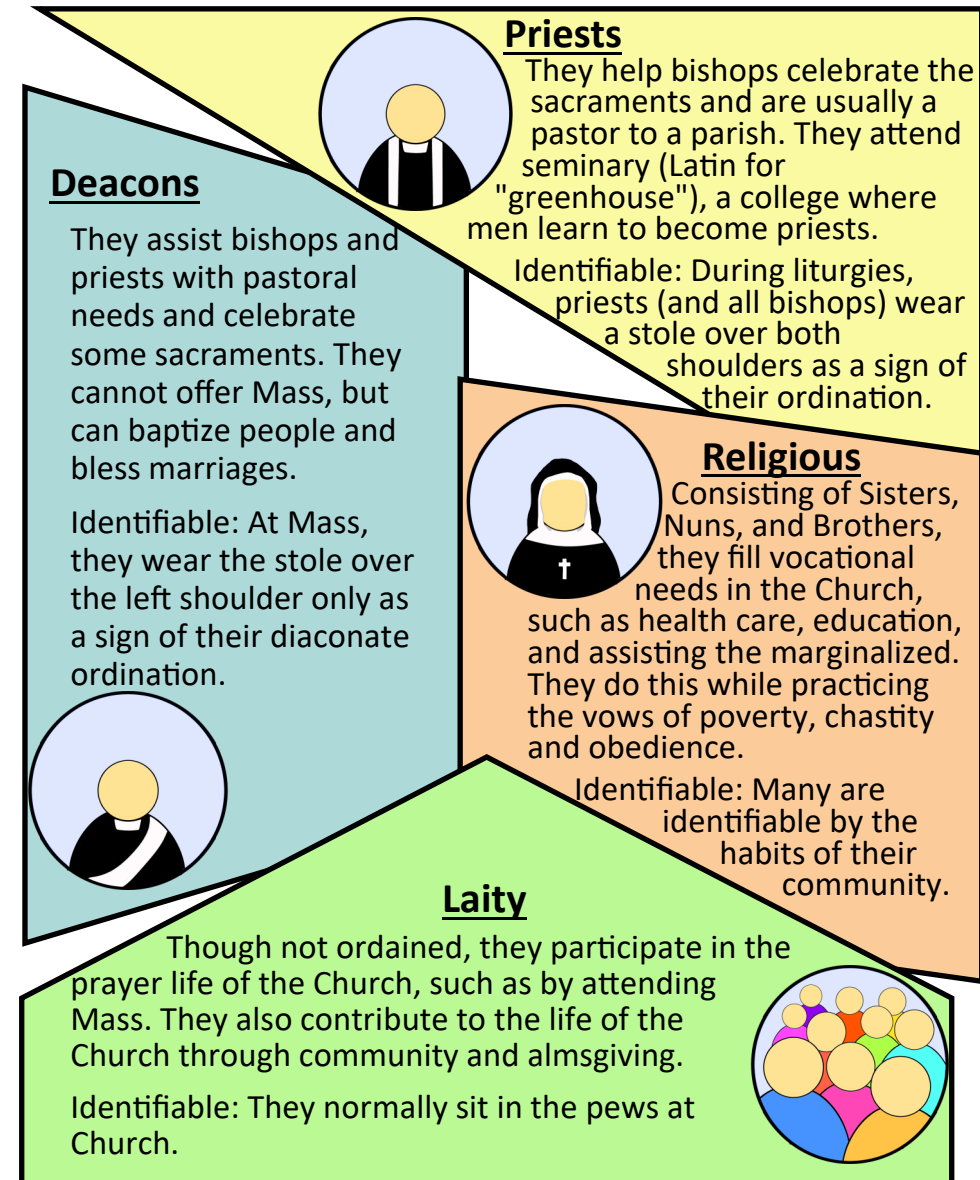
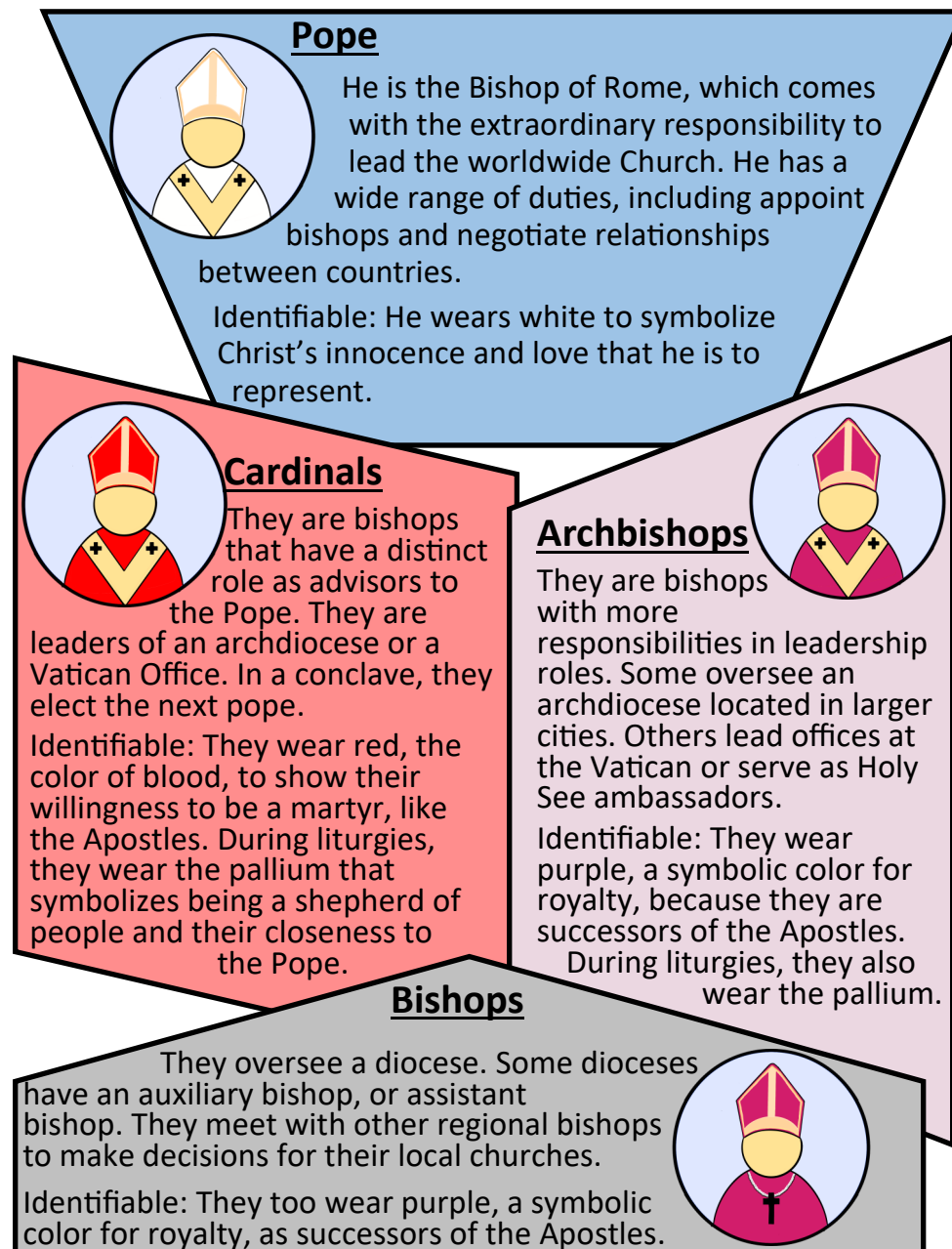
“Christ” in Greek and “Messiah” in Hebrew means “anointed.” Christians believe Jesus was anointed in a special way to fulfill the prophecies and promises of the Hebrew Scriptures to unify and save all people.



Of Jesus’ followers, twelve loyal men, known as apostles, were called to spread his message. The apostles were given authority to lead and teach. Catholics believe this apostolic authority has been passed down uninterrupted in the Church through generations of bishops to today.

Chapter 1: Background

Whether a bishop or a lay person in the pew, all baptized faithful are collectively the Body of Christ. Each person brings their gifts and talents to help build God's kingdom here on earth. Let us look at different roles in the Church:



This structure of the Church was important in the life of De La Salle. While he was ordained a priest, he also went on to be one of the first people to successfully create a religious group of "Brothers" focused on education.

Chapter 1: Background

Questions: Chapter 1, Section 1

1. After reading this information about Jesus, what is a question you have about Jesus?
2. Complete the sentence: "All baptized faithful are collectively _____." What do you believe this sentence means?
3. List the 8 positions that make up the Catholic Church hierarchy and, in your own words, write their job description.
4. Look up and write down what diocese your school belongs to and the bishop of your diocese.

Section 2: Socio-Economics and Education

Socio-Economics

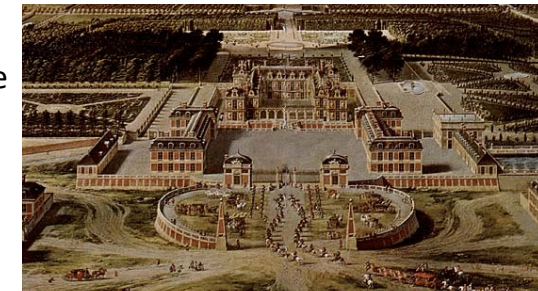
Just as religion was a daily part of 17th century France, so was awareness of the different socio-economic classes. For the most part, it was not socially acceptable for people from one class to associate with people from another class.

At the top of the social hierarchy was the king and the nobles. At that time, only about 300,000 people were considered nobles in France, or 1.5% of the 20-million population.



King Louis XIV (1638 - 1715) became king at the age of 4.

For most of De La Salle's life, Louis XIV was king of France. Louis believed in divine right and fostered his image as the "Sun King," as everything revolved around him, just as planets revolve around the Sun. The nobles and Church leaders were advisors to the king; he kept them near by for guidance, but also so he could monitor them. He and his close nobles were extravagant spenders, as exemplified by the Palace of Versailles that he built. The nobles' wealth was gained from their owned properties and heavy taxes on other social classes.



King Louis XIV spent about 100 million livres, or about 2 billion US dollars, on the Palace of Versailles.

Below the nobility were the middle class, or the bourgeoisie. The middle class consisted of people who kept civil society functional: business people, civil servants, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. While some from the upper bourgeoisie were quite wealthy, they did not have the same level of power or prestige as the nobles.

Finally, at the bottom of the social hierarchy were the poor peasants, who made up approximately 80% of the population. They worked very difficult jobs in manual or agricultural labor, but had the least access to resources such as food and education.



Wars and natural disasters made resources scarce. The poor suffered so much during De La Salle's lifetime that they resorted to making soup out of grass. Around two million people died from malnutrition or disease.

Chapter 1: Background

Education

Based on what we know so far about life in France during John Baptist de La Salle's time, how much quality education would you guess was going on? The answer is somewhat complex. There were four major types of education: private tutors, specialty guilds, elite religious schools, and charity schools. Let's take a closer look at these:

Private Tutors

Knowledgeable tutors went to homes giving one-on-one lessons to prepare students for university studies.

Pro: They provided a well-rounded education in writing, math, science, and Latin.

Con: Only the nobles or upper bourgeoisie could afford them

Specialty Guilds

Guilds, like writing guilds, legal guilds, and various artisan guilds, provided lessons by master craftsmen in specialized skills. These also included the city-regulated guilds of school-masters, who taught in the "Little" Schools.

Pro: Guilds provided reliable work and special privileges.

Con: Boys spent more time working for the craftsmen to pay for lessons than receiving lessons.

Convent Schools

Operated by nuns, they educated girls in reading and writing, as well as training for domestic and religious life. This was the only and highest education for girls, who could not attend universities.

Pro: They provided education to both wealthy and poorer girls.

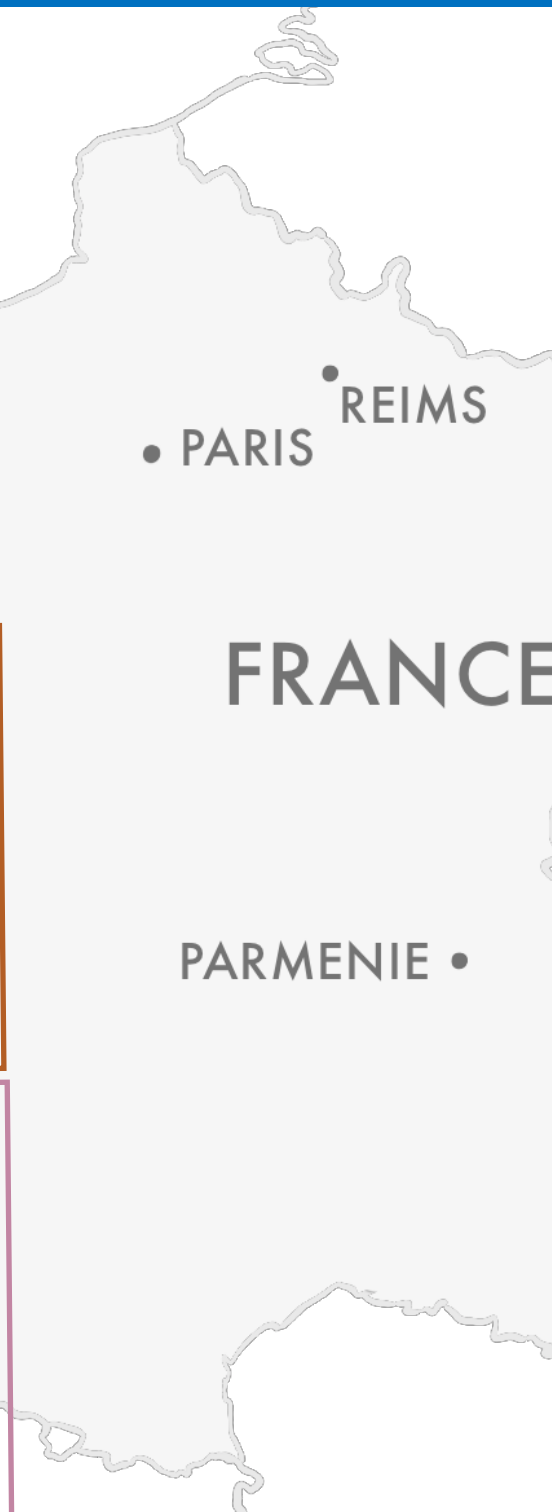
Con: There was no successful system like this for poor boys at the time.

Charity Schools

Students labeled in their parish's 'Poor Register' could attend one-on-one lessons in reading, arithmetic, writing, and religious education.

Pro: These were completely gratuitous for the poor.

Con: Aside from students being labeled as 'poor,' attendance was not compulsory, and teachers were not usually competent.



De La Salle's Profile In Education Before Meeting Adrien Nyel In 1679

1657-1661 – Taught by a private tutor in his home.

1661-1669 – Attended Collège des Bons-Enfants, which was part of the University of Reims, and received a faith-based education. He finished with a Master of Arts degree.

1670-1672 – Attended the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris, until both of his parents died and he became the guardian of his younger siblings.

1672-1680 – Continued theological studies at the University of Reims where he finished his Bachelor's, Licentiate and Doctorate in Theology. He was ordained in 1678.

1678 – Became the spiritual guardian for the Sisters of the Holy Child of Jesus who taught girls and orphans. He helped the nuns in their formative years and visited regularly as their spiritual director.

Chapter 1: Background

As you can see, education in France in the 1600s was quite varied. Although a few wealthy students could be prepared for higher education at universities, the majority of French citizens, who were poor peasants, had minimal educational opportunities. School was not compulsory, meaning children were not required



An example of how kids dressed during De La Salle's time.

to attend. Thus, it's not surprising that 80% of the population remained illiterate!

This gives us a general overview of the world in which De La Salle encountered education. The importance of the Church, strict social structures, and lack of quality schools all influenced how De La Salle would approach providing education for those most in need.

Questions: Chapter 1, Section 2

1. Based on the reading, complete the following sentence: "During this time, _____ was the king and his nickname was _____."
2. Describe the differences between the noble and peasant classes in 17th century France.
3. Briefly describe the four educational opportunities available during 17th century France. If you were alive back then, explain which form of education you would have received.

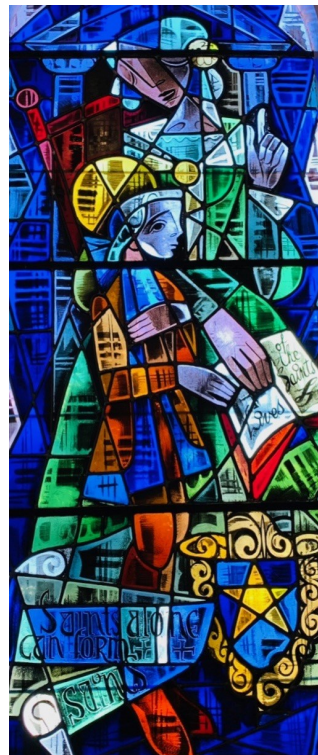
Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Section 3: Childhood

John Baptist de La Salle was born on April 30th, 1651, in Reims, France. He was the eldest of 11 children, so he had a lot of experience being an “older brother.” His mother, Nicolle Moët de Brouillet, was from a noble family; she took a step down in social class after marrying Louis de La Salle, who was an upper-bourgeoisie. Because he had a stable job as a judge, Louis’ family was



Because she was a noble, Nicolle Moët de Brouillet had a painting done during her life time.



This stained glass window from Mont La Salle, Napa, CA, depicts Perrette Lespagnol reading De La Salle the lives of the saints.

spared from the hardships of poverty experienced by the lower classes.

A key figure in De La Salle’s young life was his grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol. She took a leading role in her grandson’s religious education, including reading to him the lives of the saints. De La Salle’s early biographers agree he was highly attracted to religious matters and knew early on that he wanted to become a priest.

Like other boys of his social class, De La Salle was first educated by private tutors, who taught him Latin and other subjects to help prepare him for his schooling.

Building on this strong foundation, at 10 years old, he receive a rigorous and broad education at the Collège des Bons-Enfants attached to the University of Reims. At the same age, De La Salle took his first public step toward the priesthood by having the bishop cut part of his hair in what is known as a tonsure.



The Hotel de La Cloche is the house where De La Salle lived for his first 13 years. It still stands in Reims.

De La Salle’s Schedule at Collège des Bons-Enfants:

5:30-6:00 a.m. – Assembly; morning prayer; study

7 a.m. – Class

10 a.m. – Compositions and speech exercises

11 a.m. – Mass every day followed by lunch

1 p.m. – Meeting with teachers to review morning work

2:30 p.m. – Class

5 p.m. – Composition and debates

6 p.m. – Chapel and supper

Another influential step for De La Salle happened when he was just 15 years old. His relative, Father Pierre Dozet, resigned as canon in the Cathedral of Reims. This left the position open for De La Salle to fill. The position was a prestigious one, especially for someone so young, because it was a paid position to advise the archbishop, and to pray with him and the other canons several times a day.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Questions: Chapter 2, Section 3

1. When and where was De La Salle born?
2. What social class was John Baptist de La Salle born into? Refer back to the prior section and describe this social class.
3. Who was Perrette Lespagnol and how did she influence De La Salle?
4. Complete the sentence: "At the age of _____, De La Salle received a tonsure, which is _____."

Section 4: Vocational Roadblock

After earning a Master's Degree in Reims, John Baptist de La Salle set out in 1670 for Paris to study theology at the prestigious Sorbonne. He lived in the famous Seminary of St. Sulpice, where he was introduced to a meaningful spirituality that made a deep impression on him: to serve Jesus Christ by serving the poor.

In the midst of his studies in Paris, tragedy struck the De La Salle family. His mother died in July of 1671, and his father passed away the next year in April of 1672. The death of his parents threw De La Salle's life into disarray as he put his pursuit of becoming a priest on hold. Being the eldest sibling, he returned to his family in Reims. At age 21, De La Salle was now caring for six younger brothers and sisters. (The other four siblings had died during infancy, which was common at the time.)

Despite his many new family responsibilities, De La Salle still wanted to continue toward the priesthood. Luckily—or perhaps more accurately, providentially—he found support in a spiritual director, Father Nicolas Roland, a fellow canon at the cathedral. Roland encouraged De La Salle on his vocational journey to continue his theological studies at the University of Reims. After much hard work, De La Salle earned his degree in theology and was ordained to the priesthood by the archbishop of Reims. He joyfully celebrated his first Mass on Easter Sunday in 1678 at the same cathedral where he had been accepted as a canon twelve years prior.



De La Salle was ordained a priest on April 9th, 1678, in the Cathedral of Reims. The next day he celebrated his first Mass there.

Vocation

Vocation is a calling or an invitation from God to a personal relationship with God. The vocational path will look different for each person, but all share in a common call to God's love and serving others.

Questions: Chapter 2, Section 4

1. Why did De La Salle leave seminary?
2. Look up the term "providential." Write the definition. Then explain if you believe this is the most accurate term to use to describe De La Salle's vocational path and why.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Section 5: Meeting Adrien Nyel

Soon after John Baptist de La Salle's ordination to the priesthood, Father Nicolas Roland died. De La Salle took on some of Roland's responsibilities, including caring for the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, a group of nuns that educated poor girls of Reims. Just as De La Salle cared for his siblings after the death of his parents, he unexpectedly became administrator and chaplain of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus - a position he in which he excelled



Blessed Fr. Nicolas Roland (1642-1678), like De La Salle, was a canon at the Cathedral of Reims. He was beatified in 1994.

As caretaker of the Sisters, De La Salle had a very momentous chance encounter. In March 1679, De La Salle was at the door of the Sisters' convent and ran into a man



by the name of Adrien Nyel, who had come from Rouen to visit the Sisters. Nyel, inspired to serve the poor through education, was visiting the Sisters to try to network and brainstorm ways to serve poor boys in Reims.

This encounter at the door led Nyel to ask John Baptist de La Salle for help, and De La Salle agreed! This invitation started his involvement in this mission of

educating the poor boys of Reims. De La Salle invite Nyel to live with him and donated some of his own money to Nyel's cause. From these first steps De La Salle embarked on a journey where one commitment led to another, which resulted in the creation of free Christian schools and an educational mission that has lasted for over 340 years.



The convent door where De La Salle and Nyel first met.

De La Salle reflected near the end of his life,

God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity and whose way it is not to force the inclination of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning. (CL 7: 169)

Questions: Chapter 2, Section 5

1. De La Salle inherited caring for a group of nuns. What was the name of their order and what was their vocation?
2. How did Adrien Nyel influence the direction of De La Salle's life?
3. What person or event has most influenced the direction of your life and in what way?

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Section 6: Becoming an Educator

With John Baptist de La Salle's help, Adrien Nyel was able to open several schools in Reims in 1679. Being a better fundraiser than administrator, Nyel returned to Rouen to continue his work there. De La Salle was faced with a choice: either watch the newly founded schools close down, or take over their guidance. Although not trained as a teacher, he had received a quality education, and he knew good characteristics of teachers and schools. Ultimately, De La Salle decided to continue his involvement in these schools and commit himself more to the teachers and students.

One problem that De La Salle noticed was that many of the teachers had minimal training: they did not necessarily know how to be good teachers! To train them, De La Salle regularly invited the teachers—who were more “rough-and-tumble” than De La Salle, being from a lower social class—to his home for a meal and lessons on education. This innovation helped solve two problems. First, the teachers were assured of at least one solid meal each day. Second, they received training to form them as teachers.



This map of Reims was created shortly before De La Salle was born.

In 1681, De La Salle realized teachers would be even more effective in the stability of a community. Thus, he took the daring step of inviting the teachers to live in his grand house. They worked together, ate together, and lived together in community.



For over 300 years, the Christian Brothers vow has involved "together and by association" to empathize the role of the community in educational endeavors.

However, keep in mind the 17th century's view on class meant that De La Salle's actions were unthinkable: he was not just associating with those of a lower class, but living with them as well! Other wealthy people were scandalized by De La Salle's actions, including many of his own family members!

Questions: Chapter 2, Section 6

1. When De La Salle took over the running of the schools, what problems did he find?
2. How did De La Salle solve these problems?
3. Why were people offended by the way De La Salle helped? Then explain if you think he would have the same problem if he tried to do this in today's society.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Section 7: Community of “Brothers”

By 1682, family circumstances forced John Baptist de La Salle to sell his family home, so De La Salle and the teachers moved to the poorer district of Reims. It was in this home where the group really transformed into a community. As a result, this house is now called the “Cradle of the Institute.”



The Cradle of the Institute

It is at the Cradle of the Institute where De La Salle and his community of teachers first took on the title “Brothers.” They intentionally called themselves “Brothers” because they wanted to be present to one



another as brothers and to be like elder brothers to the children entrusted to their care.

De La Salle and the Brothers also decided that they needed to be a religiously-grounded community. Part of being a religious community meant having a religious habit and basic rules to follow.

Fratres Scholarum Christianarum

The De La Salle Christian Brothers put “FSC” after their name identifying their religious order. *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum* is Latin for “Brothers of the Christian Schools.” This official name reflects their identity as a Brother and their work as Christian educators.

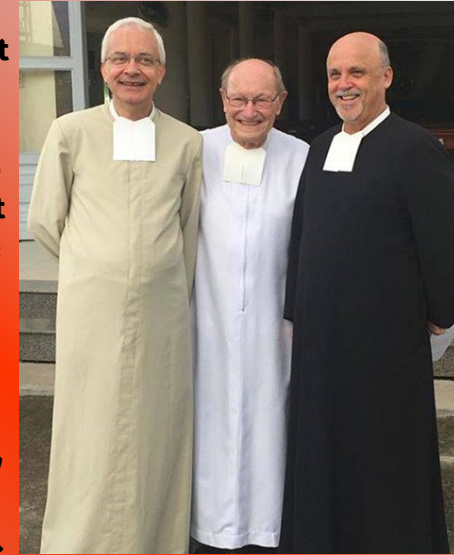
The Habit

A habit is a distinct outfit worn by a person who has taken religious vows. It demonstrates to others their commitment to God and identifies the religious order to which they belong.

The Brothers also wear a rabat, or white collar, which is the 17th century version of a collar on a button down shirt today.

Originally, Brothers also wore a hat and outer cape to keep them safe from the elements and city living.

Today, Brothers can wear the traditional black habit, a white habit in warmer climates, or tan habit in desert areas.



Questions: Chapter 2, Section 7

1. What is the official name of the Christian Brothers in Latin and English?
2. Explain the two meanings of the title “Brother.”

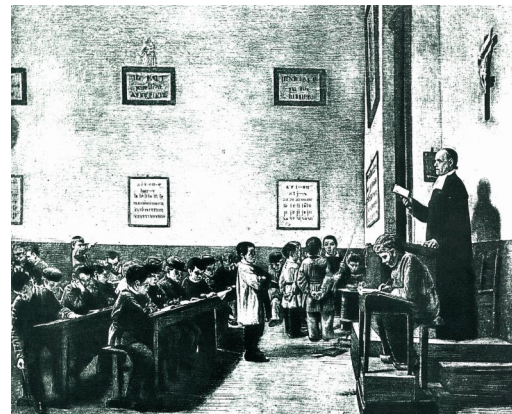
Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

Section 8: Taking on Challenges

As the new community of Brothers got started, it faced challenges both internally and externally.

Internally, some of the teachers in the community did not want the structure and responsibility of religious life. As a result, many left the community. However, they were soon replaced by others who were better suited to the ideals and mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. These committed Brothers faced several challenges. Many were overworked. When parishes withheld pay, they were unable to stay nourished, and as a result became ill, and sometimes even died.

Externally, pressure on the community came from their great success as teachers. Their successful educational system was in high demand and they even spread to other cities. This, however, made other schoolmasters angry. Yes, the Brothers' mission was to teach poor boys, but they were so good at their job that boys who could afford to pay wanted to attend the gratuitous Brothers' schools too! This took "business" away from other schoolmasters. In retaliation, they ransacked the Brothers' schools and brought several court cases against De La Salle.



This is an example of how Brothers ran the classroom. Notice the students working together demonstrating the Simultaneous Method of Instruction. The brother looks over the class. If a student was not following one of the classroom rules, the brother would use a clicking device to get the student's attention and point to the rule on the wall the student was breaking.

In the summer of 1683, realizing they had serious legal and financial troubles, some Brothers started to complain to De La Salle. He still had some of his portion of his family's wealth, his regular income as a canon at the cathedral, and his job of being a priest. The Brothers, with no backup wealth, grumbled, "What if De La Salle gives up on the community? What will happen to us?" Ultimately to deal with this dilemma, De La Salle made a courageous and faith-filled response: he resigned his position as canon (and the income that came with it) and distributed much of his remaining wealth to the poor during a time of famine. This put De La Salle on the same footing as the other Brothers – all of them trusting in divine providence to guide their mission.

De La Salle as an Innovative Teacher

Gratuitous Schools—Everyone was welcome to attend De La Salle's schools and it was free for all, even if they could afford to pay. Brothers could not accept gifts, so as to not make those who could not afford to give one feel bad.

Collaborative, Simultaneous Method of Instruction—Students were academically assessed and placed next to each other in rows with smarter boys sitting next to less smart boys. The lesson would start with the most experienced student who would pass it on to the next student, and it would continue down the row. The Brother rarely spoke to the whole class, except during Catechism lessons, which made them impactful.

Vernacular—While other schools taught only how to read Latin, the Brothers taught the vernacular, or commonly-used language. In this case, they taught students how to read and write in French, as it would be more practical to life skills students would need.

Teaching Teachers—At the time, teaching was the job one did if they could not do anything else. De La Salle saw teaching as a vocation, and took time to teach the men how to be effective educators.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

With these internal and external conflicts, De La Salle and two Brothers decided to add an extra layer of commitment to their goal of establishing their Institute. On November 21, 1691, De La Salle, Br. Gabriel Drolin, and Br. Nicholas Vuyart solemnly took what is called the “Heroic Vow” in secret. By this vow, the three promised to continue in establishing this educational institution, even if they were the last three members of the community and had to beg for bread to survive!



Despite challenges, De La Salle and the Brothers persevered. They were, after all, doing the work God had inspired them to do.

Questions: Chapter 2, Section 8

1. Why were schoolmasters trying to sabotage De La Salle’s schools?
2. In your own words, explain how did De La Salle’s wealth caused concerns in the community. Also describe his solutions to this dilemma. Do you believe he found a good solution?
3. If you were to make a Heroic Vow, who would you choose to take the vows with you? Why would you choose them?

Section 9: Parménie and the Last Years

As troubles and self-doubts about his effectiveness piled up, John Baptist de La Salle wanted to distance himself and to reflect on God’s call in his life. In 1714, he made a retreat to Parménie in the mountains of southern France. Sister Louise, a holy woman, had created a sacred space there for people to be close to God and pray.



Parménie, France

While on retreat, De La Salle received an impactful letter from the main brothers in Paris commanding him to return to their community, the one to whom he had vowed obedience. Uncertain on how to respond, De La Salle sought the advice of



Sister Louise was a shepherdess, who was inspired to rebuild an older retreat center in Parménie. Being at the retreat center allowed for the providential friendship between her and De La Salle.

Sister Louise, who clearly showed him that it was God’s will for him to return to the Brothers in Paris. Just like his grandmother long before, Sister Louise was a wise woman who communicated the word of God to De La Salle.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

After a summer in Parménie, De La Salle returned to the Brothers. He helped them navigate challenges and transition their leadership to one of their own. In 1717, the community elected Br. Barthélemy as their leader and De La Salle spent the rest of his life at St. Yon, a Brother's property, in Rouen.

Even in his final month, De La Salle was struck with another personal vocational crisis. Because of a disagreement with a local pastor, the Archbishop of Rouen had removed De La Salle's authorization to celebrate the sacraments—the vocation he had been drawn to since his childhood.



Though saddened, he responded calmly and accepted it as part of God's will.



Shortly after De La Salle passed, the Brothers had a painting of him done while on his death bed. This is a picture taken of the painting before it disappeared.

On his last day, De La Salle was surrounded by the Brothers of the community he had founded so long ago. Looking back over the rather surprising vocation he had undertaken, he reflected in his final words, "I adore God guiding me in all the events of my life." John Baptist de La Salle, our Founder, died on Good Friday, April 7th, 1719, at St. Yon. He was buried the next day at the Church of St. Sever in Rouen.

Canonization of a Saint

In the Catholic Church, the soul of a deceased person that joins God in heaven is considered a "saint." Though numerous people will achieve this salvation, some holy, Catholic people have the privilege of going through the "canonization" process to confirm they are in heaven. This is the modern canonization process:

The process starts in the diocese where the holy person died. The person's cause, or process, can start five years after they pass, unless waived by the pope.

That diocese will conduct a thorough examination into the person's life, including actions, writings, and devotion. If the local bishop and diocesan officials determine the person lived a holy and virtuous life, the findings of the cause will be sent to the Vatican's Congregation of the Causes of Saints. The person earns the title "Servant of God."

For the next step and title of "Blessed," one of three possible pathways happens:

- 1) Martyr - the person died for their faith. They automatically get the title.
- 2) Offering of Life - the person died prematurely sacrificing their life out of charity. This path requires a documented miracle.
- 3) Confessor - the person of heroic virtue died naturally, such as De La Salle. This path requires a documented miracle.

After looking over the findings, if the Congregation and the pope agree the person lived an exemplary and holy life, the person receives the title "Venerable."

Miracles cannot be explained with science, like an incurable disease being healed. A saint, who is close to God in heaven, can intercede for us asking Him for a miracle.

For the last step, all causes require a documented miracle. Upon achieving that, the person is canonized, earns the title "Saint," and receives a feast day on the Church calendar.

Some will also receive the acknowledgment of being a "Patron Saint" of a notable role they were associated with during their life.

Chapter 2: The Life of De La Salle

St. John Baptist de La Salle's Process to Sainthood

April 7, 1719 — Died in Rouen, France

May 8, 1840 — Declared Venerable by Pope Gregory XVI

February 19, 1888 — Beatified by Pope Leo XIII

May 24, 1900 — Canonized by Pope Leo XIII

May 15, 1950 — Declared Patron Saint of Educators by
Pope Pius XII

The official
document
declaring that St.
John Baptist de La
Salle is the Patron
Saint of
Educators.



Questions: Chapter 2, Section 9

1. Sister Louise was De La Salle's spiritual director during his time at Parménie. How did she help guide him?
2. What were De La Salle's final words? What do you think he meant by them?
3. According to the canonization process, what titles does a person earn before being declared a saint?
4. When and where did De La Salle die?

De La Salle In Rome

Today, the Christian Brothers' Generalate, or governing headquarters, is located in Rome. Some Brothers, who help with the worldwide Institute, work and live there.



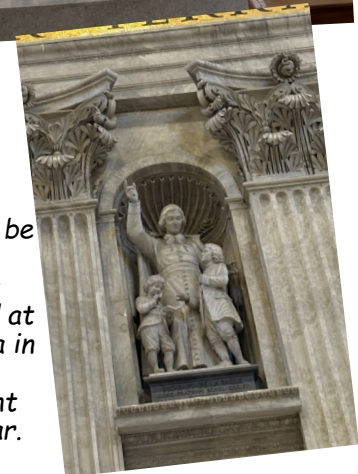
Left - The front of the
Generalate.

Lower left - The reliquary of
De La Salle located behind the
altar at the Generalate chapel.

Below - The sanctuary of the
Generalate chapel.



Lasallians can also be
proud that this
statue of De La
Salle was installed at
St. Peter's Basilica in
1900. It can be
found on the right
side near the altar.



Chapter 3: To Be “Lasallian”

Just as to be a “Christian” is to follow in the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ, being a “Lasallian” is to follow in the footsteps and principles of St. John Baptist de La Salle. The life, practices, and virtues of De La Salle provide the model for how Brothers and all Lasallians should live their lives and vocations. In this section, we will explore how all of us can exemplify being a Lasallian, whether we are a Brother, a lay educator, or student.

Section 10: A Brother’s Vocation

Christian Brothers have a vocational call to live out the educational mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle in a special way. As Brothers, they dedicate their lives to be brothers to those with whom they live and work, and to be elder brothers to the students entrusted to their care.

De La Salle, the Christian Brothers, and all Lasallians see education as a way to bring about salvation. Coming from the Latin word “salvare” meaning “to save,” salvation has a two-fold meaning to Lasallians. First, there is the religious connotation, in that providing students with a human and Christian education will help students move along the path towards heavenly salvation. After all, De La Salle was a priest, and helping others towards eternal salvation is key to that job.

De La Salle wrote,

This is also what ought to engage you to have an altogether special esteem for the Christian instruction and education of children, because it is a means to help them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. This is the very foundation and support of their piety and of all the other good that takes place in the Church.”

(Meditations 199.3)

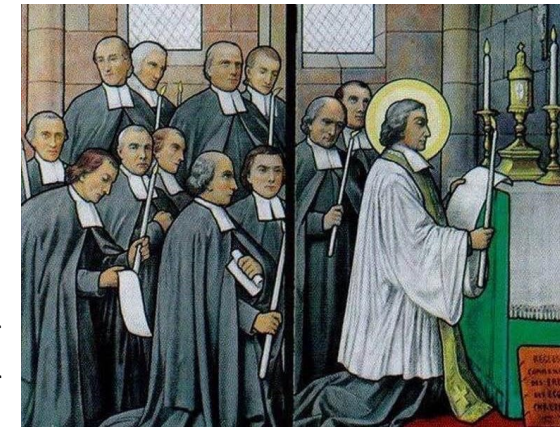
The other way that Lasallians see salvation is through the well-rounded and practical education allowing students to be successful in this lifetime. Providing an education that encourages students to discover and foster their vocational gifts and talents will lead to them being positive, successful members in society.

To keep this goal of salvation central to their mission, the Christian Brothers take five vows, or promises, to God and their fellow brothers. Three

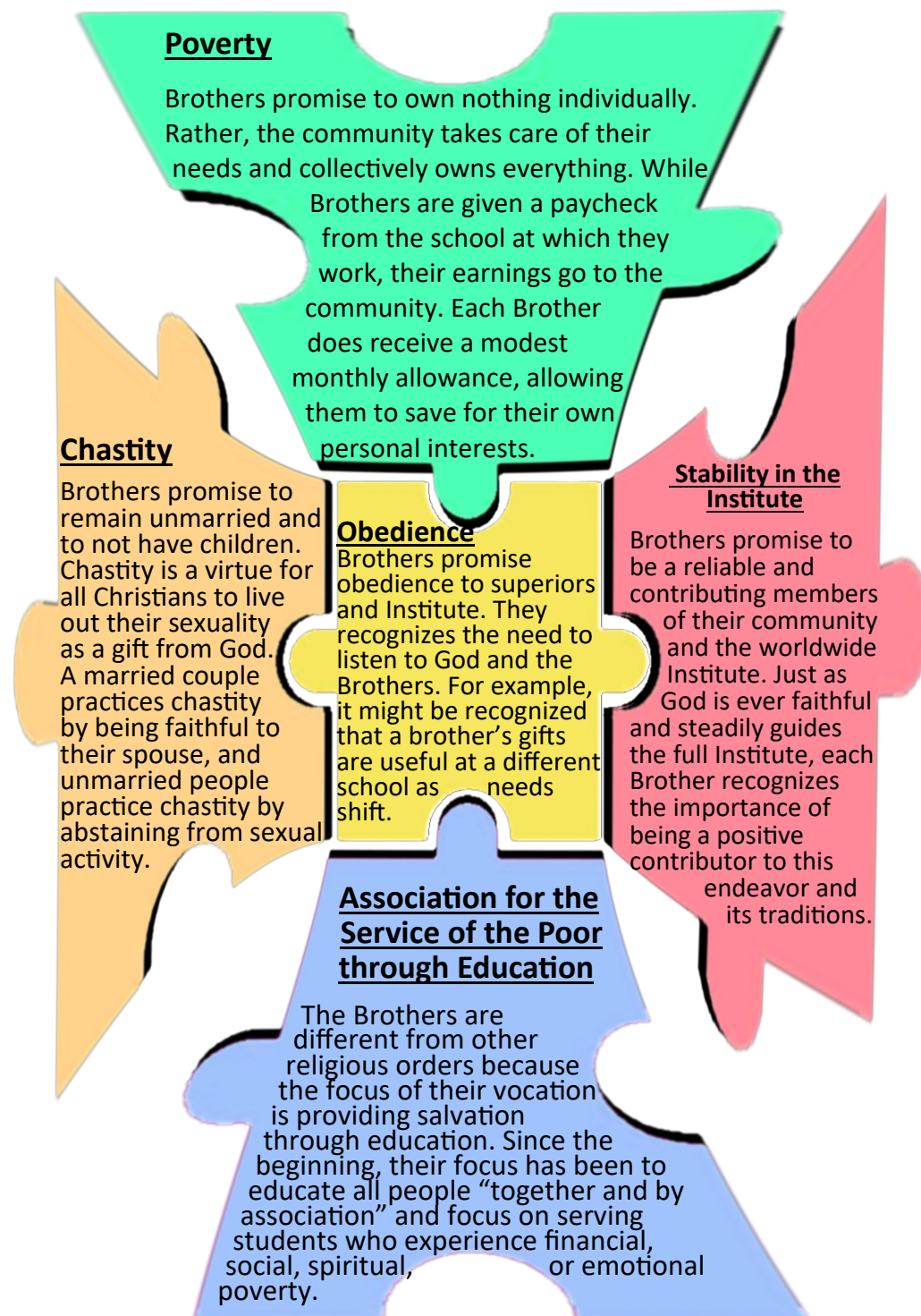
vows, known as the “evangelical counsels,” are vows promised by all religious orders in the Catholic Church. These three vows—poverty, chastity, and obedience—are taken by all nuns, sisters, brothers, monks, and priests who belong to a religious order, such as the Dominicans or Franciscans.

The two further vows the Christian Brothers take emphasize their vocation within the Catholic Church. The first additional vow is unique to the Christian Brothers and is for

“association for the service of the poor through education.” In addition, they take a vow for “stability in the Institute,” which some other religious orders in the Church take as well.



Chapter 3: To Be “Lasallian”



In essence, these vows are foundational to the vocational call of a Christian Brother. These vows ground the Brothers in a community centered environment focused on education, especially for the poor.

Questions: Chapter 3, Section 10

1. What are the two ways Lasallians understand the term “salvation”?
2. In your own words, explain each of the five vows a Brother takes.
3. The Brothers consider your lay teachers as their partners in the mission of educating you. In your opinion, which of the Brothers’ vows do you believe would best help your lay teachers in this mission and why?
4. Which of these vows do you believe would most help students pursue their education and discover their gifts? How do you think this school year would be different if you took this vow?

Section 11: Community and Charism

At the heart of Lasallian education are the relationships built in the community. As noted with several of the vows, the Christian Brothers provide education in a community setting— “together and by association.” Even in the earliest days, John Baptist de La Salle would only allow brothers to go to a new school if there were at least two brothers available; however, it was preferable to have at least three. Today, at least three brothers are needed for a community.

Chapter 3: To Be “Lasallian”

Living in community allows them to collaborate on best educational practices, share chores in their house, and, perhaps most importantly, to pray with one another. In this setting

Brothers can best be brothers to one another, while working together to be model elder brothers to their students. Like the Brothers, all members in a Lasallian school should be building positive relationships to foster the best educational community!



Another element that binds the Brothers together is their shared charism. Charisms are special graces given by the Holy Spirit to individuals or communities to help build God’s kingdom here on earth. De La Salle believed the Holy Spirit had given the Christian Brothers two charisms, or graces, to foster their vocation: faith and zeal.

For De La Salle, faith and zeal go hand in hand for providing a human and Christian education. Faith means seeking the will of God and His perspective in our daily lives. After all, we are always in God’s holy Presence. Zeal means having great enthusiasm, and De La Salle insisted each Brother have zeal for the instruction of children, including religious instruction. Similarly, all Lasallians can have faith in God’s holy Presence and zeal for quality education and for each of our vocational paths.

John Baptist de La Salle told the Brothers, “to look upon everything with the eyes of faith, to do everything in view of God, and attribute all to God.” (Rule of 1705)

Questions: Chapter 3, Section 11

1. You read how a community helps the brothers. Do you think your community helps you be a student? Explain your answer.
2. Write the definitions of faith and zeal. Then explain which you believe contributes more to make a classroom experience successful.

Section 12: All Can Live as a Lasallian

All members of the school community—administrators, teachers, staff, coaches, and students—are invited to be Lasallians and walk in the way of St. John Baptist de La Salle. One of the ways we do this is through practicing the five Lasallian Core Principles in all aspects of our school.

The Lasallian Core Principles evolved from a time when Lasallian schools were trying to better understand their identity and heritage. The five principles we have today originated from a group of high school students during a legacy San Francisco District gathering in 1993, where they contemplated aspects all their schools had in common. Over time, the terminology for those common experiences became refined into the five principles we have today. Here is a look at understanding each core principle and an example of how it’s rooted in De La Salle’s writing:

Chapter 3: To Be “Lasallian”

FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The Lasallian school nurtures in its members an awareness of the living presence of God in our world. It calls all to a deeper awareness of their saving relationship with a caring and loving God and moves all to see the world through the “eyes of faith.”

“Remembering that God is with you will help and inspire you in all that you do.” (Letter 2 - to a Brother, 15 May 1701.)

QUALITY EDUCATION

The Lasallian school provides an education that prepares students not only to contribute to society but to transform it. It calls all to use their knowledge and talents to critically examine and engage the world in light of the message of the Gospel.

“Young people need good teachers, like visible angels.” (Meditation for the Time of Retreat 5.1)

Definitions are from <https://delasalle.org/who-we-are/five-core-principles/>

The Lasallian school calls its members to live in solidarity with those who have less and are victims of injustice. It calls all to a life-long commitment to respond to their needs through programs of community service, advocacy, and justice education.

“Take even more care of the young people entrusted to you than if they were the children of the king.” (Meditation 133.2)

CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

RESPECT FOR ALL PERSONS

The Lasallian school engages its members in a concerted effort to respect the dignity of all persons. It calls all to respect-filled relationships as the heart of Lasallian education and a key expression of their identity as children of God.

“By the care you take of your students show that you have real love for them.” (Meditation 80.3)

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

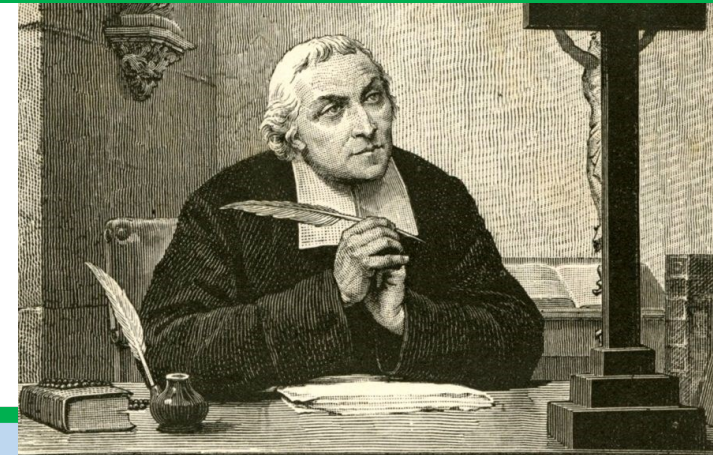
The Lasallian school is a united community where diversity is respected and no one is left out or left behind. It calls all to recognize and embrace one another’s unique stories and qualities as unique and sacred features of the Body of Christ on earth.

“Know your students individually and be able to understand them.” (Meditation 33.1)

Chapter 3: To Be “Lasallian”

Questions: Chapter 3, Section 12

1. For each of the Lasallian Core Principles, explain the meaning in your own words. Then also include an example of when De La Salle demonstrated the principle in his actions.



De La Salle as a Writer

Having received a rigorous education and rich spiritual training, St. John Baptist de La Salle was quite the scholar and writer. Not only did he write a letter every month to each Brother, De La Salle also wrote books on theology, prayer, education, and good behavior. Here is a sampling of the Founder's writings:

A student who has trouble assuming the proper posture and holding the pen properly should be seated beside one who does both of these things well, and so forth. In this way, students may be of mutual assistance to one another. (*The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, Appendix A)

We must consider that this day has been given to us only to work on our salvation. (*Exercises of Piety for the Christian School*, "Prayers During the Morning")

I need only to turn to you, for you are a God of love, and you show a tender love for us in your divine Sacrament.

You can easily fill me with all that is lovable and loving in you.

Set me aflame with love for God, and give me a burning love for my neighbor.

(*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* - an example of thinking about Jesus Christ in the form of the Blessed Sacrament)

Teachers will speak on only three occasions: 1) to correct the students during lessons, when necessary and when no student is able to do so; 2) during catechism; and 3) during the meditations and the examination of conscience. Except on these three occasions, teachers will not speak unless it seems necessary, and they will take care that this necessity be rare. (*Conduct of the Christian Schools*, Part 2)

Please try to have an engaging manner, and make it one of your chief occupations to bring about union among your Brothers. I pray that God will also grant you this union. (*The Letters* 66–To a Brother)

Do you have faith that is able to touch the hearts of your students and to inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you can perform and the one that God asks of you, for this is the purpose of your work. (*Meditations* 139:3)

Before blowing your nose, it is unbecoming to take a long time drawing out your handkerchief, and it would show a lack of respect for the people present to unfold different parts to see which you will use. Take your handkerchief out of your pocket, and use it promptly in such a way that hardly anyone notices. (*The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, Ch. 7.)

LASALLIAN AROUND THE

EDUCATION WORLD



RELAN

Lasallian Region of North America
Canada
United States
Bethlehem, Israel

RELEM

Lasallian Region of Europe and Mediterranean
Austria Hungary Malta South Sudan
Belgium Ireland Netherlands Spain
Egypt Israel Palestine Switzerland
Equatorial Italy Poland Togo
Guinea Ivory Coast Portugal Turkey
France Jordan Romania United Kingdom
Greece Lebanon Slovakia
Guinea

RELAF

Lasallian Region of Africa-Madagascar
Benin Ghana
Burkina Faso Kenya
Cameroon Madagascar
Chad Niger
Congo Nigeria
Eritrea Rwanda
Ethiopia South Africa

PARC

Pacific Asia Region
Australia New Zealand
Cambodia Pakistan
Hong Kong Papua New Guinea
India Philippines
Indonesia Singapore
Japan Sri Lanka
Malaysia Thailand
Myanmar Vietnam

RELAL

Lasallian Region of Latin America
Andorra Cuba Mozambique
Argentina Dominican Republic Nicaragua
Bolivia Ecuador Panama
Brazil Paraguay
Chile Guatemala Peru
Colombia Haiti Puerto Rico
Costa Rica Honduras Venezuela
Mexico

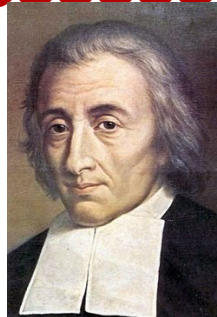
Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Section 13: A World-Wide Institute

As seen on the previous page, our school today is part of a global network that continues to live in the legacy of St. John Baptist de La Salle! When De La Salle passed away in 1719, it would have been difficult for him to imagine that his educational mission would span the globe. Here are some statistics showing how De La Salle’s vision has grown into a worldwide Institute:

1719	2024
About 100 Brothers	About 2,774 Brothers
Located in France (with 1 Brother in Rome)	Located in 80 Countries
No Lay Partners, Only Brothers	Over 92,500 Lay Partners
About 3 Dozen Schools	1,132 Schools with over 1,155,000 Students

The Lasallian Institute is led by the Superior General, who is selected to lead all the Brothers around the world and ensure the Lasallian mission is being fulfilled. Every seven years, representative Brothers from the global Institute gather at the Motherhouse in Rome in a General Chapter to discuss relevant educational topics and elect a new Superior General. In 1717, the Brothers elected Br. Barthélemy as their first Superior General to succeed De La Salle as their leader. The current Superior General elected in 2022 is Br. Armin Luistro; he is the 28th Superior General.



Br. Barthélemy

The Seal of the Institute Explained:

- ◆ **Signum Fidei - Latin for “Sign of Faith”**

Enlightened by this star and even more so by the light of faith, [the Magi] go to announce a new Sun of Justice in the place where he was born. (Meditation 96.1)



- ◆ **The Star - Symbolic of the star that led the Magi to the infant Jesus, who had a humble birth.**

Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct; adore him in them. Love poverty, and honor the poor, following the example of the Magi, for poverty ought to be dear to you, responsible as you are for the instruction of the poor. (Meditation 96.3)

- ◆ **Scallop Shell - Symbolic of baptism, which initiates one in the Christian faith.**

Are we attentive to the inspirations we receive from God? Are we as quick to follow them as these holy Magi were in letting themselves be led by the star that guided them? (Meditation 96.1)

Questions: Chapter 4, Section 13

1. Analyze your own school seal. Are there any common elements between your seal and the seal of the Brothers? If so, what are they and what is the meaning behind them?

Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Section 14: Recent Superior Generals Reflections

Here are some quotes from the most recent superior generals on elements of the Lasallian charism and spirituality:

Br. John Johnston, FSC from the United States of America

Superior General from 1986-2000

One of the most encouraging signs I see in the Institute is the renewed commitment to religious instruction. But we have a long way to go. There are many indications that young people today are increasingly grappling with religious questions. We Lasallian teachers—Brothers, laity, clergy—have to meet the young "where they are," treat them with great respect, manifest our own faith to them without attempting to impose our beliefs on them, allow them to ask the questions that are important to them, know how to accompany them as brothers and as sisters. (1991 Pastoral Letter: Irrevocably Committed)



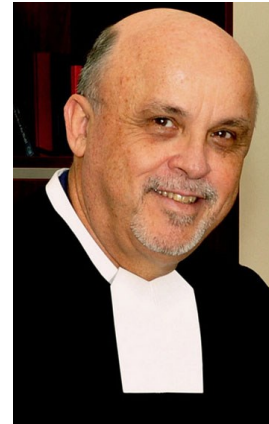
Br. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC from Costa Rica

Superior General from 2000-2014

[Zeal] deals with, therefore, a school that is not closed in upon itself but one which is open to the world and in particular to the world of the poor. From here it follows that all programs, curricula, and methodology and all school activities should be marked by respect and love for each person, by limitless dedication, by the perspective of awareness and social commitment and, above all, by the desire that each one live out the values of the Gospel, reach full realization and salvation and be committed to the building of the Kingdom. (2013 Pastoral Letter: Called to be Witnesses of God's Love)

Br. Robert Schieler, FSC from the United States of America

Superior General from 2014-2022



The building of fraternity necessarily includes the desire and ability to encounter and dialogue with others, particularly those who are different. Encounter and dialogue are the building blocks of fraternity. Being builders of fraternity is our response to the cries of the poor and the discordance so evident in today's world. [...] In a polarized society, where different cultures struggle to live alongside one another, where the weakest are oppressed, and where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community... to be a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit that inspires in human hearts a passion for all to join as one. (Witnesses to Fraternity: Pastoral Letter 2019)

Br. Armin Luistro, FSC from the Philippines

Superior General from 2022-Present

As a global community of Lasallians, united with one heart and mind, we may behold the key to doors of salvation for those who are discouraged and continue to live in pessimism or cynicism. What doors may we open for them so they can have an intense experience of God? May we allow ourselves to become instruments of God's grace of healing and hope. Are we ready to welcome and embrace the lost, the last, and the least so that they could touch the hem of Jesus' cloak, the cloak that brings salvation? Not salvation up there, but salvation from hunger and thirst, from poverty and alienation, and from anything and everything in this world that drags them down or pushes them to the peripheries. (Video message from the Superior General for the Feast of St. John Baptist de La Salle – 15 May 2025)



Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Questions: Chapter 4, Section 14

1. Select one quote from a past or the current Superior General and write a summary in your own words.
2. How do these quotes add to your understanding of your own school's mission?

Section 15: Lasallians around the Globe

Even during De La Salle's time, the Brothers provided a variety of educational experiences to ensure a human and practical education to those who needed it. When De La Salle was alive, the Brothers acquired a property in Rouen called St. Yon. This place served as a retreat ground and headquarters for the Brothers, as well as a school that included 300-500 boarding students. In addition to all this, St. Yon served as a detention center and school for boys being detained by the king and courts. It should be noted that the detention services that the Brothers provided were more humane and less embarrassing than the jails run by the government.



St. Yon in Rouen, France

Today Lasallian education continues to manifest itself in a variety of ways to meet students where they are. Here are a couple examples from around the world:

Bethlehem University

The idea for Bethlehem University was originally conceived by Pope Saint Paul VI after he visited the Holy Land in 1964. The Pope believed the Palestinians in the area would benefit from a local university in the area and it would help curb Christian Palestinian emigration. Saint Pope Paul VI asked the Christian Brothers to take on the endeavor and the university was opened in 1973. Since then, Brothers from the United States have helped lead and operate the school. It was the first university in Palestine and the only Catholic university in the Holy Land. Of its current 3,000 undergraduate students, 75% are Muslim and 78% are women.



Bamboo School

Located in Sangklaburi, Thailand, the Bamboo School was started in 2008. In this border town, the government prohibits any permanent structures, so the school is constructed out of bamboo. The Bamboo School teaches 500 students who live in Myanmar and Thailand, but are stateless with no citizenship. This school allows them to receive a primary education and to eventually receive



recognized documentation to attend public middle schools and high schools in Thailand. Though the students are predominantly Buddhist, they still use the "Live Jesus in our hearts" prayer daily.

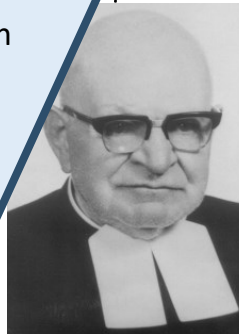
Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Lasallian Sisters

Two groups of religious Sisters have also been formed based on the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Like the Christian Brothers, they follow the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and follow the same spirit as the Brothers. They are dedicated to educating and serving the needy in their communities.

Guadalupana De La Salle Sisters

These sisters were started in 1946 by Servant of God Br. Juan Fromental Cayoche, FSC in Mexico. With special patronages to Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Joseph, they now provide a Lasallian education to students in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Italy, Madagascar, Benin, Rwanda, France, and the Philippines.



Br. Juan Cayoche, FSC

Congregation of Lasallian Sisters

These sisters were founded by the Christian Brothers in Vietnam in 1966 to help care for abandoned children during the Vietnam War. Today the Sisters do educational work in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Australia, and the United States.



Twinning Schools

Acknowledging that we are part of a worldwide network of schools that span all socio-economic levels, the Brothers established the Lasallian Twinning program in 1995. Many Lasallian schools in the United States are twinned with a school in the Lwanga District of Africa (Kenya, Nigeria, Eritrea and Ethiopia). Because of the high cost of education and the mostly financially poor situation of these African students, the Twinning program encourages schools in the United States to help make education possible for these Lasallian students in Africa by doing fundraisers and raising awareness about our larger Lasallian family. Schools often do fundraisers to help with tuition assistance, purchases of classroom materials, maintenance and general school projects.



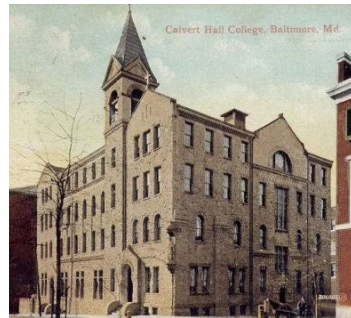
Questions: Chapter 4, Section 15

1. Explain one of the ways the Brothers have adapted to meet the current needs of students throughout the world.
2. What is another way religious Brothers and Sisters could best serve your local community? Explain your answer.

Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Section 16: Lasallian Region of North America

More locally, we are part of the Lasallian Region of North America, which includes the United States of America and parts of Canada. In 1817, the first three Christian Brothers in America landed in Annapolis, Maryland. They taught in the first American Lasallian school in St. Genevieve, Missouri, from 1819 to 1822. The oldest still-operating Lasallian school in the United States is Calvert Hall, which was started in 1845 by the first American Christian Brother, Brother Francis, in his hometown of Baltimore, Maryland.



A postcard image of Calvert Hall's old building.

Today, our region has four districts: District of San Francisco New Orleans, Midwest District, District of Eastern North America, and District of Francophone Canada. Each district has a lead brother known as the Brother Visitor, who is appointed for three or four years, and may be reappointed to the position (not exceeding 9 years). The Brother Visitor ensures the Lasallian mission is being fulfilled in all the district schools and ministries. Among the several duties of the Visitor is to “visit” the different Brothers communities and schools. Additionally, the Brother Visitor helps make sure the



Brother Visitors Nick Gonzalez (SFNO), Bob Schaefer (DENA) and Michael Fehrenbach (Midwest).

Brothers are placed in school communities where they can best serve students and he works with schools’ boards of trustees to make sure the Lasallian mission is alive in each school.

7

Universities (6 located in the United States, and the Bethlehem University in Palestine.)

20

Elementary and Middle Schools

49

High Schools

9

San Miguel Schools- 3 Elementary, 6 Middle Schools (Non-tuition driven schools in underserved, low-income communities.)

18

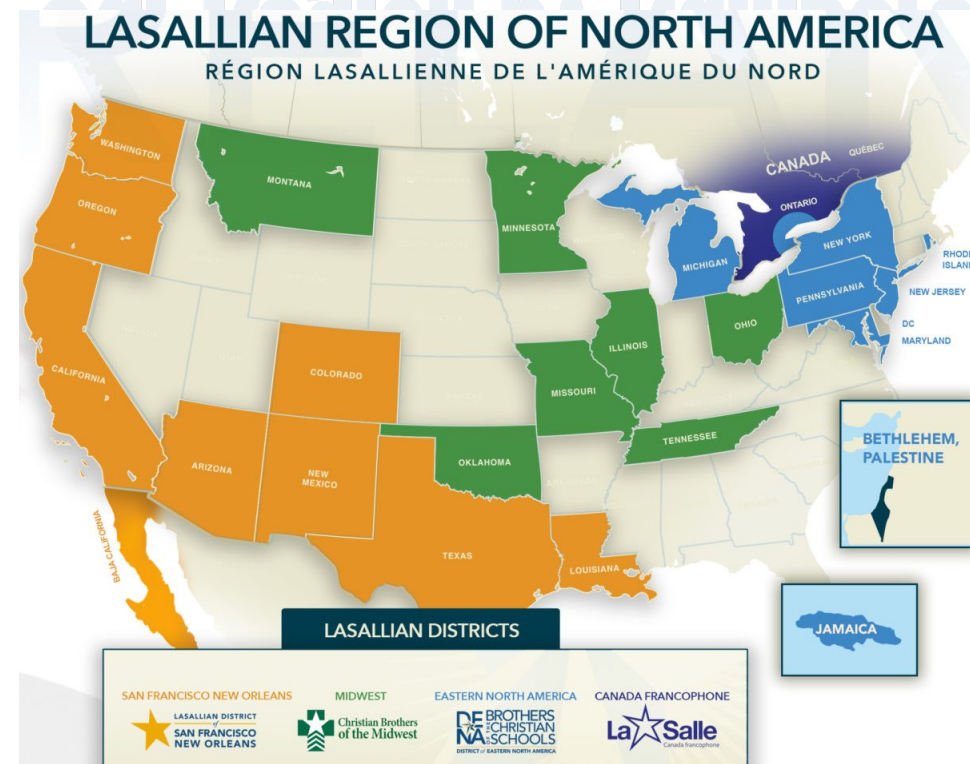
Other Educational Centers, Services and Ministries

4

Cristo Rey High Schools (Serve low-income communities with a college prep education while working at a local business once a week to help cover their tuition.)

Our Region by Numbers

Statistics as of Oct. 2024



Chapter 4: Lasallian Mission Today

Questions: Chapter 4, Section 16

1. Which of the four districts does your school belong to?
2. Look up on your school website when your school was opened and, if included, why it was opened.

Conclusion

Section 17: Community in Prayer

Pray for us

As Lasallians, we close our prayer asking St. John Baptist de La Salle to pray for us—individually and for our community.

In the Catholic faith, it is common to ask a saint for an intercessory prayer. While only God can answer prayers, we ask the saints to pray with us to God, in the same way we ask a friend to join us in prayer on our behalf. Catholics believe that we can be assisted in life by prayers from our community and from the communion of Saints in heaven!

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever!

Our final words are "Live Jesus in our hearts, forever!" This is a beautiful invitation to hope and emulate Jesus' behavior, reaching out to the marginalized and oppressed, and to live in a way that reflects Jesus' teachings and love—always and forever!



Sketching by Alonzo Aguillio.

Questions: Chapter 4, Section 17

1. Select one aspect from this section you want to keep in mind next time we pray in class. Explain why you chose this aspect.