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MANAGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS: A LAYPERSON'S VIEW

This article has been written for lay administrators in the hope of sharing a layman's view of management and administration of school organizations and a leadership style in consonance with the La Sallian concept of education. The model is heavily influenced by the culture of the community established by the founder and organized into sequential processes using management adaptations and insights into the reality of today's conditions.

A strong leader, St. John Baptist de La Salle possessed an ardent zeal, a tender and compassionate charity, agreeable manners and a boundless love for penance. All qualities he had which were necessary for his mission of establishing his Christian community.

Following the founder's style of organizing the community, some highlights in his life as a leader were selected which reflected the kind of organization in dire need today with the increasing number of lay teachers and administrators in our La Salle schools.

Consider the following elements which lend themselves easily to effective leadership and followership in any structural organization.

— St. John Baptist de la Salle organized the first group of teachers bringing them all together and teaching them the operation of a well-managed community.

— He educated the Brothers to have one mind and one heart to enable them to live in great harmony and assist each other with a tender and compassionate charity. All they possessed they had in common: even their interests were shared so that their attention was undivided.

— This kind of organization proved effective for sometime, but he noticed one serious drawback: the Brothers' great solicitude for the future. They worried occasionally about their prospects, thinking that they had embraced a lowly profession.

— He revived the Brothers' failing courage by talking to each one of them about faith in the Divine Providence. He reminded the Brothers that God knows their needs and will not fail anyone provided they remain faithful in their service to Him. His concept of organization hinged largely on submission, dependence and humility which at that time proved to be, effective.

Going through the patron's experiences some important implications have surfaced which are related to the high and low points in managing his community. The analysis below shows some important dimensions using the high points as best features which should be adopted, and where appropriate intervention strategies are prescribed to effect the low points:

— Leadership style as part of the school culture is largely influenced in successful institutions by the character and reputation of the founder.

— An organized community is like a well-knit family. The "give and take" process or mutual support of the members of the family can be learned by the members of the administrative team who act as models to all faculty members.

— The best results are obtained when teachers work together with a sense of commitment to one another as well as to the organization.

— Organization by formal or informal groups with unity of purpose is the main distinguishing feature of an outstanding organization.

— To be effective, each group, unit or department should have the same characteristics as the administrative team. Among these are:

1. A group, unit, or department is regarded as a whole component. It is made up of students, teachers and administrators as well as their support staff forming a cohesive team.

2. It is educated. Though teachers may have personality clashes and differences of opinion, the teachers have to learn to interact and to share with one another. They have to forego or relinquish their individual objectives to achieve a common goal.

3. It is supportive. Each teacher supports the others. If there is a group project everybody works to make the activity successful. If it fails, failure is assumed by all.

4. It is inspiring. The actions, values, and attitudes of the teachers inspire other members to greater efforts and achievements.

5. It is enjoyable. Teachers enjoy being one. They like the sense of unity, the sense of belonging and fun of being in a group.

— This kind of organization demands a greater coordination rather than mere compliance or sheer conformity. A member must coordinate his function with the team plan and the rules of the organization.

— The building of a strong team calls for teacher participation in the decision making process, working arrangements, setting targets, and quality control. Emphasis rests on task specialization to make the most of the potentials and skills of each member of the team.

— One of the biggest hindrances to this kind of organization is identity problem since recognition is normally given to the whole unit and not to individual achievements. This could be overcome if the administrator pays close attention to individual growth in the form of a well-organized faculty development program and reward system.

Generally, lay administrators must be aware that it is not the individual but the team that is the

instrument of sustained and enduring success in this type of management. A team can renew and regenerate itself by new recruitment as individual team members leave or retire. This is parallel to St. John Baptist de la Salle's experience of letting some Brothers leave the community when their enthusiasm in their work has slackened. His patience in training new recruits together with the others who have remained faithful paved the way for the formation of a new community filled with good will, fortitude, fervor, and piety. Lastly, the effect of this leadership style is the building up of a store of shared and collectively owned experiences, information, learnings, and decisions that can be analyzed, improved, and passed on to fellow administrators who may wish to follow the founder's footsteps in managing a La Sallian school community.

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