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THE ROLE OF THE BROTHER

IN THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL

We sometimes speak of the United Nations presence in the Mid-East. We may also allude to the United States presence in Western Europe or even to a USSR presence in Cuba. When we converse in this manner we do not refer to a great number of people but rather to the reality that a certain presence is recognized. The presence is seen as exerting an influence in a specific area, it is looked upon as giving special service, and it is generally felt that this form of presence truly makes a difference.

When we review the Brothers' presence in educational service in the Chicago District, we find that this influence through presence has been quite powerful. Four schools —St. Patrick, De La Salle, St. Mel, St. Georges— which were staffed predominantly by Brothers until the late 1950's, firmly established the Brothers' reputation for quality education. It was during the '50's and early '60's that a veritable explosion in Christian Brother education took place as the Order accepted the challenge to start ten new schools, take over the direction of four more schools which were already in operation, one of which was a college. Fourteen schools in just ten years! In subsequent years the Brothers' manpower shortage required them to withdraw from eleven of their seventeen schools. Most of these eleven schools remain alive and well today.

In this scenario we see the Brothers presence felt by the impact of numbers in their early schools. We also see the Brothers' presence felt by the influence of a small group of Brother-educators, usually joining with a like group of Sisters, and surrounding themselves with a lay staff to establish new schools. And, yes, we even see the Brothers' "presence" felt in their absence today as many of the schools that the Brothers started remain viable institutions today. Many educational faith communities exist today because of the Brothers' direction of these schools in the early days of their development.

Since the Brothers published their **Declaration** in 1967, the emphasis has been to focus on methods of making the Brothers' presence felt amid their dwindling numbers, by their influence, by their service, and by truly making a difference in their

schools. The **Declaration** urged the Brothers to re-evaluate their school commitments and to understand that their influence of the school than from the more from the quality and excellence of the school than from the number of schools which they conduct.

With the recent stress on the "Lasallian School", instead of on the "Brothers" school in the Chicago area, the question as to the role of the Brother in the schools is being asked by lay staff, by the Religious, and by the Brothers themselves. Some may feel that the downplaying of terms such as "Brothers School" and "Brothers Boys" may be the signal that the Brothers are planning a quiet exodus. But, in truth, the Brothers in the Chicago District still intend to keep their schools as their preferred educational work.

The Lasallian school is to be a place where the Brothers, Lay Faculty, Religious, and Priests are all completely involved with the whole school —with teaching, with catechesis, with apostolic and service organizations, with administration, and in extra-curricular activities. As Brother Peter Clifford, Provincial of the Long Island / New England District, wrote to his communities in June, 1986: "We are all aware that our colleagues, lay, religious, and priests, are more than replacements in our institutions for the Brothers, or unavoidable alternatives. They are men and women interested in our work and in our mission. We owe them the same attention and opportunities for growth in Lasallian thought and idealism as we owe ourselves. In addition, our mission becomes more important as it expands through teachers, volunteers, parents, and alumni groups, and other forms of the Lasallian Family".

The Brother who is the school administrator has the power to set in motion programs which will make the "Lasallian Characteristics" come alive. Faculty members need to be encouraged to hop on the academic escalator to become master teachers or department or committee chairpersons. Teachers might consider becoming exchange teachers in other Lasallian schools, or become consultants in their particular discipline for other area schools. Some may wish to enter intern programs for school administration. It will be the

principal's vision as to what the Lasallian school might become that will determine just how vigorous this whole movement will be in each school.

The teaching Brother should be one of the school's visual aids in the art of teaching. The Brother should also be an energizer to the faculty. As the scope of the teacher's responsibility broadens to that of human service educators, teachers will at times be counselors, group leaders, designated thinkers, but always stimulators of the human potential in a variety of ways. The Brothers need to take the lead with their religious, academic, and social vision, and their strong commitment to education, to truly be the animating influence within the school and to the wider community.

The Brothers need to lead the faculty in discussing the great work that all of us are doing. Neil Postman reminds teachers of their importance: "The role of teachers, it seems, is to attempt to show youth that the young enter adulthood, not by TV inform-

ation, but by having their questions answered. We now have a society of students who have answers to questions that they never asked. Unless students can lean on adults, especially teachers, they will not be hope-filled, courageous, or disciplined. The violence that is now revealed over television (their first curriculum) is seldom mediated by a mother's voice, is not modified to suit the child's age level, is not governed by any theory of child development. Teachers who are seen by their students as role models, listeners, value people, interpreters of society's mad violence and vulgarities, in addition to their competency in teaching, are needed today perhaps more than ever" (1). Brothers, we have our work cut out for us!

Brother Terence McLaughlin.

(1) Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*.