

★ *lasalliana*

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THE DE LA SALLE SISTERS OF GUADALUPE

310 years later.

— March 1679: John Baptist de La Salle met Adrien Nyel in front of the house of the Sisters of the Divine Child on rue Barbatre. This marked the beginning of a long journey which was to lead to the foundation of the Christian Schools.

— March 3rd 1989: The Holy See approved the new constitutions of the La Salle Sisters of Guadalupe, which had been recast in the spirit of Vatican II and brought into line with the new Code of Canon Law. This was a new strong and flourishing offshoot of a tree planted by De La Salle 300 years previously.

Who are the La Salle Sisters of Guadalupe?

It is a religious institute of pontifical right, founded in Mexico 45 years ago, and is a form of consecrated life for women, inspired by the Lasallian charism.

Origins and Aims.

«The Institute of the La Salle Sisters of Guadalupe owes its origin to the inspiration and apostolic zeal of Brother Juan Fromental Cayroche, of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. About the year 1944, after some twenty years of dedicated apostolate in the Archdiocese of Mexico, Brother Juan realised the need to found an institute for women which would be able to work in conjunction with the Brothers in their educational mission with young people. This Institute would be placed under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe and would take St. John Baptist de La Salle as its source of inspiration and guidance, and St. Joseph as its special patron.» (Rule, 1989, art. 1)

«Seeing in these circumstances a providential sign, the Sisters consecrate themselves to God in order to devote themselves to the apostolic ministry, according to the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.» (Rule, 1989, art. 2)

«The purpose of this Institute is to ensure the human and Christian education of children and young

people, especially of the poor. This is done either in establishments directed by the Institute itself, or in institutions where they can offer their services with the same purposes in mind, or in apostolic work in parishes and, if circumstances so require, by giving domestic help in the houses of religious or priests.» (Rule, 1989, art. 3)

Brother "Juanito".

This is how the Sisters call their Founder. Brother Jean Fromental Cayroche was born in Servieres (Lozere, France) on June 27th 1895. When he was 13 he went to the Brothers' Juniorate at Vals, which was not far from the village where he was born, and he stayed there a few months. Because of the Combes Laws which were voted in at the beginning of the century, Juanito's Lasallian formation had to take place outside his own country. He went successively to Premia de Mar (Spain) where he got to know St. (Brother) Miguel and took the habit, then to Lembecq lez Hal (Belgium) where he made his scholasticate. When he was 18, he left for Cuba, arriving there in January 1913. In 1921, he made his perpetual profession. In 1925, he arrived in Mexico.

Brother Juanito arrived in the country at a difficult time. The country was governed by Plutarco Elias Calles who, between 1926 and 1929, unleashed a vicious persecution of the Church. It was not till 1940, with the arrival of General Avila Camacho, that Lasallian schools were able to emerge from a situation closely resembling that of life in the catacombs, and which had been their lot for 20 years.

Brother Juanito's zeal, which even during the clandestine years had never wavered, was now able to be given free rein. While continuing his work as a catechist, teacher and bursar, he gave new impetus to the federation of former students which he himself had founded, and he brought out a magazine called "Indivisa Manent" which served to popularise cultural and religious matters.

It was in the midst of all these activities, based on the Simon Bolivar College, that the idea was born of founding a Lasallian form of consecrated life for women, who would devote themselves to backing up the work of the Brothers. Brother John made the idea reality.

The various stages of the process of foundation.

After obtaining permission from his Superiors, given on the condition he would not be the superior of the future community, Brother John set to work.

— **January 15th 1944:** a first group of 5 young women is formed. By the end of the year there is no one left.

— **June 28th 1945:** another attempt is made, this time with the help of three women religious from the Franciscan Tertiaries of the Immaculate Conception. By December of that year, the group is reduced to two aspirants and one Franciscan Sister.

— **January 11th 1946:** the third attempt is successful! A new group is brought together, with new aspirants and new Franciscan formation personnel.

— **September 8th 1946:** the group is constituted as a "Pious Union" and calls itself: «Sisters of the Christian Schools of St. Mary of Guadalupe».

— **March 18th 1947:** 6 postulants receive the habit of the "Pious Union".

— **September 15th 1947:** new taking of the habit; 11 postulants.

— **March 19th 1948:** the first six novices make their first vows. The first religious community is formed, still under the guidance of the Franciscan Sisters.

— **July 1948:** Brother Athanase Emile, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, visits the Sisters. He gives his blessing and encouragement to the Pious Union, which from that time onward becomes known as the "Lasallian Oblates of Guadalupe".

— **September 1948:** it is decided that the religious habit of the Sisters should be based on that of the Brothers, and consist of the black robe and white rabat.

— **May 15th 1950:** in an official letter from Brother Athanase Emile, the Sisters are affiliated to the Brothers' Institute. In the course of the same year, the first Rules are published, based on the Brothers' own Rule of 1947.

— **May 12th 1952:** the Franciscan Sisters, who have guided the Institute from its earliest days, withdraw from it as it is now sufficiently well established. The Superiors order Brother Juanito back to France and tell him to cease all contact with the Sisters, much to their regret. However... "If the grain does not fall into the ground and die..."

— **1955:** first foundations abroad: Cuba and the United States.

— **1958:** 1st General Chapter. The Institute spreads to Spain, and new houses are set up in the United States.

— **1959:** the Sisters set up a community in Rome, in the Brothers' Generalate.

— **September 12th 1962:** the Pious Union is recognised as an Institute of Diocesan Right by the Archbishop of Mexico. 48 Sisters make perpetual vows, and 60 others renew their temporary vows.

— **1968:** 2nd General Chapter. The name of the Institute is changed and becomes the "La Salle Sisters of Guadalupe" as at present, and an official request is sent to the Superiors of the Brothers' Institute to allow the return of Brother Juanito to Mexico.

— **September 4th 1971:** after 19 years in exile, during which he never ceased to edify the Brothers in France, Brother Juanito returns to Mexico. The Sisters welcome their Founder back with great jubilation, and he continues to live his edifying life in their midst till his death in 1978. In 1971 also, the Sisters set up a house in Colombia.

— **1974:** 3rd General Chapter: a decision is made to ask the Holy See to approve the Institute as one of Pontifical Right.

— **April 15th 1976:** "Decretum Laudis" granted by Pope Paul VI.

— **1979:** 4th General Chapter, brought forward a year because of the precarious health of the Sister Superior General.

— **1982:** after a period of crisis caused by differences of opinion in central government about the mission of the Institute, the Holy See intervenes and appoints a new central government team.

— **1986-1988:** 5th General Chapter, in two stages, during which there takes place a revision of the Constitutions prior to their submission to the Holy See for approval.

— **March 3rd 1989:** definitive approval by the Holy See of the revised Constitutions.

Future Prospects.

As a consequence of the introduction of mixed education into Brothers' schools, there has arisen over the past few years in a variety of places, a wish on the part of girls to consecrate their lives to the apostolate of education within the framework of a form of consecrated life for women, inspired by the Lasallian charism. This is a challenge for the Brothers as well for the Sisters:

— The Sisters have to come to terms with their Institute becoming international, as well as with greater direct involvement with the apostolate of education;

— The Brothers, for their part, will have to learn how to direct and encourage vocations that come to light among the girls they teach; and how to help the Sisters in their efforts to intensify the Lasallian and professional training of their members.

At present, there are about 160 Sisters and 22 communities. These latter are to be found in Mexico (13), United States (5), Colombia (2), Italy (1) and Philippines (1).

Brother Felix del Hoyo