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**THE LASALLIAN FAMILY:
A SHARED MISSION
(1/2)**

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This article is a speech given by David Hotek to the Brothers of the Chicago District at their District Assembly held at Christian Brothers Center, Romeville, IL on September 25, 1993.

I would like to thank all of you, for inviting me to speak with you this afternoon about a movement that is taking place within the Church, and more specifically, about a movement that is taking place within the "Lasallian" world of today. I am speaking about a movement which we call "Lasallian Family" - men and women, religious and lay, old and young, American, European, Asian, African, black, white, brown - who are united around the story of John Baptist de La Salle and who share in the mission of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, that is, "to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor." (*The Rule #3*) The Lasallian Family movement is a movement of people, people who find meaning and value in the spirit and in the educational philosophy of John Baptist de La Salle, and who are involved in the educational mission which he began some 300+ years ago.

I would like to begin by telling you a short story about a young man who entered a monastery. Very soon afterward he began to notice and be dismayed by the fact that monks, especially ones older than himself, were leaving the monastery. Troubled and confused, he went to the abbot. "Why," he asked, "do some men, after having committed themselves to a way of life, then forsake it for something else?" The abbot responded with a story: "Once upon a time a dog lay sleeping in the warm sun of the village square. All of a sudden, out of the corner of his half-opened eyes, he spied a rabbit darting across the road. He took off immediately in hot pursuit. He ran up and down the streets, through the countryside, keeping up the chase day and night and seeming never to tire. Eventually, other dogs saw him and joined in the run. But, one by one, they grew tired and stopped running. Why? They were running only because they had seen the first dog doing so. They had never caught sight of the rabbit in the first place." "So," the abbot concluded, "the one who has never glimpsed the vision easily grows tired of running. He gives up the chase because he can't remember why he had begun to run in the first place."

This story speaks to me of what the shared mission of the Lasallian Family is all about: catching a glimpse of the vision; and running after it. The Lasallian Family movement,

and therefore the Institute today, is about renewal, commitment, and shared mission. It is about active participation in the Church. It is about responding to the "call" of our baptism to be of service to others. It is about hearing the story of John Baptist de La Salle and therein finding personal as well as communal meaning. Your *Rule* states that the "spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded. The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality." (#146)

Vatican II: The People of God

One of the most critical experiences and understandings which has emerged in the Vatican II Church is that of the common vocation of all baptized. How many times have we heard this expressed in various ways? "We are the People of God, the Church!" "The people are the Church." "All people within the Church share in the ministry of Christ!" The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, in which the Church takes a look at itself and tries to fathom the mystery of its own being, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the world of today, *Gaudium et Spes*, in which the Church expresses its desire to be present in the world and to serve it, are the documents of Vatican II which attempt to explain the meaning of Church as the "people of God." These documents describe the Church as a community, not based on authority and hierarchical power, nor on a Church seen as a society of unequal members. On the contrary, it is the Church of the people of God on the move. It is a Church in which the prime mover is the Holy Spirit. It is a Church in which all the members, by virtue of their baptism, share in the mission and responsibilities of Jesus Christ himself.

"Several times, in difficult moments in the history of the Church, lay people have been the source of renewal for the Church, as for example, in the origins of monasticism and Catholic Action movements; in its determination and resolve to be committed to the service of the poor and to justice, as in the rise of the mendicant orders; in lay movements for social justice and liberation. ... Likewise today, there is a rediscovery of the idea that baptism demands the participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church. ... We experience in the Institute the same need in promotion of the shared mission." (42nd General Chapter, Circular 435, p. 40)

We must nevertheless admit that there is an element of our Church today, and also of the Institute, which has yet to recognize the fundamental truth of the documents of Vatican II and the Chapters of the Institute, much less the profound implications contained therein. More importantly, I believe that if we are honest with ourselves, we will also discover that many of us are still in the process of comprehending fully the meaning of the expressions "Christian vocation" and "shared mission." Indeed, to acknowledge ourselves as called in baptism to be followers of Jesus and fully active members of the community of faith, and to acknowledge that this call can be lived out by involvement in the mission of the Institute, is to acknowledge the all-encompassing nature of the commitment which is required of those who call themselves Christian. It is to willingly give ourselves to the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation to the youth of today by making the goodness of God manifest in every aspect of our lives. My

point here is, that the common vocation we share as Christians requires not only our **acknowledgement** that we are all called to full participation in the life and ministry of the Church and the Institute, but that we are all **responsible** for participating fully in the life and ministry of the Church and the Institute. Thus, both Vatican II and the 42nd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools call all of us to see our vocation as an affirmation and challenge, a privilege and responsibility.

The Spirit of God: The Prime Mover

The Spirit of God is active in our Institute today! There is something in the air that is calling us to move forward into the future with hope and enthusiasm. The very future of our Church and our Institute is closely linked with this action of the Spirit. Traditionally, the living out of our vocation had been undertaken within particular structures which served to separate the members of the Church into mutually exclusive, hierarchical categories: the ordained, the vowed religious and the laity. In seeking to respond to the challenge of living out our common baptismal vocation, many of us have discovered that categories and structures which put us in mutually exclusive and hierarchical relationships with one another do not provide the framework within which our common vocation can be expressed. Today, I believe, the Spirit is leading us into the process of creating new structures built upon the appreciation of that which unites us with, not separates us from, Jesus Christ and one another. In this search for new structures we have found certain values and principles which serve as the foundations upon which to build: values such as collaboration, mutual respect and appreciation, shared and participative leadership, affirmation of gifts, attention to process, shared ministry. These are the qualities that lie at the heart of today's Church when we are most faithful to our vocation. The more that we attempt to live out these values and principles, the more we become truly the Church, and the more we respond to our call as baptized Christians. The Lasallian Family movement, at its best, is a movement built upon these principles. The Lasallian Family movement is an expression of Church wherein each member is both affirmed and challenged as a full member of the community and an equal partner in the mission of the Institute. Like the young monk in the story, all of us must catch a glimpse of this vision if we do not wish to tire and drop out of the race. It is not sufficient to merely keep running because everyone else is doing so. We must run because it is our call, our challenge, our vocation. There is no turning back. This new life which we experience in our shared mission requires that we no longer look upon the Brothers as the *"only authorized agents of the Institute's mission. This view of mission is obsolete. In our unified commitment to mission there is diversity of vocations."* (42nd General Chapter, Circular 435, p. 8)

The Institute, in its desire to support and welcome this promotion of lay people, offers to those men and women who wish to be involved in the partnership the opportunity to commit themselves more closely and deeply to the spirit and charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle, who saw educators as Ministers of the Gospel. The Institute also recognizes its

own need of partnership in the changing realities of the world of education and the new evangelization and takes on its responsibilities in the promotion of the lay people in the Church. This new partnership is especially attentive to the needs of the young and especially the poor in the new evangelization. (42nd General Chapter, Circular 435, p. 30)

What is taking place within the Church and the Institute today is an "irresistible and irreversible stage in our history," to quote the words of one of the Consultants at the Chapter.

Shared Mission

Participation in the shared mission of the Institute emerges from a common experience in relationship to St. John Baptist de La Salle and his followers. In hearing his story - his sense of the basic injustice of the existing social order, his desire to right that injustice, and his acknowledgement that this could only be accomplished by humanity's cooperation with the plan of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; his particular concern for the youth of his day and his struggle to understand how to effectively respond to the overwhelming needs which he saw among them; his conviction that education is a crucial element in responding to these needs and thus to moving towards the achievement of their full human dignity; his recognition that the structures of his day were unable to meet this challenge, and therefore something new needed to be created; his willingness to risk failure and rejection in trying that which had never been tried before for the sake of creating a more just and humane world - when we hear the story of this man, it touches something in us, it calls something forth, and we recognize ourselves in him. In the story of De La Salle we come to know ourselves better, we understand more fully who we are. Our personal vocational consciousness is deepened. De La Salle's story provides a backdrop against which our work in education takes on meaning. For many it provides a hook on which we can hang our experiences as an educator. His story becomes a place of empowerment for us. It is in this place of empowerment that the creative power of the Spirit is at work, calling forth from us a deeper knowledge of ourselves as Christians and as Lasallian Family. In short, the story of John Baptist de La Salle, brought to life within us by the power of the Holy Spirit, provides us with a means of responding to our baptismal call, our Christian vocation, of accepting the responsibility of our shared mission in the Church and in the Institute.

De La Salle was not only a gifted educator and spiritual leader but also a man with a vision. He was in touch with the action of the Spirit in his life and saw "bushes burning" at every turn. He insisted that his teachers be convinced that they see themselves as God's ministers to young people, especially to the poor and neglected. He wanted his teachers to place their trust in God alone and to understand that it was God, working through them, who brought about the completion of their ministry. In effect, he wanted his teachers to see their work in Christian education as a response to their baptismal call.

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