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

David L. Hotek

What Does Shared Mission Require?

What does all of this mean for you and me today in light of the 42nd General Chapter and the emphasis on the shared mission of the Institute? In a very real sense we have been touched in some way by the story of John Baptist de La Salle, perhaps some more deeply than others. By the fact that we minister in apostolates inspired by De La Salle's educational philosophy, and by the fact that we collaborate with other educators who are also inspired by this same philosophy, we are therefore participating in the mission of the Institute, a mission that is shared equally among all its members. As such then we belong to something much larger than our particular educational institution. We belong to a Lasallian Family of educators, located in more than eighty countries throughout the world, who are attempting to continue today the mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

This movement, however, calls us to move beyond merely just "belonging" to the Lasallian Family. As members of the Lasallian Family, touched by the story of De La Salle, we challenge each other to respond more fully to the call we received at baptism, the call to ministry in God's Church. We are challenged to witness, by our lives, the Gospel values affirmed in the vision and mission of John Baptist de La Salle: values such as living in the presence of God; trusting in God's providence; expressing a spirit of faith and zeal in our work exhibiting a genuine concern for the poor and neglected youth of the world; believing that Christian education is a real ministry in the Church and a means of responding to the needs of youth; uniting together in association with other like-minded persons to fulfill this ministry. We are challenged to make a difference in today's world, to take seriously the Christian responsibilities we accepted at baptism. We are, therefore, part of a much larger movement that exists within the Church today. It is a movement based upon a belief in a collaborative Church, a Church where all the members contribute equally to the mission of Jesus Christ.

Practically speaking, what does this require of us?

First and foremost it requires faith: a belief in God; a belief that we have been called by this God through Jesus Christ, to be of service to others; and a belief that this call can be fulfilled through the ministry of Christian education. In the words of De La Salle himself, we are to "touch the hearts" of the young people "entrusted to our care." This is not something that we accomplish in isolation, but rather something we accomplish together, inspired by the Spirit of God.

Secondly, this belief requires that we place our trust in God's providence, realizing that we can not accomplish this mission alone. We are called to become a prayerful people, a people who place their trust in God. It is then that we will see the work we do in the field of education as the work of the Church. We will realize, like De La Salle, the "dignity" of this; "God-given ministry." We will look upon the students, seated before us each day, as sons and daughters of this same God, and therefore deserving of respect and love. We will develop a special concern for the poor and neglected students, the students who are most in need. We will realize that we do not minister alone, that we are part of a community of Christians who share a common vocation, and that each of us has something unique to contribute to this ministry. We will treat each other with dignity and justice.

Thirdly, this requires that we recognize that the work we do for our students, we do "together and by association." We are involved in a mutual, shared, collaborative ministry and as such we must do our best to identify, release and utilize the gifts of the entire community, Brother and Colleagues (partners) alike. The belief that every baptized person is gifted and called to ministry is the basis for our shared ministry. This work of shared ministry, however, is not easily accomplished, especially since, according to Loughlan Sofield, author of the book *Collaborative Ministry*, we belong to one of the two groups which have the most difficult time working collaboratively: preachers and teachers! All of our Lasallian schools, as well as the Church in general, are searching for models and skills to assist them in actively taking part in the work of collaboration. In the not too distant past, ministry was placed in the hands of only a small portion of the community. We generally viewed ministry as the sole responsibility of professed men and women religious, the ordained, and some laity. Today, however, the Holy Spirit is moving us beyond the "Lone Ranger" mentality of ministry to a more collaborative approach. Indeed, this is exactly what Vatican II has called us to do - to become the "people of God." It appears, from my experience, that more time is needed to fully comprehend the meaning of this statement.

Fourthly, we are all challenged to continue to seek ways to revitalize the schools and other educational apostolates with a particular attention to the service of the poor, to the promotion of justice, to pastoral action and to cultural awareness. We are likewise challenged to recognize and respect the diversity that exists in the Institute and among those who share in its mission. There are different levels of commitment as well as different lifestyles. We all need to be aware of and respect the demands of the many different vocations, commitments and lifestyles of those involved in the shared mission of the Institute. We also need to invite each other to develop further our commitment to the mission, according to the successive calls we receive from God and the paths on which we are led.

"The development of the partnership in which you Brothers participate is something quite new; fresh ground is being broken. It requires of us all a new mentality and a common effort of imagination and creation which must propel us forward together." (42nd General Chapter, Circular 435, p. 31.)

Conclusions

John Baptist de La Salle was in many ways a man ahead of his time. He verbalized in a very concrete and understandable fashion, what it meant to be a Christian educator. He spoke to the very heart of what it meant to be a minister of God and placed the work of education within the context of that ministry. De La Salle responded to the educational needs of his day and established schools for the service of the poor and neglected. He viewed the teacher as God's special minister to students and envisioned the teacher as one called to play a unique part in God's providential plan for youth. De La Salle also envisioned the Lasallian school to be a place where teaching ministers come together as brothers and sisters in association, based on a common acceptance of Gospel values and on a shared desire to foster these values in their own lives and in the lives of students. They were to work in mutual charity, that is, with tolerance, generosity, patience, humor, and humility. They were to cooperate with each other in order to make possible a collegial style of administration and decision making. They were to witness publicly their Lasallian charism and manifest an openness to all who wished to associate themselves with their ideals.

John Baptist de La Salle was a man of faith, a man with a vision. Like the first dog in my opening story, De La Salle had caught sight of the vision and had "taken off 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." This faithfilled vision kept him going, even when troubles seemed to get in the way. We who have been touched in some way by the vision of John Baptist de La Salle must strive to never "grow tired and stop running." We must not lose sight of the vision and "run merely because we see others

doing so." If this happens, we too will easily grow tired and "give up the chase."

As I mentioned earlier, the Lasallian Family movement is about renewal, commitment, and shared mission. It is about active participation in the mission of the Church and the Institute. It is about responding to the "call" of our baptism. It is about being touched by the story of John Baptist de La Salle. It is about active involvement in the mission of the Institute. The Lasallian Family movement is not something to which we belong, like a cardholding member of some educational club, but rather something that we are - real people - men and women, young and old, Catholic and non-Catholic, religious and lay - who struggle "together and by association" to become ministers of God's Word to the young men and women with whom and for whom we work.

I ask God, and St. John Baptist de La Salle, to bless us in this struggle and to grant us success in our work. •

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