

**DE LA SALLE'S SCHOOLS  
AS ARENAS OF  
RESPONSIBLE PARTICIPATION  
(2/2)**

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### 1. The reciters of prayers

There were two students who were assigned to recite prayers, one for the morning and the other for the afternoon; in the case of tardiness or absence, one substituted for the other.

They had to know the prayers well and have clear, resonant and powerful voices so that all their companions could hear them; above all, they were to pray decorously, with piety and strength.

Appropriately enough, the teacher would appoint new reciters on a monthly basis so that the majority of students would carry out this responsibility with its inherent advantage: the reciters themselves would pray in a more personal manner.

### 2. The substitute for the priest for responses at Mass

On Tuesdays, during breakfast, one student would play the role of the priest for the dialogue with the faithful and the altar servers. His companions, in turn, would give the corresponding responses. The Conduct gives several examples of how this exercise should be carried out.

Piety and modesty "must be very much in evidence" for this task; in addition, this officer needs "to avoid moving his head from side to side and avoid playing with those who are coming in and going out". One must always bear in mind whom one represents (p. 210).

The teacher will choose a new student with similar qualities for this post once per month.

### 3. The collector of mission offerings

From the very beginning the Lasallian school prepared its students for life. Theory was combined with immediate and concrete practices. What better lesson of charity and justice could there be but that the wealthy students share their bread with the needy? For this reason, parents would agree from the first moment of registering their sons in the school that they would take breakfast and lunch in school so that they could share the leftovers with the poor.

Distribution of the leftovers was not done in an arbitrary fashion; the collector responded in an equitable manner. The Conduct was very sensible in its requirements for this position! This officer had to have compassion and love for the poor; he must be honest in the distribution of the offerings, not taking anything for himself or for anyone else;

he must not be overcome by gluttony... (page 210).

If he did not live up to what was expected of him, the collector was replaced. The teacher would appoint a new collector, with the Director's consent, whenever he thought it appropriate to do so.

### 4. The Aspergill bearer

Daily participation in Mass was minutely regulated by the Conduct and these rules extended to teachers and students alike. To maintain order at the Church entrance and exit, one student was in charge of giving holy water to his companions by means of an aspergill. There were many minute regulations as to when and how this officer was to carry out his duties.

Besides piety and modesty being paramount for this officer, "he must avoid turning his head one way or another and avoid playing with those entering and leaving"... (p. 212).

This responsibility would last the entire school year unless there was some reason to replace this officer.

### 5. The keeper of rosaries

It was De La Salle's intention that students by all means participate in the sacrifice of the Mass. For students who knew how to read he composed an adapted method for them. Those who did not had to recite the rosary.

One student, who received help from some companions, passed out the rosaries at the beginning and collected them at the end of Mass. He also saw to it that they recited the rosary "slowly and modestly...that they do not talk or play around"...In the same way they had to be "sensible, devout and careful not to misplace the rosaries" (p. 214).

This responsibility was held for the entire school year and would only be changed of absolutely necessary.

### 6. The bell ringer

In each school there was one student who served as the bell ringer. His duties were minutely spelled out: when he should ring the bell and how many "strokes" he should "strike".

It is interesting to note the qualities that a good bell ringer was to have: he should be "very assiduous in attending school, careful, vigilant, exact, and very punctual in ringing on time"...(page 215).

The bell ringer was changed only if necessary.

### 7. The inspectors and supervisors

The inspector was the student who took the place of the teacher in the latter's absence. This responsibility was among the most delicate of all. The Conduct went to great lengths to describe the discharge of his duties.

As it was such a great responsibility, many qualities were necessary for this job: "the inspector must be very punctual and among the first to come to school; he must be vigilant, so as to observe all that takes place in the school; he must be a quiet person with good sense and he must not demand what he does not himself practice; he must not be partial to anyone so that he would accuse his friends and companions as well as the others...he must not receive any gift from anyone"...(pages 216-217).

This duty had no particular time limit attached to it. In case of necessity the teacher could change him with the approval of the Director or of the school inspector.

### 8. The row supervisors

Once again this shared responsibility benefitted the entire class. We can imagine the amount of time that the teacher could spend in calling the roll twice daily in classes with sixty or more students. The row supervisors were in charge of recording the absences in their particular rows.

This job was given as a reward for application, good sense and assiduity in school attendance. The position was changed if it was not being done well or if the good functioning of the class was at stake in the judgment of the teacher.

### 9. The visitors of the sick

If playing truant is as old as schools themselves are, there is no doubt that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was less motivation for students to attend school than there is today. Nevertheless, the Lasallian school did not tolerate unjustified absences. The chapter on absences is among the most prolific and demanding in the entire *Conduct* (cf. pages 182-197).

Each class had a team composed of two or three students whose job was to visit the home of absentees to find out the reason for the absence. The regulations for the “visitors of the sick” were so detailed as to be curious. For example, when students did not come to school owing to illness, the visitors were to “console them and encourage them to suffer the illness patiently and for the love of God”. “Later they will tell the teacher about their physical condition when they visited them and whether the illness was getting better or worse”. Is this not an active school?

The possibility of collusion between the visitors and the absentees is cause for the *Conduct* to carefully spell out the qualities which are essential for the visitors: “they must be honest in their behavior and have integrity so as not to become involved with bribes...in addition, they must become apostles of the school, winning over by their zeal those who are often absent so that these become assiduous in their class attendance”; also, “when they meet students on the streets who do not attend school, they invite them to attend”.

Once in a while, the teacher will reward the zeal and the good behavior of the visitors in order to maintain their spirit of cooperation and their love of school and their companions. This responsibility lasted for the entire school year unless there were special reasons that necessitated a change.

### 10. Distributors and collectors of papers

At the beginning of the writing lesson, one or two students, depending on the number of writers, would distribute to each student the corresponding sheets of exercises for that day. As these were collected, they would find out if they had completely finished the exercise; if it was neatly done and blotted...They would report any observed irregularities to the teacher in the fulfillment of their duties (p. 223).

### 11. Distributors and collectors of books

The author of the *Conduct* told the parents that their children must come to school the first day of classes with all their books; actually, there were “very poor” families and the school loaned books to these children. The names of these students were kept in a special register.

The distributor of said books knew the names of the students to whom he gave the books at the beginning of the corresponding lesson. At the end of class he collected them and looked through them since they had to be returned in perfect condition without folded pages and without marks in them.

This same student was also in charge of the preservation and collection of the teacher’s books (page 224).

### 12. The sweepers

One student in each school was responsible for its cleanliness. His duties are spelled out in detail on pages 224-225. In spite of the apparent modesty of this responsibility, the required qualities for sweepers were “diligence, a love for cleanliness, good sense, not given to arguing...” (page 225).

Normally, sweepers were changed monthly which was a good idea given the nature of the job.

### 13. The doorkeeper

Ordinarily there was only one door in a Lasallian school. If there was more than one, entering and exiting was always done through the same door and other ones were kept locked.

If possible, the doorkeeper was the student in the class who was closest to the door. His office required that class not be disturbed as he carried out his duties. He was not to talk with those who came in or went out.

The teacher chose from among the most diligent, assiduous, quiet, prudent and courteous students for this task...and “capable of edifying the people who come to knock at the school door” (page 227).

This person was changed only if necessary.

### 14. The keeper of the key

When the school building was not part of the Brothers’ residence, the Brother Director gave the key to the school to one student. His job was to be at school at 7:30 every morning and at 1:00 every afternoon in order to open the door. He could not give the key to any other student unless ordered to do so. He had to be careful that nothing in the school was carried away.

Candidates for this job had to be among the most assiduous at school, who never miss and who arrive on time to open the door (page 228).

This job was kept all year by the same student unless a special need arose that required his removal.

## CONCLUSION

All that was said above, some three hundred years ago, is in line with what the Declaration recommends:

“To give a living example of the true meaning of community, the brothers’ school will strive to promote the students’ personal freedom, encouraging them to assume the responsibility for their own formation. Education to freedom is achieved by a cordial relationship between faculty and students, by intelligent school discipline, by the very approach to teaching itself.

The experience of freedom is absolutely indispensable to training in responsibility: students need to assume an active part in the life of the school itself, its discipline, and all its operations...

Work in small groups will be preferred in order to instill self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and the spirit of collaboration. This will also minimize the problem of undue conflict and selfish ambition” (“The Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today: A Declaration”, 46.3). •