

**AN EXPERIMENT
WITH FORMER STUDENTS**

Brother Manuel F. Magaz

Our apostolic activity is called La Salle Circle. Its purpose is stated in the Statutes, approved by competent civil authority. Article 2 states: *“The Circle La Salle came into being under the auspices of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and it is the Circle’s intent to remain under its educational and collaborative influence by means of the carrying out of its activities”*. It then goes on to specify some objectives, for example:

- * To offer to members the means and opportunities for their integral continuing formation.
- * To foster friendship and conviviality among the members.
- * To maintain a close relationship with the Brothers of the Christian Schools.
- * To be committed to promoting justice and peace, etc.

Three years ago we began this journey along the lines of these objectives which were drawn up and approved by a group of committed former students. We sent hundreds of letters to former students from the rest of the high schools of Barcelona who were at retirement age. We received quite a few affirmative replies. Later on we turned to other means of communication such as the press and radio. Numerous people, even those from outside the Lasallian world, took an interest in the Circle, attracted by the catchword *“playful-cultural”*.

From the beginning, we offered members some cultural activities on a weekly basis as well as others as interest warranted, for example, cultural visits, conferences, colloquia, excursions...the range of activities grew at the rate of the teachers’ offerings. It is appropriate to note here that all of them were qualified in the subjects that they offered as “volunteers”, without receiving any recompense. The Circle took great pains to attend to the Christian formation and experience of its members.

The Lasallian charism of the fraternity animates the relationships among its members: some had the opportunity to put this into practice each week, others did this in meetings or in visits made to establish a Lasallian family group. The Executive Board is currently studying a way to introduce “the volunteer movement” among the members. Presently, several Circle members, supported by others, actively collaborate in a social ministry within a marginalized neighborhood of the city.

The Circle fulfills a human, cultural and Christian mission in its collective body of persons who themselves are continually growing. Unfortunately, neither society nor institutions bother about these qualities appropriately. Here are comments from some Circle members concerning what they have received from the Circle: *“it gives me healthy goals and the will to live”*. *“I have made new friendships”*. *“I have renewed strength to go on living joyfully and with hope”*. *“I have been afforded some culture and friendships and the possibility to devote myself to things which for lack of time I had not been able to do”*. *“For me it is a space for tranquility and harmony”*. *“My spiritual side has grown”*. *“This has been a welcoming experience, a witness of fraternity and good traditions and a place for encountering mature people with similar interests”*. *“The support received by Christian formation at Colegio La Salle and enjoying the presence and friendship of Brothers and former students have been strengths”*, etc.

Judging from this testimony, the reader would think that all the members were former students but that is not the case. The Circle is open to any man or woman who is ready to accept and live out the Lasallian charism, which is the spirit of Christianity. The reality affirms this openness since the Circle membership is spread out over fifteen city districts and bordering areas. It is true indeed that former students and persons with Lasallian connections are the most numerous and vital nucleus of the Circle. Having reached this point, I will now briefly explain some of the Circle’s particulars:

Activities offered on a weekly basis:

Most of these activities occur in a one-hour time slot; others last for two hours:

Bible - Needlework - Painting (2 sessions) - French conversation (2 sessions) -Catalan (2 levels) - Spanish literature - Sardanas (dance) - English conversation -French (4 levels) - Painting on cloth - Computers (2 levels) - English (4 levels) -Linguistic expression - Tai Chi - Bridge - Catalan literature - Yoga - Chess -Drawing - marquetry - Music - Gym - Psychology.

Occasional Activities

Chorale - Theater - Eucharistic liturgies - Prayer groups - Conferences - Colloquia - Cultural visits - Cultural and social excursions.

Students:

Of the **four-hundred** Circle members, approximately **two-hundred and fifty** of them participate in a weekly activity. A good number of these participate in more than one activity.

Teachers:

There are about thirty teachers, of whom six are De La Salle Brothers. There are highly qualified and most of them have degrees. They offer various activities and the students are pleased with them. Their dedication to this task is completely disinterested.

Information bulletin:

The members receive a monthly information bulletin of Circle activities and of news items concerning the members themselves. This bulletin is open to all who wish to make use of it.

Conclusion:

The reason for writing this has been to encourage retired Brothers - this activity has been ongoing for several years - so that they will try to become involved

with their former students and other retired persons in their educational institutions. This experiment cannot be duplicated exactly. It simply shows that we retired Brothers have ample apostolic areas within the charism of the Founder and the school's classrooms.

Once students leave the classroom, some may be able to make use of some of these activities with former students and other adults. With regard to teachers, what De La Salle school is there that does not have among its former students those who are qualified in certain disciplines and activities and who are not anxious to do something for others? It is simply a matter of searching for them and then getting them to commit themselves. On the other hand, little by little some students, expert in a particular area, will be motivated to become teachers. The Circle experience bears this out. It is very important that those in charge are able to have the community's support and also the support of the teachers. Among them sure can be found an abundance of "volunteers".

My final words are those of encouragement and stimulation. Mission is stimulating and gratifying. The retirement period is growing longer and longer and along with the growth of the time period is the number of retired persons. Many want to recall their past years, do things which their past work did not allow them to do, keep their intellectual ability in good form or pursue continuing formation and find a place suitable for sharing with others in a friendly atmosphere. What a beautiful idea it is to satisfy these human, cultural and spiritual desires in an atmosphere of Lasallian fraternity and Christian living together! Brother Manuel Fernández Magaz. •