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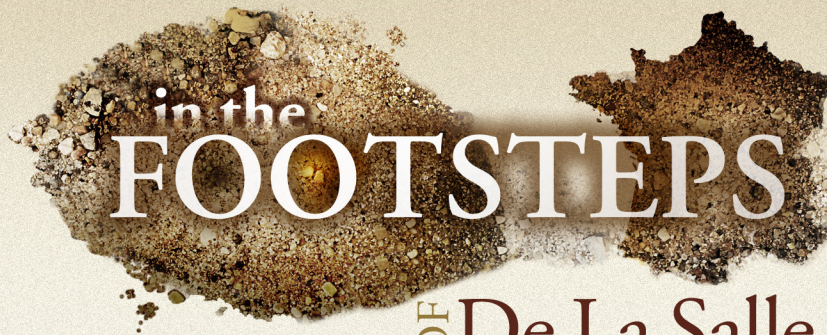
GUIDE BOOK + Q&A

in the FOOTSTEPS

 De La Salle

A Vocation Journey





De La Salle
A Vocation Journey

ABOUT THIS GUIDE BOOK + Q&A



THIS SYMBOL IS AN ACTIVE LINK TO THE WEBPAGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PDF GUIDE BOOKLET. IF YOU'RE USING A PRINTED VERSION, THEN GO TO WWW.DLSFOOTSTEPS.ORG AND FIND THEM USING THE MENUS.

This is a pilgrimage, featuring Br. Gerard Rummery, FSC, throughout the historical Lasallian sites in France.

www.dlsfootsteps.org

As an accompaniment to the website "In the Footsteps of De La Salle," this booklet is a wonderful way to explore the videos on various key sites throughout France closely associated with St. John Baptist de La Salle's life.

There are several levels of pilgrimage that are possible to Lasallians. The most basic level is simply to read about him or to read the things that he wrote. After that, there are books and articles by others that explore De La Salle's educational approach and his spiritual vision of education. Different media formats such as films or short video vignettes, collected within District or Regional libraries, further provide insightful perspectives by individuals, groups, or the Institute itself. And the list of online resources is building continually. Pursuing any of these means with others in a class or discussion group lends a further richness that cannot be found elsewhere. Finally, one could go and actually visit the places associated with his life, absorbing their ambience, weather, culture; what might be called the "feel" of the locations, even if some 300 years of history has intervened since De La Salle walked the ground in France.

The website and this booklet have been provided in order to fill the gap between that last stage, the pilgrimage itself, and the stages prior to it. Not everyone has the time or the resources to take their own pilgrimage of Lasallian historical sites. Even if they did, a good tour guide is hard to find. With this website, one of the best tour guides for English-speaking Lasallian pilgrims becomes available to everyone. Going through the website, and reading the accompanying text in this booklet, may not be exactly the same as actually being there. But it comes pretty close to conveying many of the same intangible things that an actual pilgrimage might convey: a sense of the geography and general atmosphere; an impression of the architecture, gardens, and other surroundings. It's a virtual way of being in those places. All these and more communicate a visual context that may be as important as the descriptions that Br. Gerard provides.

THIS ACCOMPANYING BOOKLET WILL PROVIDE THREE THINGS:

- 1) An overview of De La Salle's life story, so that all the places may be seen in the context of his story.
- 2) Specific information about each of the locations highlighted on videos at www.dlsfootsteps.org.
- 3) Suggested **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER** for each location that may be used by individuals or groups.

Br. Gerard's answers to various questions are a way to deepen one's understanding of De La Salle and his spirituality. Both the questions and the answers on the website may lead individuals or groups into rich discussions that apply De La Salle's charism to the real world of their daily experience. That journey is an entirely different kind of pilgrimage, but just as rich, if not more so.

It is hoped that your Lasallian pilgrimage, alone or with others, will lead you to deepen your appreciation of De La Salle's journey and inspire you to deepen your own.

SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE: THE PATRON SAINT OF TEACHERS

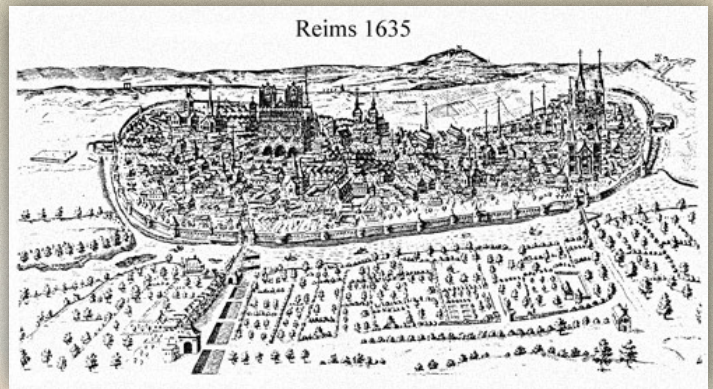
By John Gray and Br. George Van Grieken, FSC

“Do you have such faith that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and to inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform, and the one that God asks of you, since this is the purpose of your work.”

† JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE— GUIDED BY GOD

Imagine a scene in the city of Rheims, France, in April of 1679. A young priest waits on the doorstep of a convent as 17th century town life bustles around him. He has come to call on the Sisters of the Child Jesus, a new order whose work is the care and education of poor girls. The young priest serves as their chaplain and confessor. His name is John Baptist de La Salle. He is the eldest son of a wealthy professional family in the city of Rheims. Not quite 28 years old, he has been ordained for two years and is about to receive his doctorate in theology. He is a canon of the prestigious Cathedral Chapter at Rheims, which is a traditional breeding ground of bishops, cardinals, and saints. A man so gifted and so positioned would almost certainly become an important member of the Church hierarchy or a distinguished professor. This young canon, thoughtful, cultivated, and kind-hearted, will likely become notable in Church circles and a pious influence among his peers.

Then he meets someone at that convent door, a lay man who requests his help in starting a school for poor boys. He could choose to ignore the man or pass him off with some appropriate words of advice and a kind smile. But he doesn't. Instead, he pays attention to what how God might be working through this stranger—really pays attention—and he responds as generously as his breeding, his disposition, and his faith



allow him to be, little knowing what it would all lead to.

Now fast forward forty years to April of 1719. That young priest, now old, racked by asthma and chronic rheumatism, is at the end of his earthly journey. In the early morning hours of Good Friday, he lies in his bed, attended by the men whom he calls “Brothers.” His wealth was long ago given away, and the privileges that were his by birth have long since been surrendered and cast aside. His church connections are mixed at best; some church leaders admire him, but many powerful pastors and bishops have treated him and his work with little disguised contempt or hostility. His journey has been down paths he could not have imagined forty years earlier. And what are the final results of his life's work? A small community of some hundred men that calls itself the Brothers of the Christian



Schools, but a group that is not yet even recognized officially by either the church or the state, and a set of mostly parish-based schools for poor boys, schools that are really only fully appreciated by those who attend them. De La Salle must have really wondered what was going to happen to this relatively small group of followers, especially when compared to other Founders such as Saint Francis who had gathered 10,000 disciples in just twelve years. But as De La Salle begins to breathe his last in this 68th year of his life, the power of his faith and spirit is yet evident and strong. Brother Barthélemy, his successor as Superior of the Brothers, quietly asks him if he accepts his sufferings, and De La Salle responds with the last words that he will ever say: “Oui, j’adore en toutes choses la conduite de Dieu à mon égard.” (“Yes, I adore God guiding me in all the events of my life.”)

That perspective of reading the events of his life as calls from God is one that has made all the difference. Because of such faith-filled attention paid to the real circumstances of his daily life, he did not become a distinguished professor or an important churchman. Instead he became the person God led him to become, the person whom he could be in the eyes of God. The life he lived was the life that God led him to live.

Certainly, he had a privileged upbringing, growing up in a wealthy, distinguished family. He was the oldest of eleven children of whom seven survived to adulthood. His devout parents named him after John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus, a name that providentially gave a fitting indication of the role that he would play in bringing the Gospel to so many who had little opportunity of hearing or appreciating its power and appeal.

Early on, while it might have been expected that he would follow in his father’s footsteps as a magistrate of the presidial court, he chose to pursue the priesthood and underwent an official ceremony at the age of ten to confirm that intention. When he was sixteen, his uncle resigned the distinguished position of Canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Rheims in his favor, a title that brought with it both church responsibilities and church benefits. Every day he would now process into the grand cathedral of Rheims in his ermine cope and chant the Divine Offices with his fellow canons, joining the group in advising the archbishop and undoubtedly happy at his future prospects.

A few years later, at the age of 19, De La Salle moved to Paris so that he could study at the Sorbonne while residing at the prestigious Seminary of Saint Sulpice. This seminary had been founded only twenty-five years earlier in a spirit of clerical renewal mandated by the Council of Trent a century earlier. Saint Sulpice was notable for a rigorous life style and was intended to produce priests capable of self-sacrifice and self-discipline. Its graduates were slated to hold lofty positions in the Church of France. Among the regular tasks of the seminarians was to teach catechism to the poor, which De La Salle certainly did do, although there is no indication that he found it anything other than one of the apostolic duties that was part of being a seminarian.

Within eighteen months, however, this privileged world of his changed dramatically. In the short span of a year, his mother and then his father passed away. Named as executor of the estate and guardian of the younger children, John Baptist, dutifully left Paris and returned to Rheims to assume the role of head of the household. This 21-year-old seminarian—still technically a minor, since the age of majority was 25—had four brothers and two sisters to take care of. Surviving documents show that his duties as guardian of his siblings and administrator of his family estate and properties were handled with meticulous care and administrative acumen. After things were relatively settled, he was advised to pursue his studies and resume his path to the priesthood. It might not have been at Saint Sulpice, but the vocation was not to be denied. He was ordained a subdeacon in 1672, a deacon in 1676, and he became a priest on April 9, 1678. As for his studies, he received a licentiate in theology in 1676 and a doctorate in 1680.



Things appeared to be back on track by the time he was ordained, and De La Salle no doubt expected that he would resume his career in the Church and in sacramental ministry. Yet again, however, providence stepped in the way. Within three weeks of his ordination, his close friend and spiritual advisor, Nicholas Roland, died. In his will, Roland bade De La Salle to oversee a group of nuns that Roland had formed and established in Rheims, and to obtain official recognition for them from the city authorities. This was not a mild request, since it would take at least a year to fulfill all the necessary requirements. But De La Salle took on the task and in the process learned much about the educational situation in Rheims, along with the

political realities involved in establishing a new charitable group in town. Hence, by the time he had finished his task and had become a good friend of the sisters, he was also well-poised to be a good advisor for any new ventures of similar kind.

And so it was providentially that just after having finished his work for the Sisters, the beginning of his own direct involvement in the world of education came about at that convent door of these same Sisters of the Child Jesus in March of 1679, when he happened to encounter another man coming to call on the Sisters. Adrian Nyel was a layman who had worked in Rouen for many years, providing schooling for the poor. A wealthy widow and relative of De La Salle had asked Nyel to see about founding a charity school for boys in Rheims. Nyel’s first call in Rheims was at the convent of the teaching Sisters. Upon hearing Nyel’s intentions and observing his lack of familiarity with the situation in Rheims, De La Salle invited Nyel to stay at his home so that they could consult with others in town on how to start the proposed school for poor boys.

De La Salle’s help was effective, and a school was soon opened. Shortly thereafter, another wealthy woman in Rheims told Nyel that she also would endow a school but only if De La Salle would ensure that her money would not be squandered or wasted. De La Salle agreed somewhat reluctantly, since he was quite busy with other affairs, but out of charity and necessity he began to become more involved with the teachers. Gradually, and without really being aware of it, he found himself becoming

drawn into a very different world, the world of the poor—a world of disadvantaged students, uncultured teachers, and parents chronically oppressed by poverty.

Within a short time, Nyel was off to start yet more schools and De La Salle was left holding the bag, as it were. De La Salle knew that the teachers in Rheims were struggling, lacking leadership, purpose, and training, and he found himself taking increasingly deliberate steps to help this small group of men with their work. First, in 1680, he invited them to take their meals in his home, as much to teach them table manners as to inspire and instruct them in their work. This particular crossing of social boundaries was one that his relatives found difficult to bear. Even De La Salle himself must have appreciated the contrast: a Canon of the Cathedral of Rheims who was just now acquiring his doctorate mixing on a daily basis with barely literate, uncultured men that Nyel had picked up here and there, and for whom teaching was often at best a temporary vocation.

Yet De La Salle was not one to do things by halves. In 1681, De La Salle realized that he would have to take a further step—he brought the teachers into his own home to live with him. Of course now De La Salle's relatives were deeply disturbed, his social class was scandalized, and it was thought that he was carrying the Gospel a bit too far. But De La Salle could not shake the conviction that this was something that God wanted him to do, something confirmed for him in deep prayer and long reflection. A year later, De La Salle had to move to the poor part of the city, renting a house into which he and his handful of teachers moved, a house that would come to be called "the cradle of the Institute." One biographer has called the walk across town to this undistinguished home in the poorer part of town De La Salle's "personal Exodus." It was here that those who had joined this new enterprise with De La Salle first began to call themselves "Brothers."

Community life became more formalized, teaching and procedures at the three schools in Rheims gradually became more regular under De La Salle's guidance, and although most of the original men left, new candidates also appeared, inspired by De La Salle's example and leadership. Within a year however, in 1683, the Brothers became concerned about their stability and their security as part of this untested enterprise. De La Salle replied to their concerns with an inspiring talk about trusting in God's Providence, like the lilies in the field. Their rather rough response was that it was easy for him to talk, being a wealthy man by birth and a canon with a large annual income, whereas they were poor, with no skills and no prospects. If the schools should fail, he would be no worse off, whereas they would be back on the streets. Instead of being upset at their impolite outburst, De La Salle took their words to heart. He did what he usually did in situations like this: reflect seriously, pray deeply, and consult widely with people of piety and wisdom.

He considered donating his personal wealth to endow the

community, as other Founders had done before him and as some of the Brothers had hoped. After reflecting, praying and consulting, however, with determined conviction and a calm disposition, he resigned his position of canon at the cathedral, after serving there for some fifteen years, and in the winter of 1683-1684 he used the bulk of his family inheritance to feed the poor during a particularly severe famine. He gave away his entire fortune and kept just enough not to be burden on the Brothers when it came to his priestly responsibilities. Thus he quickly and irrevocably joined his Brothers in real poverty. Now, they would all be fully dependent on God alone.

For a person of De La Salle's background and position as a priest to accept these laymen as his equals and colleagues, as his brothers, was beyond belief for the society of the time. Many in his family thought him to be imprudent, if not crazy, although others admired his strong faith and evident integrity. He was certainly no wall flower. In De La Salle's eyes, he could not and would not compromise when it came to the discerned will of God.

The small community was by now operating a good number of successful parish-based schools for the poor in and around Rheims. De La Salle realized that in order to survive, the community had to govern itself from within, rather than from the outside, whether such outside influence came from a bishop, a parish priest, or even himself. At the Brothers' General Assembly in 1686, a distinctive habit was approved, a vow of obedience was taken, and the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools" was officially adopted. A year later, De La Salle insisted that the Brothers elect one of their own as Superior. The Brothers reluctantly agreed, electing 24-year-old Brother Henri L'Heureux. De La Salle was the first to show strict obedience to him. Once it

became known outside of the house that a priest had become subject to a layman, however, there was considerable upset in church circles. The idea of a cleric obeying a layman as his superior was scandalous, and the archbishop quickly ordered De La Salle to resume the headship of the group. He did so. But he also subsequently had the same Brother Henri begin his training for ordination, thinking that this would overcome the archbishop's objections and allow him to be Superior. However, within a short time, and much to the surprise and sadness of all, Brother Henri became ill and died. De La Salle was quite shaken by the event. But he looked for God's voice in it all and decided that from now on the Brothers would be fully devoted to education as their ministry and there would be no sacramental ministry, no priests. This would be a non-clerical religious group of men, dedicated entirely and wholly to education and the schools.

In 1688, he and two Brothers traveled to Paris, where in short order they revitalized a school for the poor in the parish of Saint Sulpice. This move was important because it established the group's autonomy and freedom from the direct diocesan



control of Rheims, and it allowed the Brothers in Rheims to begin to develop without leaning on De La Salle's constant presence.

As the work in Paris proceeded, first at one school and then at several more, a new challenge appeared. Schools for the poor such as the Brothers ran were meant to be restricted to the certified poor. Anyone who could pay a fee for education was supposed to go to the Little Schools or to the Writing Masters and their for-profit establishments. However, the Brothers did not distinguish in their admissions between poor and non-poor. All were welcome to their free schools, and many wanted to come, including those whose families were not on the parish's Poor Register. The fee-taking teachers, through their guilds ("unions"), filed suits for infringement on their business and violation of the established regulations. This hostility, in suits, harassment, and even violence, would continue in Paris for at least the next fifteen years.

Back in Rheims, meanwhile, other difficulties appeared. The sixteen Brothers there were cut in half because of defections. Others continued to oppose the work or tried to control it according to their own vision. Some devoted Brothers fell ill and died through overwork, and De La Salle himself underwent a long sickness that brought him near death. The prognosis for the new community and its work seemed suddenly bleak.

In response to this crisis, De La Salle purchased property outside of Paris, at a place called Vaugirard, and brought all the Brothers there for an extended retreat wherein he rekindled their fervor. In 1691, he also made a radical commitment to the work; he and two of his most trusted Brothers made a secret "heroic vow," committing themselves to the establishment of this enterprise "...even should we remain the only three members of the said Society, and should be obliged to beg for alms and live on bread only." This vow they took fifty years to the day after three of the founders of Saint Sulpice Seminary had taken a similar vow for the establishment of that worthy institution.

In 1694, the first assembly to be known as a General Chapter was held. At the end of the assembly, for the first time ever, perpetual vows of obedience, stability, and association for the educational service of the poor were taken by De La Salle and twelve chosen Brothers. Again De La Salle, despite his wish for a Brother to have the office, was elected Superior, twice, as he made them vote again. He finally accepted this as God's will, but insisted that the Brothers declare, in writing, that their choice of their priest-founder as Superior was not to be a precedent for the future and that "henceforth and for all time no priest or person in sacred orders is to be accepted into our Society or elected as Superior, and that we shall never admit as Superior anyone who has not associated himself with us by the same vow as we have pronounced."

Now De La Salle and the Brothers began to fortify their Society, strengthening and expanding the already flourishing schools and communities, and providing for the young candidates asking to join. De La Salle spent time writing a variety of texts, both for use in the schools and for the Brothers

and their life in community, which included everything from a student reading text on politeness and decorum to a detailed method for the Brothers' interior prayer.

Between 1694 and 1709, many new schools opened, others closed, and different legal battles with opponents to this new means of providing education for the poor raged on. As lawsuits were decided against him, many of them having to do with the right to teach all who came to his doors, regardless of means or ability, he began to wonder if the welfare of the community and the prosperity of the work would benefit from his personal withdrawal from the scene. A new series of setbacks, culminating in a costly and embarrassing legal judgment—the Clément affair—convinced him that this was indeed the case.



In 1709 a wealthy young man named Clément, expressing eagerness to help the educational mission, wanted to establish a teacher training school near Paris that the Brothers would help to run. The young man (not yet legally an adult, below the age of 25) could not do so without financial help, and De La Salle fronted the money to open the establishment, in expectation of repayment from Clément. The young man, however, reneged on the deal, and his influential father, a well-known doctor in the King's court, sued to invalidate the arrangement. When the case was decided in 1712, the decision went against De La Salle, who was left without the training school or the property, was ordered to reimburse any funds received, and had his honor impugned by a judicial condemnation on the very shameful charge of suborning a minor to extort money

from him. De La Salle, habitually cautious and prudent, had paid a high price for his zeal. When he foresaw that the judgment would go against him, he wisely handed all documents over to his lawyer and left Paris for an extended visit to the Brothers' establishments in the south of France—outside the Paris jurisdiction. There was really nothing left for him now in that part of France.

On this journey, which lasted more than two years, he grappled with the dispiriting evidence that his presence and activities in Paris had seemed to harm the Brothers' mission. Not all of the Brothers' communities he visited in the south of France welcomed him, as he patiently tried to repair communities that were weak or in disarray. In Marseilles, he started a novitiate to form Brothers for the schools of that area—only to see it close when the local views regarding where these new Brothers should be sent and how the Church should deal with the "Jansenism" issue came into conflict with his own. And so that enterprise came to an end and he ended up with the Brothers community in Grenoble. In addition to helping the Brothers where he could, even doing classroom teaching at the school in Grenoble, he spent a good deal of personal time in retreat at monasteries. His physical health was poor (his rheumatism was chronic), his long labors had worn him out, the difficulties in Paris continued to be a personal challenge, and the future was not clear. He pondered the continued usefulness of his presence within the Institute that he had worked so hard to establish. If it was now God's will to take him along a new route, he would follow. But where was God's will? Through the suggestion of a priest-friend in the area, he spent several weeks at a hermitage

near Grenoble, called Parménie, conversing with a devout and pious but illiterate visionary, Sister Louise, who lived there and welcomed all who came on pilgrimage.

While in Parménie in 1714, he received a letter from the assembled Brothers of the Paris area, where external authorities were again trying to tamper with the Brothers' self-governance and rewrite their Rule. The Brothers wrote to De La Salle: "We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools...command you in the name of the body of this Society to which you have vowed obedience ...to resume forthwith the general conduct of affairs." It seems that the independence of the Brothers that he had hoped for had different results than he had expected. The society was now capable of taking its destiny into its own hands, but the Brothers would do so by commanding him to return. After consulting with Sister Louise, who helped him to see that God's will for him still lay with his Brothers, he returned to Paris. As the Brothers in Paris opened the door to him, he said, "Here I am. What do you want me to do?"

Understanding better than his Brothers that although he might be needed, he was not essential to the success of the work, he did not quite do everything that they wished, for he allowed Brother Barthélemy, the novice master who had filled the void as nominal Superior after De La Salle had left, to remain in charge. De La Salle's presence and insights, however, did help eventually to resolve most of the difficulties that had been besetting them. After a year in Paris, De La Salle moved to the city of Rouen with Brother Barthélemy and the novices. There, at a complex of buildings called Saint Yon—which now housed the novitiate, a boarding school, and a juvenile center—he began to make arrangements for another General Chapter. The Brothers at this time constituted 23 houses and 34 educational establishments throughout France, with 100 Brothers and some 18 novices (and one stalwart Brother, Gabriel Drolin, on solitary assignment in Rome). After Brother Barthélemy had visited all the communities to gain their agreement to the assembly, the "principal Brothers" assembled in May of 1717. At the request of the assembly, the Founder subsequently drew up a definitive revision of the Rule, based on their discussions and input. The assembly formally elected Brother Barthélemy as the new Superior, and De La Salle was assiduous in obeying the authority of the new Superior. To one correspondent who could not break the habit of consulting him, he wrote, "I beg you for the love of God, my dear Brother, that for the future you think no more about consulting me on anything. You have your superiors whom you must consult on matters spiritual and temporal. For myself there is nothing now but to prepare myself for death which must soon make my final separation from all creatures.

De La Salle did venture forth a few more times, staying at a seminary in Paris for several months on retreat, and traveling in order to accept back the money lent during the Clément affair, which the lawyer involved returned to the Brothers at his death, thus confirming the truth of De La Salle's original legal position.

Provisionally, this money provided the exact amount of funds needed to purchase the property that the Brothers had been renting at Saint Yon and fervently wished to buy so that their work their could be secured. De La Salle was renowned in the area, and at Saint Yon, as a confessor. He especially sought out the hardened cases among those brought in for help, and was inevitably successful in changing their ways. At the same time, he was eager in sharing with the novices his wisdom about interior prayer and cultivating the presence of God.

But his age and tireless labors were catching up to him. De La Salle became ill for many months, rallying occasionally to take up his work but finally sinking into terminal decline. Even on his deathbed his troubles did not cease. He learned that the Archbishop of Rouen had withdrawn his authorization to celebrate the sacraments for the community because of a dispute with the local pastor, who wanted him to bring the entire population of Saint Yon, including those in confinement, to his parish church for Mass. Yet his long practice of self-effacement and submission to God's will had made

him tranquil in all situations. His Gospel journey had taken him long past the point at which any personal injustice could wound him. "Oui, j'adore en toutes choses la conduite de Dieu à mon égard."

At four o'clock in the morning on Good Friday, De La Salle made an effort to rise from his bed as if to greet someone, then joined his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and died. He was buried on Holy Saturday in a side chapel of the local parish church, Saint Sever. Since it was Holy Week, the more solemn funeral rituals were delayed until the following week. Throughout Rouen, and soon throughout the Society, word spread that "the Saint is dead." But the providential extension of his life, work, and influence was just beginning.

A thorough but accessible biography of De La Salle is "The Work Is Yours" by Luke Salm, FSC; a more exhaustive one is "De La Salle: A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor Through Education" by Alfred Calcutt, FSC. For a compact introduction to De La Salle's life and times and achievement, and an analysis of the meaning of Lasallian education today, see "Touching the Hearts of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools" by George Van Grieken, FSC.



in the FOOTSTEPS

Fr De La Salle
A Vocation Journey

† INSTRUCTIONS

WATCH THE INTRODUCTION (3:30)



Few of us have the opportunity to visit the actual locations in France where St. John Baptist de La Salle, the Patron Saint of Teachers, grew up and lived. Few have seen the places where the Brothers of the Christian Schools were founded and flourished. This is your opportunity to explore the locations that are intimately associated with Lasallian history, to absorb the special ambience of De La Salle's formative influences, and to be introduced into De La Salle's world by a great scholar of his life and work.

With Br. Gerard's guidance, you will be able to see the places that shaped De La Salle's providential journey, one that has touched millions of students, parents, and alumni for over 330 years. Hopefully, De La Salle's story will lead you to further investigate his life, his charism, and his ongoing influence today through books, articles, and online resources. Suggested sites to explore further include:

www.lasalle.org

www.brothersvocation.org

www.lasallian.info

- ✓ This series shows the places that mark significant moments in the life of De La Salle and the development of his work; his joys, his hopes, and his sufferings.
- ✓ The series will help others appreciate the richness, diversity, and importance of De La Salle and the educational movement that he began.
- ✓ De La Salle's story may help those involved in Lasallian ministry understand why the work took the form that it did, especially since the story is told in the places where it all took place.

» PRE-QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **What kinds of things would you like to learn about De La Salle and his life?**
- **What do you see as significant moments in your own life, and how might these be echoed in the life of De La Salle?**
- **As you begin this virtual pilgrimage, what dispositions or attitudes do you think are important to maintain?**

THE MATERIAL FOR THIS DVD GUIDE CAME PRIMARILY FROM THE PILGRIMAGE GUIDES CREATED BY BR. NICHOLAS HUTCHASON, FSC, FOR THE "CIL" FORMATION PROGRAM IN ROME. WRITTEN MATERIAL FROM THOSE BOOKLETS WERE EDITED, COLLATED, AND ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO SPECIFIC LOCATIONS BY BR. GEORGE VAN GRIEKEN, FSC, WHO ASSEMBLED AND WROTE THE FINAL TEXT, AND WHO TOOK THE PHOTOGRAPHS, PANORAMAS, AND OTHER RESOURCES AT EACH LOCATION. THE DESIGN OF THE BOOKLET IS BY AL CASSIDY.



Reims 1635

† IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DE LA SALLE



The locations that follow are listed here in rough historical order. As with any historical pilgrimage, more than a single event are described in each geographical place. Since it would make little sense to run among a series of locations in a strictly historical order, doubling back repeatedly to the same town or city to cover a later event, some locations will cover different periods in De La Salle's life. However, we will begin our pilgrimage where De La Salle was born and raised (Reims) and end our pilgrimage in the city where De La Salle spent the bulk of his ministerial years and died (Rouen). Clips from the www.dlsfootsteps.org website are suggested in the text, as appropriate.

Most of the information provided here has been directly taken from Lasallian pilgrimage booklets that Brother Nicholas Hutchinson prepared for participants in the international CIL program in Rome. This long-standing Lasallian formation curriculum included a visit to Lasallian sites in France at the end of the program of study in Italy.

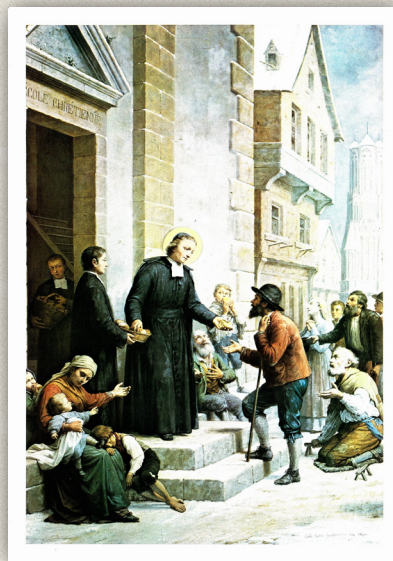
REIMS

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN



Let's first get an idea of the city where De La Salle was born and raised. This was the environment where his personality was shaped, not only by his family but also by that city's streets and markets, people and places, holidays and culture.

The city of Reims (pop. 200,000; 30,000 in De La Salle's day) lies 90 miles north-east of Paris on the banks of the small River Vesle in the wine growing region of Champagne. Reims is particularly famous for its wines. Subterranean Reims has 17km of tunnels for storing champagne and wines. (Note that De La Salle's mother was of the great Moët champagne-producing family). For many centuries the Kings of France were crowned here, and many memorials remain to testify to its historical



importance. Joan of Arc led Charles VII here in 1429. For a long time the city was more important than Paris. From the 4th century on, it was the seat of a bishop, later of an archbishop, and the center of efforts to convert the Franks. St. Remigius, Archbishop of Reims, baptized Clovis, the first Christian king of France, and all his warrior Franks on Christmas Day of the year 496, and so began the tradition of anointing kings that

was to last until 1825.

The number and size of Reims' churches illustrate the town's wealth and importance in the Middle Ages. During that time, the confines of the town formed into an oval shape, easily discerned on modern maps. The walls

REIMS

and ramparts of the Middle Ages can still be seen. In more modern times the town hall has suffered considerably. In the 1st World War it lay within the battle zone, and most of its houses were destroyed. In the 2nd World War it again suffered damage and destruction. On May 7, 1945, the capitulation of the German forces in France was signed at Reims.

De La Salle lives in Reims for about 40 years. 1651 (birth) – 1664 – Hotel de la Cloche (Hotel De La Salle, or Maison Natale) 1664-1687; Hotel des Postes 1682-1688; Rue Neuve (20 Rue de Conrai – now called Rue Gambetta) 1688; De La Salle moved to Paris. On moving to Paris, De La Salle never again lived in his native town although he left several successful schools.

HOTEL DE LA CLOCHE



⇒ WATCH “HOTEL DE LA CLOCHE 1 & 2

The Hotel de la Cloche (or Hotel de la Salle, or Maison Natale, as the house is sometimes known) is situated at 40, Rue de l’Arbalette (Street of the crossbow). It was built in 1545 and bought by Francois De La Salle in 1609.

In this house in 1650 there lived a family of magistrates belonging to the nobility. Louis De La Salle was King’s Counselor and President of the royal court in Reims. In that year, 1650, he married Nicolle Moet de Brouillet (the family of Champagne fame), the daughter of another King’s counselor. The first child of the marriage was John Baptist de La Salle, born on April 30, 1651. The first 13 years of his life were spent here.

Historical evidence claims that this was the house in which John Baptist de La Salle was born. Here it was that John Baptist first learned the meaning of sorrow at the loss of

the Maison La Cloche became too small for a family that kept growing in size at close intervals; eleven children in twenty years of married life. So the De La Salle family moved to the Rue Sainte Marguerite (Hotel des Postes). Reims has an illuminated night tour which uses the Hotel De La Salle as its starting point. The pilgrim should note the following details around the House: 1) on the right, the market square, “Place du Forum” which De La Salle crossed so often. Beneath the present Place is the actual Roman Forum: a large open market of the 3rd century, part of which has been cleared to reveal a huge room with square pillars. 2) On the left, the Town Hall, dating from the 18th century inside which, prior to 1914, there had been a commemorative plaque which read: “Les Freres avaient bien merite de la Cite.” Indeed, for from 1680 - 1880 the Brothers had been practically the only recognized teachers of the boys’ primary schools in Reims. It was from Hotel de la Cloche that twice a day De La Salle would leave to follow lessons in the College des Bons Enfants. (It was at about this time that De La Salle’s cousin, Fr. Jacques Marquette, left for North America, working with the Iroquois Indians along the upper Mississippi.)

In the courtyard is a curious winding staircase in an enclosed stairwell. On the outside of the front of the house is that very attractive statue of De La Salle by Lejeune, President of the French Academy of the Fine Arts. This is one of two statues of De La Salle by him. The front of the House is decorated with pillars, Ionian capitals and a frieze. At the left, the curiously slanted carriage entrance is flanked by two statues representing Adam and Eve. The slanted entrance was designed that way because another building jutted out at a 90-degree angle, filling in the present street, which did not exist when the house was built. Hence, the carriage entrance was on far corner of the building and was designed accordingly.

⇒ WATCH “FRONT ROOM 1, 2, AND 3”

⇒ WATCH “ARCHIVE ROOM” (3:12)

The Maison Natale is now a museum, holding such treasures as an interesting tapestry of the life of De La Salle, and a fine collection of Institute books. The house is literally decorated with antiques of all kinds of paintings and letters dating back to the early days of the Brothers. There is an alabaster statuette of Our Lady with a bunch of grapes, originating from Champagne. In this house is kept the chair that De La Salle used in Dijon in 1714, along with several garments and instruments of personal discipline.

The Chapel is the former sitting room of the De La Salle family. In the Chapel is an interesting statue showing De La Salle teaching a boy. The statue is carved from a 14th century beam which is itself a remnant from the old part of the house after the 1918 destruction from World War I. The mural on the left at the front shows Our Lady among the Arts. The Child in her arms is the younger son of the sculptor of the wooden statue (already mentioned) who recently had his son baptized in this Chapel.

The original misericord (a small wooden shelf underneath folding seats, installed to provide some level of comfort for those standing during long periods of prayer) is here. It was the seat of Canon De La Salle in the Reims Cathedral.



HOTEL DE LA SALLE EXTERIOR

his brothers and sister, Remy, Marie-Anne and Jean-Louis. The statue of De La Salle by Lejeune was unveiled in 1952. In the 17th century it is likely that a statue of Our Lady occupied the niche currently occupied by Lejeune’s statue. The base of the niche carries the date of the restoration of the building in the renaissance style - 1545. In due time

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» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

De La Salle knew the streets and people of Reims intimately, since he was born and raised here, amidst siblings and relatives. Here he played, prayed, visited friends, ran along the streets, attended school, and as a young adult gradually became involved in the plight of the poor. The educational journey upon which he embarked started in this small city in northern France, both for himself and for those he would touch through the educational charm of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

HOTEL DE LA SALLE

- ↳ De La Salle's early home was located very near the center of town. What kind of influence could that have had on his eventual work and personal disposition?
- ↳ As he grew up, De La Salle was surrounded by siblings and cousins. Could he have developed some of his leadership abilities in that environment? Explain.
- ↳ When you take in the house and its grandeur, what do you think a typical day in the life of the young De La Salle was like, in a general way?

INSIDE THE FRONT ROOM

- ↳ The room reflects something of the nature of life for an upper-class family of the time. How do you imagine De La Salle saw himself, growing up in this environment?
- ↳ When De La Salle received the tonsure, he declared his intention to become a priest. Could young people be mature enough at that age to make such a decision?
- ↳ The room opens up onto the street, which in De La Salle's time was actually a corner. What implications might that have had on De La Salle's viewpoint of the world?

INSIDE THE ARCHIVE ROOM

- ↳ There are many historical items in the archive room. Why do we want to keep in touch with tradition like that? Is it really that important?
- ↳ Can you think of a relationship between an interest in education and an interest in preserving significant items from the past? Is it relevant for the present?
- ↳ What part of Lasallian history would you be most interested in learning more about? What could you do to take a step in that direction?

CATHEDRAL OF REIMS



⇒ WATCH "CATHEDRAL OF REIMS" (4:32)

Reims Cathedral, like that of Paris and Rouen is consecrated to Our Lady. It is considered one of the most beautiful in the world. Under this cathedral traces of three others have been found, dating from the 5th, 9th, and the 12th centuries. The cathedral was damaged by shells in the 1st World War. A central tower then destroyed has not been rebuilt.

It was in the 5th century that King Clovis was baptized by St. Remi, and it is the place where most of the French kings



have been crowned. The actual building was begun in 1211. The west front, which is covered with some of the finest specimens of Gothic statues and reliefs, has three very fine portals with a large and beautiful rose window above them. Above the rose window is a royal gallery and above this two towers soar to a height of 270 feet.

The interior of the Cathedral is striking in its proportions: 455 feet long, 125 feet high, 98 feet wide. Much of the old glass has been destroyed, but the rose window is still impressive. In niches on the west wall are over 100 statues, mostly of the 13th century. Of all statues, note particularly that of the Glorification of the Virgin and, at the left porch, that of L'Ange au Sourire.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ Growing up within this grand cathedral, how do you think De La Salle's early thinking about the Church and God were shaped?
- ↳ In sixteen years as Canon of the Cathedral, what dissonances, if any, might have arisen as he became more involved with Adrian Nyel and the first Brothers?
- ↳ De La Salle's attachment to the Church never wavered throughout his life. When does his experience as Canon fit into that reality?

THE CHAPTER HOUSE

The Chapter House, located some steps away from the cathedral, recalls the Chapter Room where De La Salle, Roland and the other canons counseled the archbishop. It was on January 7, 1067 that he entered the Cathedral through the magnificent main portal to take possession of stall 21 which his cousin, Pierre Dozet, had resigned in his favor. The present choir stalls are not the originals; they were replaced in 1745. However, the original misericord is at the Hotel de La Salle.

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From this cathedral, 2 canons became saints, 4 others Popes, 14 archbishops, 37 bishops, and 21 cardinals.

⇒ **WATCH “DE LA SALLE AS CANON OF REIMS PART I”** (2:53)

⇒ **WATCH “DE LA SALLE AS CANON OF REIMS PART II”** (4:22)

De La Salle was canon of this cathedral from the age of 16 (1667) until he was 32, and it was here, in the chapel of the archbishop located next door, that he was ordained as a priest on Holy Saturday, April 9th, 1678, by Archbishop Charles Maurice Le Tellier. The following day he celebrated his first Mass in what is now the cathedral’s Lady Chapel. In this chapel is another statue of De La Salle by Lejeune. Some relics of the Founder are now kept in the main altar of the Cathedral. In 1996, when Pope John-Paul II visited Reims, he prayed at this same chapel, where is the Blessed Sacrament is currently reserved, and photographs of the occasion show the Lejeune statue of De La Salle clearly in the background.

In the square outside the Cathedral there is a statue of St Joan of Arc, commemorating her presence at the coronation of Charles VII on July 17, 1429. On the north side of the square is the Palace of Justice, with the Theater beside it.

North of the Cathedral across the Rue Carnot, is the Place du Forum, the site of the Roman Forum. From here the Rue Colbert (named after the great Finance Minister, who was born in Reims) leads to the Hotel de Ville, a handsome Renaissance building of the 17th century. North of this again lies the Port de Mars, Mars’ gate, a Roman triumphal arch of the 2nd century, AD.

CONVENT OF THE CHILD JESUS

⇒ **WATCH “MOTHERHOUSE OF THE SISTERS OF THE CHILD JESUS”** (1:30)



THE DOOR WHERE ADRIAN NYEL & DE LA SALLE FIRST MET

This convent is situated at 48 Rue de Barbatre in Reims, a few streets from the College des bons Enfants where De La Salle had gone to school as a youngster. The convent is the impressive headquarters of the Congregation begun by Canon Nicholas Roland. This has been the Motherhouse since its very beginning in 1670. Directly across the street is the original facade of the old Carthusian Monastery (now a newer building) where Father Roland, De La Salle’s spiritual director and the man who founded the

order of Sisters, made his annual private retreats.

It was at the door of this convent that Adrian Nyel met Father De La Salle for the first time – in March of 1679. Nyel was in town at the request of Mm. Jeanne Dubois Maillefer, a wealthy lady of Rouen and a relative of De La Salle. She had given Nyel money and encourage men to begin a free school for boys in Reims. Nyel was calling upon the Sisters for their

aid, and that of young Father de La Salle, to whom he bore a letter of introduction. Since he was a stranger in town, Nyel was invited by De La Salle to be his house guest while they both worked on the preliminaries necessary to start a free school. People would be less inclined to discover (and jeopardize) Nyel’s plans if he stayed with De La Salle than if he stayed elsewhere. The Sisters proudly display an early drawing of the encounter between Nyel and De La Salle.

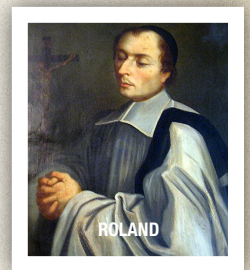
God, who directs all things with wisdom and moderation, and who does not force the will of men, wishing to have me completely occupied with the care of the schools, involved me unexpectedly and in a short time, so that one commitment led to another without my being aware of it. (Maillefer, p. 9)

⇒ **WATCH “PROVIDENCE AND DE LA SALLE”** (1:23)

In a conference room near the Chapel is a large painting of the Nativity which used to be in the Chapel and which De La Salle will certainly have known there, possibly fostering his devotion to the Child Jesus.

The tall stone chapel is original to the Founder’s time. The wooden paneled Chapel connects at right angles to the stone chapel.

In the Archives of the Sisters is a model of the original house. You will see where De La Salle and Nyel met, at the front door.



In the house the Sisters have a chasuble belonging to Fr. Roland, which De La Salle probably used when he celebrated daily Mass for them here (the lining of this chasuble is presently to be seen in the Hotel de La Salle). The Sisters treasure the death mask of Fr. Roland who had refused to allow his portrait to be painted. Fr. Roland, having been too harsh on himself, succumbed to an epidemic in the orphanage.

The Canon-Founder Roland died in this convent on April 27, 1678, eighteen days after De La Salle’s ordination. Here he is buried in the floor of the crypt.

On M. Roland’s death, his good friend De La Salle became the unofficial protector of the Sisters. He said daily Mass for them in the Chapel they still use today. Ten years later - 1688 - Louis de La Salle, his brother, was ordained in this chapel.

After Roland’s death De La Salle wrote the preface to the published works of Nicholas Roland, and he brought the De La Salle family influence to bear so that the Sisters were able to secure official recognition as a Congregation (Letters Patent, 1679), the original of which is kept in the House Archives.

It was from the Sister’s chapel here at Rue de Barbatre, that Adrian Nyel was buried after the Requiem Mass celebrated by De La Salle and attended by all the Brothers of Reims with their pupils.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

↳ **This place has been described as a key providential moment in De La Salle’s life. Why do we focus so much on this particular scene with Adrian Nyel? Aren’t there others as well?**

REIMS

- ↪ What could have been some of the other reactions that De La Salle could have made to Adrian Nyel's interest in starting a school for poor boys in Rheims?
- ↪ Why do you think it was that De La Salle responded to Nyel in the way he did? Was there evidence from earlier years, or from his personality, that could support your answer?

CHURCH OF SAINT MAURICE

- ⇒ WATCH **"CHURCH OF ST. MAURICE"** (1:25)

Almost at the corner of the Rue du Barbatre and Rue St. Maurice, the presbytery, which is not very old, recalls the curé Fr. Dorigny, friend of De La Salle, who was looking in 1678 for an ecclesiastic willing to live there and run a school in the parish. Dorigny eventually received with enthusiasm the suggestion of confiding the school to Adrian Nyel. From April 15, 1679 Nyel and his young helper lodged at the presbytery opposite the side door of the church.



The church of St. Maurice suffered an incendiary bomb in 1943 and only the chapel of Our Lady, built in 1546, remains of that which was known to Nyel and De La Salle. At each side of the door are statues (damaged) of Nicholas Roland and De La Salle (a Brother kneels before him with two boys). A plaque erected in 1881 is inscribed:

*"To the memory of the Venerable JBDE LA SALLE,
Canon of Reims, born at Reims, 30, April 1651;
Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools;
1679 the first Christian school opened at the presbytery of St
Maurice;
M. Nicholas Dorigny. Cure 1881"*

The imposing building in the Place de Musee, to the right of the west front of the church of St Maurice, is an ancient hospice - now a museum. It was once the College of the Jesuits and it was here that Nicholas Roland studied. It was partly from here that Roland and De La Salle took a strong devotion to Our Lady. From 1842-1880 they had two classes in the College for young orphans.

It is an interesting matter of circumstance that the location of what might be called the first Lasallian school happens to be located right next to the Jesuit College in Reims, a place that De La Salle did not attend himself as a student, favoring instead the University of Reims.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

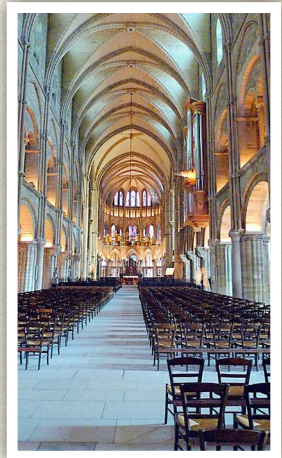
- ↪ This was the first location that De La Salle arranged for Adrian Nyel's educational enterprise? Why was it successful?
- ↪ What was it about Adrian Nyel that may have impressed De La Salle enough to make such an effort on his behalf?

- ↪ At this point, do you think that De La Salle saw, perhaps in a very small way, that he might become more involved in education? Why or why not?

BASILICA OF SAINT REMI

- ⇒ WATCH **"BASILICA OF ST. REMI"** (1:00)

To the south of the Cathedral the Rue Gambetta (i.e. Rue Neuve) leads past the Church of StI. Maurice (where Nyel started his first school) and the General Hospital (previously the Jesuit College) toward the Basilica of Saint Remi. This is the oldest church in the city and one of the finest in northern France. It was built in Romanesque style in 1005-1049 on the site of a still earlier church and was given Gothic vaulting in 1162. In actual size the church is as long as Notre Dame in Paris. It contains the thousand-year-old tomb of Saint-Remigius, archbishop (at the age of 22) and patron of the city. It was St. Remi who baptized Clovis, the King of the Franks, around the year 500. The Basilica was badly damaged in the First World War.



Saint De La Salle had a very great devotion to Saint Remi and would very frequently spend the whole night in prayer in the Basilica of Saint Remi, with the "connivance" of the church sacristan who would lock him in at night, opening the church only the next morning.

- ⇒ WATCH **"THE NATURE OF DE LA SALLE'S PRAYER LIFE"** (2:55)

De La Salle's nephew Dom Elie Maillefer was librarian of the Abbey here.

"You must devote yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask." (Meditations for the Time of Retreat, 4)

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↪ This key historical monument in Reims became one of De La Salle's interior touchstones. Why was that? Why spend so much time at this church so far removed from the cathedral?
- ↪ De La Salle would often spend all night in prayer at St. Remi. Do you have any similar experience to help understand that? What must it have been like?
- ↪ Prayer became a key component in De La Salle's personal growth. What are some of the things that are key components of your growth as a teacher and/or a person?

BROUILLET



⇒ WATCH “BROUILLET” (1:55)

This takes us a little bit afield, but it’s worth taking the short drive to Brouillet, some 20 kilometers away, before proceeding. This was the countryside that De La Salle would have visited as he was growing up. And he would come here because of his grandparents on his mother’s side, the Moets (of champagne fame today).



IN THE DISTANCE, CHURCH IN BROUILLET

Jean Moet (both grandfather and godfather to De La Salle) was married to Perrette Lespagnol and was the Seigneur of the small village of Brouillet. John Baptist de La Salle visited them as a child, staying at their house and praying in the small church nearby.

Guibert, author of an “Histoire de Saint Jean Baptist de La Salle” for the Canonization in 1900, may have been the first to suggest that the young Jean Baptist used to visit his grandparents at Brouillet. There’s a paragraph in the introduction to his book which, translated, is as follows:

“It was in 1555 that a Nicolas Moet bought the territory of Brouillet and became its Seigneur. But the Moet family did not take up residence there but used it only as an occasional place to visit. Only a century later did Jean Moet take over



INSIDE THE CHAPEL IN BROUILLET

the property as his permanent residence; the transaction is to be found in the deeds dated 1662. Many times, no doubt, Jean-Baptist De La Salle accompanied his venerable grandfather to the country retreat at Brouillet and there received from him lessons and examples of piety.”

The domain of Brouillet, from which Jean Moet derived his title of nobility, was not inconsiderable. Its existence is attested from 1501. Jean Moet inherited the property from his father and defended his rights as possessor against the claim of Simon de France and certain villagers. An agreement



signed April 30, 1658 settled the rival claims and recognized M. de Brouillet’s honorific position with regard to the (Brouillet) church -which gave him a “bench at the right side of the church. The bench to be of sufficient length to accommodate the said Sieur de Brouillet, his wife and his

family.”

For eight years at least (1662-1670), he spent a part of each year at this country property. On more than one such occasion, no doubt, the kindly and religious-minded grandfather invited his grandson to spend some time at Brouillet. Together they would have explored the grounds, the woods, the sheepfolds and the outhouses, making a survey of the surrounding countryside ...

Orphans since April 8, 1672, Jean-Baptist de La Salle and his sisters and brothers were blessed with the tender love of their maternal grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol, whose ways and virtues kept them in mind of their mother’s. No doubt, they loved to gather around her and to accompany her to the little village church, saying their prayers along with her, devoutly kneeling, like her, at the foot of the altar at a place where a tablet would one day mark the spot where her husband’s heart, at his wish, was buried. For Jean Moet loved the land-workers and farm-hands of Brouillet. He was noble not only by title but, still more, by the virtuous qualities that adorned his life.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ⇒ This is a rather plain, small chapel in the countryside. How could it have become a significant influence in De La Salle’s life? Can you think of personal, similar examples?
- ⇒ For a city kid, De La Salle must have been somewhat overwhelmed by the countryside. Do you think that this influenced his religious perspectives? How?
- ⇒ What would have been the major differences in De La Salle’s experience between living in Brouillet and living in Reims?



CHURCH IN BROUILLET



⇒ WATCH “LIESSE” (2:58)

The town of Liesse is situated about 45 km north-west of Reims. We will visit there now, even though the events associated with the town come later in De La Salle’s journey. Notre Dame de Liesse (Our Lady of Joy) was and remains a center of Marian pilgrimage.

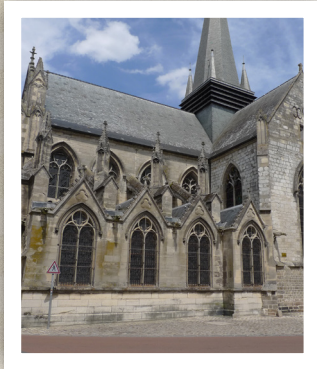
De La Salle often covered the distance from Reims on foot as a pilgrim. He sent Adrian Nyel here in March 1679, advising him to make this pilgrimage, and after that to attempt the opening of a first school.

De La Salle made Our Lady the “superior” of his young Institute: “I want Mary to be the Director and Queen of our schools.”

The day after Trinity Sunday, 1686, when De La Salle and the Brothers took their first vows, they made the pilgrimage to Liesse, walking all through the night, and again pronounced the vows at the foot of the statue of Our Lady of Joy (a small black statue above the main altar).

De La Salle also visited Liesse on his way to visit the communities of Laon and Guise.

The Church is now a minor basilica. The second chapel of the left-hand side is dedicated to de La Salle.



The stained-glass window was offered by the Superior General, Brother Gabriel-Marie, after his cure of serious tuberculosis – a cure which was attributed to Our Lady of Liesse. Several commemorations are made within this church. A beautiful window depicts De La Salle kneeling with five Brothers before Notre Dame de Liesse. The inscription on the window reads: “1684: St. John Baptist De La Salle consecrated his Brothers to N.D. de Liesse.” This event is also commemorated on a plaque. Another plaque under the statue of De La Salle recalls the consecration of the Institute in 1902. Further: “30 June 1934: The members of the General Chapter, gathered

for the election of Brother Julien Victor, came to ND. de Liesse with the homage of 18,000 Brothers of the Institute on the anniversary of the consecration made by our Founder.”

Brother Athanase-Emile, Superior General, accompanied by a delegation made the same act of homage in 1951, the year of the Tri-centenary.

One of the orders of Sisters in Liesse village is that of Fr. Barre - the Sisters of St. Maur.

“You offered yourself to God when you left the world. Can it be said that you kept nothing back? Have you given yourself totally to his service? You ought not to rest content with having once given yourself to God. You should renew this offering every day, and consecrate all your actions to God by doing them all for his sake.” (Med 104)

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ Liesse was a great pilgrimage site. If you were to go on a pilgrimage, where would you go and why?
- ↳ Walking all night in order to dedicate oneself to Mary is quite a task. Are there any contemporary examples that are similar to that? What’s that all about?
- ↳ Mary was and is a key personality for Lasallians, and devotion to her continues to be important, although measured? Why is she held up so highly by De La Salle?





LAON

⇒ WATCH “LAON” (2:10)

The hilltop city of Laon is also close to Reims, about the same distance away as Liesse, 45 km. In the interest of visiting all the Lasallian sites within one geographical area, we will consider it at this time.

The very impressive Laon Cathedral (12th – 14th centuries) served as a model for other cathedrals in Europe. It is famous for the “bulls” in the towers, commemorating the animals that had to drag huge stones up the imposing hillside in order to build the cathedral.

In 1682 Adrian Nyel left the nearby town of Guise (and, in doing so, would have caused its ruin had not De La Salle stepped in). He had been invited to start a school in his hometown of Laon, and this he found very attractive. Nyel did not make a satisfactory arrangements for the school at Laon but, with the intervention of the parish priest, Fr. Guyart, the school remained open.

In 1687 the Director of the Guise school fell ill. Beyond cure, the doctors said. He expressed the wish to see De La Salle before he died. A messenger was dispatched to Laon (midway between Guise and Reims) and another messenger covered the remaining distance. De La Salle then set out on foot with a young Brother at 1 :00 PM on a hot summer’s day. He stopped at an inn at nightfall then set out again at 3:00 AM. But, fasting and being tired, when he reached Laon he was near collapse. The Brothers at Laon insisted that he complete the journey by horse. As soon as the dying Brother saw De La Salle, he declared himself cured and, being fully recovered in a few days, this was considered a miracle.

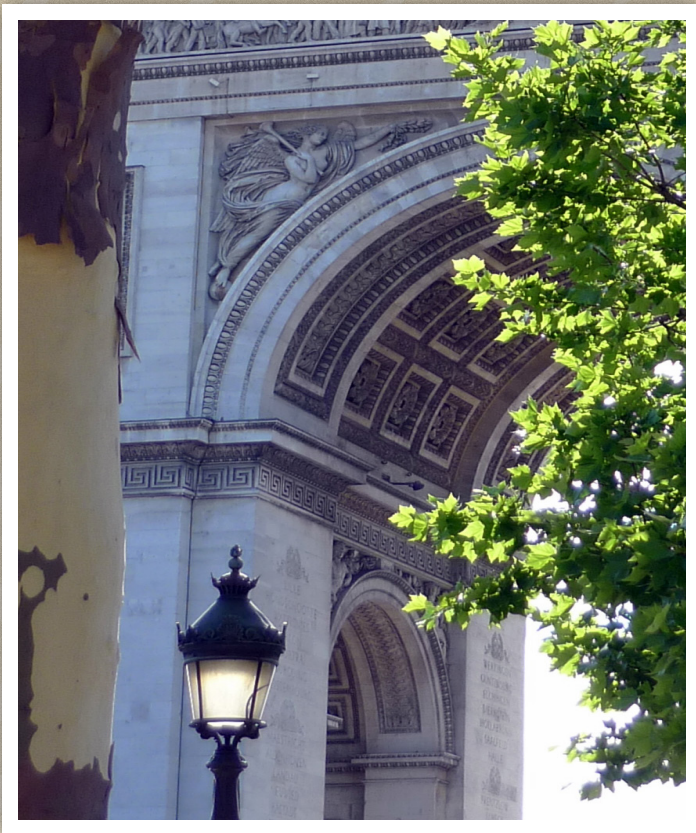
In 1688 another two Brothers fell ill this time at Laon –one critically. De La Salle (who at this time, due to the troubles in Paris, had secretly left Reims and had gone to the Monastery of the Carmelites at Louviers, where he gave himself up to prayer) was called from retreat and gave the Last Rites before the Brother died. On seeing the exhaustion of the Brothers there, De La Salle (on the advice of the doctor) closed the school for two months.

It was here in Laon that Gabriel Drolin once taught. With the “connivance” of the Municipality and the help of the parents, the Brothers continued their work here during the Revolution.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ☞ Sometimes people have a blind spot for certain places. Why do you think that Adrian Nyel was so interested in setting up a school in Laon? Do you have a similar blind spot?
- ☞ Laon is a relatively small town with a tremendously large cathedral. How might the building of a cathedral galvanize a whole local economy for years and years? Is there anything like that around anymore today?
- ☞ The towers on the cathedrals are ringed by large statues of bulls, representing the animals that hauled stone up the slopes to build the cathedral. What does that say to you about those who designed the cathedral and their theological outlook?





The Sorbonne was and is the center of higher learning in France. It was begun by Canon Robert de Sorbon, confessor to King Saint Louis, in the middle of the 13th century. Cardinal Richelieu conducted it for a while (1624); the French Revolution closed it; Napoleon re-opened it.

St. Sulpice was founded in the early Middle Ages for the peasants around St. Germain. St. Sulpice, the patron, was the martyred Bishop of Bourges. Jean-Jacques Olier (there is a plaque commemorating his work in the church of St. Sulpice) became parish priest and on August 15, 1642, he began a seminary for the diocese of Paris, started the present church, and founded the Company of Priests of St. Sulpice. (An earlier attempt to found the seminary at Vaugirard had failed). Today this Society is in charge of 60 seminaries around the world.

The dormitory wing where De La Salle lived was demolished in 1802. Today the cleared area forms an attractive square in front of the church. There is a very beautiful fountain in this Place de Saint Sulpice. The statue of Fenelon on the fountain faces the church.

He had been only nine months at the Seminary when his mother, Nicole Brouillet (Nicole Moet de Brouillet) died, and nine months after that, April 9th, 1672, his father, Louis De La Salle, also died. As a result of the death of both parents, he returned to Reims on April 19, 1672, to administer the patrimony of the De La Salle family and look after his siblings. He was then 21 years old.



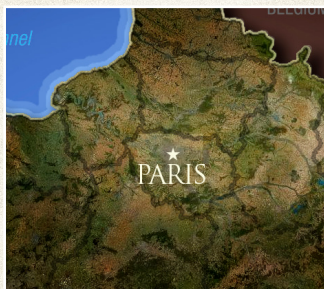
De La Salle's daily schedule at St. Sulpice was something like this: class all morning, Particular Examen, dinner, singing practice, rosary, free time for study, spiritual reading before supper. Lectures were given on Fr. Olier's Method of Mental Prayer, on Cardinal de Berulle's spirituality, and on detachment from the world. In their spare time the seminarians were encouraged to teach catechism to the poor in the now glamorous area of Saint Germain Boulevard and Boulevard Saint Michel. It is still called the Latin Quarter (although no Latin is ever spoken here).

Although the dormitory wing of St. Sulpice where De La Salle lived is no longer standing, the Lady Chapel (Blessed Sacrament Chapel), the crypt and the sanctuary had just been completed and were in use in De La Salle's day. The wooden-paneled Chapel of the Assumption is easy to miss because it is not an integral part of St. Sulpice. It was known to De La Salle. It is through the door at the immediate right of the Lady Chapel / Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

- ⇒ **WATCH "SAINT SULPICE" (1:44)**
- ⇒ **WATCH "CHAPEL OF THE ASSUMPTION" (1:24)**
- ⇨ **When you take a look at this chapel, it provides an impression of liturgical life in De La Salle's time. What stands out to you about the place?**

PARIS

This was the political and economic center of France, filled to the brim with the best and the worst of society of the time. De La Salle studied here at the seminary of St. Sulpice, made friends here, and promised to open a school when he could. He and the Brothers eventually established a number of schools in Paris, many of which were located in the area around St. Sulpice. As elsewhere, he endlessly encountered opposition and difficulties from church and civil authorities, but through perseverance, prayer, and hard work, he and the Brothers prevailed nonetheless.



SAINT SULPICE

The site of the Seminary of St. Sulpice is along the road Rue Bonaparte leading from the Square of St. Sulpice up to Rue Vaugirard. The remnant of the seminary buildings is the wall which now forms part of a very small garden at the top left of that road just as it meets Rue de Vaugirard. De La Salle spent only 18 months in the Seminary but it had a lasting effect upon him. He followed the courses in Morals at the seminary, and the courses in Theology at the Sorbonne.

PARIS

- ↳ This is one of the few parts of Saint Sulpice that has survived since the 17th century. How important are physical things such as building in maintaining connection to a tradition?
- ↳ Where does a consistent prayer / liturgical life fit into the life of an educator? Is this something that's really only necessary for devoted people to do, or for everyone? Why?



We can imagine De La Salle, bell in hand, walking such narrow streets as the Rue Princess, located nearby, little thinking he would later be teaching there, summoning the boys to his Sunday catechism lessons.

On the wall next to the sacristy is a marble plaque dedicated to Jean Jacques Olier, who was Curé of the parish, who had founded the seminary and who “gave such an honor and blessing to the parish and to the Church in France”.

De La Salle didn't know Olier personally but his spirituality would certainly have been known to De La Salle and presumably he heard about Olier's vow (with two others) to live by association and beg and live on bread alone if necessary to maintain their own society which was threatened, especially in view of the fact that he and two other Brothers took their similar “Heroic Vow” on the same date exactly 50 years after Olier and his companions had taken theirs.

Vincent de Paul was present at the death of Olier in the seminary. Around the year 1630, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac established a society of women who would visit the sick poor of the parish.

The side-chapel, dedicated to De La Salle, is the third chapel from the back on the right. In the window is the De La Salle family crest and a small portrait of the saint. In the chapel is also to be found a statue of the Founder. The plaque on the left of the altar tells of:

“St. John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of popular education in France, born in Reims in 1651 and ordained priest in 1678. On seeing the plight of the poor people he conceived the idea of forming Masters to raise the children of the poor in the practice of religion and to instruct them in the basics of Christian knowledge. Having experienced much

opposition and having distributed his wealth to the poor, he founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He died a saintly death in Rouen in 1719 and was canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1900.”

The Mother House in Rome has, outside the Main Chapel, the same text as the above plaque.

On the other side of the altar we read:

“During his theological studies at the Sorbonne, JBDE LA SALLE lived at the seminary of St. Sulpice and here was a model of the young clerics. In 1688, at the request of M. de la Barmondierie, cure of St. Sulpice, he returned to take over the charity school of the parish in Rue Princesse. He opened another (Rue de Bac, 1689) and a third (Rue St. Placide, 1698). A thousand poor children of the parish were taught in these three schools - the first that the Brothers directed in Paris. It was again in this parish that the saint transferred the novitiate that had previously been established in Vaugirard.”

The Church of St. Sulpice - like many churches - was taken over during the Revolution and became the Temple of Victory, later being used on one occasion for a banquet for Napoleon.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ Even though De La Salle was here for only 18 months, it had a profound effect on his outlook and his future. Why do you think that was the case?
- ↳ What aspects of life at Saint Sulpice would De La Salle have appreciated, and what aspects perhaps less so? Can you identify with this kind of experience?
- ↳ The friendships and acquaintances he made while at Saint Sulpice would show up again and again later in this life. What's the relationship between a personal network and the ministry of education – in De La Salle's life and in your life?

RUE PRINCESSE



⇒ WATCH “RUE PRINCESSE” (2:50)

De La Salle had several reasons for going to Paris. Had he confined his activities to Reims then the Institute would have become a diocesan organization, and under those authorities. Paris would be an important step in giving the Brothers a national scope. He had many good friends in Paris especially among the clergy, many of whom had been his teachers 16 years previously, and many other his fellow students. His fame as a competent organizer and manager of schools had already reached the capital. He had promised the parish priests of St. Sulpice that when things were right and convenient he would begin the same work there. He was to spend 18 years in Paris. His hopes would have been high as he set out on foot with two other Brothers in February 1688.

THE FIRST SCHOOLS IN PARIS

Gradually Divine Providence was moving De La Salle towards founding schools for the poor. Before dying, M. Nichols Roland, founder of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, confided to De La Salle the care of obtaining legal recognition

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for his congregation of Sisters. Shortly after that, through the intercession of Mm Maillefer and of Adrian Nyel, De La Salle became involved in the education of boys.

Having resigned his canonry, given away his wealth to the needy, and divested himself of all other cares, he decided to establish his Institute in Paris. And so in 1688, February 24, he arrived in Paris with two Brothers from Reims. The parish priest of Saint Sulpice put them up in the Sulpician School of the Rue Princesse. Eventually, they took over the nearby cramped school for the poor of the parish.

Each day the boys went to Mass at St. Sulpice in what is today the Assumption Chapel (then called La Chappelle des Allemands). The boys were taught reading and writing in French (not Latin); and were homogeneously grouped according to ability. As if these innovations were not enough he cut down of the time devoted to the afternoon “shop classes”, making knitted caps, under the direction of the shrewd shop owner, M. Raffron. At midday all the pupils were given a bowl of soup and the more needy also received bread for their supper.

The Juniorate, or training center for younger boys interested in the Brothers’ vocation, was at Rue Princesse from about 1688 until De La Salle himself discontinued it in 1691.

During the school’s 18 years of operation in this slum area, the community had many exciting experiences. De La Salle sometimes went on business trips to Reims. On one occasion he became so exhausted from the long walk that he was ill upon his return to Paris. After receiving the Anointing of the Sick he recovered and set out for Reims again. On his way he met a criminal disguised as a priest, who was expert in black magic. He convinced the man to go the Rue Princesse and stay there with the Brothers (De La Salle was to finish his Reims business and return to his Paris community where he knew Br. Henri was sick) when he did arrive a few days later, he was met at the Rue Princesse door with the tragic news that Br. Henri had already died and was buried. Then and there was settled, in his mind, the priesthood question (Henri was at that time preparing to receive the priesthood).

After the first shock, De La Salle promptly attended to the patient criminal who was living in a spare room with the community of Brothers. After some long conversations with De La Salle the man’s conversion was complete.

Until 1707 the Brothers lived at Rue Princess itself. After that date they moved to the building that was acquired as a residence for them in the Rue de la Barouillere. Along the street are bistros, wood carvers, printers, an artist’s gallery, and several pubs.

RUE ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE



⇒ WATCH “RUE ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE” (2:05)

Rue St Jean-Baptiste de La Salle is the former Rue de la Barouillere. It was re-named in 1951 recalling the fact that from 1707-1715 De La Salle rented some buildings and gardens on the site of the present Savings Bank (Caisse d’Epargne). The street is only half a block from the Rue de Sevres Lasallian Center. It was here that a large house was rented called the House of the Barouillere. It would have been behind the present post-office on what is now De La Salle Street, one half-block from Rue de Sevres property. The school occupied the site of the present-day rear part of the Bank (Caisse d’Epargne).

La Chetardye had been prevailed upon by Br. Thomas (the procurator) to provide the deposit for this house in Rue de la Barouillere. The house was primarily intended for the Rue Princesse Brothers as a residence because until then (1707) they had been living in the insalubrious dwelling attached to their school.

During several sojourns here, between 1707 and 1715, De La Salle made arrangements with the young Abbe Clement for a school in St. Denis, re-edited some of his earlier Vaugirard works, and lived with Brother Bartholomew and his novices, when they sought refuge in Barouillere during a particularly bad famine in the St. Yon area in 1709.

It was here also that he spent some time recovering from a series of horribly painful knee operations. It seems he stumbled and fell on an iron spike driven into the ground as a gatepost at the Tuileries. He had been returning from Rue St. Honore and was going to Rue Princesse via the Pont Royal and Saint Germain Boulevard, about a 20 minute walk. After hurting his knee (on which there was already a “wen”) he struggled in agony the rest of the way to the door of the Rue Princesse house.

Nearby is the Rue Pierre-LeRoux which was called the Rue de Frere Philippe from 1874-1885 in tribute to the work of education done by the Institute under Brother Phillippe’s superiorship. This street is almost opposite the Rue de La Salle. In De La Salle’s time the Rue Pierre-LeRoux was simply called the Rue Traverse.

It’s to be noted that in the nearby Rue de Sevres, at no. 95, is the Chapel of the Lazarists built in 1827, holding the remains of St. Vincent de Paul. De La Salle was in frequent contact with the priests of this Mission. One of their missionaries in Rome served as intermediary for corresponding with Br. Gabriel Drolin (although the Founder was critical of them in his letters to Gabriel Drolin).

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ☞ This first effort of the Brothers in Paris became key in the future of schools throughout the city. What parts of Br. Gerard’s commentary support that statement?
- ☞ The Conduct of Schools became a key component in the success of Lasallian education. Why is that? Are there any contemporary examples of how this principle or dynamic is true in all human ventures?
- ☞ How important is it that the teacher models behavior for students – incidental or essential? Give some examples.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ☞ What do you think De La Salle would think about all of the attention that’s paid to him today? Would he be upset, please, indifferent? What would he want emphasized?
- ☞ The letter to De La Salle that was written by the “principal Brothers” from here was personal, but very direct. How would you describe the De La Salle’s relationship to the Brothers?
- ☞ The statue by Lejeune in the small alcove of the building seems to be a favorite of many. Looking at the statue, why do you think that is? How is education represented?

CARMELITE ABBEY



⇒ WATCH “**CARMELITE ABBEY**” (4:05)

This location is associated with De La Salle because of a retreat that he made at the convent Abbey. However, the place has become infamous because of the activities associated with the French Revolution, which also involved Blessed Brother Solomon.

De La Salle withdrew to this convent of discolored Carmelites on Rue Vaugirard after the troubles with the teachers of the town. After two weeks of prayer and meditation he returned to the St. Yon Novitiate in Rouen, which had begun the year before. In this convent, a major part of which is now the Catholic Institute of Paris, is buried Frederick Ozonam, Founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, who died at the age of 40.

In the chapel to the left of the sanctuary is a statue of Our Lady which was designed by Bernini but executed by one of his students. During the Revolution it was removed, but it was returned here in the 1930's.

In the church, in the second chapel from the back on the right is a plaque commemorating all those put to death here. Brother Solomon is mentioned by name at the right of the altar.

The door into the sacristy is to the left of the sanctuary. During a particularly intense time period of the French Revolution, the local priests and religious had been herded into the church. Later they were to be conducted into the sacristy (used as a dining area during the Revolution), and down into the corridor. There at a table, within earshot of the death-throes of their colleagues who had proceeded them, they were asked if they had taken the Oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. If they had not and were not prepared to do so, they proceeded down the corridor and met their fate at the steps which lead outside.

After the event, it makes the words of Br. Solomon's last letter very prophetic. He wrote them to his sister, Marie-Barbe, on the Feast of the Assumption two days before his imprisonment: “I wish you a joyful feast. I pray that you may spend it in good health with you dear family, and in peace and quiet, so rare in our day. May our perfect submission to the will of God satisfy for every other consolation. Let us suffer all it may please him to permit, and let us remain faithful to him.”

There was another Brother with Brother Solomon who hid among the dead and later escaped and acted as a witness. About 160 priests and religious were murdered here. Their bodies were put into a well and ditch, which are no longer part of the property. The bones were later exhumed, when a road was being built, and buried in the crypt.

In the second room in the crypt, Br. Solomon's name appears just inside the doorway, on the left-hand side. Here in this room are gathered the bones of at least 100 of the martyrs. The skulls are kept separate - these show the marks of the violence done to the people.



At the beginning of the French Revolution the Brothers had in their schools, which were nearly all free, about half as many pupils (36,000) as there were in all the secondary schools in France (72,747) At that time, there were 121 communities in France and 6 communities abroad; a total of about 1000 Brothers. In 1792 when the Institute was suppressed on all French territory, in decreeing this suppression the Assembly nevertheless declared that the Brothers had “deserved well of their country.”

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ **This is a rather dramatic spot in both French and Lasallian history. How is it that such a horrendous thing could be done by people of good will and passion?**
- ↳ **Imagine yourself as being one of the people inside, being asked to make a choice such as they had to make. How do you think you would respond?**
- ↳ **What kinds of things can we do through our educational ministry that may ameliorate the human tendency toward violence? What could do you personally for yourself?**

GRENOBLE



A major city in southern France, Grenoble became especially familiar to De La Salle in his later years. He made two journeys to the South of France, walking most of the way. He visited the Brothers he had assigned to open new schools, and he wanted to remove himself from difficult situations in Paris, convinced that this was the best thing that he could do for the Brothers. He was eventually called back to Paris, much to his reluctance, in order to resume his role as Superior.

The first Brothers school in Grenoble was opened in 1708 at the request of Fr. de Saleon, a former seminarian at St. Sulpice, eventual Director of Parmenie, and good friend of De La Salle.

In this crisis period in his life, De La Salle, by this time in Grenoble, decided to make a retreat at the Grande Chartreuse. Founded in 1084 by St Bruno, the actual buildings dates from 1676. The monks were expelled in 1903 only to return in 1941. The Carthusians had a special meaning for De La Salle because St. Bruno, their founder, had been, like himself a canon of Reims. De La Salle, with a companion, sought anonymity in the monastery but his holiness betrayed him as a Br Patrice, in a deposition written for the beatification process, testified. During a visit in 1781, the Brothers were told that a lapse of 66 years had not effaced the memory of De La Salle whose holiness had so struck them (De La Salle had only spent three days here).

⇒ **WATCH “[RUE SAINT LAURENT](#)” (3:01)**

- ↪ **When De La Salle was here with the Brothers, why would he have been content to simply live in that upper room and be involved with the school as required?**
- ↪ **His piety was noticed and respected by those in the area. Was this something that he advocated for his Brothers and would it have been important to their role as teachers?**
- ↪ **Why was it that most of the time De La Salle would only send Brothers in response to a request from others?**

In 1931 a plaque was mounted on the front of the building at 40 Rue Saint Laurent in Grenoble which still identifies his hideaway: “In this house St John Baptist de la Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and organizer of primary teaching in France, taught in 1713.” There is an old spiral granite stairway, a wooden balcony overlooking an inner courtyard and a small room in the recess of the isolated tower - “the least comfortable and most remote room in the house” as Blain says. Here he wrote a new edition of “The Duties of a Christian” and made public his support for Rome against Quesnel. Once again, De La Salle underwent the grill-cure for his rheumatism. We are told that during his convalescence the whole of Grenoble became concerned about his recovery.

⇒ **WATCH “[THE BOOK DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN](#)” (3:25)**

⇒ **WATCH “[REVISION OF DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN](#)” (2:57)**



His close friend, Fr. de Saleon, then encouraged De La Salle to make a retreat at a place called Parmenie. In 1713 De La Salle sent the Director of Grenoble north in order to sort out some problems there and receive news of the Brothers. De La Salle took his place in class (probably for two weeks) and in the above mentioned deposition we are told that everyone was struck with the piety and devotion of De La Salle. “Whenever he was spotted on his way to church with his young scholars, people could be heard to say, ‘Let us go to Mass. See, there, the holy priest on his way to celebrate it.’”

For the most part De La Salle remained in seclusion during his 10 month stay here during the winter of 1713-1714.

⇒ **WATCH “[VISITATION SISTERS](#)” (1:53)**

- ↪ **De La Salle seems to have been sensitive to his responsibilities as an ordained cleric. Are there other examples of his outreach and charity as a priest?**
- ↪ **Making the daily walk up the stairs to the Sisters must have been trying. Why do you think that De La Salle made the effort and kept it up?**
- ↪ **Do you think that he might have enjoyed the opportunity to minister to a group of women? Is there any evidence to support your position?**

At either end of the Rue St Laurent is the Church of St Laurent and the Convent/Museum of the Visitation (St Marie en Haut). From the school in the same street of St Laurent De La Salle would have taken the pupils to the Church of St Laurent and to the Church of St Andre across the river.

Bearing in mind that most Masses for children would have been celebrated by the parish priests, De La Salle often said Mass in the convent. The foundation stone of the Convent was laid by Francis de Sales and the chapel was completed in 1662, the year of his canonization. All the

decorations in the well-adorned chapel are just as De La Salle saw them. Regrettably the chapel is no longer used for religious services but as a splendid concert hall. (The Convent is now incorporated as part of the museum). According to Blain, De La Salle celebrated Mass in this convent chapel.

It is a 15-minute walk from the convent/museum to the church of St. Andre, across the river. One would descend the steps from the museum, cross the bridge, and then turn right for a few yards along the Quai Stephane Jairy, and then left into the Place de Berulle and through the Rue Cujus. Turning right onto the Rue de Palais, the Church of St Andre will be seen across the plaza ahead.

⇒ **WATCH “[CHURCH OF SAINT ANDRE](#)” (1:24)**

- ↪ **St. Andre is known for the great saints that are associated with it. How did De La Salle look upon that idea of sainthood? Does sainthood play a role in the ministry of teaching?**
- ↪ **Taking students for the relatively long walk to St. Andre much have been quite a chore. Why would he have taken them there when the church of St. Laurent was so close to the school?**
- ↪ **Education is more than classroom work, it appears. How does Lasallian education make that truth into reality?**

PARMENIE



⇒ **WATCH “DE LA SALLE AND PARMENIE – AN INTRODUCTION” (4:36)**

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

DE LA SALLE AND PARMENIE—AN INTRODUCTION

- ↳ **When you see a place like Parmenie, where De La Salle really didn't spend a great deal of time, why do you think it became such an important moment in his life?**
- ↳ **What other aspects of De La Salle's experience, writings, innovations, and perspectives regarding education and his work with the Brothers would make Parmenie a fitting place for personal renewal?**
- ↳ **What kinds of things do you do in order to recharge your batteries? What more could you do, if only you had the time? What could you do even without the time?**

This idyllic setting, high in the mountains outside of Grenoble, is a special retreat setting for all who come there. It was so for De La Salle during one of his most difficult periods, and it is so for Brothers and for student groups today. Its long religious history, prayerful atmosphere, and evocative natural setting give some measure of the blessing that it must have been for De La Salle as he was struggling to understand, accept, and live out God's ongoing call in his life.

The name Parmenie (Latin “para moenia” - alongside the walls) indicates that the place was heavily fortified. A deep cistern near the present chapel is a souvenir of Roman days. Here, it is thought Mercury and Isis were worshipped and the Druids gathered.

In the early Middle Ages Parmenie served as a refuge for the early Christian bishops. It is believed that relics of the Holy Cross were kept here and so Parmenie became a place of pilgrimage as early as the 8th century. After a devastating flood in 1219, a pilgrimage was led to Parmenie and that is now commemorated in the annual September fair of the neighboring village of Beaucroissant.

After being in the hands of various religious orders (including the Carthusian nun, Blessed Beatrice, who died in 1303 and is buried at Parmenie) the property remained in ruins for 200 years until the advent of the shepherd girl, Sister Louise, who was born in 1646. She was convinced that God had told her to build a shrine at Parmenie in his honor.

Eventually Louise received permission and, with help, rebuilt the Chapel. It was blessed on May 3, 1674 and the relics of Blessed Beatrice were re-interred. All the ancient monastery buildings were still in ruins but Louise enlarged the chapel (the former chapel was now used as a sacristy) and built a residence large enough to house a priest, several retreatants, her companion and herself.

In 1681 Sister Louise sought permission from the local bishop for a permanent chaplain. Thinking she would be unable to succeed, he invited her to find a priest who was willing and able to help. Fr. Roux was to work at Parmenie for 30 years. Additional buildings were erected to accommodate more retreatants. After Fr. Roux's death the retreats were directed by Fr. de Saleon who, on becoming bishop, was succeeded by Fr. Salong.

The encounter at Parmenie between De La Salle and Sister Louise in 1714 is perhaps the most important event that ever took place there. There is good reason to suppose that if this providential encounter had not taken place, De La Salle's work might have perished.



After a serious illness at Grenoble, De La Salle was invited by Fr. de Saleon (who had first asked the Brothers to Grenoble) to spend a few days in the solitude of Parmenie. Aware that De La Salle's zeal for the apostolate might force him to leave Parmenie too soon, De Saleon took advantage of some urgent business in Provence as an excuse to ask De La Salle to replace him temporarily as Director of the Retreats. This gave De La Salle a way of expressing his gratitude. (His room was probably the sacristy which is now the sanctuary of the Chapel.) Could this work be the answer that God had in store for him? Sister Louise, who was at this time looking for a new Director for the retreats, told De La Salle that his work was with

the Brothers.

It was either at Parmenie or at Grenoble that De La Salle received the letter from the Brothers in Paris. His decision to return to Paris was confirmed by another meeting.

⇒ **WATCH “DE LA SALLE'S EXPERIENCE AT PARMENIE” (1:33)**

An example of Providence at work: Claude Dulac de Montisambert, a man of honorable family and upbringing, had been a gambler then when a soldier. Twice he had been close to death. After eight years of military service he left the army

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without notifying his family (He knew that his father would oppose and block any such move). He wanted to try his vocation as a Capuchin and as a Carthusian but had to leave when he realized that his father's consent was demanded. At a Trappist Abbey the abbot told him to continue searching. He then sought out the advice of the local priest who happened to be Fr. de Saleon and who invited him to spend a few weeks in retreat with him at Parmemie.

⇒ **WATCH "PARMENIE CHAPEL"** (2:26)

⇒ **WATCH "PARMENIE: CRYPT"** (3:07)

Dulac had previously seen Brothers in Grenoble but because of his upbringing and lack of formal schooling did not at first feel attracted to them. De La Salle first considered that Dulac might be a wanderer who could not settle down but on June 6, 1714, he clothed this 23-year old with the habit in the Grenoble community. Br. Irene, as he now was called, was sent to Avignon under Br Timothy. He was a very poor teacher and this caused him to ponder his vocation. He later became sub-Director of novices under Br Bartholomew and then Director of Novices, and Director General of St Yon (in this capacity he closed De La Salle's eyes in death), and first Assistant to the Superior.

Both Blain and Maillefer say that the Founder spent a fortnight at Parmenie but Burkhard argues convincingly for a stay of the greater part of four months (February-June of 1714) with intervening returns to the Grenoble community.

Sister Louise was 82 when she died on January 22, 1727, having spent 54 years on Parmenie. Shortly after Sister Louise had fulfilled her divinely-appointed mission, Parmenie fell back into oblivion. In 1964, just 250 years after De La Salle's sojourn, the Brothers acquired title to Parmenie. Arson was committed the following year but Parmenie has been rebuilt by Br Leo Burkhard and became the focus of a large gathering of young Lasallian people in 1980. It is presently a retreat center for the District of France.

⇒ **WATCH: "SR. LOUISE AND DE LA SALLE"** (1:23)

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

PARMENIE SR. LOUISE AND BR. LEO BURKHARD

- ⇒ Sr. Louise seems to have been quite a person. From what you know, why do you think that this was the case? And how is it that an illiterate shepherdess became so appealing to a Canon of the Reims Cathedral and Doctor of Theology?
- ⇒ Br. Leo Burkhard was passionate about De La Salle and his experience at Parmenie. Where is your passion, if it exists, in the area of Lasallian history or pedagogy or spirituality?
- ⇒ Parmenie is now a retreat center for Lasallians and others. Why is it important to have times for retreat, renewal, and rest? Look beyond the obvious answers.

⇒ **WATCH: "WHY IS PARMENIE SO SPECIAL TO US?"** (4:1)

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

PARMENIE DE LA SALLE AND PARMENIE – A KEY DECISION

- ⇒ There are key moments in everyone's life, moments that shape one's future. Why was this decision such a key one in De La Salle's life? What other options did he have?
- ⇒ What kinds of things do you think were going through De La Salle's head as he was reading the letter from the "principal Brothers" and trying to decide what to do?
- ⇒ What are some of the key moments in your life – times when you knew that your choice would make a major impact on your life? How did you finally come to a decision?



ROUEN



The industrial city of Rouen in northern France included many poor families in the 17th century, whose children were often left to roam by themselves while their parents worked. De La Salle and the Brothers endured many hardships in order to become established throughout Rouen, and their property at St. Yon became a model educational enterprise, both for students (including delinquents) and Brothers alike. De La Salle himself lived at St. Yon for many years, and it was here that he spent his last days.

Rouen, known as the museum town of France, is the country's third busiest port and a major industrial, textile (printed cotton goods became known as "rouenerie"), commercial and administrative center - Normandy's capital. Its Musée des Beaux Arts is one of the finest in France. The 13th - 16th century Cathedral of Our Lady has two impressive towers and a huge 19th century spire, France's tallest. The right tower of the Cathedral, the Butter Tower (so called because it was thought to have been built with the money paid for the dispensation to eat butter during Lent), has a carillon of 50 bells. In the Cathedral is retained the heart of Richard the Lionhearted.

Joan of Arc's Tower is in the keep of the Castle (1204) of Philippe-Auguste. It was in this tower that Joan was tortured. A mosaic in the paving of the Place du Vieux Marche marks the spot where she was burned at the stake.

The Tour de la Grosse Horloge (with its elaborate clock machinery and faces and its bells that still toll every evening at 9:00 PM) was seen by Joan of Arc and by De La Salle.

In 1789 the Revolution passed quietly in Rouen, but the big walls surrounding the town in place of the present boulevards and quays were torn down except for the Porte Guillaume Lion.

Rouen, famous for its pottery, is the native town of the 17th century French dramatist, Pierre Corneille. His house faces Joan of Arc's statue in Place du V. Marche, by the Rue de Gros-Horloge.

⇒ **WATCH "DE LA SALLE AND ROUEN"** (5:30)

- 👉 **Br. Gerard provides a comprehensive overview of the various major locations associated with De La Salle. What stands out to you? (Suggestion: Listen to it twice.)**
- 👉 **How is it that Rouen became such an important place in the history of De La Salle and the first Brothers, when the city was neither very welcoming nor supportive, at least at first?**
- 👉 **When you think about your own educational institution, what aspects of its life do you find enlivening, challenging, and hopeful?**

SAINT YON



Harassed on all sides in Paris by the ecclesiastical authorities and by the Writing Masters, the Founder now decided to remove the headquarters to the Institute from the capital. He had discovered in the outskirts of Rouen, in the suburb of St. Yon, a large house and property for sale or lease. On August 11th, 1705 he rented this property from the owner, the Marquise de Louvois, and on the 31st of the same month Br. Barthelemy and the few novices who remained took possession of the house. For thirty-five years previously it had served as a holiday and convalescent home for the Benedictine nuns of St. Amand. The nuns were generous enough to leave the chapel completely furnished.

It was an ancient lordly manor, situated on the banks of the Seine in the St. Sever quarter of town. The vast buildings stretched over an enclosed ground of some 16 acres, planted with large trees. The manor had been known as St. Yon since 1615.



When not detained in Paris on business affairs, it was to St. Yon that De La Salle loved to return. It was at St. Yon that he hastened to re-establish the annual retreat that had been practiced with success at Vaugirard and at La Grande Maison. St. Yon also served as a house where Brothers could come for physical

relaxation on weekends as well as the renewal in a retreat conducted by De La Salle. It was at St. Yon that De La Salle was to write the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

⇒ **WATCH "DE LA SALLE'S MEDITATIONS"** (5:32)

The parish priest of Saint Sever had earlier feared that the Brother's Chapel of Saint Yon might prejudice his own collection and therefore imposed impossible obligations. Instead, De La Salle offered to open a school which had been closed for lack of competent teachers - which offer was accepted. Anxious to recognize the Norman hospitality, he re-opened this free school that had been founded in 1687. The young Brothers did their practice teaching in this school.

Every year, all the Brothers from the northern communities spent the month of September in St. Yon to vacation and to make the annual retreat. The spacious grounds were a welcome change from the cramped conditions in which most of the communities had to live.

Besides the Brothers and Novitiate, St. Yon came to have 3 distinct establishments: a boarding school, a school for unmanageable children, and a house of correction. Each section of the Mother House had its own Director and staff. There were ordinarily between 260 and 280 boarders in the schools. By 1780 the number had risen to 500. In that year, there were in St. Yon, between all the categories, 125 Brothers! There was quite a regiment of "serving Brothers" in their brown robes - cooks, bakers, a blacksmith, gardeners, tailors, carpenters, linen-keepers etc.

From 1705 forward, with a brief interruption at the

beginning, until 1771, St. Yon was the heart and center of the institute. During those years, 92 communities were established up and down the length and breadth of France. Between 1728 and 1790 in the cemetery of St. Yon, 115 Brothers were buried. The very first was a young Brother of eighteen, Br Chryseuil “mort en odeur de saintete” says the register.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ **This is quite a place. What impressions do you get from the various locations in the building and Br. Gerard’s descriptions of life at St. Yon?**
- ↳ **How was life in 17th century France, especially in a place like St. Yon, different from 21st century life in your own location? What similarities, if any, are there.**
- ↳ **De La Salle and the Brothers were often stretched to the life, in terms of time, resources, and personal strength. How is it that they were able to persevere year after year?**

BOARDING SCHOOL



In 1705-1706 middle-class families, particularly of the commercial world, asked De La Salle to take boarders. He agreed (He did so all the more readily since the resulting small income would help maintain the novices and the extremely poor Brothers in the free schools of Rouen).

According to a school “Regulation” (prospectus) of 1750, subjects taught included grammar, math, military art, accounting, bookkeeping, catechism; drawing was an option. For some pupils, there was also hydrography, mechanics, calculus, music and living language. A supplementary fee was charged for advanced courses (e.g. special math). History, geography, French literature, rhetoric, architecture, and music formed secondary teaching. But the sciences claimed the greatest success.

From 1780-1790 there were 300-500 pupils in the Boarding

School, aged 8 - 16 years. 150 years later the French Parliament was to adopt this form of teaching for the whole of France.

SCHOOL FOR UNMANAGEABLE CHILDREN

New buildings were erected. De La Salle took charge of boys sent here by their fathers as to a Reformatory. These boys were engaged in the same studies as the other boarders, attended the same prayers, but ate at a separate tables. As their behavior improved, they could join the division of the “free” boarders.

The success of the Brothers in this re-education led the President of Normandy Parliament to hand over to De La Salle a “detention center” or house of correction.

⇒ **WATCH “THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND THE PRACTICAL LIFE” (2:03)**

HOUSE OF CORRECTION

This was to receive individuals deprived of their liberty by king or court. These young men, the “enclosed ones”, sent here instead of to prison, had caused some scandal or had compromised their family’s position and reputation. Mature men were also here to avoid the shame of imprisonment to their social position of family name. They included nobility, priests, religious, upper and middle-class people, and some mentally deranged. They assumed Saint’s names on entering, thus ensuring anonymity.

In this detention center they had cells and places of isolation for as long as was needed. As they improved they were allowed to keep birds, cultivate flowers in window-boxes, follow courses in geometry, drawing and architecture. The gardens and workshops could be made available to them.

On arrival they were first deprived of anything with which they could commit suicide. They took recreation in groups of 10 or 12, supervised by a Brother. They attended religious exercises together (but separately from the boarders). Rioting was always a possibility. Division walls existed only between the enclosed ones and the others in St Yon.

Unreasonably, the parish priest of the neighboring St Sever insisted that those sent to St Yon by an order of Parliament (the “enclosed ones”) should be taken to the parish church for Mass and other services. De La Salle said this was impossible and insisted that the parish priest could visit the school instead. After the Cure’s protests to the Archbishop, De La Salle’s permission to hear Confessions was withdrawn. Still mortifying himself, De La Salle was commanded by his confessor to cease from abstinence. Sometime later, his head was badly injured by a door that fell upon him, resulting in violent head pains. Confined to bed, he rallied and rose to celebrate Mass on Feast of St. Joseph, to whom he had a special devotion.

On Wednesday Holy Week, De La Salle received Communion, having been lifted from bed and dressed in his soutane and cotta. The next day he was anointed by the Cure of St. Sever, the same one who had caused him so much trouble. At the desire of Brother Bartholomew, the Superior De La Salle blessed him and all the members of the Order. His last words were: “Qui, j’adore en toutes choses la conduite de Dieu à mon égard.” (“Yes, I adore God guiding me in all the events of my life.”)

ROUEN

Toward 4:00 am Good Friday morning, April 7, 1719, John Baptist De La Salle made an effort to rise from his bed as if to greet someone, then joined his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and died.

His body was laid in the Chapel of St Suzanne in the parish church of St Sever at the insistence of the Cure, despite previous quarrelling. The body was laid under the side altar on Holy Saturday. About 18 months later Br. Bartholomew also died at St. Yon and was buried near De La Salle in St Sever.

⇒ **WATCH “ST. YON”** (10:04)

Once Br. Timothy, the new Superior General, had secured the Letters Patent (1724) which gave the Institute legal existence in France and the Bull of Approbation (1725) which gave it the recognition and protection of the Holy See, he set about making the Mother House in Rouen a worthy center of the institute. He began immediately by constructing a suitable chapel. Most of the work on this was done by the Brothers themselves, the saintly aristocrat, Br. Irene, taking a special pleasure in doing the work of an unskilled laborer. This chapel, quite a handsome building, was completed in 1730, and was dedicated to the Holy Child Jesus under the invocation of Mary Immaculate, St. Joseph and St. Cassian.

In 1950, at the request of former pupils of the Brothers, the Municipality changed the name of the nearby square “Place St Gervais” to “Place Jean Baptiste de La Salle.”

In 1906, De La Salle’s relics were transferred from Rouen to the then Mother House at Lemberq-Les - Hal, Belgium, and then in 1937 finally to the new Motherhouse in Via Aurelia, Rome.

CLOISTER OF ST. MACLOU



⇒ **WATCH “CLOISTER OF ST. MACLOU”** (2:08)

At no. 186 Rue Martainville, indicated by a sign “Aitre St Maclou” is the delightful building that doubled as a school and a cemetery. It was only in 1651 that the southern wing (where the school was to be - in the area behind the statue of Our Lady) was built. The other three galleries had been constructed between 1527-33. Between 1745 and 1749 the headstones were removed and the lower story of the present building was constructed. Previously this was an atrium - the upper stories being on ‘stilts’ - and the wealthy were buried at ground level below the second story, while the poor were buried in the yard itself.

Brother Ponce was transferred here from Darnetal in 1705 as the first Director. De La Salle himself is said to have taught here to replace a sick Brother. The First President of the Normandy Parliament and the Archbishop of Rouen visited here - probably in 1706. Many stained-glass windows in Lasallian schools throughout the world recall this visit which won the admiration of the archbishop for the pedagogy of the Brothers.

It was only in 1781 that the dead were no longer buried here. In 1791 it ceased to be a Brothers’ school and then became workshops. The Brothers returned in 1819 only to leave again in 1905. Between 1911 and 1920 it was a girl’s school and in 1927 became the property of the city of Rouen. Currently it houses the School of Fine Arts. The “Danse Macabre” on the frieze of the buildings in the courtyard can



still be seen, including the temptation of Adam and Eve, and carvings of a monk, priest and cardinal. Most of the sculptures were damaged in 1562 by the Calvinists.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ⇒ **The school that was located here experienced all of the challenges of cramped, city life. What similar challenges might one find in a contemporary inner city school location?**
- ⇒ **Dedication to teaching the poor is often exhausting, with little rewards. How is it that the Brothers were able to maintain that dedication for years on end?**
- ⇒ **Is teaching the poor only a one-way street? What could we learn from the poor?**

CHURCH OF ST. SEVER

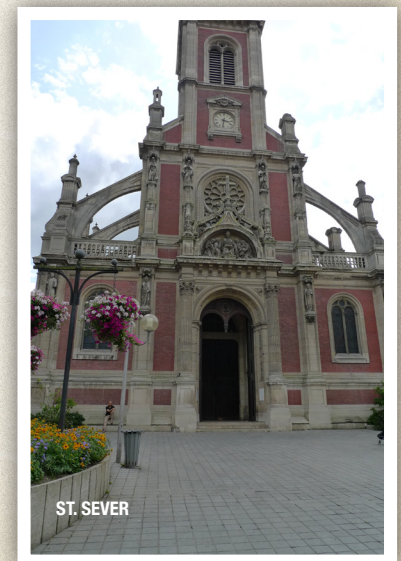


⇒ **WATCH “CHURCH OF ST. SEVER”** (2:01)

Although not an ancient church, it has the oldest Roman crypt in Rouen, dating from the 5th century. It is thought that here lies the tomb of St. Mellon of Cardiff, who was bishop by the middle of the 3rd century.

In 1860 the St. Sever known to De La Salle (and once called “the ugliest building in Rouen”) was replaced by the present church which stands perpendicular to the original church but on the same site.

The tombstone presently on the wall in St. Sever (Latin text) was the original tombstone in St. Sever. When the relics were transferred to St. Yon in 1734 a new tombstone was



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made for St. Yon with a French translation for the original Latin text. It was the “French” tombstone that was broken when the Founder’s relics were scattered in the Revolution, and a part of the “French” tombstone is now in the side chapel of the Pensionnate Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.

A plaque in St. Sever recalls: “John Baptist De La Salle born in Reims, 30th April 1651, priest, founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who created and established gratuitous popular schools in 23 towns of France, including Darnetal, and five schools in Rouen. He resided at the manor of St. Yon (the present Ecole Normale) from 1705 to 1709 and from 1715 to 1719. He died there on Good Friday, April 7th, 1719. From 1734-1835 his remains were in the chapel of St. Yon, Rue St. Julien (which had been constructed by the Brothers and their pupils during the years 1728-1734). This memorial was erected in the year of the Tercentenary of the birth of St J.B. de La Salle, 1951.”

In 1925 the parish priest of St. Sever erected a chapel to De La Salle in his church, in reparation for the troubles De La Salle had in that parish.

Painted in 1715, there are now two pictures that are from the Brothers chapel of St. Yon in the church of St Sever, in the chapels of St. Joan of Arc and St. John Baptist de La Salle. This chapel of the Founder dates from 1925 and is due to Fr. Farcy, priest of the parish and author of a history of the House of St. Yon. He learned from his father, a teacher trained by the Brothers in the Rouen teacher’s college, his great devotion to De La Salle. In the left aisle, in the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, can be found an altar which came from the Brothers chapel of St Yon.

» QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ↳ **When De La Salle died on April 7, 1719, there were some 23 communities around France and 100 Brothers. What do you think might have been going through his mind?**
- ↳ **De La Salle seems to have had his share of controversies with parish priests, pastors, and other figures in the hierarchy; but always very respectful. Why was that? And how did he handle such difficulties, especially if he knew that he was in the right?**
- ↳ **When you think about your own death, what kind of legacy or remembrance would you like to think you might have? Is there any evidence that such might be the case?**

PLACE ST. CLEMENT



⇒ WATCH “PLACE ST. CLEMENT” (2:15)

The monument erected here in honor of De La Salle is the work of the sculptor Falguiere. Brother Lucard, the Director of the Teacher’s college, received help from all the authorities to launch a fund-raising campaign in the late 1800’s among the former pupils of the Brothers to cover the major part of the cost. The generosity of the benefactors was such that excess money was given to the city of Rouen. The statue was mounted in 1875 in the Place Carnot but was transferred to the quieter neighborhood of St. Sever because of the difficulties with traffic circulation in 1885.

Seemingly, the mayor had wished to dispose of the statue, but an alum of the school and a member of the City Council managed to preserve it and bring it here. At the time of the occupation during World War II, the Germans were foiled in their attempts to move and melt down the statue.

The bronze group of the statue weighs more than three tons. The total height is 12 meters. Its transfer here in 1885 inadvertently saved it from destruction by bombing during the raids on Rouen in 1944.

The monument shows the Founder teaching a young child the way to heaven. A second pupil is deeply engrossed in reading. The work is of bronze. The base has the arms of the La Salle family (chevrons) and those of the institute (star) as well as the crests of the cities of Reims and Rouen. The children placed at the four corners represent the four corners of the earth. The bas-reliefs recall that De La Salle gave his goods to the poor and that he was honored with a visit from James II at the boarding school in Paris.

The monument is a fitting end to a Lasallian pilgrimage, attesting as it does to the timeless endeavors of this Patron Saint of Teachers for the good of those entrusted to the care of his teachers.



in the FOOTSTEPS

St. John Baptist De La Salle A Vocation Journey

This project came about because of a proposal made by **Brother George Van Grieken** (currently the Director of the Lasallian Resource Center - www.lasallianresources.org) to **Brother Gerard Rummery** (Lasallian Scholar from Australia) and **Brother Roch Dufresne** (Director of Video Productions, Cathedral High School, Los Angeles, California) to document and film an introduction to the major historical sites in France associated with the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle, Patron Saint of Teachers and Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.



“Be satisfied with what you can do, since God is satisfied with it, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with grace; and believe that, provided you want it, you can do more with the grace of God than you think.”

De La Salle

All involved were excited about the idea, and a detailed proposal was drafted for the Brother Visitors of the United States-Toronto Region (RCCB), who subsequently approved the undertaking in December of 2008.

Scouting Lasallian sites in France was accomplished by Br. George and Br. Roch during Easter Week 2009, and filming commenced in July 2009, taking place over the course of ten intensive days.

Post-production became quite the task (as it always does), and the Q&A component required the addition of another DVD. The entire film project was finished in September of 2010, and the accompanying booklet was completed by July, 2011. In 2018, the www.dlsfootsteps.org website was entirely redesigned so as to be more accessible to more people.

Many Brothers and communities throughout France were very generous with their help and hospitality. They illustrate and exemplify the reasons behind, and the value of, a project such as this. Lasallian education and the movement begun by De La Salle continues to be a living witness to the enduring power of what real faith and zeal can do when wedded to the Gospel and to dedicated individuals.

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