



Greeting to Pope Francis
Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General
16 May 2019

Thank you, Holy Father, for being with us during our celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the Death of John Baptist de La Salle. We are grateful to you for declaring this a jubilee year for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, our students and fellow Lasallian Educators. We appreciate your kind and compassionate exercise of the Petrine ministry. You have reminded us that Christ's Church is a Church "which goes forth."¹ Your witness inspires all of us to create a culture of encounter and to bring the Good News to those who are different, despised and ignored. Thank you, Holy Father.

This year, we not only celebrate the life and work of John Baptist de La Salle; but also, and most importantly, once again discover that he points the way to Jesus Christ. His own personal experience of salvation impelled him to "recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children and adore him in them." (Cf. Med 96.3). This encounter with the poverty and ignorance of the "children of the artisans and the poor" lead him to found a community of Brothers dedicated to announce the Gospel to the poor through a human and Christian education.

Today the movement he and the first Brothers launched is guaranteed by 90,000 women and men educators, Religious Sisters, clergy and 3,500 Brothers educating 1,000,000 students in 80 countries. We are also inspired by the witness of our numerous Brothers who have been canonized, beatified and declared venerable.

But, during this anniversary year, we are not simply recalling the past; inspired by De La Salle, the universal Patron Saint of Teachers, and guided by the Holy Spirit, we are also reigniting in our hearts an ardent zeal for the Reign of God and striking out on new paths. As religious Brothers

¹ Evangelii Gaudium (EG) No. 20-24

dedicated to human and Christian education we have the freedom to go beyond social, political and national borders. By the witness of our consecrated life and through our educational communities we liberate the oppressed, reach the unreached, educate the abandoned, and bring the joy of the Gospel to those in despair and without hope.

John Baptist de La Salle understood the Gospel mandate to go to the poor “with the heart of a poor man.” Today each Brother, indeed each Christian, is challenged to do the same. In our work of bringing experiences of the Reign of God to the world of education, we are accompanied and enriched by dedicated women and men who generously and professionally share with us the ministry of human and Christian education.

Our Lasallian Partners fill us with hope and we share with them our spiritual and pedagogical heritage. They are, like us, heirs of John Baptist de La Salle, and like him, co-ambassadors of Jesus Christ and co-ministers of God. Together we are writing new and exciting chapters in the ongoing Lasallian narrative.

The Gospel and the Church call us and our Partners to touch hearts and teach minds. In doing so, "we see an evangelical energy to bring the living love of Christ into the teacher-student relationship so as to transform the classroom into a redemptive and saving place".²

We are convinced that the spirituality we inherited from de La Salle continues to have an extraordinary transforming force and dynamism. It is a unifying spirituality whose Christological center of attention is not so much perfection itself but service to one's neighbor, solidarity with those who suffer, and dedication to the young people who need us. Therefore, it is a practical spirituality that keeps us open to God's presence in the world and to the needs of others.

We know that the spirit of faith and zeal plays a unifying role that helps us to see reality, not as something profane, but rather as something sacramental. Everything is revealed to us in God: beneath "the rags of the children" we encounter Jesus; the school, "God's work", becomes a God-enlightened space where the Brothers and our Partners, by our concrete and effective love towards the young, makes visible the face of God.³

On April 7, 1719, 300 years ago, the first Brothers found themselves without their founder and guide. Their small community was not recognized by the Church or the State. They pledged to continue the mission by responding to the human and Christian educational needs of poor urban children. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and Holy Father, under your pastoral guidance today, we and our Lasallian Partners are committed to continue the charism of De La Salle and respond to "the educational needs of those whose dignity and basic rights are not recognized. Our mission is to make it possible for them to live with dignity as daughters and sons of God."⁴ We express our loyalty to you as Bishop of Rome and we assure you of our prayers and fraternal affection.

Thank you, Pope Francis!

² Coldwell, Timothy, FSC, "A Generative Charism for New Generations: Reflections and Questions, 2019.

³ Cf. Circular 466, "They Will Call Themselves Brothers", Rome, 2013, p.7.

⁴ Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Article 13, 2015.