A journey that leaves its mark: my experience in Kenya

Mr José Manuel Merino Gil is the principal of Colegio La Salle Santander in Spain, and for many years now, he has been participating in Lasallian international volunteer ministry during the summer. «I have been to Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Rwanda (four times), India (also four times), Molembeck (in Belgium), Lebanon (with the Fratelli Project), Equatorial Guinea, and Kenya», he says.

«This experience has taught me to rest while working, to live focused on the present, without thinking about 20 plans or 15 problems», he writes in one of his chronicles about his latest experience in Kenya. «Although some days I ended up tired from the weather or the work, my mind was at peace, disconnected from almost everything that was not the here and now».

José Manuel shares with LaSalleOrg News a testimony of faith, fraternity and service in the spirit of hope, through the text ***«A journey that leaves its mark: my experience in Kenya».***



This summer I had the opportunity to live an experience that has undoubtedly left a beautiful «tatoo» on my personal and professional life. For four weeks, I was in Kenya, collaborating with various Lasallian works in Nakuru and other locations, and I was able to see first-hand how the Lasallian mission is carried out in contexts very different from ours, especially in the «peripheries», but with the same Lasallian spirit and atmosphere.

I spent the first week at the international Novitiate in Nairobi, together with the director and friend, Brother Agustín Ranchal. There I spent two very peaceful days, talking to the novices about La Salle in Spain and Europe, teaching some classes on Artificial Intelligence and introducing them to the *Godly Play* methodology, sharing three sessions with them.

During the rest of my stay, I lived with the community at La Salle Mwangaza College, but above all I collaborated at La Salle Child Discovery Centre (CDC). These two centres are part of the Lasallian District of East Africa (Lwanga). Mwangaza College is a vocational training centre for young people and adults, with specialisations such as Business and Accounting, Hospitality, IT, Electrical Installation, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Fashion and Design. There, I collaborated with the secretariat and the library and taught several classes on Artificial Intelligence to IT students. I also shared my time with the teachers, supporting staff and students, sharing not only the daily academic routine, but also simple moments over African tea, conversations in Swahili and the warmth of an open and fraternal community.

At the Child Discovery Centre, a home and educational centre for vulnerable children and young people, I taught daily classes on the introduction to Artificial Intelligence, as well as sharing games, dances, talks and cultural learning. From the very beginning, I felt like «part of the landscape», and they taught me much more than I could ever teach them: their language, their expressions and, above all, their way of looking at life with hope and passion.



I also visited other Lasallian projects, such as the new mission in Homa Bay, on the shores of Lake Victoria, where the Brothers are developing a school that will be an educational, cultural, social and sporting reference point for the region.

During my stay, I drafted three projects to request financial assistance from several NGOs, including PROYDE. In addition, thanks to the solidarity of families, friends and people close to the two La Salle schools in Cantabria, we were able to raise €1,500 to cover tuition fees and basic needs for the children at the CDC. This is a wonderful example of how, together, we can transform realities.

I return with a full heart and the certainty that, even though geography and

circumstances may change, the Lasallian charism continues to be a living and necessary response to providing comprehensive education and hope to those who need it most and are most vulnerable. I am deeply grateful to the Brothers, educators, students, and families who have welcomed me as one of their own. This experience is not just a memory: it has become a commitment to continue building bridges and creating opportunities, here and there.

Podéis consultar mis crónicas diarias en mi perfil de Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/jmamerino

José Manuel Merino Gil
Socio y voluntario de PROYDE
Director, Colegio La Salle Santander