

Brother Armin Luistro to young Lasallians: “The world has always been shaped by dreamers”

- **Download here the Welcome Message from Brother Armin Luistro to the Lasallian Youth Pilgrims of Hope**

We’re sharing the Welcome Message from Brother Armin Luistro, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to those participating in the International Gathering of Young Lasallians held at the Generalate on 31 July 2025. Brother Armin pronounced these remarks at the conclusion of the prayer in the Sanctuary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

“Why are you here? Why are you visiting our school?” One Young Lasallian asked me recently. It sounded like an impertinent question. Only the young like you are capable of asking impertinent questions such as this and get away with it, still looking innocent. It is rare for me to be asked in this manner. I have managed to visit 62 countries so far. Honduras was country visit number 62. I have 18 sectors to go before I finally complete a major responsibility in my job description.

But throughout my visits I rarely get impertinent questions. And so, when I was asked, I tried to respond as best I could. The gist of my response I will share with you because I think it will give you an idea of what I truly think and feel about this International Gathering of Young Lasallians today. This was my response:

“I am here because I need to see you. To hear you. To feel you. Perhaps to offer my hand in high five. Or a fist bump. And maybe to have the privilege of shaking your hand. Once in a while, to be blessed with your warm embrace. And for a bonus, you will make my day if you would allow me to take a selfie with you. That will be a reminder to myself—a most solemn reminder—that to serve you, our young people, is the most important reason why this Institute is here— maybe it is the only reason why this Lasallian Institute exists.”

But even more recently, I had another surreal encounter in one of those school

visits. I was ushered into this preschool classroom together with several school administrators. They were all very strict looking and serious. When I entered the room, around 3 dozen kids were happily engaged in their activity for the day. Everyone was animated, and they cheerfully greeted me as I went from table to table. All of them, except one 4-year-old boy. He was self-absorbed, and none of the colour, the music, the noise around him could shake him from his loneliness. In the big commotion created by our intrusive presence, this 4-year-old—Sergio is his name—approached me ever so quietly and just wrapped his arms around my legs. I sat on the low chair of the kindergarten pupils and tried to look him straight in the eye. But he buried his head on my lap and the only thing I could hear was the words, “Mama, Mama.” For one sacred minute, I knew the answer to the earlier impertinent question. So, this is how it feels to be deeply moved. The answer was not in my head but deep down in my heart. Here, I discovered my life had meaning. My heart taught during that one-minute me how to see rightly and discover what is essential. During that one sacred minute, I was a brother to Sergio. Friends, that was one of the longest one-minute in my life, and even now how I wish it could last forever. During that time, I felt real—woefully human, blissfully divine.

Today and in the next few days, my prayer for you is that you will also discover why you are here. Before the mortal remains of St. John Baptist de La Salle, in this holy place, I renew my personal commitment to be a brother and *hermanito* to each of you, to Sergio and to everyone here. That is my commitment. That is the meaning that I have in my heart today. I make the same vow on behalf of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and on behalf of the global Lasallian Family. All of us, we need to see you, we need to hear you; most importantly, we need to feel you. There is no other reason why this House, why this Institute should exist except for you, for you and all young people who De La Salle says, “may be far from salvation.”

Dear friends, dear Young Lasallians, If I, if we get distracted, if we forget to listen to you, to train our eyes on other goals or if we push you aside, you have the right to remind us, to tell us —your leaders and elders—the attention, love, and care that you so deserve.

I remember Greta Thunberg, who addressed world leaders at the UN Headquarters in New York. She spoke her mind impertinently like any young person without flinching. She said,

“This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in our school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you leaders, you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you! ... You have stolen our dreams and my childhood with your empty words... People are suffering. People are dying. You are burning yourselves; it is very hot in Rome. Entire ecosystems are collapsing... How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just ‘business as usual’...? You are failing us.”

The words of Greta Thunberg are painful because they are true.

Dear Lasallians, as I welcome you to this year’s International Gathering of Young Lasallians, I carry the guilt and the burden of my generation and the generations before me. In so many ways, we have failed you. I am sorry. I really am sorry. Societies, governments, world leaders have failed you. What future can we offer? How dare we call you our hope for the future? We have not stopped polluting the earth with so much garbage. Other leaders have convinced peaceful citizens that owning a gun is the best defence and starting a war is the best offense. What kind of world are we passing on to you as our legacy?

Dear Lasallians, I am sorry. We have failed you. As I stand here, in this holy place, in this sacred sanctuary, my mind, my heart is thinking of Gaza, where close to 62,000 have died, many of them are women and children. Some younger than you. We have four nursing students enrolled in Bethlehem University and currently are working, attending to the needs of the infirm and injured in Gaza despite the unimaginable limitations and obstacles that they face. They, too, have an existential answer to the impertinent question. Why are you here?

But there are so many other areas in our world where there are more questions than answers. The devastation and displacement in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine are described as the deadliest war in Europe since World War II. Unspeakable violence and humanitarian crises are daily stories in many parts of Sudan, Congo, Syria, Myanmar, Yemen, to name a few. Today, almost 700 million people live in extreme poverty, says the World Bank, surviving on less than 2 euros a day. How much money do you have in your pocket? And how many can survive on the money you have in your pocket today? Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy on us.

A Malaysian-based multi-ethnic reform movement posted this account by Dr. Ezzideen from Gaza just 5 days ago, and I read:

"I swear to you before God... what I saw today was not life... A truck passed by. It was empty. Its floor was covered in a thin layer of flour dust. Just dust. Not bags. Not bread. And then I saw them. Not rebels. Not criminals. Children. They ran, ran like hunted things, toward that truck. They climbed it with hands that have never held toys. They fell to their knees as if before an altar. And they began to scrape. One broken lid. Another, a piece of cardboard. But the rest used their hands. Their tongues. They licked it. Do you hear me? They licked the floor, dust from the rusty steel, from dirt. From the back of a truck that had already driven away. One boy was laughing. Not because he was happy, but because the body goes mad when it is starving. Another was crying quietly, like someone who no longer believes anyone is listening. And I stood there. With all my shame."

Dear Lasallians, dear Young Lasallians, this is the world that we are bequeathing to you. Shame on us! Recently I gave a message to a small group of Young Lasallians gathered in Parmenie this year. This is my only message for you today:

"Around 2025 years ago, with just a dozen close friends, Jesus at age 30 started his ministry proclaiming the Father's grand dream for the world: no more weeping, good news to the poor, liberty for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed.

Around 345 years ago, John Baptist, at age 28, gathered a few young men, your age!, to form a community of teachers so they may proclaim the Father's grand dream where children, especially those who are "far from salvation" can see the Kingdom. He envisioned inclusive schools that were open to everyone, especially the poor who had no way of overcoming the social and economic barriers of their time".

In both founding stories, Jesus and John, the protagonists were just a small handful of young dreamers hearing the same call, captivated by the same dream, united with one heart and one spirit to bring light and life and love to the whole world. Today, consider the power generated from their small community of young people with big dreams and even bigger hearts.

The world has always been shaped by dreamers. Their dream took shape not in grand proclamations and extraordinary events but in the small decisive steps and struggles to live in authentic fraternity and committed service to their educational mission.

Dear friends, I conclude by asking you the same impertinent question I asked in the beginning: "Why are you here?"

Sanctuary of St. John Baptist de La Salle

Generalate, Rome, July 31, 2025

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