

La Salle Connection - Episode 1: Saint John Baptist de La Salle, his family and his education

“La Salle Connection” is a multimedia series designed to connect the Lasallian Family with historical events that continue to inspire Lasallians today.

Before becoming the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, John Baptist de La Salle, the eldest of several siblings, played an unexpected leading role within his family. In the episode of his life that we consider today, we will see how, through the tasks that life imposed on him, he formed his character and sought a deeper meaning for his priestly vocation.

In 1671, when he was only 20 years old and while he was at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris and studying Theology at the Sorbonne, his mother, Nicole, died at the age of 38. He had not yet recovered from this loss when his father, Louis, also died at the age of 47. Not even a year had passed.

De La Salle was then forced to return to his hometown to take on responsibilities as guardian of his six younger siblings while continuing his studies at the University of Reims after a year's break. The complex tasks of guardian and administrator shaped his skills in administration, organisation and planning. It was a wealthy family, but one with many creditors. Mr De La Salle took it upon himself to rebuild the family fortune for the security of his siblings. One of his sisters was already in a convent. Another married during those years. One of his brothers joined the Augustinians and the others were studying. He cared for them all with brotherly love. We know the delicate accounting with all its details. It is a beautiful text about his role as the eldest brother.

Amidst the demands of life and the pain of farewells, his priestly vocation, which had been awakened many years earlier, matured. In August 1675, he completed his Degree in Theology; on 9 April 1678 he was ordained a priest, and on 26 January 1680 he earned his Doctorate in Theology.

His mission as a priest was not yet clear to him. His spiritual director convinced

him to change his role from canon to parish priest, but the paperwork did not go well. De La Salle continued to wait, trusting that God would show him the way. In 1678, his spiritual director, Fr Roland, died and left him in charge of representing the teaching Sisters he had founded. De La Salle devoted himself to them, but he still did not see this as a calling from God for him.

In the next episodes, we will continue to share other significant moments in the life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. You can find them at www.lasalle.org and on our social media.