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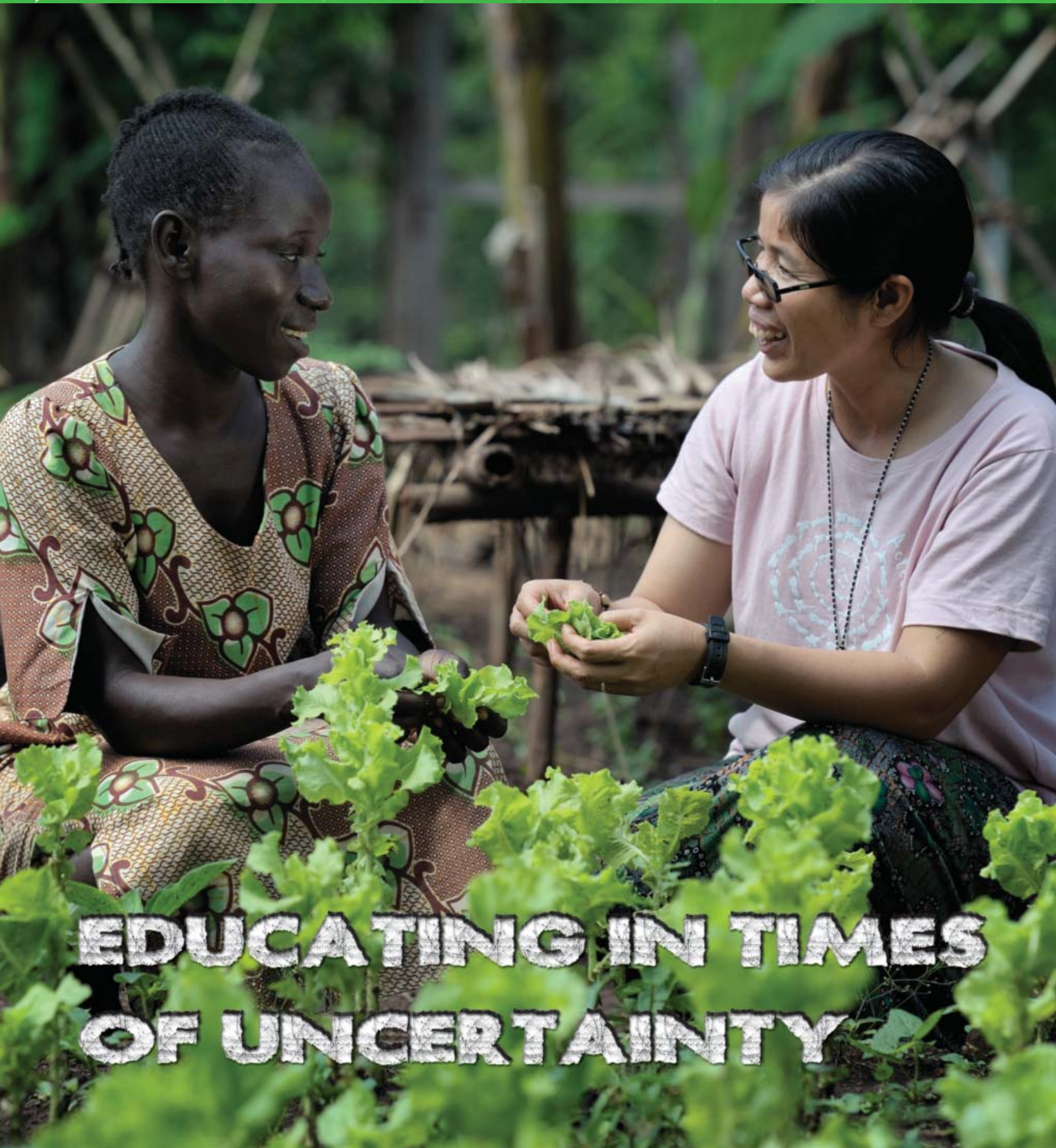
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**EDUCATING IN TIMES
OF UNCERTAINTY**



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Our Companion in Uncertainty

In the General Archives of the Institute, there is a short note dated October 30, 1790, which was written in the Mother House in Melun near Paris by Brother Solomon Leclercq. It says, "Nothing has yet been decided about us. We are waiting on events, but it does seem at least there will be big changes for us which could be very damaging and may even bring about our ruin. May God be blessed!"

The canonisation of Brother Solomon can serve to make us more sensitive to the fragile situations and uncertainties experienced by the Institute all through its history. Indeed, in his Testament written a few days before his death on April 7, 1719, the Founder urged the first Brothers to show union and obedience to the community in the face of the challenges of their age. A good time after that, there were days of anguish for Brother Agathon, Superior General 1777-1798, when the French Revolution came knocking on the doors of the schools and brought into question the place of the Brothers as educators in a society that was changing. Similarly one century later, Brother Gabriel-Marie, Superior General 1897-1913, must have been very saddened by the feelings of uncertainty experienced by more than ten thousand Brothers driven out the French system of education because of their status as religious. Today, we are still experiencing very complex situations, and the future of the Institute is uncertain.

Uncertainty Reminds Us of the Gospel

Uncertainty is so much part of being human that Jesus of Nazareth himself was not able to escape it. He experienced it most intensely on the cross, and by his resurrection he

showed us the path of extreme love. Now as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, Jesus continues to surprise us by his presence among us as God who became incarnate in our weakness so that we might participate in his plan of salvation for all. The future is open to the Good News every time a child is born. As a result, every Advent is for the Church a cry of hope.

We Lasallians understand that this plan of God's love is something we experience as educators in the world of school in all its forms. Whether it be in a small local school or a big university, we pursue our aim of training citizens in relation to the complex situation in the society to which we belong. And we do so with conviction and with a driving passion which is nothing other than God's own passionate love for humanity.

The Pedagogy of Hope

The 363 years of our history as a community have taught us to walk forward in hope. That means the hope specific to an educator which we experience in the context of a school and which transforms the lives of those whom God has entrusted to our care. For us who are teachers by vocation, our pedagogy can only be one of hope.

What Have We Learned from our journey together?

God our Father is caring and respectful. He does not control our lives arbitrarily, but rather accompanies us with love. In His infinite love, He opens up numerous possibilities for us to be active witnesses to His plan of salvation. That is what Saint

John Baptist de La Salle declares in his memoir on the origins of the Institute. "God, who guides all things with wisdom and gentleness, and is not in the habit of forcing our human inclination, wishing me to become committed entirely to the care of schools, did it in such an imperceptible way and over a long period of time" (Blain I,169). Each of us has felt the same experience as De La Salle in our own itineraries as educators. We came to work in schools without having planned to do so from the beginning, but we have found there our *raison d'être* which motivates us to act and to transform our lives day by day.

We were called to form a community of educators in a move that was unprecedented in the Church, and which saw lay people engaged in the



ministry of Christian education. It is a “ministry” because it cannot be understood other than by the transcendent symbol of ambassadors of Jesus Christ. But at the same time, it is an essentially lay experience, because it respects human nature and supports our society in its infinite thirst for justice and peace. We Lasallians are always in a position of dialogue with society. Even when conditions are most unfavourable, we maintain a pedagogical approach as witnesses to the value of Christian schools.

Consequently, there is no Lasallian community if there is no practice of discernment. The Brothers, as the original witnesses to God in schools, are invited to continue this passion through their community discernment. The new Rule has stated that discernment should include those with whom we share the educational mission (Cf. R. 18.1). In times of uncertainty, it is even more necessary to take into account the gifts of each individual, the signs of the times, the calls of the Gospel and of the Church and the guidelines of the Institute. All of this helps us to grow together in a unity that is fed by the diversity in the forms of Lasallian vocations that exist in the world.

We have learned that our concern is directed towards the education of the children, the young people and the adults whom God has sent to us. Here and now, He is helping us to hold fast through the difficulties. Throughout the history of the Institute, Brothers have preferred to focus on the pragmatic resolution of problems in education, rather than to

deliver theological and political diatribes. That was the way the Founder operated in his time, and that is the way the Brothers have acted whenever society has become strongly opposed to the continuity of Christian schools. We should keep in mind the paradigmatic Circular 21 of Brother Irlide (January 6 1881), in which he asked the Brothers to be men of their times and of their country. He urged, “Let no setback or persecution lead us to abandon [schools]. It may well be according to the designs of Providence that our blood must be added to the sweat of our labours so as to make them fertile and produce rich harvests for heaven” (p. 20). It is by giving your life through love that you find your *raison d'être*.

There are moments of hope

In the second decade of the 21st century, we are once again perplexed by the challenges that confront us. There is still a lot of discerning to do, a lot of praying and a lot of deciding. Our strength resides in our community based on faith, a faith that welcomes with open arms, is ecumenical and deeply Catholic. Our commitment to education impels us to discern ways to find a new pedagogy to suit the school of the 21st century. Our presence in the world of education has been enriched by a multitude of Lasallian vocations which the past could not have imagined, but which reveal the value of the laity in the universal Church and in the Christian school of today. Without doubt, now is a time when we ought to foster a hope that goes well beyond optimism.

Br. Diego Muñoz León
Service of Lasallian Research and Resources
The Generalate, Rome

News

CIAMEL

In September 2016 in the Generalate, there was a meeting of the International Council for Lasallian Association and Educational Mission (CIAMEL). The aim of the meeting was to move forward on the commitments made by the 45th General Chapter.

Some of the points covered in the meeting include:

The process of producing a Declaration on Lasallian Pedagogy as decided by the Chapter is moving forward with the support of the Service for Lasallian Research and Resources and the Secretariats for Formation and for Association and Mission.

We would like to repeat here the invitation to all Lasallians to take part in the discussions on the Declaration and also the Guide for Formation, in the light of the way things are organised in each Region.

We also studied Proposition 13 of the 45th General Chapter, which asked for the formulation of Criteria for Lasallian Identity. It was decided that the members of the CIAMEL would continue to gather information and material from the Regions and Districts related to such criteria and then send it to the Secretary for Association and Mission so that the next sessions of CIAMEL can make some proposals.

In the Midst of Challenging Situations: Our Lasallian Response in Pakistan

It is a reality that being a Lasallian in the Pakistani context is challenging and threatening. In order to deal with these situations and cope with the challenges, we have adapted certain policies.

1- By Promoting Interfaith Harmony

We try to practice the principles of interfaith harmony in the best way we can; we are sensitive toward religious education. Muslim students are free for Islamic education as a compulsory subject whereas Christian students choose Christianity. We are trying to promote 'acceptance' instead of 'tolerance' because the former is more effective in establishing pluralism. We have as an aim to promote Pakistani nationalism and also secular instead of religion-based identities.

2- Being Moderate

Pakistan's poor education system has increasingly become a matter of international concern. Lack of access to quality education, which in turn limits economic opportunity, makes young Pakistanis targets for extremist groups. Our deep concern that everyone receives at least a moderate education appears to be an objective of vital importance.

Thus the key element of our survival is to be moderate, become less extreme, intense, rigorous, or violent in all circumstances.

3- Quality Education for All

Over the years Lasallian institutions have been producing quality education for all without any discrimination in



Pakistan. We are ranked highly for our quality education serving the lower echelons of the population.

4- Remaining Consistent in Challenging Situations

Being a Christian institution means we often have to face some religious discrimination. This critical situation distresses us while operating in Muslim community. But at this stage, consistency leads to ultimate success in a highly extremist environment. We, the Lasallians in Pakistan, focus on and practice consistency in all our institutions.

5- Building Strong Community Through Positive Relationships

We believe that our survival is only possible if we have strong community relations. We try to remain in touch with our stakeholders, governmental officials, parliamentarians, social workers and particularly media personnel.

Lasallian institutions are characterized by positive, friendly and supportive relationships with students, staff and families through a balanced education offered according to the Lasallian Traditions.

6- We Are Still Doing Welfare Work While Others Are Doing Business

We always try to be economical in our educational system as compared to our competitors. This is one of the reasons that we win the confidence and favor of the people. Our Lasallian schools in Pakistan are facing a huge challenge of meeting the demands set by private and commercialized schools. More over the competition is becoming wider. The cost of running private schools in this country is increasing day by day. This is due to the increasing number of competitors.

7- Promotion of Peace Through Sports

We always hope to send a message that promotes Peace through Sport. The contribution sports can





make towards peace-building efforts has generally been considered one of the best and effective tools to use by Lasallians in Pakistan. We arrange the Inter-Lasallian Sports Encounter every year that allows students from both religions to be on one platform. This practice not only helps us in the promotion of peace but also attain the attention of the society.

8- Outreach Programs

Lasallian Youth Ministry Pakistan is very much active in organizing outreach programs for the marginalized segment of the society. The Majority of the members of Youth Ministry are Muslim. They work very hard and always take initiatives to make contributions to this program. This helps us to work more openly through them.



9- Fundraising

To create the sense of generosity among the children we arrange fund raising programs. Friday is a specific day when children collect charitable donations out of their pocket money. This charity is used to help the deserving people especially at the time of any natural calamity.

Mr. Amir Shahzda
Administrator, La Salle College, Faisalabad

Mr. Noveed Asif
Coordinator, La Salle College, Faisalabad



“How Do I Struggle Even in My Own Vocation as De La Salle Brother Today?”

An interview with Br. Armin Luistro, FSC

Secretary, Department of Education in the Philippines (2011-2016)



“No, Don’t take the job”, said probably every person whom Br. Armin consulted when he was deciding if he should accept the post at the Department of Education (DepEd). He knew it was for the right reasons. However, Br. Armin asked himself if he would still be able to wake up in the morning and face the mirror for that decision.

Br. Armin Luistro, FSC, is an advocate of integrity and reform in the Philippine government; the Brothers took a stand on how significant changes are. Lasallians have a prayer that goes, “Let me be the change I want to see”. Then he reflected, “We talked about it, we prayed about it, we asked for change, now I’m asked to do the change”. It was difficult for him to say, “No – my journey, Mr. President, ends here. I cannot continue on that path”. He eventually said yes, chose to be involved and wanted to make a change.

Br. Armin was educated in Lasallian institutions his whole life. He finished his elementary and secondary education in De La Salle Lipa in Batangas, his hometown. He graduated from De La Salle University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy and Letters. In the same university, he finished his Master’s Degree in Religious Education and Values Education. He completed his doctorate degree on Educational Management at the University of St. La Salle in Bacolod City. Now, Br. Armin just finished his 6 – year stint since 2010 as Secretary of the Department of Education in the Philippines (DepEd).

Initially, he experienced stereotyping. His critics would say that since he was strongly identified with Catholicism, education on

reproductive health would be a problem. Nevertheless, the office pushed for age-appropriate, developmental, and culture-sensitive sexuality education for learners. He was also criticized for coming from a private school and that his perspectives were elitist affecting his decisions in the office. Even so, Br. Armin pushed for pro – poor initiatives, prioritizing construction of classrooms in far-flung areas. During the term of SBAL (Sec. Br. Armin Luistro, FSC), as he is fondly called in DepEd, the office was able to push for a 254% increase in the Basic Education Budget from PHP 161.4 B in 2010 to PHP 410.4 B in 2016. Former President Aquino signed the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, institutionalizing the K to 12 Basic Education Program, which covers one year of kindergarten and 12 years of basic education. The curriculum aims to provide sufficient time for the mastery of concepts and skills developing life-long learners. The senior high school core curriculum, in particular, helps ensure the basic education graduates’ readiness for tertiary education, as well as provides specialized training and preparation for specific career options. This was a big move in the country’s education system since there were only 3 countries in the world that were not implementing a 12-year basic education cycle. Further, the office hit targets on eliminating more than 180,000 backlogs on classroom construction. A total of 89,720 classrooms were constructed and 95,429 more are lined up for construction.

From being in a private institution and transitioning to holding a government position, the biggest adjustment for Br. Armin was bureaucracy. In terms of volume, he had to make sure that policies were cascaded to 46,000 schools compared to 18 La Salle schools when he led de La Salle Philippines (currently there are 16 La Salle schools in the Philippines). Being in La Salle and having a tradition of networking and meeting together as a Philippine Lasallian Family, it was a little easier for Br. Armin to push projects and programs. In a bureaucracy, he had to deal with political push and pull. “It is a totally different world”, says Br. Armin.

His different involvements as an administrator in various schools and organizations and experiences as a De La Salle Brother helped him go through his 6-year post in DepEd. The credibility of the De La Salle Philippines network of schools and his

positions in the past gave him and the people that surrounded him an assurance that he would do tasks well. Since he was part of a religious institution, he says that there were less bribes from suppliers and he would always gain a sense of respect from officials of the government. Br. Armin also points out that networking became easier because many of the people he interacted with; mayors, teachers or principals are either alumni of a La Salle school or would have had children or relatives from a La Salle school.



The Filipinos in public schools have the same profile with those whom De La Salle met and gave his heart to during his time. In a sense, they were closer to the realities of the Lasallian Mission than those in the La Salle schools. Through the years, Br. Armin said that the challenge really is to translate that spark in the mission into a government bureaucracy. Because of the volume, crafting policies for 46,000 schools, transforming it or at least making a dent on the Philippine educational system becomes almost impossible as an immediate expectation. The difficult task at the end of the day, he says, is to be a man of hope to believe that reforms that are made will bear fruit maybe not during his term, or maybe not even during his lifetime. It was difficult for his team to create metrics to see immediately if the reforms were taking action but Br. Armin had to gather the troops and explain to teachers that they were planting seeds and that they had to believe that the fruits and the flowers would come later. His task was to ensure stakeholders that the results will come even if they were not there yet in the beginning.



His favorite experience in the job was meeting with people, going to far-flung areas and sitting down in different classes in the smallest classrooms. He and his team came with the will to inspire people and teachers on the ground but instead the commitment of the people inspired them more than Br. Armin and his team inspired the teachers. He went to remote areas and walked several kilometers and found that the best models of reform in individual commitments and initiatives of teachers on the ground who may not be even supported by the bureaucracy that much. He recognized the joy that at the end of the day whatever Filipinos do takes second priority in knowing that there will always be a brother and a sister in a far-flung school. For Br. Armin, the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood was a great consolation of being part of the Department of Education.

The experiences in DepEd also affected him in his vocation as a De La Salle Brother. Coming into the office, Br. Armin had a very idealistic mindset to be able to reform the institution, make changes that will last and leave a legacy. "I was a fool to even think of it that way". He said this because the biggest surprise to him was the irony of it – recognizing that he may not be able to have left a legacy in DepEd, may not have even made changes or perhaps the little changes that he had contributed to the office may not even last. "The fact is: the department has changed me", Br. Armin says.

Reflections post-DepEd was the most critical for Br. Armin personally. He would post to himself different questions. "How do I struggle even in my own vocation as De La Salle Brother today? Will there still be meaning if I go back to the same La Salle Schools and ministries that I have been in?", he asked himself and answered, "I guess not". He described that an experience as intense as DepEd allows one to recognize that he cannot go back to La Salle and its schools as the same man with the same values. He found teachers who committed and sacrificed their own lives for their students heroically making him put his commitment to the vows to shame. "I make the vows and I see these teachers live those vows", he says.

It was almost a 6-year exposure for him, these experiences will not only be remembered and prayed about but these experiences have shaken him and changed his perspective on things, his contributions to the mission and what he thinks will be the path of that journey with his God for the rest of his life. As he said in an interview with Rappler, a Philippine social news network, "This is the most meaningful job I've ever had in my life and maybe none other after this".

Kalikasan Castillo
De La Salle Philippines

Vietnam: Rebirth, Renewal and Innovation

After their January 6th 1866 arrival, it took the eight French Brothers from Toulon only three days to open a school in Saigon. Their positive interaction with the people, the high quality of instruction, and the dedication the Brothers brought to their work quickly gained them a very positive reputation throughout Indochina. In response to appeals by the clergy and the local people, step by step, La Salle schools spread throughout Vietnam and extended into Cambodia. Former Brother Visitor Lucien Hoang Gia Quang recalls the extent of Lasallian education as extending enormous areas “from central Hue City to Can Tho City in the Mekong delta region”.

The District continued to grow incrementally and by 1975, it had slightly more than 300 professed Brothers and 15 novices.

At that time, the Brothers conducted 23 ministries including primary, secondary and technical schools, Vietnamese and ethnic minority boarding schools, a center for blind children and a teacher training college. Numbering more than 25,000, the students were involved in many activities sponsored by the schools including, but not limited to youth movements such as “Coeurs Valliants”, Young Christian Students, the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Scouts.

But life was to change dramatically for the Brothers in 1975. Shortly after April 30th when the Communists took control of the government, Vietnam’s education was nationalized and all of the Lasallian schools were taken from the Brothers. While the Brothers initially were allowed to continue teaching, by 1978 the Brothers were pushed out of formalized education entirely and were no longer allowed to teach, administer or work in schools.

The 1975 event caused great losses to the De La Salle congregation and a serious crisis within their identity as educators. As former Brother Visitor Francois d’Assise Tran Van Anh commented, “At that time we asked ourselves if teaching was the ultimate goal of our religious life”. The denial of teaching struck at the core of what most Brothers held dearly in their hearts: service to the poor through education.

Devastated by this turn of events, the De La Salle Brothers in Vietnam realized that they needed to re-create themselves and seek new ways to serve youth. In that pivotal moment, they developed a spirit of innovation in serving God’s people which is now characteristic of the Vietnamese Brothers. Brother Peter Phat, the current Visitor of Vietnam puts it this way: “In every chapter since the 1975 end of the Vietnam War, we have tried to find out what God wants us to do in order to keep ourselves loyal to our charism and to our vocation of bringing salvation to children, especially those who are poor and neglected”.

It is that spirit of discernment and innovation which has invigorated the Vietnamese Brothers, enabling them to assess the needs of the people and then direct their activities to respond appropriately. As Brother Anh comments, “Every four years we assess our past activities and work out new orientations to further adjust ourselves to social realities”.

In performing this examination, the Brothers have felt more connectedness to who they serve and how they perform their ministry. “This basic question has helped our Brothers to deepen the meaning of our identity and continue whatever is necessary to develop again”.

No longer being consumed by the constant demands inherent in running schools, the Brothers have devoted more time and effort to embracing the Lasallian “principal function” of evangelization and catechesis. In doing so, they have addressed these formerly ignored but very important developmental areas for youth.

In the last 40 years, the District has renewed its efforts in the following areas:

- **Catechesis.** The Brothers have trained many catechists in how to educate youth in their faith. Working primarily in parishes, the Brothers are making a huge impact; but to do so, many of them have had to creatively re-tool their skills. As an example, Brother Aloysius, an eighty-year old former mathematics teacher changed his focus towards writing textbooks and workbooks for religious classes. His materials are now widely used in Vietnam due to their popularity and effectiveness. As another example, when the southern-most rural province of Vietnam needed catechists, the young scholastics innovatively utilized river boats to serve the otherwise isolated and remote populations.
- **Remedial/vocational and technical education.** Although the Brothers were not allowed to conduct classes in schools, they creatively established a system of boarding residences for students attending the government schools. This enabled





the Brothers to re-teach the day's lessons, offer tutorial help, and provide access to language centers and technical courses (such as cooking, welding, fixing machineries, and computer skills.)

Almost all the Brothers' communities have had to share space in order to accommodate youth in a boarding facility. As a result of this living/studying environment, thousands of youth have obtained English and/or computer certification from these vocational and technical instructional facilities. With the support of friends and former students, vocational classes for street or disabled children additionally have been created. Offered gratuitously by the Brothers, those woodcarving and cycle-mechanic training programs provide skills enabling street youth to become self-sufficient without resorting to street theft.

- **Formation/permanent formation (of Brothers).** Communities with existing boarding houses are given the task of nurturing aspirants until they are mature enough to join the postulancy. To help the young Brothers with a low mastery of English or French, many of the documents from the Generalate have been translated into Vietnamese. As part of their training and since 1975, the young scholastics have translated Lasallian writings into Vietnamese. As such, these years have been a time of profound Vietnamization of Lasallian writings.

Vocations to the order have increased since the late 80's when the government adopted a more open educational policy. Currently, there are 88 professed Brothers in the District of Vietnam, 61 of whom are under the age of 60.

With much enthusiasm, the Brothers have established a primary school in the Central Highlands and a charity school in Saigon. These first ventures back into formalized education demonstrate a willingness of the government to allow the return of

Lasallian schools. In 2017, a junior high school is expected to open in Dakmil. In preparation, Brothers are being sent for educational Masters and Doctoral degrees to learn how to properly administer these and future schools.

The movement of the Brothers back into educational ministries in Vietnam is very encouraging. Despite the difficulties which followed on the heels of the Vietnam War, the Brothers have emerged stronger, more innovative and better-equipped to address the educational needs of youth in Vietnam.

This year, the Brothers will joyfully celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Brothers' presence in Vietnam (1866-2016). Together and by association, the Brothers and their Partners, are following the footsteps of their forebears as they move into the future fully committed to educating the youth and the poor in the country. "This work is the Lord's and it is also our work" (GC 45).



Br. Andrew Ho
Auxiliary Visitor of Vietnam

Br. Simon Thien
Student at De La Salle University, Manila

The Year of Mercy in Académie De La Salle



Académie De La Salle is a school which fosters holistic Education. Following the example of Saint John Baptiste De La salle; Educators provide Human and Religious Education to young children who are entrusted to their care.

In a session with Academie De La Salle Educators, Brother Jean Bosco Bigirimana, the President of the Delegation of Rwanda in his talk on Lasallian star said that a Lasallian star represents five values of Faith, Fraternity, Responsibility, Justice and Service. He added that to educate is not a job but the mission. Having a clean understanding and knowledge on these values; we are helping our students to deepen their way of living and seeing the society from what is happening in the contemporary society ways of living and seeing things through these values. Therefore, students have understood the Gospel values of Mathieu "I was hungry and you fed, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you

received, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me".

School Service to Society

Monday 19 September 2016, students brought things of different variety: Beans, rice, soap, sugar and other edible products to help the needy in the society.

We put together what they brought and it was shared with five families around the school.

The students do not only give food to the needy but also pray for them when they reach their families. They offer a prayer together with the family asking God's blessing on them. Students become aware that there are people in the society who are living in bad conditions and do not have daily living facilities and they wish to continue to help them. They are able to identify who are the needy in society. A student in primary two (P2) said: "with my classmates I went to visit an old woman and she did not have food, her clothes were in bad condition and when we gave what we had for her she was very happy. I will bring her more soap next time". Another primary five Student (P5) said:

"we visited an old woman and when we arrived at her house we found her preparing to cook 1kg of beans and there are many in the house and it was not enough for them. I felt good because we had brought her 5kg of beans".



Thanksgiving Day



It is the culture of Academie De La Salle to recognize what God has done for the school throughout the year. 9 October 2016 was a thanksgiving day in Academie De La Salle. Both parents and students gathered in the school ground for the celebration of the day. This day was marked by two important events: the celebration started with a thanksgiving mass celebrated by the Bishop of Byumba Diocese who reminded everyone about the quality of a good educator and warning that “an educator who failed his/her responsibility, becomes a poisoner and should be taken away from educational domain”. After mass students and parents shared a meal in the school compound.

The students showed their talents through dances, poems and debate. Pupils demonstrated their talents in their presentations and it was a wonderful moment for educators and parents to admire their efforts through

these pupils’ talents. It made educators and parents realize how far they can go in participating in God’s plan for these pupils who are entrusted to them. Education is key for success we want to make our school a place where we teach our pupils to become better persons in their future. The parent president committee recognized the effort made by the school in providing holistic education to the pupils. He stressed the efforts made in promoting the spoken language. The celebration ended with the prayer done by the bishop asking the blessing of God upon us.

Br. Fabien HABİYAREMYE
Delegation of Rwanda

Could You Not Watch With Me?

In South Sudan, three Brothers of the Christian Schools live and work alongside religious from other congregations of men and women and occasional lay volunteers, in an initiative called *Solidarity with South Sudan*. The seeds of *Solidarity* were planted during the 2004 Congress of Religious Life when our former Superior General, Brother Alvaro Rodriguez, was President of the Union of Superiors General. The theme of the Congress was *'Passion for Christ: Passion for humanity'*.

A comprehensive peace agreement was reached in Sudan, in early 2005, ending more than 40 years of war between the predominantly Arab, Muslim-controlled north and the largely Christian, African tribes in the South. So it was that the Bishops of Sudan asked the religious congregations to assist the long processes of healing, rebuilding and development in the south. Following the ideas voiced at the Congress, a new paradigm was developed wherein men and women from different congregation and of different nationalities, would live and work, together and with passion, to assist the local people help themselves.

It was agreed that *Solidarity* would not administer or teach in schools, would not staff hospitals, would not become responsible for parishes but rather would respond to the great need for training local teachers, nurses, midwives and pastors. Thus the *Solidarity* mission statement asserts that ***'Solidarity with South Sudan aims to create self-sustainable educational, health and pastoral institutions and programs that will help to empower South Sudanese people to build a just and peaceful society. Solidarity is a collaborative commitment of religious institutes of men and women, members of the Unions of Superiors General and the Church in South Sudan working in partnership with the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference.'***

After a two-year study of the needs and possibilities in South Sudan and with commitments of participation and support from diverse congregations, now numbering more than 200, the first *Solidarity* members arrived in 2008. So it was that I came to a peaceful and hopeful South Sudan in 2009. Essential facilities had been developed with our FSC Brothers doing much of the fundraising, organising of construction and reporting back to donors. Later, *Solidarity* would establish its own fundraising and development capabilities. Br. Alvaro was strongly committed to this *Solidarity* project and his successor, Br. Robert Schieler, indicated his ongoing commitment in his closing address to the General Chapter and by an early visit to South Sudan. Our ministry in South Sudan comes directly under the Superior and his Council with Br. Jorge, and now Br. Pierre, serving on the *Solidarity* Governing Board.

Following a referendum, South Sudan became an independent country in July 2011 bringing optimism and joy to the population. A diversity of goods were becoming more





available and one could move around the towns and through the countryside with no fear of attack. It appeared new prosperity was imminent; but little was being done by the Government to develop infrastructure. *Solidarity* by then had 30 religious of 19 different nationalities from 20 different congregations, working in South Sudan. Bringing together such a mix of religious from various congregations, and countries has worked very well indeed. *Solidarity* built two campuses for training teachers and redeveloped and opened a Health Training Institute. Curriculum materials were prepared and the number of programme participants was steadily increasing.

But by December 2013, tribal tensions and resentment had grown, civil war broke out in Juba and spread quickly to some other parts of South Sudan. Our Malakal campus was engulfed in fighting and is now occupied by the military. In this very 'dirty' war, women, children and the elderly were targeted, often brutally. The economy within South Sudan has almost collapsed, leading to an inflation rate over 600% and the spread of the crisis to those parts of the country that had previously remained peaceful.



Food has become very expensive everywhere, many people are not being paid, including soldiers, and far too many people are hungry. The people now fear soldiers from other ethnic groups who loot, rape and burn the people's houses seemingly without consequence.

Our *Solidarity* members did not expect, or choose, to come into this situation that seems so dangerous; but here we are and the question Jesus asked of Peter, rings in our ears, 'Could you not watch one hour with me?'. The people here cannot escape. They are too poor to become refugees. There are no boats here, but if there were, they could not pay to board them. To flee the fighting, many have walked, scrambled or stumbled across the borders into Uganda, Kenya or Sudan – where still they have so little They look at us and ask: 'Can you help us? Will you not watch one hour with us?'



We stay because we are training registered nurses, midwives and teachers and developing pastoral and agricultural initiatives. Most teacher training colleges and health training Institutes have shut down as violence once again engulfs this

land. But our two Colleges, each with over 100 in residence, continue, with students from many different tribes living and training together to be teachers, nurses or midwives. Our agriculture programmes help to provide the food required.

Even more importantly, our students are learning to live in peace with their neighbours from other tribes. These future leaders of the next generation are the sign and promise there can be a resurrection – if we stay with them in their hour of greatest need. Students from the graduating class of new teachers have made these statements:

'I like the way Solidarity people live with one another – in peace as brothers and sisters.'

Paul Osman

'It is all about people. My most valuable experiences weren't academic. They were all about people – social skills, respect, self-worth and empathy.'

Gabriel Nyany

Yes, it is all about the people, many of whom have suffered so much in their country. The people must come to view themselves as South Sudanese together rather than as ethnic rivals or competitors. Our graduates will be agents of change for the better.

'My country is a war-torn country and people think there is no hope for the country but when I came to Solidarity, I came to know people from many tribes and nationalities and we lived in peace and harmony. That is one of the greatest achievement I have got from Solidarity.'

John Gor

None of us feel totally safe here but we are much safer than these poor people, the very poor who ask us to watch, to accompany, to live with them in hope of a better South Sudan. The words of the proverb make resounding sense: *'A ship in the harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are for.'* During the recent outbreak of violence in Juba, most NGO personnel evacuated but we hear the voices of the people who articulate: *'You did not leave us. You stayed with us. You still believe it can be better. You give us hope.'* The seas may be a bit rough at present but our Solidarity ship is still making headway. What better place for our Brothers to be?

Br. Bill Firman, FSC
Executive Director of Solidarity with South Sudan



From the District of ARLEP



Fortunately, we in ARLEP are not experiencing a literal persecution. When we hear the news from other parts of the world, we are astonished to find that such situations exist today. All the same, we can still feel we are in communion with those suffering Christians, since we too suffered a direct form of persecution some decades ago, and the high number of martyrs, canonised or otherwise, included many De La Salle Brothers.

We are not experiencing a situation which involves persecution, torture or even death, but that does not mean to say that we do not know what it means to face a certain kind of marginalisation with verbal and cultural abuse just for being Christians. The political and social experiences of Spain in the 20th century mean that currently the specific form of secularisation that we are experiencing in our District carries a certain tone of aggressiveness, and stubborn opposition, which is manifested repeatedly in the political situation, in the world of culture, in communications media and in social media. When it comes to expressing opinions about religion, the yardstick is lengthened or shortened according to hidden interests. It is hard to believe but true that some people think it is good to attack religion, that it is a sign of progress and that it gives a good return in social esteem. We Christians cannot get over the way in which we are constantly the target of biased and intentionally bad interpretations. The bad news about the Church is put under the microscope, while the

good news is passed over in silence. Baseless opinions are asserted about the social work of the Church, about its wealth and about religious education. One cannot deny the social role played by the Church in the great crisis that we are going through, or its concrete aid which allows hundreds of people to live with a modicum of dignity when there is no other help available. But some people still choose to keep looking the other way and seeing only the dark side.

Personally, I do not have to go very far to meet examples of this in my own life, specifically in the context of teaching. These cases are not about attacks or dismissiveness, although there is an element of that in them. I shall explain it by two anecdotes which show how

brazen the ignorance of religion can be.

The first anecdote dates from a number of years ago, but it illustrates a mentality and attitude that continues to surprise me. I was studying philosophy at the University of Oviedo, in Asturias. Our college of La Felguera only taught pupils up to the age of 16, so they had to go to other schools in the city to study for their high school certificates. One day, some former pupils expressed their surprise to learn that I was studying philosophy. Why? Because in their school the teachers of philosophy had convinced them that philosophy and religion were totally opposed to one another. Philosophy was the place for a sincere search for the truth, while religion had





nothing to do with that. In other words, being a believer and being a philosopher were incompatible, opposed and irreconcilable. Philosophy moved in the sphere of reason, while religion moved in the world of belief and obscurity.

The anecdote is apparently very simple, but it reveals a mentality which is very widespread in some cultural circles in our country. It is thought that the decision to be a believer does away with the ability to reason, to develop a critical mind, to maintain intellectual rigour in analysing the state of things in the domain of science. That is why, when I was asked some months later to give the final talk at a philosophy conference, I chose the title "A philosopher and a believer?". By using the question mark, I wanted to make the audience realise that not only is there no inevitable opposition between philosophy and religion but that they have progressed side by side all through history, and that religion presupposes a broader vision which in no way renounces the knowledge of reality.

The second anecdote is much more recent and happened in our university of Aravaca with some students of social studies. For some classes dealing with the topic "Intervention in the world of poverty and exclusion", I invited in some speakers whose knowledge and involvement in the world of the excluded could enrich our study. They all gave a really impressive testimony of life and work. They were all Christian militants, and did not try to hide the fact as they spoke, but one of them expressed his Christian understanding of life with greater clarity and depth. He described the Church as a solid platform for involvement and the gospel as the source which nourished his commitment. His testimony was just as good as those of the other speakers and delivered with the same force and vital radicality, but when he had left the reactions of the students were viscerally opposed to what was said and to the one who said it. The fact that he said his motives for action were based on his discipleship of Christ and had mentioned the Church in his presentation was sufficient grounds not only

for giving his words a poor welcome but also for turning the students fundamentally against him. One student even said he felt hurt and wounded. I and some of the students tried to give a reasoned argument against this fixed opinion, saying they should understand that the speaker could not hide the motives which inspired him and gave him the energy to live a commitment that went beyond a merely professional response. We tried without success to get them to see the profundity of his contribution, asking them to set aside, if need be, the Christian angle of what he had said. But it was no use.

This happened in a Christian university where the students are well aware of its ethos and in the class of a De La Salle Brother. Such illogical overreaction comes to my attention repeatedly and it speaks for itself.

Fortunately it is not all like that, though not by much. Moreover, I am confident that this situation can change and there appears to be some slight indications that it is doing so. But just now, these experiences and the general atmosphere we are breathing make me think that there exists a new type of persecution and conflict which is just as real, although not wholly comparable with that suffered by Christians in other places.

Br. Esteban de Vega
Director of Novices RELEM





Three splendid



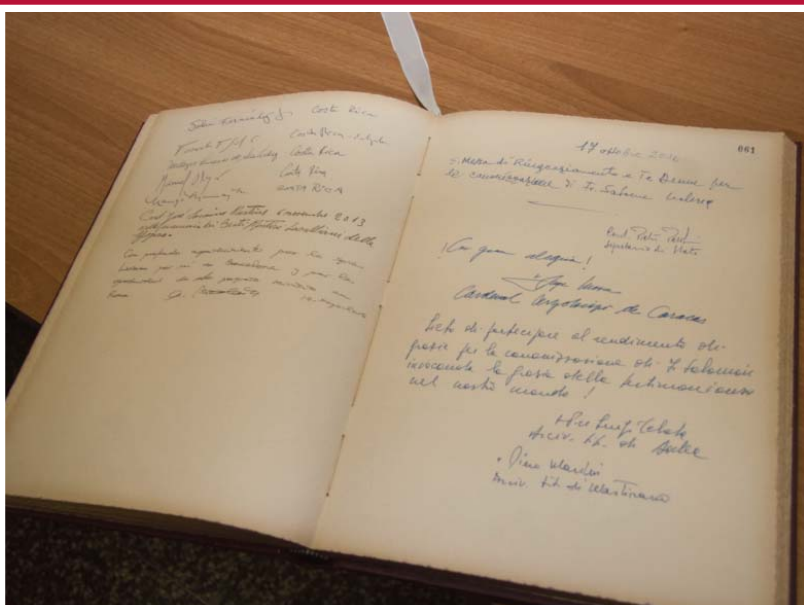
It is customary when speaking about saints to say "They have ascended into the Glory of Bernini". And that is exactly what happens, because in the apse of St Peter's Basilica there is a representation of the "Gloria" made by Bernini, in which the artist has placed the Cathedra of St Peter below and above it a tripod of angels and clouds, and the light shines through the oval window of white and yellow stained glass in which is depicted a dove as the symbol of the Holy Spirit. For hundreds of years, the ceremonies of beatification and canonisation have taken place in this apse, and the culmination of the ceremony is precisely the unveiling of the image of the new saint or beatus in this oval of the Gloria, to the sound of bells and the triumphant music of trumpets and the great organ, accompanied by the firing of the canon from the Castel Sant'Angelo. Ascending to the "Glory of Bernini" means, therefore, being proclaimed a saint or beatus.

Our saintly Brother Solomon ascended to the "Glory of Bernini" in 1926, when Pope Pius XI proclaimed him beatus on October 17, along with 190 martyrs of the French Revolution, because in those days the ceremony took place inside the basilica. His canonisation, on the other hand, took place in the Piazza San Pietro, full of people from all over the world.

The canonisation was marked over a period of three days by the Brothers and other people devoted to the new saint. On *Saturday October 15*, there was prayer and meditation in preparation for the great event on the following day. This prayer service was held in the splendid church of San Luigi de' Francesi, a place dear to Lasallians, since it was there that celebrations were held in honour of St Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in 1888, the year of his beatification, and in 1900, the



days of glory



year of his canonisation. The same church saw more festivities in honour of the martyrs of the French Revolution, including Brother Solomon, on the occasion of their beatification on October 17, 1926. The prayer service included the reading of extracts from the letters of Saint Solomon and moments of reflection and meditation alternating with splendid singing by the choir of the Schola of the Basilica of St Peter. The two hours of the organised programme went by very quickly.

On Sunday October 16, a beautiful sunny day, the Piazza San Pietro embraced in a moving welcome around a hundred thousand pilgrims gathered from the five continents to celebrate the nine new saints proclaimed by Pope Francis.

Finally, on Monday October 17, in the Casa Generalizia of the Brothers, the third moment of glory occurred, namely the Mass and *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for the canonisation that had

taken place. His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, presided, accompanied by his Eminence Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino, Archbishop of Caracas, the diocese where the miracle occurred which led to the canonisation of Brother Solomon. Also concelebrating were their Excellencies Piero Marini and Pierluigi Celeta and eighteen priests. The choir *Canticorum Jubilo* from the Lasallian Pio IX Institute of Roma enriched the celebrations with the performance of select items of music. The final surprise of the day was a dinner to which all were invited, and which was provided by the Neapolitan chefs who had provided the delicious pizzas in the Vatican on the occasion of the canonisation of Mother Teresa. They repeated their performance for those attending the celebrations for Saint Solomon.

Br. Rodolfo Meoli, fsc
Postulator General

Defending the Poor and Preserving the Common Good in the Peruvian Amazon Forest

The De La Salle Brothers arrived in Iquitos, in the Peruvian Amazon jungle, in January 2000. Almost from the beginning of our mission I was working in youth ministry and accepted the post of Adviser of Youth Pastoral work for the whole of the Peruvian jungle. That involved traveling to different areas of the jungle and thanks to this opportunity I could get to know the reality of the villages, especially rural and indigenous communities. As a result of that experience and with people who had been through the youth ministry, in 2004 we founded a civil association, the Loretan Environmental Network, whose mission was *“to inform and educate the population of the Loreto region towards an environmental consciousness that knows how to value the natural resources, promoting the sustainability of rural and indigenous communities”*.

In rural areas it was easy to see the misuse of forests, exclusion of poor communities in the forest management and handing over of large tracts to companies that did not keep the Peruvian forestry law. Seeing these abuses and having had a call for support from the Vicariate of San José we filed legal action against the state, finally winning in the Supreme Constitutional Court. But it was a “victory” in part because despite the decision the unjust and mis-management continues until today. There we won our first “enemies” who were angry that someone should question the status quo.

The De La Salle Brothers lent a house and land that was for pastoral work to the civil association to coordinate the work. My pastoral work had enabled me to see the situation in indigenous communities and I also discovered, in Iquitos, a large number of indigenous young people trying to survive in higher education institutions. Most of them lacked basic conditions such as electricity and safe water in the city. We had space in the Brothers’ piece of land and in coordination with the regional government, who donated wood and roofing sheets, we built 10 huts, three students living in each hut. We continued to work on environmental education and human rights education in many communities and earned the trust of rural and indigenous communities.

In my youth ministry work in indigenous areas I had seen the abandonment on the part of the state and major damage in rivers caused by bad practices of some oil companies. In March 2008 the indigenous communities of three river basins decided to protest in the airport of Andoas. The government reacted by sending special police forces and the sad result was the death of a police officer and the arrest of 35 men from the communities. The latter were sent to the prison in Iquitos, which is located only two hundred metres from the Brothers’ piece of land where the native students are staying.

A few weeks later I received a call from Andoas, the community leaders asking for my presence to listen to and film their versions of what happened in the community. To enter Andoas I needed authorization from the oil company. I wrote to the President and I found that he’s an alumnus of Colegio de La Salle in Argentina. He offered his cooperation and assured me an air ticket. During the visit I was able to film the bullet holes in the wooden walls of the houses of the indigenous community. Some policemen had entered the village without authorization and had shot indiscriminately. I could see the place where the policeman died in the garden of a grandmother, and the holes left by bullets from his gun fired against the house. Someone had shot him with a shotgun. On the second day of my time in the village two young parents went fishing at 9pm, in the community’s fish farm that is located a few meters from the airport guarded by the special forces. Earlier that night at the airport there was a ceremony of remembrance of the 30 days since the death of the police officer. While they are fishing they saw four figures coming out of the airport area dressed in black. One of the indigenous ran for fear of the police but the other remained. The next morning his body with clear signs of torture was discovered by his little son.

The head of the parish in Andoas is an alumnus of the Salesians and he and his wife were always accompanying the fragile community. The population called him that morning when they discovered the tortured body of Carlos Curitima. The head of



the parish filmed everything that happened in the discovery of the body with his video camera.

Before returning to Iquitos I received all the filmed evidence as well as testimonies of the population.

On my return to Iquitos I discovered that the version given out by the national press of the events in Andoas was far from the truth and manipulates the information, seriously putting at risk the 34 indigenous prisoners in jail. It's then that I decided to make a video with all the filmed and testimonial evidence I had in my possession.

The trial against the Indians started and the judges admitted my video and testimony at the trial. Thanks to the quality of the three judges and after six months of trial all detainees were acquitted.

During the trial something even more serious occurred, in Bagua, in another region, when the central government wanted to pass a law that would endanger the indigenous territory. In the confrontation that occurred more police and indigenous died.

Through these sad events the civilian population slowly realized the dangers present in the current management of the natural resources in the forest and what the Church denounces in the encyclical "Laudato Si".

I think the sufferings of many, the efforts of some committed journalists and pastoral workers had their fruit, and the indigenous and non-indigenous began to understand their duty to protest against any models that fail to respect people and nature.

And this awakening had another effect – that those people and institutions who had participated in the educational process with the population are perceived as a "danger" or a cause of "destabilization". So one morning in June 2010 I received a document signed by the Minister of the Interior giving me 15 days to withdraw from the country. I was numbed and scared. I couldn't believe that my mission was perceived as dangerous.





Fortunately my surprise was even greater to experience the tremendous wave of support at local, national and international levels, a happy conspiracy of believers and nonbelievers who recognized the human right to educate people as to their rights and civic duties.

During the grueling months of the trial of the indigenous men the President of the country celebrated the construction of a huge statue of Christ on a hill on the coast of Lima, the capital of Peru. A triumphant Christ, solid, of cement, and built with funds from the Brazilian company Odebrecht.

In the middle of my possible

expulsion process I presented another model of Christ, fragile and floating on the waters of the Amazon, and this was published in the national press:

"Our Christ is the outraged Christ of the Amazon.

Our Christ is the excluded, marginalized one, of people who are never consulted.

It represents the Jesus who took the part of concrete, real and needy people.

Our Christ is not the powerful one. He's the Christ of the poor, the poor in spirit who know how to share together.

He's not the Christ of the orthodox (religious or economic) that are at the top, sharing their cocktails in palaces and embassies.

Our Christ is of the riverside and indigenous peoples who "do not exist", that are not listed on maps and government figures".

(Currently, in 2016, the President and several leaders of the company Odebrecht are in jail in Brazil accused of corruption and bribery).

My expulsion order produced several cartoons in the national press. I found an amusing identity they gave me as a character in the movie "Avatar". They played on the word "avatar" to make two words (A and Botar) equivalent in English to "to be thrown out".

The Minister withdrew the expulsion order. Thanks to the spiritual solidarity from the public and the support of many of the Brothers of La Salle I'm still here in the Peruvian jungle.

Among many interviews I gave at that time I offer a portion of what the magazine Vida Nueva published:

"After ten years at the head of a school of Fe y Alegría, in a marginalized area of Lima, he embarked on a project of no return: the defense of indigenous communities and the environment in the Peruvian Amazon. Since 2000 lives in Iquitos, where he continues to lead educational processes, with evangelical prophecy, while acknowledging that he has recently discovered the Amazon.

– How is life in the jungle?

– Fragile. It goes from one extreme to another: from cold to heat, drought to floods ... a full life you that can quickly turn to death. Not a day like another, everything is changing. From a critical perspective, what is happening now could have a major impact on the future of humanity. In the Amazon we see the fragility of the planet in the face of the abuses of Western civilization.

– *What do you refer to as abuse?*

– Initially, the abuses of oil companies. In 2004 we discovered the pollution levels in the waters of three major rivers (Tigre, Pastaza and Corrientes), caused by companies such as Occidental, Petroperu and Pluspetrol. At that time we denounced that they were pouring 200,000 barrels of salted water into the rivers. The truth was much worse. We were called liars. Today, these rivers have almost no fish, which has resulted in malnutrition. We also discovered the level of illegal deforestation and its social implications.

– *What Church presence is required at this time?*

– Looking at the panorama of emergency that we have , committed people are needed: lay (single or married), religious, priests, bishops ... a team of very awake people, critical in a good way, generous, that even contemplate the possibility of dying in their mission.

– *What have the indigenous communities taught us?*

– Where I live there are more than 50 young indigenous people from ten different ethnic groups. All speak their own language and are studying. I value their relationship with nature, their ability to understand that they are part of a spiritual world, and are neither more nor less important than the river, trees, or plants.... That's the first: put the human being, with our ambitious nature, within a much larger plan. Second, accept our fragility as a daily fact, in a world where everything is planned and nothing can fail. The indigenous offer us values for healthy spirituality that confront the sickening spirituality that we are imposing with extractive models without limits, where everything is to be eaten up.

The local Church, in the Vicariate of San Jose, offered me great support, as indicated in part of the letter of the then Bishop:

"I worry that the work of some missionaries is considered to be a crime that disrupts public order when they inform communities and institutions of their national and international rights and yet, on the other hand, the pollution of rivers, deforestation of forests, lawlessness and corruption that offers concessions for the unjust enrichment of a few people or companies to the detriment of the inhabitants of the Amazon are not considered crimes".

The Institute for the Common Good wrote:

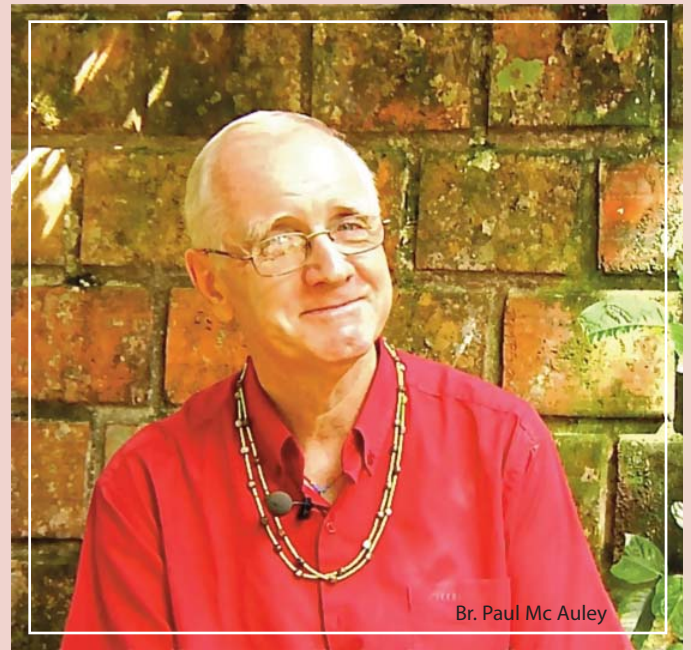
"We are convinced that the development to which most aspire cannot have solid foundations if the rights of all who live in Peru, starting with our Amazon compatriots are not respected. As the Bishops of Latin America said at the meeting of Aparecida "On decisions about the wealth of biodiversity and nature the traditional populations have been virtually excluded, nature has been and continues to be attacked, the land was pillaged ... a very important example in this situation in the Amazon" (Aparecida 84).

With each passing day I feel more passionately the need to confront the challenge of the fresh experience of every day with the values and insights of Jesus and see what educational challenges come out of that confrontation. Our history, as followers of La Salle in following Jesus, is rich in examples of creative responses.

La Salle, perceiving the lack of answers for abandoned youth, felt strengthened to reject and leave behind his title of "Canon" and takes the risk, with his deep trust in providence, to respond from a different social position, much more fragile and socially unrecognized. He's almost mocked in his day. That's how we started as a Lasallian community.

My case is a tiny detail in the mosaic of cases that have to sprout within the Lasallian mission as seed or yeast in the particular place and time in which we live, whether that be Nairobi, Tokyo, Miami or Rome. We are "useless servants" but immensely useful if we see ourselves as participants in an evolutionary dance.

Your dance matters too!



Br. Paul Mc Auley

Br. Paul Mc Auley
Director de la Red Ambiental Loreana (RAL)

Venezuela – A land of grace

La Salle Foundation of Natural Sciences, Venezuela



A country and its people are not the same thing as the national government. There exists here a climate that is a mixture of resignation and rebellion, despair and resistance. The Lasallian presence in Venezuela is to be found in seventeen locations, with twenty-four educational establishments or activities. Just three of these centres depend solely on contributions from the families. Of the others, fourteen are run by agreement with the government through the Venezuelan Catholic Education Association (AVEC). Seven are by agreement with the Ministry for Higher Education for Science and Technology, and they receive limited and very reduced financial aid for their functioning. They may receive contributions from benefactors or families.



Because of the efforts of the national government to use the educational system to inculcate its ideology among the next generation, our Association has responded by constantly calling for pluralism of thought and respect for people's faith to be present in the field of education as the Constitution stipulates.

It is difficult to survive when the value of the currency, and as a result the salaries, is diminishing day by day. Our centres of education cannot find the resources for necessary maintenance. Many teachers, like other professionals, are leaving the country because they do not see any future in it.



The annual national meetings of the Association give us strength and a sense of belonging. They help us to see that it is possible to follow Jesus in the Lasallian way and to sow the seeds of hope in a country where liberty and solidarity need to be reborn. Resilience is on the increase. We perceive more and more that there is much to be done to increase our mission.

Br. Antón Marquiegui
La Salle Foundation of Natural Sciences, Venezuela

San Miguel Schools: Living the Mission in Changing Times



A young boy struggles to find his place. He wants to get a good education, but his family can't afford the price of tuition. He falls behind in his studies. He has a lot of potential and a lot of energy, but nowhere to channel that promise. His dreams are many, but his options are few. Instead of offering safety and opportunities, his neighborhood offers violence and dead ends. Indifference threatens his future. But he wants to achieve.

This is a situation commonly found in the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN). The San Miguel network was founded in 1993 in the United States to help address this reality by providing quality education to underserved students, typically in grades five through eight. The model uses small class sizes with extended school days and longer academic years. The schools focus on the needs of the whole student by setting high expectations for academic achievement, offering individualized attention, fostering social development, teaching life skills, promoting service, deepening faith, and engaging students' families. In the 23 years since the founding of the first school, the network has evolved and adapted to each local culture – from how it incorporates the Catholic faith to how it deals with a lack of financial and human resources.

Brother Lawrence Goyette, FSC, founded The San Miguel School of Providence in Rhode Island in 1993 as a first-of-its-kind school serving boys of all faiths and cultures from low-income neighborhoods. San Miguel schools are not tuition-driven, so leaders rely on generous donors to fund school expenses.

"The San Miguel School of Providence would not have made it to year number three without reaching out to all members of the local community: the Lutheran Church of St. Paul, the Episcopal Diocese, the Jewish community, business and government", said Brother Lawrence. "Funding was an issue in

a state which ranks at the bottom of philanthropic giving".

In 1993, a Lutheran parish allowed San Miguel Providence to use its recently closed school building without paying rent or utilities for the new school's first ten years. That generosity and the initial commitment of funding from the former Long Island-New England District alleviated the immediate stress of a lack of financial resources and allowed San Miguel Providence to focus on the students and to begin its fundraising efforts. It also received state funding, which meant the school, rooted in the Lasallian mission, could not be overtly Catholic, at least in its early years. Therefore, educators focused on character-building and the Lasallian formation of its staff. Slowly, as the years went by, the school became known throughout the state of Rhode Island for the positive impact it was having on its students. Fundraising efforts strengthened. The school was able to slowly and deliberately begin incorporating faith into all aspects of its life.

"Once our school could show amazing results, especially in providing hope and opportunity for boys from underserved communities, the faith dimension became a non-issue", said Brother Lawrence. "There could now be 100 percent participation in the Lasallian formation of its staff, board and student body".



Providing formation helps keep the mission alive even as schools face limited human and financial resources. Finding committed volunteers helps as well – whether they are volunteers from local communities or Lasallian Volunteers, a program of RELAN that provides dedicated, well-trained young adults for a year or more of service.



Marilyn Paquette served at The San Miguel School of Providence as a Lasallian Volunteer during the school's early years. She now leads RELAN's newest San Miguel school, De La Salle Academy in Concord, California, which welcomed its first class of boys in 2014 with Paquette as the founding principal.

The beginning years of the Concord school are much different from the beginning years of the Providence school. Concord is the only San Miguel-model school affiliated with a Lasallian

high school, De La Salle High School, and faith formation is at the forefront.

"Our reality at De La Salle Academy is such that our students and families are craving a focus on faith in school and in their lives so that faith forms the basis of why we are here and who we are called to be", said Paquette. "We speak very intentionally at the Academy about being Young Men of Faith! We focus on our students having a vocational call from God. Faith and integrity are pillars in our community!"

Unlike many San Miguel-model schools, De La Salle Academy is fully funded for its first five years thanks to a generous donor. Like the start of the Providence school, this has given De La Salle Academy a chance to focus on building a community and curriculum and creating the school culture.

In the years between the opening of the first San Miguel-model school and the most recent one, a number of schools have opened

and then closed or transformed into other types of schools due to struggling finances and changes in local needs. Schools in Camden, New Jersey; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Racine, Wisconsin; Memphis, Tennessee; and Chicago, Illinois, either closed or changed to a different model.

Today, in addition to the schools in Providence and Concord, there are nine other San Miguel-model schools: De La Salle Blackfeet School, Browning, Montana; De La Salle Elementary



School, Memphis, Tennessee; The De La Salle School, Freeport, New York; De Marillac Academy, San Francisco, California; La Salle Academy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; The NativityMiguel Middle School, Buffalo, New York; San Miguel Middle School, Tulsa, Oklahoma; San Miguel School, Chicago, Illinois; and San Miguel School, Washington, DC.

As times change, so do the needs of students. The San Miguel model therefore adapts: some schools are co-educational or dual-charism or not in an urban area.

For example, De La Salle Blackfeet School (DLSBS) opened in 2001 in Browning, Montana, and serves mostly Native American boys and girls in grades four through eight. Browning is in a remote location where unemployment runs near 70 percent, most families live below the poverty line, and rates of alcohol and drug abuse are high. The education system struggles against overcrowding, and the high school dropout rate is nearly 50 percent.

Despite this challenging environment, the threat of indifference is overridden by the passion of those who serve the students and the determination of the students. Jonathan Ficaró, a Lasallian Volunteer, described serving at DLSBS as an opportunity to be a part of something truly special, inspirational and transformative.

“Indifference cannot factor into the life in the community of a San Miguel school”, said Ficaró. “Serving at our school transforms one’s understanding of what it means to be present to a community faced with issues of poverty. Being present within these San Miguel communities means to share in the life of its members”.

DLSBS fights indifference and keeps the Lasallian mission strong despite limited human and financial resources, not only by welcoming long-term volunteers into its community, but also by inviting donors and immersion group participants to enter into the lives of students.



“It is in the personal exchanges that one looks for the means to reach out to the other”, said Brother Dale Mooney, FSC, DLSBS president. “It is in challenging the ever-present tendency to commodify (people) that we establish the possibility for these interpersonal exchanges”.

That personal connection is critical to the success of San Miguel-model schools. It carries the schools through tough times and lifts up the hopes of students. The passion and commitment of the students, their families, staff and volunteers at all San Miguel-model schools overshadow the ever-present threat of indifference.

“Our families and our students do not want to be indifferent”, said Paquette. “They want to be part of a community where the dignity of individuals is recognized and celebrated. San Miguel-model schools strive to create that community. We rely on the strength of the mission to help us battle indifference and become a part of something that is bigger than ourselves”.

Elizabeth Moors Jodice
Director of Communications, RELAN

Secretariat for Formation

CIL: Lasallian Formation for the Mission



If we want formation to be on-going, it will have to be done locally. The last General Chapter said in Proposition 28, "Each District strengthens or creates Lasallian formation programmes for formators, Brothers and Lay Lasallians, so as to train local leadership teams to give formation and effective support to all those working in the mission". In view of this, a session was organised in the Generalate in Rome from the 16th to the 28th of October 2016. It was a two week session for Brothers and Lay Lasallians who are or will be leaders of formation programmes in Regions, Districts or establishments.

A group of 41 participants from the five Regions of the Institute shared their experiences and ideas on Lasallian formation for mission. Eighteen Districts and two Regional offices were represented. The quality of the participants showed that those responsible for formation are chosen from among the best Lasallians. There were 16 Brothers, one priest and 24 Lay Lasallians (12 men and 12 women), and they showed an excellent approach to the activities of programme. They established positive relationships among themselves, and the programme turned out to be a successful experience, individually and collectively, which had a profound effect on each of the participants.

The programme was organised in three stages based on the model of See-Judge-Act. To begin with, people shared the experiences and practices of Districts or establishments. Each District had time to present to the others the good things they are doing in terms of formation. The emphasis was placed on trying to understand the specific contexts of the various places and the ways in which formation tries to respond to them. The second and longer stage comprised a series of five 'illuminations' or presentations on Lasallian formation for the mission. Two presentations were given by Brothers André-Pierre Gauthier and Alain Houry from France, and the third was by Dr Carmelita Quebengco, of the Philippines. They were all based around the pivotal inspiration of the gospel in the journey of De La Salle, in his spirituality and his mission.



Two other presentations focused on the question of the formation of leadership teams for formation, now and in the future. These 'illuminations' were presented by Brothers Paulo Dullius and Chuy Rubio from the Secretariat for Formation and by representatives of the Secretariats and Services of the Generalate. The third and final part was the shortest, and it was the occasion for people to evaluate their own programmes of formation in the light of what they had experienced and of the presentations they had heard. This enabled people to identify the next steps to be taken in each District in order to improve their programmes.

The session also showed how relationships are an essential element in formation for the mission. The message given in the conference hall was confirmed by periods devoted to prayer, meditation, personal and group reflection, group meetings and outings which enabled people to meet one another and served to build a fraternal atmosphere which was reflected in the way we were welcomed and when the time came for departures. The start of the session coincided with the canonisation of Brother Salomon Leclercq in the Piazza San Pietro and the whole programme was influenced by this. A formation programme is a life experience with wide-ranging effect, but its impact can only be measured afterwards in retrospect. Consequently, we want to keep in touch with the participants during the year following the programme in order to find out what has happened as a result of the proposals made at the end of the programme.

The experience of Rome is important because it gives people the chance to discover new places, but also because it opens people out to the international and multicultural dimension of the Institute. Participants were challenged to leave their comfort zones and react to different languages and cultures. The daily timetable made us aware of our individual limits and made us appreciate the other Lasallians with whom we share spirit and mission but not culture and language. Our understanding of De La Salle is different after such an experience.

Testimonies drawn from the final evaluations made by participants:

For me, the important moments were the many possibilities for sharing and discussing with different groups and other Regions and Districts but also with members of my own District.

The whole thing was interesting and especially vitalising. The conferences differed in style, but they all provided a dynamic input into our group discussions which were rich in exchanges. Each of them brought its specific insight into the mission, while being linked to the others and complementary to them.

I was sorry that we did not get a more organised input aimed at deepening our understanding of certain fundamental and indispensable aspects, which must be kept in mind in Lasallian formation for the mission, namely Christology, the-gospels, the Founder's Meditations etc.

I was hoping to get some information, or even a brief workshop, on how to produce a formation programme in broad outline.

It was a marvelous programme and I would like to repeat it in my District, adapting it to the different cultures and the diversity of religions.

This session on Lasallian formation for the mission has made us take a deeper look at our practices in the light of the goals and principles. But it also requires all the Regions to work to achieve it 'together and by association'. Specifically, that needs to be translated into an effort to have exchanges between Districts about concrete projects for promoting an experience of fraternity that overcomes the language obstacle.

I would like to thank the leadership team and the Generalate Community for the efforts they made in the organisation, the welcome and the fraternal atmosphere. We felt that we were Brothers and at home, enlightened by the spirit of our Lasallian Family.



God speaks to us in a thousand ways



I had finished writing this article with great care, with the ideas and quotations all neatly arranged, because I thought it was important to have everything 'well prepared'. I then went to visit the chapel to offer my work to the Lord and to ask Him to tell me anything He wanted to say so that the message would be from Him and not from me. I then went back to do a final reading of the text so as to finish it. But lo and behold! Something happened that had never happened to me before. When I opened the document on my computer I did something wrong and everything was erased. The document was blank. I got the feeling that the text had not been in line with the Lord's plans. Perhaps He wanted me to write less about the things that were needed and more about my actual experience. So I started again and rewrote the article from the beginning.

I think small details like these are significant even when taking big decisions. They are needed to make us question our certainties and doubts about what God really wants of us. Take another path. Put your life

in the hands of God in prayer and allow Him if necessary to undo everything you have done and to redo it in a better way. Obviously, you have to put aside your pride and your desire to make things go exactly as you plan them and expect them. If we cling stubbornly to our own point of view, we risk sacrificing many possibilities for the Holy Spirit to act and to breathe where He will. Do not let our structures stifle Him.

One of the gospel citations which led me to come to Lebanon was Luke's text, «We are useless servants; we have only done our duty». The message I took from this was that I should do what I ought to do, what the Lord and my neighbour want of me rather than what I want, since in order to be happy we do not have to be doing what we want but we have to love what we are doing. With this in mind, I have tried to live out the mission that Jesus has entrusted to me here. It is not my work; it is his.

You might think it would be very interesting to be in a situation which attracts the attention of people all around the world. But when you are here doing your daily work, you forget all that and concentrate on the people you are serving and can help. I have no special skills or qualities, and I am sure many people could do what I am doing and do it better. However, God has brought me here and I trust Him. In spite of my weaknesses and faults, He is able to work miracles to complete his work, and I know He can write straight with crooked lines. I try to put myself in Jesus' hands and let Him do the work.

I am not saying it is easy. Things here are complicated, and there is a lot of work. But the things we are confronted with every day are not impossible ones. Even though I do not speak Arabic, we manage to communicate with the children by a song or a joke or a game, and they all understand. Obviously, I have started studying the language so as to understand people and express myself better.



Some people ask me why I have come here from so far away, and whether there are no poor people or poor neighbourhoods in my own country. In my opinion, if people had asked all those questions in the past, many countries which are Christian would still have no knowledge of Jesus today. Somebody has to go, but somebody also has to stay behind. If we think that Christians are missionaries by baptism, then clearly the ones who go and the ones who stay behind are both equally important. Provided they are acting consistently and sincerely in response to God's call to serve him completely and faithfully, it does not matter where they are working, neither do the difficulties they meet. The important thing is to be walking with Christ.

Personally speaking, I am only trying to respond to the call I felt a long time ago and which has grown over the years. I believe it is a question of seeking to be faithful every day. God does not call us to ensure that things go well for us or to be successful in human terms. He calls us to respond with trust to the merciful love He has for us by saying, "What would Jesus do in my place here and now?"

I honestly think I am blessed to have this chance to live in the Near East where the culture is profoundly religious, whether Christian or Muslim. That makes life easier and strengthens our faith. Somehow it gives me great joy to be surrounded by Muslim

children and to tell them that God loves them, thinking as I do about the God of Jesus who is their Father, even more so because I am bringing something to these children in whom I see the face of Jesus. They are children who are fleeing the experience of war, and some of them are still experiencing it in their homes either through explicit violence or a lack of attention and affection. Our pupils do not come to us in order to learn but because they feel loved. That is why, although classes start at 9.00 a.m., they are already there in our yard by seven o'clock, playing and shouting "Fratelli, Fratelli".

Our Founder's word "to see everything with the eyes of faith" is still valid and enlightens us, even though we are not in a situation of persecution or religious war. In a society which does its best to remove God from the equation and ridicules anyone who shows faith or looks for transcendence, Jesus himself is our example. It is not easy to go against the flow, but it is worth it, or rather it is worth Life. The gospel is right when it says, «Blessed are you when they insult you, calumniate you and persecute you because of me. Rejoice and be happy, for your reward is great in heaven». I think we need to ask ourselves the question, "If I am not being persecuted, is it perhaps because I am only lukewarm about living my faith?"

Lady Providence

"Don't you have a lady to do your cooking yet?" That is the question Miquel and I are asked repeatedly. We answer quite sincerely that it is Providence who does the cooking for us. And we are not kidding. We say it with joy, certitude and confidence. Our fridge always contains something to eat which has been prepared and brought to us by a family, a teacher or a friend.

Currently it is my turn to be in charge of the Project. Towards the end of February, I was due to make the first payment on the renovation works for the building, but we had no money. Just 30 minutes before I had to tell them that regretfully I could not pay them, a former student of the Marists showed up wanting to meet us and make a donation. As he left, he casually made us a gift of 1,000 dollars, which was just the amount I needed.

We have lots of examples of that sort of thing. That is why I think the difficult times we are experiencing are privileged times, because they are times of grace. More than ever, we can show our trust in God's Providence and feel its effects in ways that are strange but real. The saints were aware that when human resources (e.g. vocations of different kinds) or material goods were scarce, it was time to return to the basic position of trust in God our Father who would not give a stone to His children who ask for bread. So if we ask God for something and He does not give it, maybe it is because we have unthinkingly asked Him for a stone.

So let Him erase our "documents" and oblige us to redo them when necessary. He will be making us "rewrite" our lives in a new way. We trust Him to take care of the results in His own way.

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