




Witnesses to Fraternity

PASTORAL LETTER 2019

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General





The Encounter, a new monument and statue of the Founder at *Lewis University* in Romeoville, Illinois (USA), is inspired by the moment in March, 1679 when De La Salle met Adrien Nyel at the entrance to the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Rheims, France. For De La Salle, this chance encounter symbolizes the beginning of his involvement in the world of education, the discernment of his life's purpose, and the beginning of the Lasallian story.

The original statue of De La Salle, which was created by Alec M. Smith, a Minneapolis-based sculptor, invites students to walk through the doorway and to enter more fully into the Lewis University experience, where they will deepen their understanding of the Lasallian Mission and have the opportunity to cultivate a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Upon graduation, De La Salle's outstretched arm ushers students back through the doorway to make a difference in the world that awaits.

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Witnesses to Fraternity

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General

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La★Salle

Pastoral Letter 2019

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FRATRES SCHOLARUM CHRISTIANARUM
THE GENERALATE

Witnesses to Fraternity

Dear Brother,

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.”

Eph 5:14

I ask you to take a moment to reflect upon and discuss fraternity, a fundamental characteristic of our vocation. As you do so, read my letter attentively and consider the questions with “the eyes of faith”. Afterwards, perhaps you and your community could gather to discuss and share your experience of God (R 46) enriched, I hope, with the fruits of my own reflection.

✳ To begin, I would like to invite you to wake up and make yourself consciously aware of Christ's light shining upon you. Take some time to experience God's presence in your life, in the life of your community and in the lives of all those you encounter. Pause and contemplate how Jesus indwells in the depths of your heart. Recall that before God formed you in your mother's womb, God knew you; before you were born, God consecrated you. (Cf Jer 1:5)

Pray with Psalm 139 1-18.

Recall an experience that suddenly awakened you to God's presence in your life.

Now, fully awake and "risen from the dead", ask God: "What does God do all day"? Do not answer too quickly; rather, let Christ's light shine upon you and think deeply about this.

Before you, others have wondered about God's activity. The 13th century mystic Meister Eckhart said that "God lies on a maternity bed giving birth all day long".

The social psychologist Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC, referring to Eckhart, says that "God is forever birthing forth new possibilities". Furthermore, he also says that:


The witness required in the name of mission is to the God who co-creates across the entire spectrum of creation, across time and history, forever inviting humans to collaborate in that global and cosmic process of birthing possibilities for new hope.¹

¹ O'Murchu, Diarmuid, MSC, *Consecrated Religious Life: The Changing Paradigms*, Orbis Books, NY, p. 133.

From the very beginning, when seeds were being sown for the birth of the Institute, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers, awakened by the Gospel and illuminated by Christ, helped the sons of artisans and the poor to discover new hope-filled possibilities.

This year, I would like to invite you and your community to an experience of *Great things are Possible*. I believe that, through your personal and communal commitment to encounter and dialogue, you can give birth to new possibilities of hope for your sisters and brothers, many of whom are tossing about in a sea of unhinged minds, mean spirited discourse and hateful behavior.

While we certainly know that creation is God's work and that just about everyone is kind and well-intentioned, we are also well aware that the whole creation is groaning in labor pains and even we are groaning inside ourselves, waiting with eagerness for the Reign of God to be fully realized. (Cf. Rm. 8:22-23).

 Describe a concrete situation that demonstrates the tension between God's desire that everyone enjoy life to the fullest and the people and policies that prevent this from being fully realized. What small act can you and the Brothers with whom you live do to improve one specific person's lot in life? How can you awaken this person to live an experience of God's love?

I believe that each Brother individually and all Brothers together in community should be like persistent and annoying alarm clocks that wake people up, that are in fact loud enough to wake the dead. Once awake, we can invite all those entrusted to our care to open themselves to the light of Christ and to engage in an encounter and

dialogue as a means for building a more merciful and just world (the Reign of God) for everyone.

My expectation is that this letter will encourage you and your community to wake up and continue your journey of Christian conversion guided by the light of Christ and infused with the wisdom of the Spirit. *“Starting from the confrontation between life and the Gospel, welcome and actualize the power of the Spirit who converts hearts and renews the face of the earth.”*²

Great Things Are Possible, the Institute’s theme for 2019-2020, is rooted in the Gospel-inspired mandate that we Brothers be builders of fraternity (Cf. Rm. 12:10). A review of news from around the world clearly demonstrates we are witnessing increasing intolerance, lack of courtesy and senseless violence. We see that some governments, whether liberal, conservative, or populist, do not respond in lifegiving ways to “legitimate grievances, economic injustice and social fragmentation. In their different ways, liberals and populists are both hollowing out democracy and the wider Christian humanist foundations on which it rests: the dignity of the person, the common good and lived fraternity.”³ Many elected leaders demonize people who are different. Migrants and refugees are ostracized and often subjected to policies that disregard their inherent rights as children of God. I am reminded of Saint Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:15): “You live in a world that is twisted out of its true pattern and among such people you must shine out as beacons to the world, upholding the message of life.”

² Campos, Miguel, FSC & Sauvage, Michel, FSC. *Encountering God in the depths of the Mind and Heart*, Rome, 1995, p. 426.

³ Pabst, Adrian, “The Ugly Sisters of Modern Politics”, *The Tablet*, 27 July 2019, pp. 12-14.

In a similar vein Pope Francis writes:

The experience of discontinuity, uprootedness and the collapse of fundamental certainties, fostered by today's media culture, create a deep sense of orphanhood to which we must respond by creating an attractive and fraternal environment where others can live with a sense of purpose.⁴



We are often told that “today’s media culture” fosters discordant living. Do you make an effort to filter the media’s messages and examine them with “the eyes of faith”? Can you and your community create ways to ensure that your attitudes and behaviors are more informed by the Gospel and less manipulated by mass media?

We are all the image and likeness of God, members of the one human family and global community. In our FSC communities we first and foremost strive to experience our innate brotherhood. We live the experience of fraternity on a daily basis - its wear and tear, its joys and frustrations. Every day, we recall the presence of God in the midst of the community. We are sustained by a rich life of prayer, the Eucharist, the grace of reconciliation and constant care for one another. We know that our fraternal life is a fragile but prophetic sign. Our fraternal life “is part of the answer that God gives to the absence of brotherhood which is wounding the world today”.⁵ Today, this sign must be both audible and visible;

⁴ Pope Francis. *Christus Vivit*, Rome, 2019 No. 216


⁵ *The Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church Today*, Vatican, 2015, No. 6.

it must awaken people who are beyond the doors and windows of our communities to the light of Christ.

As I travel the world, I am made aware that our Partners, students and other members of the Lasallian Family look to us to model fraternity. I recall the Synod *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment* (2018) where many participants expressed a longing for fraternity. As Brothers who are called to be builders of fraternity, we have a much to share with young people.

Former Brother Superior Álvaro Rodríguez wrote:

“If there is one topic which I hold especially to heart, it is that of our fraternity. We are called to be witnesses of fraternity. I do not think we have been able to exploit our fraternity, our ‘being brothers’ as one of the prophetic elements of our vocation and one of the most important elements of our mission. We ought to ask ourselves to what extent our fraternity is evident and contagious today.”⁶

 Brother, you and your community are challenged to increase your loud, clear and joyful witness to fraternity:

The Brothers wish to be at one and the same time brothers among themselves, brothers to those they meet and their Partners, and older Brothers to those entrusted to them. Through these relations, they witness to evangelical fraternity, a sign of the presence of the Lord.⁷

⁶ Rodríguez, Alvaro, FSC. *Being Brothers in Community, Our Primary Association*, Pastoral Letter, December 2001.

⁷ *The Rule*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 2016, Article 53

Our witness to evangelical fraternity is rooted in our baptism; therefore, it is neither determined by age nor the extent of one's involvement in active ministry. How loudly and clearly are you and your community bearing witness to evangelical fraternity? Together consider one concrete strategy to increase the impact of your witness.

Your consecration “is a manifestation of the mystery of communion in the Church, an expression of the love of God for humanity, and a prophetic sign which establishes the values of the Reign of

The Brothers seek to share with many other people the fraternity they foster in their community. The community, as the home and school of communion, is actively and generously accessible to others, especially to Partners, young people trying to discover their vocation, and to the close relatives of its members... (Rule 52)

God as criteria for discerning human realities.”⁸

The building of fraternity necessarily includes the desire and ability to encounter and dialogue with others, particularly those who are different. Encounter and dialogue are the building blocks of fraternity. Being builders of fraternity is our response to the cries of the poor and the discordance so evident in today's world.

You individually, and together with your Brothers, must be a passionate witness to merciful, just and harmonious coexistence.

⁸ Ibid. Article 24.

Living with passion in the present means becoming “experts in communion”, witnesses and architects of God’s plan for communion... In a polarized society, where different cultures struggle to live alongside one another, where the weakest are oppressed, and where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community... to be a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit that inspires in human hearts a passion for all to join as one.⁹

You and I first experience fraternity in our communities:

For each Brother, the community is the privileged place for being evangelized, to develop as a person, and discern educational needs. By their presence and their active participation, the Brothers build up a consecrated and fraternal community dedicated to the mission.¹⁰



Do you and your Brothers realize how important consecration and fraternity dedicated to God’s plan for humanity are to fostering stability in the Institute? How can you improve your experiences of consecration and fraternity?

In community, we accompany each other in our quest to be coworkers with Jesus in his project for the Reign of God. Together we help each other to live life to the fullest and we discern unmet educational needs calling for our witness and service. A vibrant community life is a confirmation that small seeds can produce abundant fruit. It was those first fragile communities in Reims and

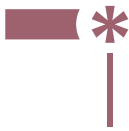
⁹ Pope Francis. Letter to All Consecrated People, November 21, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid. Article 45.1

Paris – Brothers learning to participate in God’s plan of salvation through the education of the sons of artisans and the poor – that the charism was firmly rooted in good soil.

Echoing John Baptist de La Salle’s vision of our participation in God’s plan of salvation, Saint John Paul II said:

To carry out this service appropriately, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God and be aware of the challenges of their time, understanding the profound theological meaning of these challenges through a discernment made with the help of the Spirit. In fact, it is often through historical events that we discern God’s hidden call to work according to his plan by active and effective involvement in the events of our time.¹¹

 Describe a person and a situation (a historical event) that revealed to you God’s plan for a particular circumstance.

The polarization in our world and the violence we inflict on one another are sadly the historical events of our day calling for our loud and clear wake-up call to brotherhood and sisterhood.

The Rule explicitly speaks of our witness to fraternity:

“The Brothers seek to share with many other people the fraternity they foster in their community. The community, as the home and school of communion, is actively and generously accessible to others, especially to Partners, young people trying to discover their vocation, and to the close relatives of its members...”¹²

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Vatican City, No. 73.

¹² *The Rule*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 2015, article 52.

Bearing witness to fraternity is one of our key roles in the Church and the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education. Our life in fraternal charity and in solidarity with the poor through our educational service is a sign and an instrument of God's plan. It is one way we can make the Reign of God visible and make great things possible. (cf. Rule, 15).


“By testifying to Christ and living their typical life of communion, consecrated men and women offer the whole educational community the prophetic sign of Brotherhood [and Sisterhood]. Community life, when woven with deep relationships ‘is itself prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders’”.¹³

St. Paul VI provides an example of the potential of witnessing to the Good News:

Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an all together simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst?¹⁴


¹³ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and the Mission in Schools*, Rome, 2002, No. 48.

¹⁴ St. Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican City, 8 December 1975, No. 21.

 Do you really believe that the witness of you and your Brothers provokes people to wonder about our motivation? Do you really see that people are awakened to the light of Christ by the way you live? Do you not see that you can do more to increase the value of your witness?

I am reminded of an experience during my pastoral visit to RELEM. General Councilor Brother Aidan Kilty and I were visiting the school and community in Roubaix, France. Unemployment and social deprivation characterize this poor, urban area populated with Muslim immigrants. The assistant director of the school described herself as a “Muslim Lasallian”. She was effusive in her gratitude for the welcome the Brothers had given her as a child of parents with little financial means and for the encouragement that they gave her to continue her studies. She was grateful for the openness of the Catholic Church (the light of Christ!) to differences; she was almost in tears as she expressed what it meant to her to assimilate Lasallian values and to transmit these values to the young people of her neighborhood.

The community of three octogenarian Brothers (our mandate to bear witness to the Gospel is not determined by age!) and a former Brother connected to the school was also inspiring. All are involved in a variety of activities with the parents of the students. They assist a group of Romani people in a nearby neighborhood, teach in a literacy program, are involved in parish activities and prepare their own meals. In the doorway to the house we noticed a bicycle air pump. It is available to the young people who frequently come to the community. These Brothers and their Partner are an example of a fraternal and open FSC community that impels people to experience God’s loving presence.

 Take a few minutes to read and ponder upon Jesus' words as recorded in Mt. 5:14-16.

Brother, in what concrete way can you increase the visible witness of your fraternal life. Great things are possible when Christians – when Brothers of the Christian Schools – loudly and joyfully awaken people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. What more can your community do in this regard?

Encounter and dialogue are the ingredients to building both our communities and a more just, loving and fraternal world. Meeting and conversing with others, especially those who are different, can break down our preconceptions, prejudices and assumptions. Together we can find common ground for cooperation and collaboration.

Our experience of God should facilitate our engagement with others since “Our faith is an intimate and living conversation with God. This is evident in the Bible, whose main narrative is made up of encounters and dialogues as God reveals himself and his intentions to the patriarchs, prophets and leaders who respond on behalf of the community.”¹⁵

Both our communities and educational centers should bring people together. Pope Francis says that “*Catholic schools are places promoting a culture of encounter*”.¹⁶ He also affirms that ...Everything started in an encounter with the Lord. Our journey of consecration was born of an encounter and a call. We need to

¹⁵ Marrin, Pat, “Encounter and dialogue: Pencil Preaching for Tuesday, July 30, 2019, The National Catholic Reporter, July 29, 2019.

¹⁶ Pope Francis. *Christus Vivit*, Vatican City, 2019, No. 222.

keep this in mind. And if we remember aright, we will realize that in that encounter we were not alone with Jesus; there was also the people of God, the Church, young and old, just as in today's Gospel.¹⁷

In a previous letter to you I shared a reflection on the Emmaus story:

The accounts of Christ's appearances after the Resurrection, including that on the road to Emmaus, reveal much of what Christianity is. These are intimate encounters and they are also shared encounters. Discipleship is a calling, but it is a shared calling, not a solitary relationship with God. It is a calling lived out in community, and the story of Emmaus, where the disciples finally recognize Christ as he breaks bread, is a reminder that Christianity is lived out in a Eucharistic community. And that Eucharistic community requires not only love and worship of God, but recognition of, and love of, one's neighbor.¹⁸

John Baptist de La Salle's encounter with Jesus prepared him for that all-important, upsetting and determinative meeting with Adrian Nyel that "marked the beginning for the upheaval of the entire internal universe of De La Salle. It marked the perceptible taking hold of a process of interior and social liberation which [brought] him to a point where he had neither the intention, the desire, nor the courage to go by himself."¹⁹

¹⁷ Pope Francis, 22nd World Day of Consecrated Life, 2 February 2018.

¹⁸ True Christian Dialogue, Editorial, *The Tablet*.

¹⁹ Sauvage, FSC, Michel. "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle", in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, Robert Berger, FSC, Editor, Lasallian Publications. Landover, Maryland, 1999, p. 230.

✳ Describe an important, upsetting and determinative meeting that marked a change of direction for you in your life. Did this turn around lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus and a more immediate relationship with a poor person? Can you describe a time in a community where together and by association you had such a conversion?

We all want to respond to the calls of Jesus, the Church and the Institute, to encounter those who are different; however, their very difference makes us hesitate. Going beyond borders and developing relationships with others are means to overcome our hesitation. Going beyond borders is more than meeting the needs of the poor and abandoned. It is opportunity for self-discovery, opening ourselves to the possibility of dialogue and conversion through the encounter with the one who is different. Going beyond a border is as much for our own benefit and growth in Christ as it is to awaken others to the light of Christ by providing concrete responses to the practical needs of others.

✳ Read Mt. 25:31-46.

It is neither necessary nor useful for you and your community to spend time trying to discover the practical needs of others – Jesus has done the work for us. You obviously cannot respond to everyone; however, you should identify one specific person to whom you can respond in way that will lessen their anxiety and make their life more bearable.

Driven by Jesus' command, great things are possible when we go forward together.

Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world.²⁰

Throughout my pastoral visits I have encountered new expressions of creativity and new forms of ministry in response to the practical need of the poor for human and Christian education. In every part of the Institute Brothers and Partners are bringing hope – the light of Christ – to desperate children, young people and families.

Future Partners inspired our presence in the *Beyond the Borders* initiative known as the *Bamboo School*. Founded by five women, the school, located on the border of Thailand and Myanmar, houses children of immigrant families who are stateless and without civil rights. The children are denied access to Thai schools and this Lasallian educational community presents their only accessible opportunity for education. The school is free and every day each family contributes a small plate of rice. The rice is enriched with nutritional components and often serves as the only meal of the day for the children. The school assists in regularizing the children's immigration status with Thai authorities.

In Phokeng, South Africa, there is a community called *Tsholofelo* comprised of a Brother, a Sister and Partners. They offer a basic education for several hundred children, who with their parents, live in converted cargo containers without water or electricity.

²⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican City, 2013, No. 11

The *Tsholofelo* community, through encounter and dialogue, is building fraternity with the larger marginalized community.



With your Brothers, describe a new ministry of human and Christian education in your District or Region that awakens people to new possibilities and brightens their lives with the light of Christ. How does your awareness of this ministry influence your sense of God’s concern for the poor?

When we encounter and engage with poor people, refugees, the discarded and despised we grow in wisdom, deepen our consecration to God and our relationship with Jesus. “We grow in wisdom and maturity when we take the time to touch the suffering of others. The poor have a hidden wisdom, and with a few simple words, they can help us discover unexpected values.²¹ When we go “to the ends of the earth” to announce the Good News, a reciprocal evangelization occurs. The evangelizer is evangelized by the new and different cultures and peoples encountered. The Gospel is both proclaimed and discovered in the newly encountered culture.

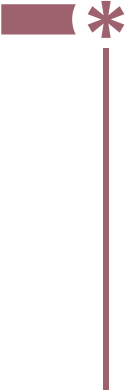
We often speak of our communities and ministries as spaces of transformation. “To be transformed, first we must meet people who are different, not our family, friends and neighbors who are like us...”²² For De La Salle, the transformation to deeper commitment to the Reign of God began when he encountered Adrien Nyel. Lasallian educational communities encourage personal encounters with those who are considered to be different, undesirable, despised, beneath us or disposable. “When tolerance and mutual

²¹ Pope Francis. *Christus Vivit*, Vatican City, 2019, No. 171.

²² Vanier, Jean Pastoral Letter, 2015.

understanding between pupils of different religions prevails in a school, that is already a tremendous example of human fraternity and ecumenism.”²³

Our educational ministries are built on mutual respect, and “mutual respect means service to the person of Christ. Cooperation is between brothers and sisters in Christ”.²⁴ This quality of respect must spring from and be nourished by personal encounters with the other. Reflecting about the ongoing migration of human persons, our Holy Father reminds us that, “A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throw away culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world”.²⁵

Bring your “eyes of faith” into focus by reading
 Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 27:19; Matthew 25:35; Colossians 3:11; and, Hebrews 13:1-2.

Regarding migration, are you able to balance legitimate policies to control one’s borders with your obligation to welcome the stranger? Can you identify communities or ministries in your District or Region that have strategies in place to effectively welcome the stranger?

Whatever your role in your community and the ministry – teacher, administrator, counselor, mentor, fraternal presence, or

²³ Lauraire, Leon, FSC. *Pedagogy of Fraternity*, Rome, 2015, p. 14..


²⁴ The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, 60. Rome, 19 March 1977..

²⁵ Francis, Pope. 2014 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

through prayerful awareness – as a Brother you are to “infect the contemplative glance by educating to a silence that leads to listening to God, to paying attention to others, to the situation that surrounds us, to creation. Furthermore, by aiming at the essential, consecrated persons provoke the need for authentic encounters, they renew the capacity to be amazed and to take care of the other, rediscovered like a brother”.²⁶

A fraternal and cordial encounter with those entrusted to our care has the potential to awaken others to the fact that:

“God has a unique and magnificent dream for each and every one of us; to live without fear, to love and be loved, to travel lightly on the great adventure of our everyday lives. How do we go on this adventure? We must begin with the heart. The heart sees the truth that the head misses. We must open our imagination. And be ready to laugh. After all, isn’t it miraculously ridiculous that we mean so much to the creator of the universe.”²⁷

 Brother, you and your confreres:

...are agents of the Holy Spirit...who renews the face of the earth. Redouble, therefore, your... creativity while at the same time you enter into dialogue among yourselves, with the students, with their families and their world, as well as with all others who want to serve the Church...²⁸

²⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and the Mission in Schools*, Rome, 2002, No. 24.

²⁷ Tulloch, Jonathan, “Hearing the Eternal in the Cry of a Child”, *The Tablet*, February 9, 2019, pp. 7-8.

²⁸ Sauvage, FSC, Michel. “The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle”, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, Robert Berger, FSC, Editor, Lasallian Publications. Landover, Maryland, 1999, p. 227.

Can you laugh about the miraculously ridiculous fact that you and your community mean so much to the creator of the universe? Is not God’s concern for you reason enough to redouble your efforts to be brightly shining witnesses to Jesus Christ?

Our encounter with the other bears abundant fruit when enriched with dialogue. In our Lasallian tradition, “The ‘placing of oneself in the presence of God’ already constitutes a dialogue between the person and God”.²⁹

“To place oneself in the presence of God is not just reminding oneself of a theory; it is to reread one’s own story in order to try to discern the passage of God in it.”³⁰ The Meditations, especially the Meditations for the Time of Retreat with their scriptural foundation, can serve as a starting point for our dialogue with God and each other:

“The meditations of the Founder continually remind the Brother of his commitment and of the need to enter into this internal and transcendent dialogue with the living God, who calls, transforms, satisfies and make thirsty again for more.”³¹

Former Brother Superior John Johnston once asked Brother Michel Sauvage: “for you today, what is the main objective of Lasallian studies? Brother Michel responded: “the most urgent

²⁹ Campos, Miguel, FSC & Sauvage, Michel, FSC. *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart*, Rome, 1995, p. 401.

³⁰ Campos, Miguel, FSC & Sauvage, Michel, FSC. *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart*, Rome, 1995, p. 395.


³¹ Berger, Robert, FSC. Editor. “La espiritualidad en tiempo de Juan Bautista de La Salle”, Lasallian Publications, Landover, Maryland, 1999, p. 227.

need is to encourage by every means possible, a dialogue between John Baptist de La Salle and today's world".³²

Brother, I encourage you to frequently return to both the writings of our Founder and those of our Lasallian scholars. Three contemporary texts worth revisiting for personal and community dialogue are *Being Brothers Today* (Toward the 44th General Chapter, Document no. 3, 2006), *They will call themselves Brother*, (Circular 466, 2013) and *The Rule*. These 3 documents address the challenges for our Lasallian mission in the 21st century.

The Lasallian mission, at both the national and international level, is expanding in secularized, pluri-religious, and multi-cultural contexts. In these contexts, the Brothers strive to enter into a respective dialogue with the persons they are called to serve. This attitude presupposes openness and a willingness to listen, to learn, to witness to Gospel values and, as far as possible, to announce the Word of God (Rule 14.1).

The Gospels and other accounts of encounter and dialogue help us to realize our important roles as witnesses to fraternity and communion.

 Do you and your community organize your activities in a way that enables you to give the necessary importance to religious studies and spiritual reading? (R 72.4)
Do you frequently recall that it is not yourselves that you are witnessing to, but Christ Jesus? (Cf. 2 Cor 4:5).

³² Sauvage, Michel, FSC. At this Juncture of Lasallian Studies & The Diffusion of the Founder's Message, SIEL Program, Rome, 1988-89

The Institute has a proud history of providing quality human and Christian education in multi-religious societies. Brothers, past and present, ministering in lands where Christianity is a minority are models of fraternal witness. The experience of these Brothers reveals that dialogue and respect must underpin any encounter with cultures, religions and traditions:

In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations."³³

Dialogue is:

The search for mutual understanding and the desire of points of encounter. Essential conditions for dialogue are attentive listening, respect, empathy, and compassion. Dialogue within the school and university community is chiefly the one between teachers and students. In relation to the social community in which schools and universities operate, dialogue involves listening to the needs of the community and searching for whatever collaboration is possible, for the common good. In relation to cultures and religions, dialogue becomes the commitment to

³³ Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) – Taipei 14.

share knowledge; respect; listening, and fomenting collaboration geared toward human development.³⁴

Brother, our joyful, loud and clear experience of fraternity, when firmly rooted in our encounter with Jesus Christ and nourished by a strong life of prayer, has the potential to awaken people to the possibility of accomplishing together great things to benefit of the common good. I believe that, “To be faithful to the Holy Spirit implies... a definite commitment to the unexpected; an interior deepening and ecclesial openness; a personal growth and an unselfishness for mission; a welcoming of a gift and a making use of talents...”³⁵

Prayer awakens us to both God’s presence and to the plight of the poor and, at the same time, increases our experience of interdependence with each other and with all of humanity. “When we are linked up by the power of prayer, we, as it were, hold each other’s hand as we walk side by side along a slippery path; and thus by the bounteous disposition of charity, it comes about that the harder each one leans on the other, the more firmly we are riveted together in brotherly love”. (St. Gregory the Great)

“The kingdom of God as preached by Jesus demands that we challenge and change the world of our time so that it becomes more just, more compassionate, more forgiving and more inclusive.”³⁶ And,

A key concept for building a different society, after the collapse of the ideological illusions of the twentieth century,

³⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *New Educational Horizons: Leadership in Catholic Schools and Universities*. Editors: Italo Fiorin, Angelo Paletta, et al. Vatican City, 2018, p. 26.

³⁵ Campos, Miguel, FSC & Sauvage, Michel, FSC. *Encountering God in the depths of the Mind and Heart*, Rome, 1995, p. 429.

³⁶ Ban, Kevin. “Being Church in the World Today: From a Devotional Church to a Kingdom-Driven Church”, *SEDOS*, Vol 51, NO 7/8, July August, 2019.

The Lasallian mission, at both the national and international level, is expanding in secularized, pluri-religious, and multi-cultural contexts. In these contexts, the Brothers strive to enter into a respective dialogue with the persons they are called to serve. This attitude presupposes openness and a willingness to listen, to learn, to witness to Gospel values and, as far as possible, to announce the Word of God (Rule 14.1).

is ‘fraternity’. The new paradigm that opposes the paradigm of rapacious and destructive individualism is the paradigm of gratuitousness. Those who are willing to help improve society through education are invited to “think of gratuitousness, and therefore fraternity, as a key characteristic of the human condition to ensure that the State and market can work smoothly while aiming at the common good.”³⁷

You and your community and the whole Institute – Brothers, Partners, and the entire Lasallian Family – convinced of the potential

to awaken people to the Good News, make great things possible through encounter and dialogue, and “...must have the courage to challenge and change the injustice, hatred, racism, greed, poverty and discrimination which prevents us from living together as brothers and sisters in the one family of God.”³⁸

³⁷ Fiorin, Italo, et al. *New Educational Horizons: Leadership in Catholic Schools and Universities*. Vatican City, 2018, p. 48.

³⁸ Ban, Kevin. “Being Church in the World Today: From a Devotional Church to a Kingdom-Driven Church”, *SEDOS*, Vol 51, NO 7/8, July August, 2019

✳ Stop now and spend some time contemplating God’s loving presence:

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead: wherever you presently live, whatever your age and with whom ever you are creating community, pause and bask in the light of Christ.

Re-energized, renewed and rededicated to encounter and dialogue with others, consider how you and your community can redouble your efforts to loudly and clearly witness to the Good News. Remember that “The reinvention of religious life for today is a renewed commitment to the choice of radical Christian community that inspired, attracted, and sustained the religious of every age. Jesus is the foundation, the Gospel is the task, and community is the process.”³⁹

I personally have been awakened by many of this past year’s events and have been made aware of the light of Christ shining through our witness to the Reign of God.

Brother Paulo Petry, General Councilor, and I recently conducted the Pastoral Visit to the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL). This Region is vibrant, rich in indigenous cultures, theological reflection, and diverse ministries. It is also blessed with many Lasallian vocations – Brothers, Partners and volunteers. The Visitors’ decision to expand ministry to the poor and

³⁹ Hereford, Amy, SSJ. In Dairmuir O’Murchu’s *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding*. Orbis Books, New York, 2016, p. 196.


marginalized, outreach programs offered by its numerous universities to the surrounding communities, volunteer programs, and the *Beyond the Border* initiative in Tabatinga, Brazil, have expanded the opportunities for encounter and dialogue and have sown the seeds for the birthing of new possibilities.

The Pastoral Visit to RELAL concluded as the Synod on the Amazon began in Rome. “One of the defining features of the Amazon Synod is that it acts from the periphery toward the centre...As so often happens in the Gospel of Jesus, it is a voice from the margins that is patiently calling to the centre in a shared quest for purity of heart”.⁴⁰ The Synod will provide a new impetus for making great things possible for our sisters and brothers who encounter many obstacles to living life to the fullest.

The 300th anniversary of the death of John Baptist de La Salle, the Year of Lasallian Vocations, the International Educational Congress, the renovation of the Mother House’s museum, and new Lasallian publications provide us with ample opportunities to drink from our sources and resources to create new strategies for revealing the light of Christ to all peoples.

The delegates to the 45th General Chapter desired to respond boldly and creatively to the cries of each Region to begin “an initiative that would deal effectively with the needs expressed in the metaphor *Beyond the Borders* and determine the process in order to establish and manage it (Proposition 19). Earlier this year the *Beyond the Borders* initiative was launched. We have been encouraged by the number of Brothers and Lasallians who wish to be a part of this venture that will generate new possibilities for the poor and the vulnerable found on the margins of our societies.

⁴⁰ Oropeza, Mauricio Lopez. “Make room for the God of surprises”, *The Tablet*, 17/24 August 2019, pp. 4-6.

 Are you aware of Beyond the Borders initiatives in your District or Region? Have you thought about participating in one of these ventures? Do you think these initiatives could awaken young people to consider the consecrated life?

The 3rd International Mission Assembly, the Young Brothers Assembly and the International Young Lasallian Symposium will enrich our preparations and inform proposals for the 46th General Chapter (May 2021).

Brother James (Santiago) Miller was martyred on February 13, 1982. Like many before him, Brother James was committed to the well-being of the young people entrusted to his care, especially indigenous young men at risk. Brother James' beatification (7 December 2019) is evidence that great things are possible through the ordinary activities of our lives.

“We consider this death like that of the apostle of the poor, of the marginalized, and of the needy, who daily fulfills his ordinary mission with dedication and affection, who strives every day in the field of education for the betterment of those most in need...⁴¹ Brother James' murder was a futile attempt to extinguish the light of Christ and calls us to remember those countless others – catechists, farmers, church workers – whose lives were cut short because they strove to awaken people to the inherent dignity of God's daughters and sons.

⁴¹ Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, *Faithful Witness of the Gospel*, 2003.

Brother James' call to wake up others to see Christ in the faces of the poor cost him his life. He now enjoys the fullness of Christ's light. Let us pray that we have sufficient zeal to encounter and dialogue with others as ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ and sufficient faith to loudly and clearly proclaim to all whom we encounter:

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

Eph 5:14

I conclude my letter to you with a poem by Brother John Deeney of the District of Ireland, Great Britain and Malta. The poem is a reflection upon the expanding Lasallian narrative from the time of De La Salle and the first Brothers. One brother, captivated by the metaphor, shared five “ripples” for him and the Lasallian mission today: 1) moving beyond our own structures; 2) making our mission accessible to those in need; 3) our Lasallian spirit complementing many other spiritualities; 4) being attentive to the needs we encounter in association with other like-minded and like-hearted people; and, 5) always the much-needed call to reflection leading to contemplation. The poem may serve as a catalyst for your own reflection.

RIPPLES: 1719–2019

From an original impulse
ripples flow.

The initial energy displaces
surrounding molecules
- people even -
and the motion continues,

rising, falling, rising, travelling,
leaving the original in the past,

a memory, a life-giving death bequeathing
that disturbing force driving outwards still
through present and future.

Spirit-wind catches the ripple crests
building power to push
through history and unbelief.

Dry reeds rustle and sway
on the dark margins.
Reflections break up, reform renewed.

The light of the morning star
glimmers on ripples, in minds.

Brother John Deeney
2019, Tercentenary of the death of St. John Baptist de La Salle





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