LASALLIAN REFLECTION 7

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2021-2022

TO, DRE Δ Ø rward! F Building new paths to transform lives Brothers of the Christian Salle

Schools



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Utopia is on the horizon. I take two steps closer; it takes two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon moves ten steps further.

As much as I walk, I will never reach it. So, what good is a utopia for?

Precisely for that reason: it is useful for walking.

Eduardo Galeano

AS MUCH AS I WALK...

The preservation instinct encourages us to do so, to conserve; not to look for novelty, because something inside us tells us that if we encourage this "crazy idea" we could end up frustrated and social unrest could ensue. However, thanks to the scientific and economic development of the last centuries, we have gradually gained the confidence to believe that, with so many innovations in so many fields at once, progress would be irreversible and would be destined to continue indefinitely.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged this pattern of thinking. Despite how much progess we have made in our walking, we now realize that human life was still threatened by unknown viruses until recently. Although we call it a "health" crisis, this crisis came to reveal that a large part of humanity is victim of other illnessess and sufferings. While we knew that the social gap between the haves and have-nots is nothing new, it has been aggravated and revealed more harshly in recent months.

Quarantine, confinement and social isolation took away the source of income of so many people who had been supporting their families in the informal economy. Access to health centers has never been and is never equitable for all social classes.



Wow! Just talking about social classes already implies the recognition that people, originally equal in dignity, are classified, separated and treated in different ways. What was already being experienced before the pandemic has been revealed in a more cruel way: the 2,100 richest people on the planet own more wealth than 60% of the people in the world.¹

This chasm can also be seen in our mission area: access to quality e-learning depends on a good Internet connection, the necessary equipment and, first and foremost, access to electricity. It is true that education is not limited to the school, but the school as a physical space, besides being a privileged place of teaching and learning, is also a place of affective encounter, an instrument of social leveling, an integral environment favorable for growth and for the expansion of human qualities.

And... the school is a source of nourishment as well. Even in placeswherethereisacertainease of access to online education, the number of children who suffer from chronic hunger is large since the school they attended before the pandemic provided them with at least some food that is no longer possible in the present circumstances. La Salle is present in Congo, Venezuela, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Haiti, which were ranked among the top 10 countries on the Hunger Index in 2020.²

This pandemic has made us understand that isolation and social distance are necessary; but loneliness should not be, This pandemic has made us understand that isolation and social distance are necessary; but loneliness should not be, nor should be fear.

nor should be fear. It is when loneliness and disenchantment try to darken the horizon that Jesus' words "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (Mk. 6:51) are most enlightening, and remind us of the good news that marked the beginning of his public life and the first announcement of the Kingdom of God: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim

the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19) The contrast cannot be greater between the utopia announced by Jesus and the reality that we are living. The world we see around us seems to confirm that, no matter how far we walk, we will not reach the horizon of the utopia we desire.

Faced with this situation of uncertainty and ambiguity, the "Take heart; it is I, do not be afraid!" invites us to adjust our expectations for the future, but it does so by reinforcing "the fundamental element of utopia: hope."³

2. I WALK TWO STEPS...

This utopia does not mean a simple assumption that everything is or will be wonderful; rather, it represents our conviction that there are always alternatives. John Baptist de La Salle reminds us that "there is nothing to be gained by being discouraged."⁴ Like our Founder, who had his feet firmly on the ground, we are certain that the world is something greater than our short passage in it. Thanks to our tricentennial experience, we know that the two steps that we walk towards the horizon mean small progress that keeps hope alive for the future.

The last General Chapter pointed out the horizon towards which we should walk, making us aware that this utopia—*the work of God that is also ours*—required concrete steps to carry it out. The General Council proposed an itinerary⁵ that would bring us closer to that horizon, marked by frequent signs conveniently placed each year through the Lasallian Reflections.



The slogans, mega trends, biblical icons and reminders of our common history suggested in them have given us the opportunity to find in our usual contexts areas where these two steps have the capacity to turn into transformative results.

In fact, the objectives proposed at that time have helped us to take the necessary steps, not only to approach our goals, but also to build new paths and transform lives. Above all, in recent months we have confirmed that ours is a Possible Mission for Lasallians. In a simple survey we conducted to learn more about initiatives that exemplify the possibility of this mission, we discovered nearly 90 generous and creative responses to the challenges presented by the situation we live in these times. We highlight just a few of these initiatives, divided into six areas that, in our opinion, represent many others that demonstrate that we have and ambiguity.

certainly been able to take *two more steps* towards:

1. The exercise of leadership and the communicative task in complex circumstances:

circumstances The have given a great impulse to the transformation of the leadership structures in the Institute at all levels. It is true that the adoption of more advanced communication technologies has allowed us greater flexibility, regularity, and effectiveness in administrative meetings and in the exercise of authority. The initiatives taken by leadership teams at all levels are numerous and effective; the common denominator in all of them is a change in perspective: we now better understand that true leadership needs to be prepared to govern and be encouraging in circumstances with higher levels of uncertainty, complexity



LEADERSHIP

2. Openness to wider collaboration:

The beauty of collaboration is that we combine knowledge with the desire to learn, mix strength with wisdom, and unite creative ideas in a single willingness to serve. For some years now, we have been united with the Marist Brothers by our educational intentions and mutual sympathy for the establishment of works at the service of the most needy: the most recent one being on the Melilla-Morocco border.⁶

The Lasallian Region of Europe and the Mediterranean, which includes the Middle East (RELEM) continues to promote collaboration and exchange between educational centers of all levels through its offers and search platform called *International Lasallian Exchanges*,⁷ and through the annual LSDreams scientific contest.⁸

On the other hand, immediate and real-time collaboration at the global level has been possible thanks to technology, but above all to the creative spirit of the Young Lasallians who, led by their International Council (ICYL), launched the Indivisa Manent Movement⁹.

Perhaps the most visible effort in terms of the number of people involved and the effective economic response it produced were the #LasalleCOVID and #LaSalleBeirut campaigns organized by the Secretariat for Solidarity and Development.¹⁰ Here, the Institute reacted as what it really is: a single body.

3. The search for greater closeness and accompaniment:

Confinement has sharpened our sensitivity to being close as well as the search for the intimacy that is necessary to ensure

a good accompaniment. In the Lasallian Region of Asia and the Pacific (PARC) the experience of online postulancy is carried out for young people in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The postulants live in a formation community in their respective countries, but meet periodically by videoconference for prayer, sharing and learning. The regional team of formators has been greatly strengthened by the participation of presenters from across the Institute, who engage with the postulants in a variety of interesting discussions. In Antilles-South Mexico, the communities assume a concrete commitment to establish a culture of prevention to counter violence and discrimination, and promote human rights.¹¹ Similar and interesting experiences of accompaniment in community are being carried out in the Lasallian District of the Far East (LEAD) with two different groups, one of adolescents and the other of adults. Topics addressed include: the Challenges of Lasallian Education today, the role of the Lasallian in Caring for the Earth, fostering Personal Relationships in advancing both the Mission and Human Fraternity in light of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti (FT).*¹² And in a face-to-face and virtual manner, Lasallians in Canada offer a space for accompaniment, formation and living together for young people who feel isolated. At the Youth Village in Saint-Augustinde-Desmaures, Quebec, workshops such as "Knowing how to live together," "Resilience," "Perseverance," and others, help them cope with the anxiety and stress associated with the pandemic.¹³

4. The concern for maintaining a quality education for all:

We are pleased to note that, although technology has helped to maintain and raise the level of quality and academic demands, the teacher has not lost sight of the ultimate goal of these changes: the The thirst for eternity has increased as the confinement is extended.

student. The "Benilde Global Campus" of the Lasallian Region of the United States and Canada (RELAN) could be an example of this type of initiative, since it encompasses all the educational activities of the more than fifty high schools in the Region.¹⁴ Some initiatives have a specific area of formation, such as that of the District of Lwanga, where an ambitious online program

on the Defense and Protection of Minors is being carried out in six African countries.¹⁵ But like these ones, we have received 20 other responses pointing out school support initiatives, in particular, in the area of teacher training: seminars, accreditation courses, conferences and workshops at different levels, national, regional or international.

5. Attention to fundamental spiritual needs:

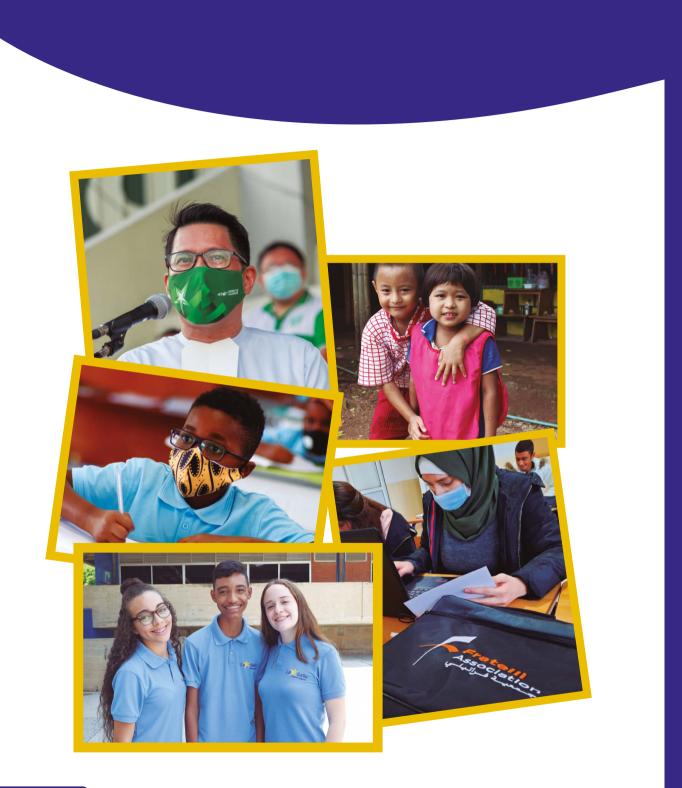
The thirst for eternity has increased as the confinement is extended. There has been a proliferation of proposals for prayer, for deepening one's faith, offers of innovative methods of spiritual motivation, programs

that emphasize the importance of meditation, the beneficial effect of spiritual direction, the richness of interreligious dialogue, etc. In most of the Districts the annual retreats of the Brothers were organized virtually, many of them with the presence and participation of lay people. Some examples: The Lasallian District of Eastern North America (DENA) also¹⁶ offers a space called SALT (Sharing a Lasallian Table); the District of Central America-Panama has two projects that provide positive feedback: "Vida Interior"¹⁷ and "Yo Me Sumo;"¹⁸ the District of San Francisco-New Orleans organizes online conversations and spiritual reading groups;¹⁹ the District of Italy holds monthly meetings for reflection and dialogue;²⁰ the Lasallian District of Spain and Portugal (ARLEP) has created a web page specializing in Lasallian spirituality.²¹

There are some Districts that have transformed the crisis into an opportunity for Vocation Ministry. ARLEP, for example, created the virtual space "We are La Salle" to present in a contemporary and suggestive way the Christian vocation and the different life options based on the Lasallian charism.²² Similar creative pastoral initiatives can be found in Argentina-Paraguay;²³in Bogota;²⁴ and in the Latin American Lasallian Region (RELAL), collaborating at the regional level with other religious congregations.²⁵

The Secretariat of Association for Mission has created an international and multi-religious group of Lasallian Spirituality that intends to be a "Laboratory of Ideas" (*think tank*) that offers formation and further development in living our own spirituality.²⁶

REFLECTION



6. Greater commitment to the educational service of those most in need:

The uncertainty of recent times has not made us doubt our charism; on the contrary, it has intensified our commitment to the education of young people, especially those most in need. The Secretariat for Solidarity and Development and the Lasallian community of Mozambique from the "Centro Educacional e Assistencial La Salle - CEALS" in Beira attracts, trains and organizes young volunteers to provide services in other schools to children and young people of the same age who are at risk. It makes them aware of children's rights and the advantages of staying in school and persevering.²⁷ In the United States, RELAN²⁸ and the DENA District promote the same values in what they call "the four pillars:" children's rights, racial justice, migration movements, and environmental justice. LEAD's "Kada Uno" project in the Philippines has been at the forefront of supporting the most vulnerable sectors with the development, production and distribution of clinical ventilators and face masks. The success of its initiatives has been enhanced by the participation of various NGOs, religious organizations, schools, young Lasallians and private companies that have the same objectives.²⁹

We know that, in the complexity of the world's problems, the examples mentioned in these six areas could only be described as *small* steps on the long road to utopia. Yes, but by walking them together we can proudly call them "small-big" steps because we have learned to see reality from another perspective. We now know that the key question is no longer "How can I solve this problem and get it off my chest?" but "How can I address this situation and do good for these people, and for future generations?"³⁰



3. MY EYES HAVE SEEN UTOPIA!

Changing the question by projecting it into the future is identified with the spirit of utopia. Walking towards a horizon makes us know intuitively that it is by walking that we will one day be able to reconcile humankind with itself, its brothers and sisters, its history, with nature, and with God. This spirit of utopia is very present in the Jewish tradition, in the vision of its prophets. Two of them, one named Simeon and the other named Anna, old, righteous and pious, who during their long lives were actively waiting for the restoration of Israel, saw "THE" Salvation where others saw just another baby (Cf. Lk. 2:22-40)³¹ They, without having seen that baby already grown and formed by his parents Joseph and Mary, without having heard his message, already identify him and make him known to others as the Light of all humankind: the utopia they longed for so many years is finally found in their old and rough hands.

Growing older and burdened—in addition to the years and their ailments—with life's difficulties and disappointments, can make people feel tired and without aspirations. The worst face of growing old is the lack of ideas for the future. This was not the case for these two elders: Anna and Simeon's hope in the utopia of salvation for all grew with age! Their future perspective fulfills the promise of another prophet, Joel, who centuries earlier assured that a time would come when God would pour out his Spirit "upon all flesh; and our sons and our daughters shall prophesy, our elders shall dream dreams, our youth shall see visions" (cf. Joel 2:28). If our old people do not dream, our young people will not be able to see any utopia on the horizon that invites them to keep on walking.

Pope Francis has told us that "a young person without utopias is an old person ahead of their time, aged before it was time. A utopia in a young person grows well if it is accompanied by memory and discernment. Utopia looks to the future, memory looks to the past, and the present is discerned. The most characteristic aspect of the young is utopia. Hence the insistence on the encounter between the old and the young."³²

This dynamic tension between memory and discernment that utopia produces is the axis around which our educational task revolves, whether to learn, to teach, or to form each other. John Baptist de La Salle also dreamed dreams in which he saw "that all people would not only come to the knowledge of the truth, but would also be saved" thanks to the timely presence of teachers who would contribute to this vision (Cf. JBLS, MR 193.3). Reason tells us that this attempt at salvation is utopian and that in the effort to carry it out, everything may be lost. But this utopia gives meaning to our existence, because it demands, against all odds, that the mission we carry out has a meaning and that we make it possible. This utopia gives meaning to our existence, because it demands, against all odds, that the mission we carry out has a meaning and that we make it possible.

Our youth will have vision if they see that their mentors dream similar dreams; if they see that in their educational community bringing education to the children and young people who are most marginalized in society is something that is "in the sight of all as a light that shines on all nations." Then we will know that we too "have already seen the salvation-utopia" and that we can now accelerate our steps towards it.

It is when the shadows of meaninglessness abound in society that the presence of that light becomes more necessary

and when it becomes more urgent that there are those who insist on walking, one or two steps further, towards the great utopias. In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis repeatedly points out how among the shadows that cloud the future of our society, indifference to those who are thrown by the wayside is a pandemic worse than that produced by COVID-19. Indifference and discouragement push the horizon away; on the contrary, the active hope of Simeon, Anne and John Baptist de La Salle, is a provocative inspiration to walk another ten

steps.



4 THE HORIZON, BEYOND...

It is true that the horizon continues to move ten steps away, but it is also true that the Lasallian utopia, little by little and from commitment to commitment, has motivated us to walk another ten steps further. The Global Education Pact "invites us to be protagonists (...), assuming a personal and community commitment, to cultivate together the dream of a humanism of solidarity, which responds to the hopes of humanity and the design of God. It encourages us to initiate processes of transformation without fear, looking to the future with hope."³³ We, from the typical Lasallian values, walk towards this horizon keeping this utopia alive, because we believe in a life that is worth living; we form a great community that makes us strong, and we are building new roads that bring us closer to the horizon of the O educational service of children and young people, especially the poor.

We believe in a life worth living

The pandemic has helped us to reflect on the "big questions" that we often ignore in the midst of the routine of daily life: Is it worthwhile to continue living as we have been living? Should I do more with the time, talents and resources that I possess? What is my contribution to the betterment of society?

As an institution, these recent times have also given us the opportunity to rethink existential questions: Are we doing our work ethically? Are we practicing the principles we preach? What is the main reason for our presence here and now? With our reflections and responses, we are discovering that utopia will grow and remain attractive to animate our steps if it is accompanied by remembrance and discernment.

The utopia we dream of today is reminiscent of the past. We can make our utopia a mission possible because we believe that it means:

To stand up for the right dialogue between justice and charity, without remaining silent in the face of unspeakable violence caused by discrimination and racism.

fraternity in this way:

Dreams, without commitment and ruptures; *Spirituality, without incarnation or prophecy;*

The mission, without the poor;

Money, without austerity and mercy;

Devotion to the Founder, without Following Jesus Christ;

The community, without awareness of reality.

In a poetic vein, borrowing Anthony de Mello's inspirational

The lecture that the Master was going to deliver on "The destruction of our utopia of fraternity" had been widely announced, and many

people came to the monastery gardens to listen to him. The conference

These are the things that will put an end to our utopia of fraternity:

concluded in less than a minute. All that the Master said was:

story "Humanity" we could adapt it to describe our utopia of

- To create an environment where every human being knows the role they play in the cosmos, without forgetting the anonymous victims who perish due to lack of respect for our mother earth.
- To fight against the status quo without surrendering to the way things are because of it.
- To recognize God's presence where good things happen for the poor, without being discouraged by the long waiting time.
- To firmly believe that we can live a life worth living, without being driven by anguish.

We form a great community that makes us strong

Our strength lies in the sense of community and belonging, fraternity and teamwork. The recent Declaration on the Educational Mission is clear in highlighting that what characterizes our educational processes is the role played

by the "community." The educational service of the poor always involves a pedagogical proposal based on fraternity, commitment to justice, promotion of equity and a clear conception of the Church inspired by synodality.



We build new roads

People are often surprised at how well they have managed their time in confinement. For many, the experience has left them better equipped to face future challenges. At the institutional and community level, we can also talk about this type of experience. It is not uncommon to meet people who, after undergoing these ordeals, have acquired a clearer image of themselves and the community to which they belong. Individuals and institutions have discovered skills. abilities new for resilience tolerance. and growth potential which they did not fully realize.

But the experience has not been the same for everyone. There are those who have reinforced or renewed old habits, or taken on negative or cynical roles that add to their frustrations. Circumstances have forced others to quit their job or

abandon seemingly brilliant projects. Confinement has even contributed to the increase in cases of family separations, domestic violence. child abandonment and femicides. The speed of communications has made us even more aware of racial, cultural and social discrimination, as well as the neglect of our common home and of other types of violence against indigenous cultures and peoples.

All of this brings with it the challenge of adaptating and innovating. The Lasallian utopia challenges us to build new and difficult roads with determination and enthusiasm. How can any of this be done? By implementing our Declaration on the Educational Mission. That is, by placing the person at the very core of the educational process.³⁴ Indeed, our charism has much to contribute to the world with a pedagogy that, in line with *Fratelli Tutti*, integrates in a more direct and clear way the meaning and significance of social existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, the conviction in the inalienable dignity of each person, and the motivation to love and welcome everyone (Cf. FT 86).



5 PRECISELY FOR THAT REASON UTOPIA IS USEFUL, TO WALK!

We have been deprived of our previous routines for many months and now, what is left for us? A number of them are not missed, at least not at the moment: conducting technical or administrative meetings by video conferences instead of in-person, for example, is a relatively straightforward matter. However, losing any model of action is disorienting and the loss of some of the usual or familiar models can even be disheartening, such as the opportunity to teach and learn on-site with teacher and peers in the same physical environment. Perhaps what we regret is the loss of certainty, the kind of certainty that familiar customs offer to those of us who live them out unquestioningly. Perhaps it is a search for safety, the kind of security that a child looks for in her

parents. Or an intimate longing for a reliable harbor in which to find peace of mind. Whatever the cause, we all find it difficult to accept that the reality of the world is unstable, changing, ephemeral. Without the comforting blanket of routine and habit, we have the opportunity and the obligation to do something extraordinary: to see the world as it is, and to understand and accept that our images will continue to change, not because they are wrong, but because we are becoming more and more equipped with better instruments of vision. Our reality does not become more unstable, it is just that our understanding of reality is, by necessity, a work in progress.³⁵

Looking to the past-memory and present-discernment, with hearts full of thanksgiving, Lasallians, together with their extensive network of human and Christian education on the five continents, look to the future-utopia and, with old Simeon in the Temple of Jerusalem exclaim: "Our eyes have seen your salvation!" (Lk. 2:30). Utopia is possible! In the small and in the humble, God has revealed Himself and continues to reveal to us the horizon of the new day in which the poor receive the Good News; the captives, liberation; the blind, sight; and the oppressed, freedom. We will be surprised by that new day as we walk many more steps.

6. PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

• The world we see around us seems to confirm that, no matter how far we walk, we will not reach the horizon of the utopia we desire. Being aware of these things is already a first step. Now, what can be our concrete contribution to the betterment of society?

Our predecessors, mentors, Brothers, parents, grandparents or teachers have dreamed dreams that they have somehow passed on to us. Which of those dreams motivate us to see a more positive future?

• We have qualities, knowledge, stories and experiences to share with others that are younger than us. What is the vision of the future that we want to communicate to them?

 Seeing the world as it is now helps us to understand and accept that the present reality will continue to change.
What must die in us to allow God to bring new things into existence in our environment? • The Lasallian utopia invites us to build new paths. What alternatives or proposals for innovation can we suggest to get closer to the horizon we envision together?



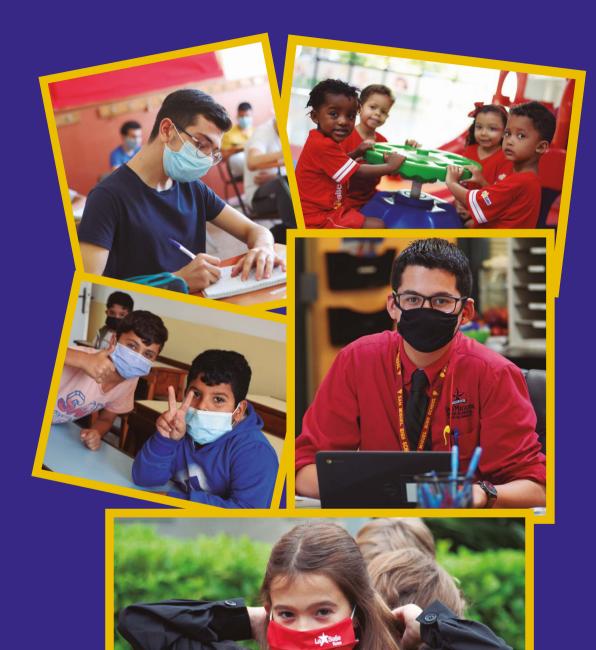


- ¹ Statistics: Oxfam America. 2020 Annual Report.
- ² Statistics: Phillip Morris "How a Virus and Social unrest became a Test of Our Humanity. National Geographic, November 2020.
- ³ Claudio Magris. Utopia and Disillusionment. Giuseppe Publishing House 1996.
- ⁴ Letter 54.8, *To Brother Roberto*, May 1, 1708.
- ⁵ Cf. Circular 470 "Towards the year 2021; Living Together our Joyful Mission" Rome, 2015.
- ⁶ https://champagnat.org/es/comunidad-fratelli-de-melilla-un-proyecto-conjunto-de-maristas-y-lasallistas-para-ayudar-inmigrantes/
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- ⁹ https://www.facebook.com/lasalleorg
- ¹⁰ De La Salle Solidarietà Internazionale ONUS: Homepage (lasallefoundation.org)
- ¹¹ https://www.lasalle.org.mx/comunidadsegura/
- ¹² www.lasalle-lead.org
- ¹³ http://villadesjeunes.com/
- ¹⁴ https://www.catholicvirtual.com/benildeglobal-campus-2/
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- ¹⁷ http://lasalleca.org/lasallistasenpascua
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- ¹⁹ https://delasalle.org/programs-events/ brothers-formation/
- ²⁰ http://www.lasalleitalia.net
- ²¹ https://espiritualidad.lasalle.es/
- ²² http://www.somoslasalle.com/

- ²³ Instagram @somoslasallanos and somoslasallanosparaguay
- ²⁴ https://www.youtube.com/ lasallecolombia
- ²⁵ http://www.relal.org.co/index.php/ uncategorized/1033-i-encuentro-virtual-de-pastoral-juvenil-y-vocacional
- ²⁶ https://www.lasalle.org/ profundizar-la-espiritualidad-lasaliana/
- ²⁷ https://www.facebook.com/ceals.lasalle https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/ceals
- ²⁸ https://lasallian.info/lasallian-higher-education-group-focuses-on-advocacy-and-social-justice/
- ²⁹ https://www.delasalle.ph/kadauno
- ³⁰ Cf. Richard Rohr, The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See (The Crossroad Publishing Company: 2009), 156-158.
- ³¹ Image taken from the site https://discover.hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/ When-God-Gives-You-the-Silent-Treatment.
- ³² Pope Francis. Address to the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. Rome, February 28, 2014).
- ³³ Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the launching of the Educational Pact. Rome, February 12, 2019
- ³⁴ Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission. Article 1. p. 117. Rome, 2020
- ³⁵ Cf. David P. Barash. Lost paradigms: How science changes. Letras Libres Magazine. April 2020.



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To learn more about the initiatives that respond to **"TO DREAM IS OUR WAY FORWARD!"** browse *http://www.lasalle.org* and our social networks lasalleorg

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LASALLIAN REFLECTION

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2020 - 2021 6. You are part of the miracle



Artist Vanessa Tremain has produced the illustrations - *https://www.mariatremain.com* The photographs are of Lasallian schools and ministries in different parts of the world which are sent by the Districts to be part of the archives of the Service of Communications and Technology Service in the Institute as well as the Secretariat for Solidarity and Development - Rome.

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It is available for use at www.lasalle.org

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