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Brothers of the Christian Schools

LASALLIAN DNA

BUILDING A

Fraternal World

Pedagogy of Fraternity, Pedagogy of Encounter

La Salle

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Lasallian Reflection No. 12

Building a Fraternal World

Pedagogy of Fraternity, Pedagogy of Encounter

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

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LASALLIAN DNA

BUILDING A FRATERNAL WORLD

Introduction

Sometimes the deepest lessons are not taught in the classroom but discovered along the way. This text is written in the form of a conversation between teachers and students, because when we walk alongside one another, distances are bridged and the distinction between teacher and learner disappears.
We become companions on a journey, moving in the same direction, sharing our questions and reflections.

This is the first step towards living fraternity: ***recognising one another as equals.***

We invite you, dear reader, **to join us on this journey,** because the following pages are not written merely to be read, but to be accompanied and shared.

And so it was that we began this quest to discover what, for us, is the most significant and essential aspect of La Salle. That is why, in this text, we offer you our vision, our experience, our precious pearl. But we also want to pose this very question to you, our reader:

what is most important to you about the *Lasallian Project?*

With your answer and ours, we can continue to write this shared story, encouraging others to discover La Salle, to live it out, and to continue making the Kingdom of God a reality through the Lasallian Educational Mission.

So let us begin our journey.

As we were travelling with some young Lasallians, they asked us: 'What is the most important thing about La Salle for you?' It was a brief, direct and, shall we say, fleeting question. We both looked at each other and thought: how do we answer this? How do we summarise such richness, such potential, such history, such a long journey?

We began to give an answer, and the first word that came to mind was FRATERNITY; a very short word, but one with great meaning. First of all, it is a concept that describes the deepest and most historic reality of La Salle, because it comes from the Latin *frater,* meaning brother. And that was what John Baptist de La Salle wanted from that first community gathered in 1682: that they should be brothers, that they should live as brothers, and that they should accompany the students as their elder brothers. But that was over 300 years ago. Now, for us: what does fraternity mean?

Fraternity means that I recognise the other as my brother, my sister, and, consequently, I love them, seek their well-being and ensure that they lead a fulfilling life and that their dignity is always respected. This leads us to build close relationships with people, to not rush past them so quickly that we do not even notice their presence.

The spirit of fraternity **encourages us to see every person we meet and never to be indifferent to someone who is suffering or in need.**

As educators, it invites us to train others in service and solidarity, because knowing that we are brothers and sisters leads us to reach out to others and seek diverse ways to build a better world.

As we continued to discuss and reflect on this, Luke's parable of the ten lepers came to our mind; this helps us to understand the experience of fraternity as a pedagogy of encounter:

> **As he continued his journey to Jerusalem, he travelled through Samaria and Galilee.**
> **As he was entering a village, ten lepers met (him).**
> **They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!**
> **And when he saw them, he said, Go show yourselves to the priests. As they were going they were cleansed.**
> **And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.**

**He was a Samaritan.
Jesus said in reply, ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?
Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God? Then he said to him, stand up and go; your faith has saved you". *(Lk 17: 11-19)***

In Jesus' time, lepers were not only invisible, but were completely marginalised and excluded; this was the requirement of Jewish law (cf. *Lev* 13 and 14). This situation left them living without hope, because in addition to their physical suffering, they experienced severe social exclusion. It was a form of psychological, social and spiritual suffering. The leper inspired fear and revulsion because of his severely disfigured appearance, the odour emanating from his body, and the danger of contagion. He was regarded as a despicable being who had to be avoided and whom it was permissible to abandon. In other words, there were many reasons to justify keeping one's distance from people with leprosy. Everyone understood that it was best for society if they were kept at a distance and if no one visited or helped them. It was a socially accepted decision for the good of all.

However, Jesus does not act according to society's expectations; he does not do what everyone expects. In both the text of Matthew (8:1-14) and Mark (1: 40-45), Jesus touches the leper and, by touching him, heals him. Jesus touches him. Can you imagine the situation? Imagine the smell, the ravaged body, the risk of infection.

Jesus transcends all that and sees only the person: a person in need of help, who needs to be shown unconditional love, a neighbour who needs to be shown closeness and fraternity. Surely the leper or lepers (depending on which

Gospel text we take as our reference) look at him in surprise and, sceptical, ask themselves: Is he really going to come near me? Me, whom everyone rejects? Can't he see that I am repugnant, that I provoke disgust? Jesus looks at him, approaches him with immense mercy and offers him healing. Along with this comes social reintegration: a new life where he can relate to people again, where he is no longer excluded, where he no longer feels marginalised.

What must have gone through the minds of the lepers at that moment? What must they have felt in their hearts? That encounter brought them salvation, it brought them the possibility of a new life, of returning to their loved ones, of being part of their people once more. And all because someone stopped, looked at them, touched them, met them and changed their lives.

How many situations in our daily lives and in the lives of those around us can continue to cause the effects of leprosy: psychological, social and spiritual pain.

The strength of fraternity, of walking side by side, of showing solidarity, is the call we receive every day to build bridges, to help heal others, to form a community, to be *leaven.*

The Gospel sets the course for the Lasallian school to set out on its journey and live fraternity in the manner of Jesus with the lepers; we are aware of the hard nature of this task, but it is indispensable in a Lasallian institution. It is our daily task.

Fraternity and Sisterhood

The journey continued, as did the questions: why is there so much talk of fraternity and not of sisterhood? The question took us by surprise once again. The first thing we said was: it is not a question of one word or the other.

It is both *fraternity and sisterhood*, for it is the person in their circumstances, in their reality, whom we wish to draw closer to, with whom we wish to walk.

But this question certainly forced us to reflect and to continue seeking answers.

Words are coined as humanity needs to name and make evident a certain reality. It is then that 'sisterhood' comes to highlight the richness of the bonds of support and solidarity among women, for which a more specific word is required. In this way, our vocabulary is enriched and now has the potential to be more precise when we wish to speak of bonds of love for one another.

Historically, the Lasallian world has used the concept of *fraternity* to express the noblest aspect of the human being: giving oneself to others in the pursuit of mutual growth. However, we must recognise that in certain contexts, it is a word associated with the masculine.

For this reason, history itself urges us to broaden our horizons with the *word 'sisterhood'* and, although it is not explicitly defined in Lasallian documents, the imperative of the full inclusion and recognition of women in the Lasallian Educational Mission is indeed expressed.

This reflects the application of fraternity to contemporary gender challenges, and we seek to honour the journey of women and their indelible mark throughout history.

As noted in the document *A Conversation for the Lasallian Family: Deepening Our Identity* (2020), women have been and remain a vital and integral part of the Lasallian Family and its mission throughout the world. Today, they make up more than half of our global workforce. But it is not just a matter of numbers; it is about recognising that women have offered and continue to offer a distinct contribution to the Lasallian mission because they foster a culture of caring for others, create safe spaces where we can all grow as people, and ensure we are not afraid to show our own vulnerability.

Nevertheless, speaking of sisterhood is also a challenge for women. It involves accepting the challenge of sharing

who each of us is, of not seeing the other woman as a rival, but as a fellow pilgrim whom we must care for, encourage and accompany.

Let us seize this opportunity to live out our *"together and by association"* with the awareness that we must always look after those most in need, without feeling that, to be well, we need to fly the flag of a cause that divides us or distances us from others.

Let us not erect walls that separate us from one another. Let us build *1LaSalle* that transcends borders and cultures, maintaining our commitment to faith and service through flexible networks and safe environments that foster reciprocity and responsible trust. Only in this way will we be certain that all of us – men and women, Brothers and lay people – are Lasallians who wish to respond fully to God's call to collaborate in the mission of embodying God's love for the children and young people we encounter day by day.

Ultimately, what characterises Lasallian fraternity and sisterhood is that unconditional and universal love which the Greeks called *Agape.* It is that self-sacrificing and committed love which focuses on the will rather than on feeling; which is characterised by the pursuit of the greatest good for the person, even at the cost of one's own sacrifice. It is the closest thing to the love that God has for us and which we wish to live out in the Lasallian community.

Pedagogy of Fraternity

Each of us was left pondering. It has been interesting to discuss this historical journey and the words that help or hinder us in seeing reality. Suddenly the silence is broken and we are told that there are still many questions to be asked. Everything we have said and what they know has been done helps them to understand a fundamental aspect of being Lasallian, but... what about today? What are we Lasallians doing to live fraternity in this changing and increasingly polarised world?

For some years now, we have been speaking of the "Pedagogy of Fraternity", a practice set out in the *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission* (2020). It is a very brief phrase, yet one of great depth that opens our eyes to many possibilities in how we understand our mission. It is an invitation to extend the fraternal experience of the religious community to all those with whom we share the educational field: students, educators, staff and families; in other words,

it is a call for fraternity to become the heart and soul of the *educational mission.*

This pedagogy aims to educate pupils so that they become builders of a society based on solidarity, one that listens, respects, is peaceful and chooses non-violence.

It is in the small details that fraternity is lived out. That is why being a Lasallian teacher, or simply being a Lasallian, means being fraternal, because we seek different ways to foster environments of mutual support and cooperation amongst the students. In this way, each student can progress at their own pace to acquire knowledge and become a better person. This experience of fraternity has been present since the early years as a distinctive Lasallian feature through the system of duties and tasks entrusted to students, to foster solidarity and mutual support. In today's world, this involves creating safe spaces where we recognise, respect and welcome one another as people;

where, beyond the image so carefully curated on social media, we are able to see and *connect with* those walking alongside us.

Fraternity today is an invitation for us to follow in Jesus' footsteps in his encounter with the lepers, and to be able to approach others with respect, tenderness, and mercy; not to be afraid to touch them, and to invite them from the bottom of our hearts to join a community that welcomes them, respects them and encourages them to live life to the full. However, fraternity is not merely a pastoral activity.

It also means *revealing my vulnerability* to my brothers and sisters on the journey;

allowing them to draw near to my 'leprosy' so that, through them, I may receive the love and salvation that God wishes to offer me. In this way, a channel is opened through which life in its fullness is manifested and communicated to the extent that we recognise and live as brothers and sisters.

Another very important aspect of the pedagogy of fraternity is accompaniment. Particular attention must be paid to human relationships in every Lasallian work so that they become deep, personal and warm. Only in this way can we live the 'pedagogy of the heart' which seeks to 'win the hearts' of the children, showing the student authentic, committed and selfless love.

It is a love and care that encompasses *"tenderness of a mother and firmness of a father"* because it always seeks a balance to maintain dignity and mutual respect; support and personal responsibility.

The quality of this fraternal relationship is a path of humanisation, liberation and evangelisation, which helps the pupil to overcome their limitations and fears and to gradually discover what they are called to be.

Fraternity is essential for personal growth because it acts as an axis between mission and community; between the 'I' and the 'we'. It transforms the mission into tangible actions and builds the community day by day as a reality inspired by the Gospel. A reality composed of light and shadow and which is always in the process of conversion.

As Torralba (2011) points out, fraternity is a driving force for transformation, conceived as a holistic attitude which, in our case, transcends the school setting and becomes a way of life. Through it, the formation of "good citizens and true Christians" is fostered. For this reason, and since the time of De La Salle, an essential component of this formation has been "Politeness and Christian good manners", considered the human foundation for life in society. This must also be contextualised for the present day. De La Salle highlighted the importance to these aspects as a concrete expression of charity; it is a way of recognising the dignity of the other person and my awareness that God dwells within them.

In today's world, which is caught between the digital and the physical, "good manners" are a way of building bridges that allow us to remember that behind a screen or a face there is a person whom I am called to see as my brother and sister.

Lasallian education **seeks to eradicate violence and aggression in society; therefore, the aim of our formation is for students to behave in a calm, serene and respectful manneboth inside and outside school.**

This way of being in society is the visible testimony of the education received. It is a commitment that is reflected in the development of a supportive fraternity that seeks equal opportunities, integration, respect for every person, warmth in relationships and the formation of communities that work for the common good.

The emphasis on gentleness and sensitivity is an essential feature of the *pedagogy of fraternity.*

These two virtues, which might seem old-fashioned, take on a renewed urgency today; they are the necessary antidote to counteract the culture of shouting, cancellation and disposable treatment. Pope Francis warns that "we are still 'illiterate' when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies" (*Fratelli tutti,* 64), a deficiency that fraternal education seeks to remedy at its root.

Inspired by this vision, De La Salle believed that, to live and educate in fraternity, the educator must make no distinction between pupils and must love them all, with a preference for the most impoverished. In the current context, the battle is not only against explicit violence, but also against indifference and the objectification of people and their relationships.

For this reason, the pedagogy of fraternity presents itself as a *counter-cultural proposal.*

It is not limited to theory, but strives to look at people, welcome them and care for them regardless of their situation.

Ultimately, this pedagogy takes the form of love that "enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity" (*Fratelli tutti*, 62).

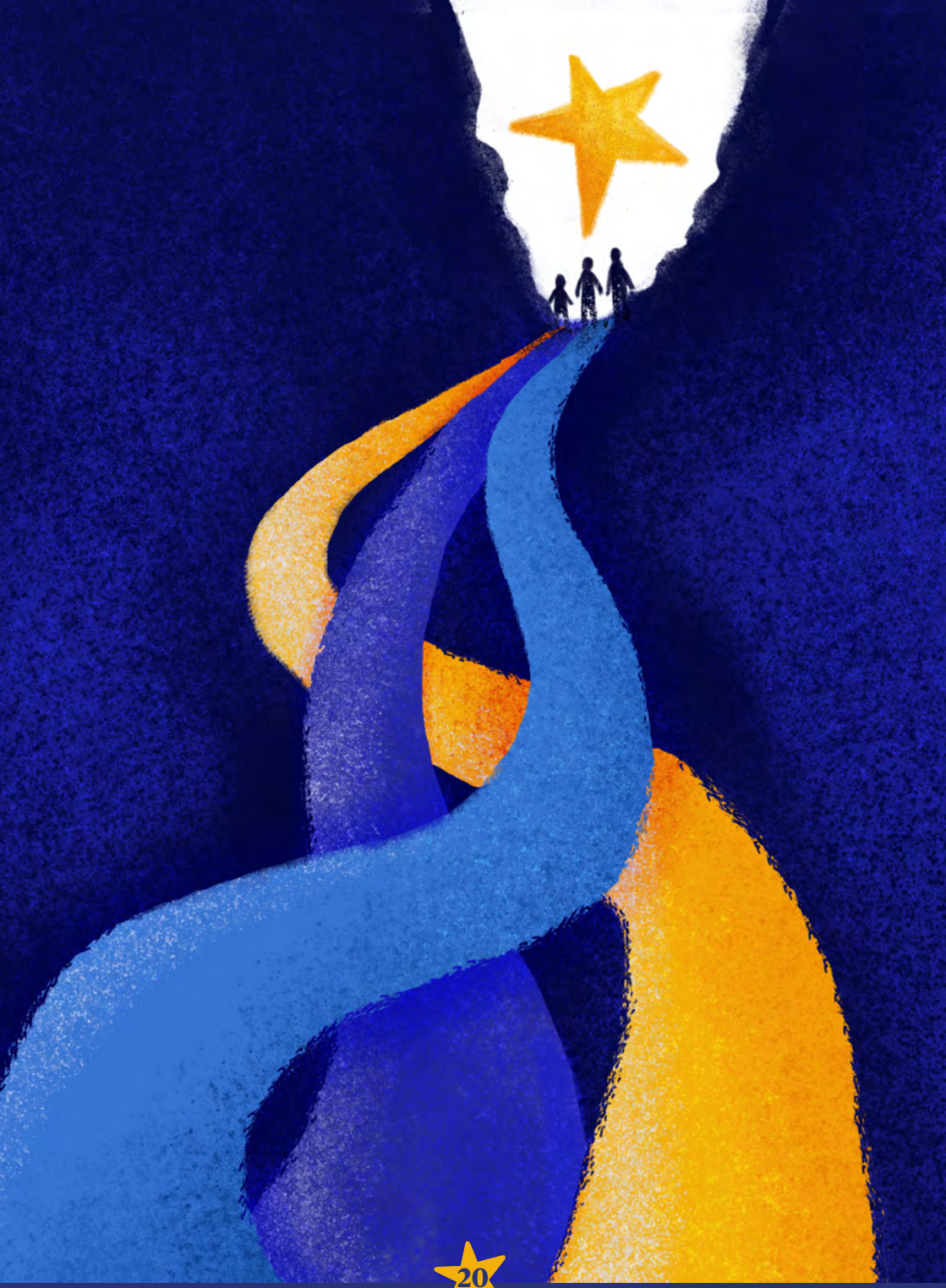
Education for fraternity is a response to the crisis of care and the lack of meaning afflicting the world, as its development is closely linked to the acquisition and lived experience of values such as peace, justice, solidarity, human dignity and, crucially, interiority. The experience of interiority is the antithesis of violence and indifference and is cultivated through reflection, examination of conscience and the "frequent remembrance of God's presence".

Lasallian education today is called to form students in the meaning of life, and this is achieved through the *experience of fraternity;* when a person feels part of a community, recognised, welcomed and loved for who they are.

To generate such environments, the educator must cultivate a culture of deep, respectful attention that enables them to accompany their students so that they may live their daily lives as a place of salvation, as a sacred space in which they

can encounter God and be a presence of God for others. This care helps the Lasallian to develop critical thinking and discernment; skills necessary for analysing situations, unmasking the causes of injustice and finding original responses to educational needs.

Fraternity, **therefore, is a sign that another world is possible; it is a call to hope and a commitment to people, especially the most needy and vulnerable. It is a choice of encounter, communion and solidarity.**



The Fraternal Exercise of Synodal Leadership

And the dialogue continued. All this sounds impressive, yet who is responsible for making it happen?

How do we ensure that the Lasallian school becomes a *"laboratory of fraternity"?*

We like this question, as we realise that the topic has interested you greatly and you are seeking ways to make it a reality in your school and in your lives. Moreover, it is all the more interesting because, for fraternity to become a reality, it is indispensable that we all commit to building it at every moment and wherever we find ourselves.

The community is responsible for ensuring environments of fraternity, but we must remember that the community is all of us. To help us, the Church has provided us with an excellent framework by speaking to us of synodality as an experience of participation and of communal discernment of God's will for our lives. This sounds a bit complicated, but it is very simple to understand.

Fraternity and synodality are two sides of the same coin. Fraternity is the bond that unites us, because we are, and recognise ourselves as, brothers and sisters to one another.

Synodality **is the way we walk together; it is fraternity set in motion.**

Because we live as brothers and sisters, we are willing to listen to one another, to respect one another, to sit at the same table and engage in dialogue; to find value in what the other says, even if we do not always agree with it; to decide together and to commit to the decisions taken.

Thus, fraternity becomes a call from God to go out and meet others, those who are furthest away, those who do not think as we do, to share with them the path of service, solidarity and encounter. Lasallian Association is the legacy that De La Salle left us to live out the mission that unites us. In 'together and by association' we can find the roots of both fraternity and synodal leadership; although in De La Salle's time it was not conceptualised in this way.

In "together" lies the communal dimension, that is, a fraternal way of sharing life. This implies the recognition that the educational mission to which we are called is too great to be carried out by a single person. But it is also the certainty, set out in the *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission* (2020), that the community "is the one that educates, that strengthens its members, that cares for the weak and nourishes their spirit". Fraternity transforms

a group of people who are together into a community where the mission, life and experience of God are shared.

In the phrase "by association" we can find an echo of synodality, because it implies a co-responsible community where discernment is practised and leadership is exercised through participation, listening and mutual commitment. We can speak of synodal leadership when the entire community takes on the role of inspiring society in the building of the Kingdom of God, bearing Christian witness, and fostering relationships of responsible trust and compassionate mercy to prioritise the care and transformation of vulnerable or violent environments into spaces of growth and fraternal development.

The Lasallian Mission, which seeks to be leaven for a more fraternal world, is energised by integrating these processes of leadership, fraternity and shared responsibility into management, planning and formation.

The ultimate aim of this pastoral approach of walking together, synodally, is to move beyond self-referentiality and extend *universal fraternity,* forming multiple, diverse and flexible networks at the service of humanity, where each and every one of us is important and called to be witnesses and mediators of God's love for others.

Environments of Fraternity

(THE LEAVENING MOVEMENT)

And how can we involve the whole community in building fraternal environments?

To answer this question, we need to consider that a fraternal environment, whilst very important as a formative agent, is not an end in itself. It is not enough to have safe and pleasant spaces where we all feel very comfortable. It is necessary for that experience to become a force that leads us to want this not only to exist in our Lasallian settings, but to become increasingly common in the different environments in which we move. To this end, we must commit ourselves to building it.

The *Leavening Movement* represents this commitment of Lasallians who choose to live fraternity in an active and contagious way as an expression of their faith, as a vocational choice and as a permanent mission.

The Leavening Movement uses the Gospel metaphor that defines the essence and methodology of the mission. The image of the yeast, taken from Luke 13: 20-21, symbolises something small, hidden, yet essential for making a large

dough rise. Yeast acts "from within, from below, from close by". This reflects the pedagogy that God follows in the dynamic of the Incarnation and the way in which the Association for Mission, through the formation of fraternal communities, can become a transforming presence that challenges injustice and proposes more humane ways of living together, relating to one another and living.

The 46th General Chapter (2022) noted that

> **"we are one Lasallian Family, with diverse vocations; *leaven for a more fraternal world,* sent forth to encounter God in those who are poor, and to promote justice".**

This vision invites us to transcend our pastoral choices and address new forms of poverty, so as to discover there the place where God awaits us. We are called to be communities that go out and communities that send forth, because each of their members becomes leaven, a distinct "point in the dough", according to their situation and vocation.

The Leavening Movement, by opting for a pastoral and synodal way of "walking together", seeks to renew the vocation of the Lasallian Family by overcoming self-referentiality and understanding that Association is a way of living in communion for the mission. This therefore implies an inner transformation, a conversion leading to a profound commitment.

The key question guiding this movement is **"where is your brother? where is your sister?".** This implies a process of conversion that leads us all, Brothers and lay people, to accept our own frailties and vulnerabilities so as to allow the Holy Spirit to act through us and make us his mediators,

to redirect our mission towards the peripheries – geographical, economic or existential – , thereby reaffirming the Lasallian commitment to educational service for the poor and abandoned.

Universal Fraternity Through the Lasallian Mission

Having spoken of fraternity, community and mission, what is their scope? How far must we go? Fraternity is universal.

Lasallian Mission is founded on the *recognition of the inalienable dignity* of every person; a central principle that resonates with Pope Francis' call to love one another beyond geographical or religious boundaries.

Today, this universal fraternity is the horizon towards which the Lasallian Mission is moving, where it is no longer enough simply to be brothers within the school. We must overcome institutional individualism, weave a global network of hope, and go out to the peripheries to seek out those who, for various reasons, cannot reach our ministries. Fraternity encompasses care for our common home and incorporates integral ecology as part of our mission, in the awareness that the consequences of climate change and economic and social problems affect the most impoverished first.

Unlike a world governed by the logic of relationships based on self-interest,

Lasallian Association is a *"communion for mission"* that seeks to transform the stranger into a neighbour, breaking down the walls of exclusion, fear, indifference and violence to build a great family where everyone can feel at home.

Fraternity places human relationships – characterised by tenderness, warmth and courtesy – at the heart of the educational process, thereby transforming the Lasallian into a 'peacemaker' who fosters a culture of encounter in the face of the aggression, indifference and individualism of today's world.

Lasallian education is not neutral; it is a "humanism of solidarity" that deliberately chooses the educational service of the poor as the core of its mission, seeing in the faces of the vulnerable the saving power of God and the opportunity *to build a civilised and fraternal society.*

The Lasallian network is configured as a web of flexible and universal networks which, whilst walking in awareness of its own vulnerabilities, seeks to transform inner life in order to generate collective processes of justice, solidarity and care for our 'common home'.

Connection to the Institute's Current Projects

The journey continues, and so do the questions. However, at this point we wish to conclude this dialogue with an invitation to you, the reader.

In all Lasallian ministries, you will find fraternal traits and signs that embody everything we have shared. Nevertheless, it seems that it is on the peripheries where these signs take on greater relevance; not because they are better, but probably because of the contrast with their surroundings.

When, in an environment rife with insecurity, uncertainty, ignorance and violence, someone kindles the light of fraternity to seek out those most in need, the marginalised, the isolated and the despised, the importance of small acts that make a huge difference becomes clear.

It is beyond borders, on the peripheries, in the Leavening Movement, where Lasallian ministries stand as beacons of fraternity, because they serve those most in need wherever they may be, standing in solidarity with them to improve their environment and make it once again habitable and welcoming.

We Lasallians, together with the Marists, have established the Fratelli communities. Its name already embodies its main mission: to live fraternity in the exercise of charity towards those most in need, cultivating – whether in Lebanon or Colombia – the seed of human and fraternal relationships that form communities where everyone knows where their brother and sister are, understands their reality, feels their pain when the other suffers, and makes decisions always with the other's good in mind.

The Leavening Movement and the Fratelli Project are two Lasallian gems among many others. We invite you, dear reader, wherever you may be, to share with us:

where have you found your brother, your sister?

In this way, together, we will strengthen this network of fraternity, knowing that in different parts of the world we are striving to live fraternity in its many forms: in listening, in sharing what we have, in respect, in forgiveness, in kindness, in dialogue, in the search for peace, and in building spaces of encounter and welcome.

And how do you live fraternity?

References

Our Lasallian heritage has consistently reaffirmed, through its writings, that the experience of fraternity is at the heart of our charism. In this spirit, we list the sources consulted for this text, drawn from the immense documentary wealth of our history.

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