



3. Communities of faith

**The Mission calls to
Communion**

3.0 The sign of community

In the Lasallian story a fruitful dialogue between Mission and Communion has been kept alive from the beginning:

- the Mission calls to Communion;
- Communion grows and becomes enthusiastic in serving the Mission;
- Communion makes itself a message for the Mission;
- the Mission produces Communion among those who come to serve it.

This dialogue makes itself effective and concrete between the educational works and the communities. It is there that the dynamism is produced which is, perhaps, the most decisive and prophetic characteristic of the Lasallian charism: living community as a response to the Mission of educating the poor, children and the young. The sign of community is probably the best indicator of a Lasallian project. It is not about “a type of community” but rather a community dynamism which, first of all, creates bonds between persons and then simultaneously, structures itself into diverse forms of community, according to the culture, personal processes, identities.... and arising from the invitations which the Spirit proposes to us. The same dynamism produces the communion between the different communities, giving rise to the District community, or to the diverse Lasallian Institutions, Societies or Fraternities.

The dynamism of communion is like blood which

spreads through the whole Lasallian body to nourish it and make the cells grow; it is the spirituality of communion which gives life to Lasallian Association.

The Lasallian community in its multiple forms whether at local level – the small community – or at District or Regional level – the community of communities – is the place where communion is learnt, it is the place where association is lived and learnt, since this is in the Lasallian sense, association: communion for the mission.

We can try to make a provisional “typology” of the new Lasallian communities, which are being added to the traditional ones of Brothers and Sisters. We are not considering here the formal bond of association, but rather association a lived fact.

1. There are Christian and Lasallian communities that are united in the charism with the Institute, although without explicit ties of association. Even while maintaining their autonomy, they develop bonds of communion with the body of the particular district. Their community structure takes on various forms; in some cases it may be the moments of encounter either in a weekly or a bi-weekly meeting while reserving more intense moments or longer periods of sharing for scheduled times of the year. There are also cases of Christian and Lasallian communities living in common under the same roof, with a daily rhythm of community prayer and a high level of communication and the sharing of goods, all of which is motivated by the Lasallian mission of



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education. Oftentimes these faith-based communities are formed within the existing educational communities, or rather side by side with a particular Lasallian educational work, and they offer their cooperation in various ways.

But as frequently happens the Lasallian charism causes them to find new needs and provides them with the initiatives to invent new responses and begin new works of education.

2. There are also **Lasallian Communities** formed with the adherents of different religions. It is the mission that unites them, the desire to give a response to the needs of the poor, and that finds them laboring together in the Work of the Lord. Many elements of Lasallian spirituality help them to find meaning to what they are living, even though each one may add the perspective of his or her own faith. For all of them John Baptist de La Salle is a teacher of life and spirituality. This kind of pluri-confessional community for the mission is an example that the Spirit and his presence in our midst are at work through the Lasallian charism, even beyond the limits of the Institutional Church.

3. **The Lasallian Volunteers:** This movement may be described as an experience of temporal association in which the volunteers gratuitously place themselves at the service of the Lasallian mission of education for the duration of at least one year (or a school term). The richness of the experience comes from being lived and accompanied in community while receiving the lights of Lasallian spirituality. This type of experience, besides its own positive aspects, may open the door to a more lasting association either as a religious or a dedicated lay person.

4. **Mixed communities**, formed by Brothers, Lay Educators (married or single) and Volunteers. Usually these communities take shape in order to give a response to the felt needs of the Lasallian mission of education. At times they are joined to a particular school, such as in the case of the San Miguel Schools in the United States. Other



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times it may mean a community "of insertion", that is, situated in a social milieu of especial necessity, either in an urban barrio or in a rural area, in order to feel from within the needs related to education and provide effective and global answers.

Later we will present some examples of the new Lasallian communities. In other parts of this Bulletin you will find more examples, presented from other perspectives of Association.

Br. Antonio Botana

3.1a The Signum Fidei: pioneers in Lay association

When the first group of lay partners who wished to commit themselves to a new expression of the Lasallian charism in the world went about looking for a name, they did not have much difficulty deciding on “**Signum Fidei**”. It came almost naturally. The phrase, found in Institute insignia, would underscore their deep bond with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. More importantly, the words “Signum Fidei” captured what they wanted to be: **signs of faith** in the world of education.

But what led to the formation of the group that eventually chose that name? Everything began when Br. Jose Pablo Basterrechea, then Vicar General, came to realize that he had heard a recurring idea emerging in various ways in the course of his travels. Br. Manuel Olivé recalls Br. Jose Pablo saying that Lasallians from far-flung areas of the world had been saying to him: “We would like to draw closer to the Brothers, not only to their ministry, but, and above all, to their spirit. We desire a deeper Christian life, but with a Lasallian accent. We are willing to bind ourselves more closely to the Institute in some form of commitment that will have a Christian and educational dimension.”¹

Words soon turned into action. Br. Paulus Adams, Assistant Superior General, was asked to explore the idea in depth. Br. Manuel Olivé, who was based in Rome as Moderator of the International Alumni Federation, volunteered his help, and, as we know all too well from the Founder’s story, “one step led to another”. Finally on June 5, 1976, this new expression of the Lasallian charism came to birth. The pioneer group of eleven, coming from several countries of Europe, made their first consecration in the presence of the Brothers gathered for the 40th General Chapter. The felicitous name proposed by Br. Paulus, “Signum Fidei,” summarized their mission and vocation.

Although international in character from the very start, that first group of lay Lasallians did not know that they were blazing a new path towards

the exciting horizon of the Lasallian Family that we see ahead of us today, some twenty-five years later. The attention that the 43rd General Chapter gave to “Association” and “Associates” in 2000 ratified the intuition sensed by Br. Jose Pablo, and the then Superior General, Br. Charles Henry, that the ferment that they had experienced in the Lasallian world in the mid-70’s was in fact the stirring of the Holy Spirit.

The Growth of the Association

According to statistics gathered in 2002, Signum Fidei (SF) numbers about 1,000 members spread in some 30 countries around the world, with the largest concentration found in Latin America, followed by the Near East and Asia.

In the Americas, Peru has by far the largest concentration, with some 400 members, including a sizable group of Signum Fidei youth. This is hardly surprising since Br. Manuel Olivé continues animating the group there with his indefatigable, charismatic presence. Less numerous groups thrive in Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. A sizable group exists in the United States, whereas in Canada the numbers have dwindled considerably.

In the Near East, SF has a significant presence in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt, while in the Far East they are in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

Europe’s SF communities are found in Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Malta, while one member lives in France. In Africa-Madagascar, Signum Fidei has spread to Equatorial Guinea, Togo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Madagascar.

This expansion appears to have come about largely through the efforts of individual Brothers who took the initiative in starting up SF communities

in their countries. As a result, it is true to say that SF has developed differently in different countries, often in accord with the focus given it by the Brother who started the group. In some countries the majority of the SF are teachers or school personnel, while in other countries most of the members are alumni, parents of former students, or retired teachers. These differences can also be attributed to the loose structure of coordination that Signum Fidei has relied on over the years.



Brothers' religious vows, the Signum Fidei commit themselves "to further, uphold, and defend the integral education of young persons and adults, especially of those who have strayed from the way of salvation."⁶ In addition to this general commitment, the Signum Fidei further specify in their own words how they intend to carry out that general commitment, clearly making the mission of "human and Christian education" a constitutive element of their vocation.

The Signum Fidei Vocation

By recognizing the Signum Fidei as "Associates" in the current richer understanding of that word, the 43rd General Chapter affirmed Signum Fidei's fidelity to the five characteristics by which the Chapter described an Associate.² These characteristics are in fact spelled out in various articles of the "Style of Life" and the "Vademecum," the foundational documents that guide this open community of committed Lasallians.

The 1994 edition of the SF "Style of Life" describes the members as "adult lay Christians with a special call from God" who "use the life of St. John Baptist de la Salle as their method of living according to what is found in the Gospel."³ Three essential elements make up the Signum Fidei vocation: a consecration that expresses their desire to live out their baptismal commitment with greater determination, an apostolic commitment to education, and personal witness as a member of a faith community.⁴

Consecration Linked to Ministry

Patterned after the vow formula of the Brothers, the Signum Fidei consecration begins with the same words of consecration to the Holy Trinity. The SF renew their baptismal consecration by offering themselves "to procure God's glory as far as they are able and as God will require of them."⁵

However, when it comes to spelling out the specifics of that consecration, instead of the

Signum Fidei: Members of a Faith Community

The SF members live an "open" community life. They reside on their own or with their families but regularly come together with the other members for prayer and ongoing formation. Whenever possible, they carry out their ministries together. The frequency and content of the meetings are determined by the members at the beginning of each year.

The bond of association among the members is expressed in the consecration formula by the words, "I unite myself with the other members of the Signum Fidei Association..."⁷



Deep bond with the Institute

From its very origins Signum Fidei has sought to maintain strong bonds with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In describing the founding moments of SF, Br. Manuel Olivé said:

“By unanimous decision we affirmed the close ties between us, the spirit of de La Salle, and our newborn family with the Brothers’ Institute; and as a consequence, Faith and Zeal would be the two motives that would inspire those who were to join this new community, which we wanted to be open, Lasallian, and lay.”⁸

The “Style of Life” makes that close relationship with the Brothers’ Institute more specific by requiring Brother Visitor’s approval before an Aspirant makes the first act of consecration. In addition, it is the Visitor who is responsible for appointing the Moderator(s) or Animator(s) of the SF communities.

This brings up one of the challenges facing Signum Fidei today. In some instances the Visitors find it difficult to identify Brothers who have the time and the interest to serve as SF Moderators. Although it is possible to name experienced SF members as Moderators, the preference continues to be for Brother-Moderators. But with the problems of ageing and lack of manpower in some Districts, finding Brothers to serve as Moderators is becoming increasingly problematic for some Visitors.

Some Other Challenges to the Signum Fidei Today

Lack of knowledge or understanding. Even if it is the “first-born,” so to speak, among the groups of Lasallian lay associates, Signum Fidei does not appear to be sufficiently known or understood in many sectors of the Institute. This lack of knowledge is one of the reasons why the association has not grown more rapidly.

Sometimes this lack of knowledge, or at least a lack of appreciation, can occur in Districts where Signum Fidei has already established communities. Changes in District leadership or in local school leadership can bring about negative or positive effects on the relationship between the SF

and the District or the school, depending on the new leadership’s attitudes towards the ministries carried out by the SF members, particularly when these ministries have a separate identity. The challenge for both parties, then, is to continually seek ways of strengthening the bonds between SF and the District, as envisioned from the origins, so that SF can be fully integrated into the mission of the District or its educational centers.

“Competing” forms of association. In much the same way as the first-born child ceases being the center of attention when a newborn enters the family, today Signum Fidei is in danger of being left aside as attention is drawn to the new and varied expressions of Association emerging in the Lasallian Family.

Unlike the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who was not “at home” in his father’s house, the challenge to the SF members, it would seem, is to continue to be confident of their role as first-born among the groups of lay associates, and to continue playing a vital role in the Districts where they are present. To do this, the SF members need to be deeply convinced of the validity and importance of their vocation, and zealously continue inviting others to this tried and tested way of living Lasallian association.

As “older brothers,” the SF members are called upon to set the example of what it means to live as Lasallians who have made a public commitment to the Lasallian mission. In addition, SF members have an important message to share with the rest of the Lasallian Family based on their lived experience of the past twenty-five years.

Initial and continuing formation. The need for solid, developmental formation programs for partners and associates is often listed as a high priority throughout the Lasallian world today. For Signum Fidei to retain its spiritual vitality, it, too, must constantly direct its energies to the initial and continuing formation of its members, offering them a strong foundation upon which to build a lasting commitment to the Lasallian mission. The scarcity of Brothers available for the animation and ongoing formation of SF communities underscores the seriousness of this challenge.

Coordination. Since its inception, the responsi-

bility for coordinating the SF at the international level has been entrusted to a Brother appointed by the Superior General. This Brother invariably had other full-time responsibilities that competed for his attention. As a result, the international coordinator mainly concentrated on circulating news about the Association worldwide and sending out spiritual reflections. Perhaps the time has come to explore other ways of coordinating and fostering greater union among the SF communities worldwide.

Finances. A more mundane challenge confronting Signum Fidei both internationally and at the local levels, is that it possesses no funds of its own. While the Districts have generally been very generous in providing for the financial needs of the SF in their respective sectors, SF needs to grow away from financial dependence on the Districts, and even from the Brothers' Institute. This financial self-sufficiency will enable SF to strengthen its network and embark on new initiatives in the service of the Lasallian mission.

Response to the Challenges

Next year twenty SF members and five Brother-Animators representing Signum Fidei groups from all over the world will come together for the First International Signum Fidei Assembly. For the first time in their history the SF members themselves will have the opportunity to chart the future of their worldwide association. It should be noted that this historic event will take place in the context of the new vitality that the Lasallian Family is experiencing all over the world as more and more



partners and associates make the Lasallian mission their own.

As pioneers in the “promised land” of formally-structured groups of lay associates, Signum Fidei continues walking forward with hope—hope, not for itself, but for the mission that the Church has entrusted to the Lasallian Family. But above all, hope for the young people of the world, especially the poor, who need signs of faith, true “Signum Fidei,” to guide them towards fullness of life.

*Br. Victor Franco,
General Counselor
SF Animator*

¹ Hno. Manuel Olivé, *Cartas a Un Signum Fidei*, #3. Lima 1996.

² The Documents of the 43rd General Chapter (Circular 447), pp. 4-5. Rome 2000.

³ Signum Fidei Association, *Style of Life*, #3, p. 5. Rome 1994.

⁴ *ibid.*, #8, p. 5

⁵ *ibid.*, #54, p. 13

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *idem.*, *Cartas* #3

3.1b The Signum Fidei Fraternity

The groups that comprise the **Signum Fidei Fraternity** are, first and foremost, communities of faith that live the Lasallian charism based on their “Style of Life.”

– Many of the Signum Fidei groups are built around an educational work which depends on the Brothers’ Institute, but more and more there are Signum Fidei groups which, while always in communion with the District, are setting up educational and catechetical works and on their own initiative, normally to respond to the needs of the poor.

This is the case for the Signum Fidei of Peru, which administers three schools for more than 1,200 poor boys and girls; it is also the case for the Signum Fidei of Colombo (Sri Lanka), which administers an educational work on the outskirts of the city of Colombo, in a very poor population; and it is the case for the Signum Fidei of the Philippines, which administers various educational projects for poor families, and these projects are supported by other works within the District.

– Participants in Signum Fidei groups tend to be teachers, administrators, members of leadership or maintenance teams in educational works, married or single; but other persons also participate who, while not connected in their work or office to educational works, feel attracted by vocation to

education and/or catechesis, in very diverse forms.

– There are many reasons for starting a Signum Fidei group. The group in Tulsa, Oklahoma (USA), made up of 17 persons who are closely connected to Bishop Kelley High School, expressed their reasons which led them to begin this adventure eight years ago:

“Many of us wanted to assure that the Lasallian charism would still remain in place at such time that the Brothers would not be present at all. Some members of the staff had attended Buttimer (the Lasallian Formation Center for de US-Toronto Region) and we knew that we needed to formalize the group to better prepare for increased Partner responsibility for the mission of the school.”

As for why Signum Fidei, it is primarily because that was what was available to us in a recognized way. We wanted something beyond an informal association. Instead of trying to develop our own system, we decided to use what was in place and recognized by the Institute.

The group provides accompaniment for the members which assists them in becoming more aware of and committed to their own Lasallian identity.”

– How does a Signum Fidei group help its members take on the Lasallian identity? This response comes from the Philippines:

“Basically, the Signum Fidei encourages the members to exemplify the life and mission of the Founder and inspires the members to embrace the Lasallian spiritually as the focal point of their formation process. In their group sessions, cell meetings, assemblies, retreats and/or recollection, the members emphasize the Lasallian mission of touching hearts and transforming lives. Each group is encouraged not only to enhance the personal and spiritual life of each member but help others improve their lives, especially those who have less in life. Thus, each group is encouraged to have formal or informal apostolate activities that will help improve community life.”



– But this identity is not an experience that stays inside each person. The Signum Fidei groups attempt to project the Lasallian identity into the educational work in which they are present. This is the life experience which is found in the Signum Fidei group in Tulsa, as expressed by Marianne Stich:

“Many members of the group are the people who are beginning to understand the sharing of responsibility for the future of the Lasallian charism. I think that all the members of the group are committed to ensuring that the Lasallian identity of the school is obvious in decisions, financing, and general education. There are varying levels of understanding of just what that means, but I believe that the members of the group are committed to the Lasallian way of educating.”

– How does one who aspires to become a member of Signum Fidei become involved in a particular group? The processes are varied. Let us see how some groups in the Philippines describe the process:

“Those who come into the Signum Fidei circle share experiences to help improve their spiritual life and persevere in their apostolic commitment. One or two years of aspirancy life equip the prospective members with the readiness to formally join the association. Aspirants formally declare their intention to join the Association in appropriate ceremonies. Aspirants join the consecrated members in the formation activities like workshops, cell meetings, retreats and/recollections where they study the life of the Founder, improve their spiritual life, share faith experiences, determine how they can adopt an apostolic work/activity, and how they can persevere in their commitment. After one year of aspirancy, the aspirant then formally declares in writing his/her readiness to join the Association during the consecration ceremonies in the presence of the National Animator and Brother Visitor.”

– The “consecration” made by members of Signum Fidei, is it a type of “religious life” consecration, such as that of the Brothers?

The first thing that must be said is that we are talking about an authentic consecration of the lay Christian, who renews his/her baptismal consecration in order to live it based on the Lasallian

charism and commitment. It should not be understood as a type of “religious life” consecration, along with “vows,” in the style of the Brothers. The “Signum Fidei” consecration is done “within” the secular life.

How is this consecration expressed? The groups from the Philippines express the ritual that they use for their consecration in the following way (see the formula elsewhere in the Bulletin):

“Declaration of one’s commitment to the Signum Fidei Association is done publicly in an appropriate ceremony in the presence of the National Brother Animator and Brother Visitor. The member expresses his/her desire to be consecrated or to renew his/her consecration for a period of one year formally in writing. The aspirant also expresses his/her desire to join the aspirancy program. The consecration formula is recited during the ceremony. A Signum Fidei pin is conferred by the National animator and Brother Visitor on those who are newly consecrated. All those who join the ceremony, the aspirants, those renew their consecration and the newly consecrated members affix their signatures in the Signum Fidei logbook.

Efforts are geared so that members sustain their commitment. In the cell meetings, regional and national assemblies discussions on how this goal can be achieved are taken up.”

– The inner life of each group or community is also very variable, according to the culture, the age of the participants, the possibilities of gathering together on a regular basis...Following is how the





Signum Fidei groups from the Philippines talk about it:

“Organizational structures and appropriate venues are provided where members share their internal life with others. Each local group holds regular assemblies where faith experiences are brought up and/or their apostolic commitment is discussed. Also each local group is even divided into small groups or cells where members can intimately share their joys, aspirations, frustrations and dreams with their cellmates or colleagues. On a larger scale, regional assemblies or national assemblies are held where regional or national issues are thrashed out.”

– How do the Signum Fidei groups relate to the District? How do they feel the universality of the Lasallian mission?

There are two aspects that do not happen automatically, but there is also a learning process whereby each person matures at his/her rhythm. This is expressed very well by Marianne Stich when she talks about the Signum Fidei group in Tulsa:

“At the founding of the group, we sought and received formal recognition by the Visitor. Members of the group are actively involved in various groups at the district and regional level. One member is on the Mission and Ministry council, one has served on the Regional Education Board. The vast majority are Buttimer or LLI (Lasallian Leadership Institute) graduates.

When discussing solidarity, varying levels of understanding also exist. There are those who consciously commit themselves to living in solidarity with the Brothers and other Lasallians. There are those who probably do not understand yet that implication of consecration. That is probably one area of formation that needs to be addressed. The Brothers are present and supportive. They are all willing to accompany the group in whatever way we ask. They have done an excellent job, over the last few years, of “pushing us out of the nest” and leading us to understanding the responsibility for our own formation and group that Signum Fidei implies. There are several members who understand the international nature of solidarity with other Lasallians. It is difficult to say that all members understand that. I think this is an opportunity for growth for us.”

3.2 The Lasallian Fraternity

District of France

The Members: The Lasallian Fraternity is composed of men and women, married or single, who agree to live their baptismal commitment in the service of the young, following the example of Saint John-Baptist de La Salle and in union with the Institute of the Brothers. One agrees to enter the Fraternity as in response to a call. This vocation is discerned and deepened in the course of a period of varying length, of prayer, sharing and community experience. For those who are married, the agreement of the partner is necessary before any commitment.

An open community: in order to reinforce their fraternal links, the members of the Fraternity live in an “open community”. This is composed of at least three members, living in different places but close to each other and meeting on a regular basis to pray, form themselves, reflect and share with each other.

“Making a community” implies:

- a link (daily prayer, regular meetings)
- an ideal to be shared (Lasallian spirituality, the educational service of the young)
- a care carried by all (community life and its growth).

The formation of the members of the Fraternity is an important and constant concern. It helps them to develop, to discern and to live their vocation. A part of the community meetings is devoted to it on each occasion.

The Mission: The Lasallian Fraternity has chosen as its mission the service of human and Christian education of the young, as a priority in Lasallian schools or other Lasallian works, linked with the pastoral ministry of the local Church. This education service extends to everything which touches the life and formation of the young in domains as varied as: teaching, catechesis, leisure time pursuits, finance and the different services which are provided within the educational institutions. The

The title of “**Fraternité Lasallienne**” (Lasallian Fraternity) has been adopted by this “Lasallian intentional group” of the District of France, which was officially recognised as “associated with the Lasallian mission” with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by the 43rd General Chapter (Circular 447, pp. 5-7). Up until January 2001 it was known as “*The Lasallian Third Order*”.

members of the Fraternity thus work in close collaboration with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Brothers who compose it, pursuing the same aim and sharing the same mission according to the spirit of Saint John-Baptist de La Salle, while respecting their states of life.

The Spirituality: The spirit of the Lasallian Fraternity invites each of its members to a deepening of his or her Baptismal Faith and leads them to committing themselves to the service of the human and Christian education of the young and more particularly the poor. They thus live their commitment as a true ministry.

This spirituality is nourished daily by reading and meditating on the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to act in them. This is the favoured link of





the community of Faith which they are trying to make lived, since they do not live in the same place. This community in this way gives meaning to the commitment of all the members of the Lasallian Fraternity, working in a spirit of gratuity and of service following the example of Christ.

The Commitment: Within the Fraternity, it is possible to take on a temporary commitment of one year, renewable. Following several temporary

commitments and after reflection with the community, a member of the Fraternity can ask to make a permanent commitment.

So as to live fully his commitment, each member commits himself to participating on a regular basis in the life of his “open community” as well as in spiritual retreats.

The members of the Fraternity participate together, each year, in a spiritual retreat. At the end of the retreat, the members of the Fraternity renew their commitment in front of the assembled community. The daily remembering of this commitment is for each one a source of grace in fidelity to the received mission.

In order to ensure accompaniment and in consultation with those in charge, the Brother Visitor of France will name Brothers to act in an accompanying capacity. The person in charge of the Lasallian Fraternity is elected by the members who have committed themselves, for a period of four years, renewable once.

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3.3 Lasallian Association for Mission in Bristol (LAMB)

District of Great Britain

This all began in 2001, at a meeting of a group of 50 teachers at Saint Cassian's Centre, the house of spirituality that the District of Great Britain has in Kintbury. There it was decided to form local or regional groups to carry out the Lasallian mission based on the needs and the experiences of each place. Soon afterwards the group in Bristol formed.

LAMB tells the story

The call of the Mission: Our approach and vision is strongly based on our experiences of working at Kintbury, taking school groups there, or going on retreat there. We have learned at Kintbury that young people hunger and thirst for spiritual direction in their lives. So many young people, on leaving Kintbury, state that it has made a big difference to them – it has given them an insight into the spiritual life. For many, it has started a journey of spiritual discovery that will go on for the rest of their lives. For some, it has started a process whereby young people minister to their peers, go on to work at Kintbury or a similar place, and play an active role in the life of the Church. We ask them to pass the message on to their peers, to be witnesses to Christ. This is a difficult thing to do; even for adults it is difficult. To do this effectively in a secular society requires courage, commitment and support. Perhaps it also requires training of some kind. And, anyway, not all young people have the opportunity to go to Kintbury (or a similar centre).

Our response: Our vision is that we can work in schools to follow-up on the good work that is started at Kintbury and other similar places. We can help by planning and organising events in the school for young people. We can provide a level of support for both teachers and young people. We can establish a “presence” in the school so that we

The LAMB community is an example of a community made up of two concentric circles, that is to say, there is a small, full-time group which is supported by a broader group whose participation is adjustable.

become trusted, and everyone in the school sees that we are there as a resource for them. We can provide a continuity of spiritual experience that goes on from one year to the next. We can be a “listening ear” for those who need it. We will have time for people.

LAMB's Mission Statement: We are a growing, open, Christian community, alive in the spirit and the charism of St John Baptist De La Salle. By living a life of love, witness, mutual support and prayer we desire to listen to, and reach out to all, especially the young and those in need.

The link to the Brothers: Central to our community has been our link to the brothers. What will be the nature of this link in the future? From a community point of view the brothers are essen-



Foto: Marcin Krawczyk



tial as they keep us firmly rooted in the charism and work of De La Salle. LAMB would probably not be where it already is if the brothers were not involved in the thinking, decisions and spirituality of the group. LAMB must continue to be not simply “allowed” to work by the brothers but to be an extension of the very evangelisation and outreach of the brothers in the twenty-first century. In this sense “Association” is not simply about remembering a past link with the brothers or with Kintbury, but is actually a vehicle by which the brothers continue their work and mission in the new millennium.

The proposal to the District: Based on experience and reflection, in 2003 the group made a proposal to the District about what the LAMB community would look like, made up of two concentric circles:

1. A part-time group consisting of volunteers who offer their time at evenings and weekends. This group will be:
 - prayer partners to those in the full-time community,
 - a support to full-time members,
 - a faith support to each other.
2. A full-time group. This group will have a regular presence in schools and will be able to organise and run events during school hours. The full-time group will arrange a timetable of activities with each school separately. The full-time

group will be a residential group, Brothers, Sisters and lay volunteers (younger and older) will share a house, pray, eat and carry out a mission together. We will ask for a minimum commitment of one year for volunteers wishing to join this community; but this could be extended by mutual agreement. Two or three Brothers will live and work in this community and for an initial commitment to the project of three years.

It has to have individuals within it who will give witness to Lasallian values of prayer and community by the work they do, not simply by being coordinators or administrators. A community that integrates the work of older and younger members so as to share the gifts of both. A community of prayer that shares values that Lasallians hold dear.

They would receive considerable support from, as well as giving support to, the LAMB community already here in Bristol and we would like to see the residential community as the visible expression of the community already here: in other words they are the same community, they simply have a different role.

The birth of the Saint Gabriel community:

This is how the Saint Gabriel community, in Clevedon, came to be, in association with LAMB, in 2004. It was initially made up of two Brothers and two lay persons. This is what they have to say:

“We are up and galloping. We are a community of four: Owen, Caroline, Michael and Benet. A fifth young woman has expressed an interest and we have responded with an invitation to “come and see”. Owen and Benet are Brothers. Caroline was in charge of a house of prayer and acted as a chaplain/counsellor one day a week to one of the schools; she has lots of local contacts; Michael is a young volunteer. He is keen to be involved with the students and is a superb musician. We hope to find someone of similar age to offer peer support.

The LAMB group has been wonderfully helpful and supportive. They really are a dedicated group. Some students with Kintbury experience also wish to be associated with our community and work.

We have met as a community and drawn up various understandings about our life together. We

worked on our prayer life and our own faith sharing; this latter comes naturally now. We continue to review on a regular basis what is effectively a Community Annual Programme, though without any real formality.”

The two circles in action:

The two groups will carry out a ministry to young people based on the Lasallian marks of “gratuity” and “by association”. Gratuity in this case means that the students receive the ministry freely; we will expect the schools to give something towards this, but nothing like what it would otherwise cost. “By association” in this case means that it is a team ministry, with peer ministry at the heart of it.

In particular this community offers schools and colleges:

- Prayer and opportunities for youth-centred spiritual experiences.
- Practical, creative activities to engage the talents of our students while adapting their own talents to the differing needs of our schools and colleges.
- Young people bearing witness to young people, sharing their own faith journeys while at the same time “being with” the students in their faith journeys.
- Working with students in small groups and discussion groups supporting existing chaplaincy groups such as “Justice and Peace” groups.
- Retreat and post-retreat work.

- Support the teaching staff through opportunities for prayer and friendship.
- Leading and coordinating assemblies and/or services.
- Out of school opportunities for prayer and faith development.

The aim of the community is to work with young people in a faith environment. Prayer is at the heart of the community. There will be time for prayer at regular intervals with resources for prayer. Meals will be taken in common and could be shared with those outside of the community, within reason of course. There will be community time together for recreation. Community Days are to be recommended and fortnightly meetings with the wider LAMB community. Time is given in evenings and at weekends for preparation of resources and for the possibility of Youth Events either in schools or in the diocese. Community activities in summer help in the formation of community.

The work of LAMB is based first and foremost upon building community, with each other and with young people. It is not just about providing a service for the young people, although that may be how we go about the work. Instead it is about enabling young people, wherever they are to be found, to become part of the Lasallian family, to “empower” them so that they might more readily answer the call of Christ.



3.4 The “Galilee” Community

District of Valladolid, Spain

The “Galilee” Community (**Comunidad “Galilea”**) is a group made up of 6 married couples (each with two or three children), one Brother and another lay person. Its reference point is Colegio La Salle in the city of Valladolid, Spain. Most members are teachers in the school and one of them is the current Director of the school. Some work in professions other than education and one of these is the community's current leader.

The history of this group began in 1984, as narrated by one of the members:

Several of us teachers from the school got together once per week, invited by a Brother to reflect on various human and Christian topics. Over the course of the next two years our spouses joined the group. Our immediate concern had nothing to do with faith, but it was simply a matter of sharing our experiences and our concerns as friends. But little by little faith became an important point of reference, and we began to move forward in formation and in prayer.

We began to get to know the Bible, and we deliberately started to work out a Christian group project. At the same time, we got more and more involved in Youth Ministry in the school and within the District, and we participated in District prayer meetings at Easter. New members

were added to the group until the group's current number was reached.

We had already been in existence as a group for several years when we began to participate in Lasallian formation sessions. Then, as we discovered more about Lasallian spirituality and the Founder's own life journey, we realized that we, too, were part of what it means to be Lasallian.

Over the course of several years, until 1999, several Brothers took turns leading the group and providing formation for us. Beginning in that year, the group took on the responsibility of leadership and elected a lay member as leader from within the group itself. This process produced in us a very beneficial effect of responsibility in that all the members of the group took on roles within the group and personal and community commitments increased substantially. The group began to define itself as a Community.

Since the year 2000 we have brought up issues such as the Lasallian character and association. We participate in meetings with other Lasallian communities in order to clarify these issues for all of us. In January 2003 the group decided to seek formal association from the Brother Visitor and his Council. In August of the same year, during District Day, we made our promises of association in the presence of other Brothers and Lasallians of the District.

How does the group feel about and express Lasallian mission, charism, and spirituality?

In recent years we have brought up and discussed in detail that very question. To help us respond to it, we have devoted a lot of time to formation, both in group meetings as well as by participation in Lasallian sessions on the District and Regional levels, and even on the international level with sessions such as SIEL.



Our commitments have a markedly Lasallian character, not only on the part of those of us who are involved in teaching. Apostolic efforts which the community agrees to are basically carried out at Colegio La Salle and in District organizations. We participate in educational campaigns for justice, in leading Christian youth groups, in organizations which provide aid for the needy. We are involved in local shared mission teams, and we are on various District committees. We have taken on various responsibilities in leadership and in the organization of the school. The members of the community feel that they are sent by the community to each activity in which they participate. Our prayer is essentially Lasallian, in the importance that we give to the presence of God or to God's Word, for example.

What helps you most in strengthening the ties between your community and other communities and the District?

Besides the weekly group meeting we have other kinds of periodic meetings, such as those for festive celebrations with our families and in different places, or meeting for reflection and sharing experiences with other communities. Each Sunday we attend Mass in the parish church of one of the members of the community, on a rotating basis. Once per month and even at other times, we celebrate a Mass with the Brothers' community from the school.

We maintain strong personal, friendly relationships with the Brothers of the District and there is a sense of working in a common project. We participate in District meetings. Brother Visitor



includes our community in the visits he makes to the communities within the District. We feel that we make up part of the District, and we feel that we are in solidarity with the Brothers in their search for new ways to carry out the mission together.

The community is now going through a time of strong commitment with its history and with the designs which the Spirit might have in view for it; it accepts naturally the challenges that arise; it is deepening its spirituality and it is enriched by active participation, both as persons and as a group, in the different activities that are put forward.

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3.5 A Lasallian Community on the south side of Chicago

Mike Anderer-McClelland (37). Director of Community Outreach. San Miguel Schools of Chicago.

Karin McClelland-Anderer (36). Director of Shared Mission and Formation Christian Brothers of the Midwest District.

Thaddeus Smith (46). 6th Grade Teacher. San Miguel Schools of Chicago.

Jack (2) and **Clare** (1). Children of Karin and Mike.

We are a community of three active Lasallian educators

We stand on our experiences of Lasallian communities with whom we've lived in the past. We each consider our time in other Lasallian communities as the building blocks to where we are today.

It is important to note that we had an imagined way of what our community would be, and then the way it actually evolved. In the past year since we moved out of the San Miguel Community to form this community we have experienced the many forces that both enrich and challenge our original idea of community together: as three

adults, two going to graduate school, a married couple maintaining their relationship, the third nurturing a significant relationship, taking care of two young children, all three of us working full-time in Lasallian ministries, caring for and accompanying sick and dying parents. We recognize that this is not the kind of life imagined for a consecrated religious. The challenges and gifts are no different than a married couple or single person not living in community. We simply choose to live these gifts and challenges, including the challenges and gifts of ministry, together, in support of one another.

We have a personal sense that our success in ministry is possible because of our sharing of these gifts and challenges. We could not do our ministry, be who we are, without the support of one another.

Our "community" goes beyond the house in which we live. We feel a very strong tie to other Lasallian communities, both in Chicago and outside of it, but especially those communities directly connected with the ministries in which we work. We are also tied to other local communities, and to the neighborhood to which we minister. Without these ties, we would not be sustained in the same way.

Our prayer life as a community is different than we expected it to be. We don't have the flexibility and time to sit down **every** morning and/or evening in our prayer room for 30 minutes of prayer and reflection. However, we still feel the prayer time we do have together is significant. Furthermore, we have come to realize that the conversations we have with each other, and others in our extended community (Lasallian and otherwise), during meals, washing dishes, replacing the lawn, planting flowers, cleaning the basement, putting up the Christmas tree, painting Easter eggs, putting together baby furniture, preparing the house for visitors, restoring the floors, sorting baby clothes, and so on, are **real encounters, experiences of God's loving presence in all that we do.**

Photo: Frank van den Berg

What makes us think we're Lasallian?

We have all lived in Lasallian communities in the past for significant periods of time, one of us as a De La Salle Christian Brother, the other two as Lasallian Volunteers. More recently, the three of us lived in a larger Lasallian community in Chicago (connected to the San Miguel School). Karin has lived 7 years, Mike 9 years, and Tad 7 years (to date) in Lasallian communities, always with both lay and consecrated members (until this year).

We all work in Lasallian ministries as a deliberate, conscious choice. We have worked in other educational ministries, public and private, but have chosen to continue working in Lasallian ministries. None of us is from Chicago originally, and we deliberately moved to Chicago from other parts of the United States because of the opportunities available in Lasallian ministries in the Midwest District.

In our own spiritual journeys, we have individually come to identify with the Lasallian charism. We describe our lives as a vocation, and we believe that this vocation is animated by the Lasallian charism. We all feel called to serving in the Mission; we all feel our work is inspired by the Spirit and rooted in our faith.

We are trying to experiment and provide a model of how to live as a Lasallian community as mature adult Christians and Lasallians. We live in a large house that is a home. We make a point for it to be welcoming and well kept, not just a place for us to store our "stuff" and rest in between responsibilities at our respective ministries. We have been making changes to the house (slowly, as money is limited) so that we can be sure to have ample room to invite others into our community for meals, prayer, discussions, etc. We also hope to add another bedroom so we can expand the number of adults in the community.

We came together and began discussing the idea of community living in this way five years prior to



moving, together, into the San Miguel Community in Chicago (2002).

The community we are developing is not an experiment; it's not a "Petri dish" for non-vowed religious people. Maybe it's a "Petri dish" for faithful people, vowed or not. Would it be any different if a Brother lived with us? This isn't something for just single people or married people, but **faithful** people active in ministry -in particular, the Lasallian educational ministry.

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3.6 Community of Brothers and Volunteers of El Salto, Durango

District of North Mexico

In El Salto, Durango, Mexico, in the District of North Mexico we find a community made up of 3 Brothers and from between 25 to 30 young people who came from many different cities in Mexico and even from different countries, such as the United States, France, or Spain. These young people make a one-year commitment to live in community and to carry out its mission. The community is located in the Prelature of El Salto, in the Western Sierra Madre mountains.

Currently (June 2005) Brothers José Francisco Hernández, Juan Gómez, and Gabriel Sarralde are the Brothers who live in this community.

When and why did this experience begin?

In 1982 the “Lasallian Missions” began in the Sierra of Durango. The pastor of the local parish, along with Brothers Lorenzo González and Ramón Hernández Carpio launched this movement as an evangelical response and an experiment in human development in favor of the people of the Prelature. Summer, Christmas, and Holy Week missions grew stronger in 1992 with the establishment of a Brothers’ Community and, two years later, with the beginning of the Missionary Volunteer Movement. The objective, drawn up by the pastor with the help of the Brothers, was to respond to the educational needs and those of Christian formation for the children, young people, and adults in the towns and settlements of the Sierra. It was for this purpose that Community Centers were established in the towns and at the same time in El Salto there were established and strengthened formation courses for: Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Catechists, Youth Coun-



selors and Promoters of Human Rights. Also, links were established between the towns of the Sierra and the Lasallian community of El Salto.

Is this a missionary experience or would it more properly be called an experience in community for mission?

The Holy Week and the summer missions in the District have always been considered to be, since their inception, as living in community for the educational service of the population. Young and more adult missionaries make up small fraternities of a life lived in common which includes prayer and training with a view to carrying out the Lasallian mission in favor of children, young people, and adults of the Sierra. This is what is lived at the Victory Center in El Salto. The Brothers and volunteers make up a community of faith and fraternity in service of the local Church, committed to human development and the evangelization of the rural population. Brothers, male and female volunteers, live in the same area (made up of three small houses with some larger common areas), they pray together, and together they plan and program the apostolic activities they are going to realize. They make up small fraternities that are sent to towns to

live with the people and together with them they find the most appropriate ways to respond to their educational needs and to their needs for religious and spiritual growth.

Where do the young volunteers come from? What are their motivations? What do they hope to find here?

Ordinarily the young people come from youth groups in Lasallian insti-

tutions, such as high schools or universities, or from other university groups that work in conjunction with Lasallian institutions. Their motivations are varied but the common denominator is their willingness to serve poor people and to do it from a Lasallian perspective: education, religious training, human development for the love of Christ. The young candidates know that they will find in the Victory Center in El Salto a community of reference in which they can grow as persons and as Christians and with the community and in the community they make plans to serve the population. They come knowing that they will receive no financial gain. It is certain that many of them come with adventure as a motive. The spirit of adventure is transformed into a missionary spirit as they come into contact with the reality of the Mexican countryside, with the people and their needs and they sense that as baptized persons they have a mission to serve. Several of the young people express a desire to give thanks to God for having received so many benefits and they express this by devoting themselves especially for this one year, leaving aside their work or study commitments to serve their poor brothers and sisters.

How is their community experience developed?

The volunteers join the community in August or in January. They begin with two or three weeks of introduction and drawing up the community annual program. In the program they express the group convictions and the specific ways they will live faith, fraternity, and service. They keep in mind the life of the community and its apostolic outreach. Community life is conducive to the human and spiritual growth of each person: prayer, study, personal reading, times for interchange and decision-making, socializing and relaxing. Time is provided for updating and for ongoing formation as regards human development (analysis of reality, strategic planning, community development, communication, formation of the social conscience) and as regards evangelization (Christology, ecclesiology, morality, Bible studies, liturgy, prayer, popular religion, Lasallian studies). Community life, therefore, has various dynamics that aid in training to respond critically and creatively to the spiritual, social, and educational needs of people of the Sierra.



Photos: Tarsicio Larios

What is their apostolate like?

The volunteers are part of the overall plan of the local Church to give impetus to, along with the people in the towns, the quality of human and Christian life of persons and of their communities. With the local Bishop and the Prelature's Pastoral Plan, the El Salto community carries out its apostolic activities in two phases:

- The insertion phase: small fraternities made up of two or three persons establish themselves in the towns for a three-week period. The fraternity organizes, according to the local needs of the people, courses, social and cultural activities. The fraternity provides community activities aimed at improving or developing talents and it fosters the life of prayer and the spiritual growth of the local community.
- The other phase is carried out at the Victory Center. People from the neighboring towns are invit-



ed to participate in courses, workshops, seminars, retreats, youth meetings and assemblies at the Victory Center.

At the end of this experience, what was learned about the Lasallian charism and about Lasallian Association for the educational service of the poor?

As the volunteer year comes to a close, the young people experience moments of great tension. On the one hand, they have been in touch with the needs and urgencies of the people, and on the other hand, they are aware that they must leave this situation to return to their “ordinary” lives of work,

study, family, friendship, socializing. This step does not happen without strong tension. Their lives are no longer the same. They are young people who have prayed deeply, who have touched human sorrow, who have lived and discovered the richness of their own gifts to collaborate with people, who have lived in community and they feel part of a great family that has worked for the promotion of people. Many of the young people recognize that their volunteer year has not been a “parenthesis” in their lives but a “trampoline” that has launched them as Christians and as Lasallians, toward new challenges.

How does this experience influence the young people later on in life?

The volunteer year has been a school of life for them. Not one young person has expressed any unease for their year as a volunteer. On the contrary, they feel that their lives have been impacted and many recognized that God was made especially present to them and they accepted the challenge to continue on going from commitment to commitment. Some former volunteers have become involved in prayer, fraternity, and service groups which they themselves have called the Adrian Nyel Community. Among former volunteers several have opted for priestly or for religious life. Others have become sponsors of youth groups and missionary groups in Lasallian schools, parishes, and universities. Many of them who have opted for marriage realize that their living faith and their willingness to serve are direct results of their year as a volunteer. The friendship that unites them to other former volunteers is made manifest at their meetings, retreats and assemblies that they have periodically and in which they assess their living commitment and their willingness to live the Lasallian charism.

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3.7 Lasallian Volunteers of Cameroon

Under the protection of the District of Cameroon, a new form of Lasallian Association is being developed. It is a group of former students which began in Douala in 1992, but in 2001 was transferred to Mbalmayo. Here this Association of Lasallian Volunteers began a new stage with about ten members. Br.Eugène Ly is the spiritual guide of this group.

Vitalis Ndikum is the Director of the community. He is 30 years of age and has been in La Salle for 15 years, first as a pupil and after his university studies, as teacher of Computer Studies and Electronics in Douala. His greatest joy is, he says, working with young people, having dialogue with them and living in their midst.

From that time the members have been living in community; a community life punctuated by prayers, teaching, listening to the Word of God, exchanges. It is this community dimension which reinforces the strongest links between the members, steeped in a spirit of Love for the formation of the young people confided to them. This community groups together young unmarried persons, who devote themselves for a time to the education of others before getting married and founding their own home. Other young people are very committed. The married Volunteers do not live in community but come every morning to give their classes and devote part of their time to the young.

They have set in motion a professional formation centre for young people and adults, the Br. Mutien-Marie Centre. Young people come there to learn a trade in the following disciplines: electricity, electronics and computer studies. The formation is essentially centred on industrial techniques and the learning aims, above all, at giving the children a practical formation necessary for self-employment.

“Everything needs to be built - says Vitalis -. I write every day to different international organisations looking for financial help for our work. It is necessary that the poorest have an opportunity to



receive the formation which we offer here. The Lasallian charism leads us to opening the young to the world in teaching them a trade, thanks to which they will be able to live; the charism leads us to speak to them of God who is the beginning and

“Our major challenge is to build a solid team associated with the Brothers in the Lasallian mission. It is a long road, made up of joy, disappointment with those who give up and frustration. Meeting with God helps us to discover Him, to recognise Him in others and through our collaboration with the Brothers, to spread his reign in our country. The challenge is, therefore, to form groups of volunteers, associates, devoted persons, full of zeal for announcing Christ through the education of the poorest of the young.”



end of their being, to remind them of the presence of God every day. We want to be a concrete example for them.”

The Volunteers’ Community attaches a lot of importance to the formation of its members and to the sharing of experiences. It especially empha-

sises, on the one hand, the importance of formation in prayer, religious and Lasallian formation, and on the other hand, formation in fraternal life. “At the heart of this process is to be found the discovery of the commitment to the poor which had overwhelmed us. Concern for the education of the poorest was the starting-out motive, but none of us had in any way measured the dimension of his commitment. No one really understood what was meant by the poorest and what it is to work for the poorest. In spite of difficult moments and discouraged people, the discovery of the face of Christ in the young who are materially poor, has been a stimulus for continuing our mission and making it dynamic.”

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3.8 Lasallian Volunteers of the Philippines (LSVP)

In the Philippine context, year after year, many Filipino children have to stop studying because of poverty. Year after year, many Filipino children have to work to help feed their families. Year after year, many children have to abandon their dreams for the harsh realities of a hand-to-mouth existence. Who would care enough to bring hope to them?

The LaSallian Volunteer Program was conceived in order to participate and contribute in this call of the Philippine society, especially the young Filipino people. The core purpose is to provide a venue for the members of the Lasallian Family where they can commit their expertise, talents and skills to the service of marginalized communities, thereby attaining fullness of life for all.

In 1994, the Lasallian Volunteer Program (LSVP) was set up by the District to formally recognize the volunteer spirit and initiatives which had expanded over the years. Since then, batches of graduates have been trained and sent off to teach and serve in La Salle schools and poor communities all over Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Wherever these Lasallian Volunteers (LSV's) were sent, they vowed to share a human and Christian education with the young and the poor in their everyday ministry.

The volunteers come together and initially build a Christian Volunteer Community among themselves which then inserts itself in the life of a poor, depressed or isolated communities usually in the rural areas. The volunteer members live a simple life, in a modest dwelling, usually not far from the way the homes of the people they serve look and are.

Today, communities of Lasallian volunteers are found in poor mission areas where there are pressing needs, primarily in the education of children and youth-at-risk. Graduates, teachers and staff members from Lasallian schools make up these



LSV communities. The LSV communities enter the mission areas with a set goal of initiating and implementing a sustainable educational program for youth-at-risk in the area.

The educational programs introduced are eventually turned over to the care of the community within a specified period of time, thus empowering the mission area in the program conceptualization, implementation and evaluation.

LSVP is funded by the Fund for the Apostolates for the Poor (FAP) of the Philippine Lasallian Family.

Those who can be part of LSVP are... An alumnus/alumna, single, not more than 35 years old, in good health, willing to serve anywhere in the Philippines for at least 1 full school year, dedicated and committed to the Lasallian educational ministry, an effective witness to the Lasallian spirit of faith and zeal.

*Ms. Evangeline de Peralta.
ex-Director of the Lasallian Volunteer Program
Director of the first all lay Lasallian
Volunteers Community in the Philippines*

3.9 A Community Life with San Miguel School

USA/Toronto Region

Emily Vogel is the Director of Graduate Support at the Back of the Yards Campus of the San Miguel School in Chicago, IL. She presents his own experience of community life from the Lasallian volunteer perspective.

The Lasallian Volunteer Perspective

When I graduated from high school, I thought my Lasallian days were finished, because I was going to a public university. But as our guiding God would have it, I was able to stay connected through summer gatherings with Lasallian Collegians. A service trip to San Miguel School in Chicago was the pivotal experience that led me to take a leap of faith away from my degree in Communication Disorders and toward the Lasallian Volunteer Program. I felt the Spirit churn inside me as I served at San Miguel and lived in community for that one weekend; it was the kind of feeling that spoke loudly and clearly: “This is it!”

In the years to follow, I lived in community with

Brothers and Lasallian Volunteers in California and Baltimore. I also traveled to Bangkok and Sri Lanka as part of the San Francisco District’s Adult Immersion Program. Now I live in Chicago –in community– at San Miguel School in the Back of the Yards neighborhood: the same place that spoke so loudly to me five years ago. None of these experiences would have been possible without the work of the Christian Brothers who answered the call from the Holy Spirit to take the Institute to places it never before planned to go and to form this Association that many people refer to as the Lasallian Family.

We are an institution in which people not only work together but also live and play together. We break bread together; we pray together; we take trips together; we even pack up our life and move across the country together; all for the sake of that churning inside us, telling us that we will not be at peace unless we answer the call. The Spirit has led us here: to a beautiful mystery that we are not supposed to understand!

The Lasallian Volunteer Program is for me the best example of how serious the Institute is about this idea of association. Some people question the effectiveness of this model, saying that the inter-generational mix does not create a healthy living environment. They criticize the mixing of religious and lay lifestyles and of genders. In my opinion, however, these elements add to the richness of community life.

What is the attraction of this kind of lifestyle? Why do young and old, religious and lay, want to live together? The quick and easy answer would be that they choose to do this for the mission. Although, ultimately, I do feel that the mission is the glue, it is unrealistic to believe that this is the motive for all young adults who choose to be Lasallian Volunteers. Not all Lasallian Volunteers have



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received a Lasallian education, and not all Lasallian Volunteers are even Catholic. In addition, a great number of Lasallian Volunteers are not planning a career related to education after their volunteer commitment.

I'm pretty sure that the average young adult does not truly comprehend community living in the Lasallian tradition until it's "too late." The power of the volunteer year(s) can be so impressionable that people often change career paths, get sucked into the vortex of the Lasallian Spirit, and at the most basic, yet profound, way, recommit their life and their values to those of simplicity and service.

Young adults choose to volunteer for many reasons. They look at our world of violence, poverty, and despair and want to make a positive impact before entering the "real world." I believe that many choose to live in community, as in the Lasallian Volunteer Program, because they long to be part of something with deeper meaning, to be attached to a group of people they can depend on for support and companionship. Moreover, young people are free today to explore opportunities that will deepen their spirituality in profound ways. The Lasallian Volunteer Program is just one way they can live in religious communities without the pressure of expectations or the need to make a lifelong commitment.

This is not to say that community living is blissful –far from it! At times community living was the source of all my frustration, when changing the toilet paper roll or refilling the water container for the umpteenth time was enough to set me over the edge. Living and working with the same people day after day pushed me to my limits while putting a mirror in front of my face to show me some of my grandest weaknesses. The experience called upon a whole new level of patience and understanding while challenging me to rise above my own selfish desires.

But the blessing of community is that other members are usually experiencing the same feelings. In



fact, one time during my volunteer years, we all shared stories about our "nightmares" about one or more members of the community, often metaphors for the frustration that had been building inside. Thankfully, we were able to share these nightmares in a loving way because we had been able to build a previous foundation of unity rooted in the spirit of love.

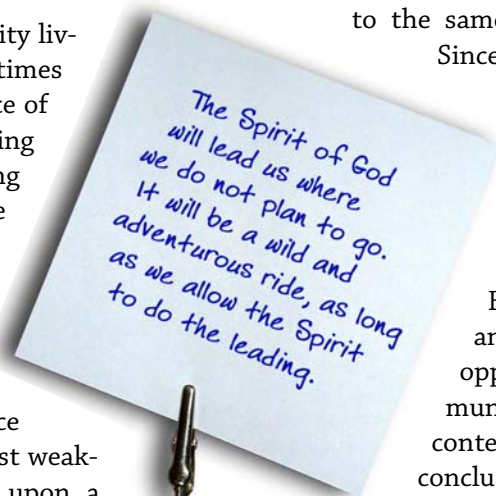
But how? How does a group of men and women, young and old, religious and lay, build a foundation of unity rooted in the spirit of love? It certainly doesn't just happen, and it doesn't happen to the same degree in all communities.

Since my Lasallian Volunteer years,

I have become particularly interested in the idea of community, within the Lasallian context as well as in neighborhoods and cities.

In two of my three years in Baltimore, I was blessed with an urban tribe that provided the opportunity to experience community living outside the Lasallian context. As a result, I came to three conclusions about what I believe are the most necessary ingredients for producing a healthy and life-giving community environment.

– First and foremost, for community to happen, it must be intentional. Community does not just occur. It is unrealistic to think that put-





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ting five to fifteen different personalities under one roof with the name Lasallian attached to it is going to create the spirit of community to which I am referring. For community to happen, people must want it to happen. They must agree on what community is, and they must be willing to find a way to create it.

- Second, the members must be willing to share themselves and to inquire about others' personal and spiritual journeys. The personal stories of community members are a key ingredient to community. It is not uncommon to find people at the dinner table for hours because they are caught up in sharing stories about life's tragedies and surprises. Young teachers can be seen captivated by the wise Brothers and their sagas of past classroom blunders and teachable moments. Likewise, the shrewd Brothers can be seen lost in the joy of the idealistic young teacher who has all the energy in the world to impact the life of each and every student. These symbiotic relationships thrive on the energy of one another.
- Third, community members must be willing to play together. We are all required to work together; often there is a scheduled time to pray together. Everyone usually eats together, but playing together is a bit trickier. Giving up valuable free time for the sake of the community is not only essential to fostering the community spirit but often requires the most sacrifice.

Birthday celebrations, holiday parties, happy hours, and weekend trips all contribute to the joys and fruits of community living.

One of my favorite community-bonding experiences occurred when I was living in Oakland. We took a spring-break trip to Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks. All six of us piled into two cars, slept in tents next to one another, hiked to the mountaintops, and sang embarrassing songs around the campfire. I remember being nervous before going on the trip, because I thought that what I really needed was a full week away from these people with whom I spent all my time. But much to my surprise, I realized upon returning that what I really needed was a full week of playtime with them—a full week to enjoy one another's company outside the confines of schedules, students, and stress. Playing together that week was a true blessing and testimony to the work of the Spirit.

Friends and family often ask me why I choose to follow the Christian Brothers and their mission all over the country. They are curious to know how a job can be so important to me that I would risk leaving many beautiful versions of home to create new versions of home in new cities. Seeing the struggle I often have in leaving behind loved ones, they wonder why I would choose to do this to myself. To be honest, I often feel the same way! But for some reason, it feels like the right thing to do. It feels like a call that I cannot ignore—that churning inside hasn't gone away.

While on a mission retreat for San Miguel last fall, I reflected deeply on this struggle and wrote in my journal, "This isn't just a job—it's a way of life. People work here because it completes their version of life. We aren't just co-workers; we are more like sojourners, traveling together and supporting one another along the journey." I return to that reflection often, and I feel grateful for the rich and varied experiences that have come from my Lasallian journey thus far.

The Spirit of God *will* lead us where we do not plan to go. It will be a wild and adventurous ride, as long as we allow the Spirit to do the leading.