

5. Brothers with arms Open

And also:
Heart and Memory



5.1 “Were not our hearts on fire?”

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*Br. Timothy Coldwell,
New Orleans - Santa Fe District*

Once Jesus left the two disciples whom he met on the road to Emmaus, it dawned on them how they missed his stories, speeches, and lessons. They looked one another in the eye:

“Were not our hearts burning... ?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem, where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way... (Lk 24:32-35)

This ought to be our stance as Christian Brothers. We ought to set out at once in search of our colleagues and tell the story of our fraternal association and our encounter with Christ: how that close encounter has transformed us and fuels us with zeal for our mission. When we arrive, we shouldn't be surprised to find the rest of our company sharing stories of their encounter with Christ and their zeal for the mission!



Brothers and Lasallians (a term that embraces all ministers in the educational community organized around and inspired by the story of Saint La Salle) are drawing the blueprint for a new kind of association that is rooted in these one-on-one encounters with Christ and the mission. As a Christian Brother, it seems to me that whatever definition

we ultimately arrive at for association will depend in large part on the stories we, as Brothers, tell. After all, stories spark an instant intimacy between the narrator, the narrative, and the listener. As they address this new century's questions about our educational ministry, all Lasallians need our “Brother” stories like a newborn needs its mother's milk.

It strikes me that Saint La Salle's discernment style can serve as a story-rich model for all Lasallians, including the Brothers, to define association for today. Our Founder's “double contemplation” was a Petri dish of experience and prayer: he knew the despair of the children of the artisans and the poor families in his time, and his relationship with God was steeped in contemplative prayer. This prayerful interface - knowing God's desire that all are saved and the dead-end existence of poor kids - led our Founder to cooperate with God in founding the Christian Schools, and, of course, to bring together a community of like-minded men.

The first step in this spiritual dialectic is to tag the events, currents, and movements that are today's “**signs of the times.**” I offer you my humble attempt to identify a short list in our Region (US-Toronto):

- There are now more lay pastoral ministers (30,000) in the parishes than active diocesan priests (27,000). Eighty percent of them are women; over two-thirds are working full time, and half of them feel they have received a call from God.
- The declining numbers, primarily of priests and men's religious orders.
- The zest with which our young people pursue the American ideal of *happiness* is suffocating the longer, slower, biblical pilgrimage to *meaning*.
- Eighteen per cent of the Catholic school population attends Catholic schools. Forty years ago, it was forty-seven per cent. The decrease is

because many of our schools are too expensive and out of reach of the non-scholarship poor.

- The San Miguel and Cristo Rey networks that are rising like Ezekiel's vision of dry bones in the desert feature middle and high schools that target poor and marginalized youth and minimize tuition through donations, grants, and internship programs.

The next step in the dialectic is to bring faith into dialogue with the raw material of experience. This is a tough challenge in personal discernment, let alone a communal one. The communal effort means acknowledging that there is no single faith expression, that it is presumptuous to claim to know the mind of God. Even so, our discernment is authentic because we have a dynamic tradition. This tradition is clear: we give divine traction to our merely human projects when we *"look upon everything with the eyes of faith, do everything in view of God, and attribute all to God"* (Rule, art. 5).

Again, I offer a short list of **"signs of faith"**:

- My contemplation has led me to an unshakable sense that God wants people to know his mercy and justice, to be saved, and that the Christian School is one of the most dynamic and life-giving instruments of his love.
- God desires that salvation, eternal and temporal, be accessible. "Every culture needs to be evangelized" (Rule, art. 18).
- "The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded. The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality." (Rule, art. 146)
- God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4).

The fruit of this discernment in which we contemplate the signs of the times and of faith is a holy agenda for an association for mission. As a Brother, I would like to issue a call for concrete initiatives to help *animate* this holy agenda.

First, we Brothers need to acknowledge that the transmission of the faith in the school setting is more and more in the hands of a different group of

artisans. These Lasallians are not mere apprentices; they are journeymen intent on mastering the trade—the trade of cooperating with God in making the school a saving place. Lasallian leadership means a new infrastructure. The spiritual and practical formation and certification for faculty, paralleling that received in our training as Brothers, is necessary.

Second, to the degree possible, we need to invest a disproportionate amount of resources in the care and nurturance of our principals and presidents.

Third, we must continue to create vibrant collaborations in answer to Proposition 5 of the 43rd General Chapter. The Institute mandated that in each District "the Brothers and their Associates create a structure... responsible for the Lasallian educational mission, in which all participate with deliberative vote." Full Lasallian participation at the local and the regional level requires our support.

God has led us to see that there is a larger educational community than the Brothers of the Christian Schools and that this community needs our spiritual wisdom and pastoral direction. It is my sense that God is inviting us more and more into a ministry of "animation leadership."

On a personal note, this divine invitation and these needs have dramatically influenced the evolution of my consecrated life. If asked ten years ago, I would have said that my vow of association is an act of self-donation: *"Domine, opus tuum."*





["Lord, the work is yours."] I vow to give my heart, mind, body, and soul to your work-and to *support those who share this vow*. Today, my evolved defini-

tion would be more inclusive: to *support those who share this mission*. My life has a new imperative because there is a new community in my life: the educational community of Lasallians who share my faith and zeal for the mission.

This brings me back to the imperative of sharing the story of our fraternal association and our encounter with Christ in the Lasallian community. Our "*animation leadership*" includes conceiving and creating more opportunities to tell stories that celebrate and honor cooperating with God for the salvation of souls. The Brothers' cup of tradition runneth over. Books, how-to manuals, dossiers, and documents have their place in transmitting this tradition, to be sure, but it is the story that transforms. Let us re-commit ourselves to sharing the story!

5.2 Formation in Association From the Very Beginning

*By novice Brothers Alejandro and Cristian.
District of Argentina-Paraguay*

Even before entering the Postulancy we were involved in some activities with lay men and women, both with and without the Brothers. As we reflect among ourselves, especially on the meaning of what it means to carry out the mission, but also on the integrity of our lives as Brothers, it is very difficult for us to imagine ourselves without the close company of our lay brothers and sisters. "Association," for us, has to do with the fact that we who make up the District feel that we are all companions on the journey.

One of the first surprises during the postulancy program was for us to take into account the different situations in which we were involved, inside or outside the house, all of which had impact on our formation. It was obvious that community prayer, interviews with the Brother Director, workshops on Biblical and Lasallian studies, studies in the Institute for Teacher Formation were, without a doubt, part and parcel of the formation needed to be De La Salle Brothers. But so were:

- being with teachers, participating actively every day in classes that we had planned and carried out for boys and girls, learning from the experience of the teachers and contributing our knowledge of the neighborhood from our experience of living there,
- participating regularly, over the course of three years, in the weekly meetings of the faculty members and staff, along with the Principal, thinking about the running of the school, reviewing our educational practices, helping design the way different groups within the school relate with one another, establishing the grounds by which personnel are selected given the growth of the school,
- building, along with some adolescents from the

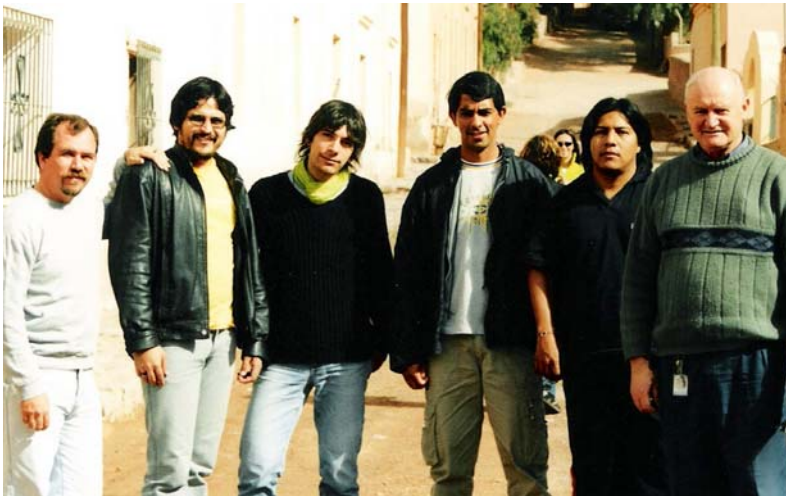
In the District of Argentina-Paraguay, Brother candidates for Argentina are enrolled in the Postulancy program for four years in an impoverished area in Gran Córdoba, called the Argentine Malvinas (Paraguayans have a similar program in Asunción). There the Brothers support a primary school. During these four years of formation and while they are involved in studies in education, the postulants work for half-days in the school as they help the teachers. At the same time, they do other things in the neighborhood as an outreach program for the schools' educational and pastoral ministry activities.

The novitiate lasts for two years, during which many of the courses are open to lay participation. One of the two years takes place within a community of Brothers who care for an educational work and the novices work there very closely with the lay teachers.

The authors of this article are **Alejandro Bruni** and **Cristian Tolaba**, the two Argentinian novices this year, who are making the novitiate along with the two Paraguayan novices, **Juan Ignacio Allende** and **Claudio Ramos**.

neighborhood, an experience of youth pastoral ministry, to teach about social sensitivity and critical analysis of the social reality, Christian discernment, but above all to encourage a sense of belonging, identification, friendship, sharing, socializing, celebrating the faith within the framework of a Christian community,

- being present to and aware of difficult situations, caused by chronic poverty, as regards families from the neighborhood, in an attempt to resolve the delicate matters of nourishment, living conditions, physical and psychological violence,
- forming a part of teams made up of men and women teachers and Brothers who accompany activities and discussions about pedagogy and pastoral ministry in the majority of the District's schools,
- participating in District Assemblies, meetings, retreats, formation opportunities, along with a



- significant group of Brothers and lay persons in order to think about District dynamics, and animating the mission;
- discerning about all these experiences in the heart of our formation community, postulants and Brothers together, our eyes fixed on progressive thresholds that we dare to cross, from faith which brings us closer to consecration, from clarifying our motivation, to aid us in our personal and community synthesis to experience conversion in our lives.

All these situations made our formation real and they were challenges that raised questions for us and made us grow in responsibility.

In this way, we discovered and we lived association: we recovered stories, texts, memories and anecdotes about the “role” of the Brothers in recent years in the history of our District of

Argentina-Paraguay. Using broad strokes, and generalizing a bit, we found ourselves having two styles or models within a certain type of progression. The first model was characterized by the almost exclusive exercise of *authority* on the part of the Brothers. They were the District *landlords* and *rulers*. In this model, the mission was, above all, *something bestowed*. The second model was characterized by a greater *intellectual lucidity*: Brothers or lay persons as *animators* of the processes in which authority is more collegial and exercised by means of multiple *teams*. The lay persons in this model are already *associates*.

In this present time that we are building, we want above all that our contributions be *quality* ones. We want to become a *sign* of the fraternal and incarnated presence of the Risen One. This sign is not exclusive, but it is *one more sign* in the midst of our brothers and sisters. We want to be *companions* along with them.

In our current experience, in the first months of our Novitiate, we have already been able to experience, alongside other Brothers and lay persons, encounters that make up the formative process itself, such as: “Prayerfully reading the Bible,” “Articulation of School Teams,” “Initiation into Lasallian Spirituality,” “Conversion of the way you look at the poor,” etc. These courses are related to the program that we continue to follow in our Novitiate and they help us to understand better the cluster of experiences that have already been mentioned. In this way, we continue to review everything that has been done since the beginning of the postulancy up to the present time and this helps us to recognize in a more conscious way the journey that we’ve already undertaken. The objective is to improve the quality of the responses that we give personally, in the community and in the District.

This preparation will be the basis for the drawing up of our Personal Annual Program which we will take with us in July to two different communities into which we four novices will be placed. There we will continue our novitiate formation, living in communities that collaborate in educational projects of Lasallian schools and in the promotion and accompaniment of communities and neighborhood groups.

5.3 The Commitment of the Young Brothers for the Association

Young Brothers from the District of Bilbao

As persons called to Association...

1. We commit ourselves to put the accent on the relational part of educational activities, to choose concrete options that foster our presence in tasks that involve direct contact with children and young people: activities in pastoral ministry, free time, formal and informal groups...
2. We commit ourselves to work actively with lay persons in the areas of relationships, working together, formation, to broaden and to challenge our view of the Lasallian mission.
3. We commit ourselves to promote and to be proactive members in strengthening the Christian community in the school where we are and to promote all activities that facilitate a sense of belonging to the "District Community," in a broader sense than each individual Christian community.
4. We commit ourselves to promote all that favors interchanges and teamwork, both within our educational centers and between centers, as regards experiences in education, pastoral ministry, management... In this way, we Brothers and lay persons build the Lasallian School Network and we create converging structures required by the new realities to which we try to respond.
5. We commit ourselves to offer strong, personal support for those lay persons and Brothers who take on administrative posts.
6. We commit ourselves to active, fraternal, and close lives in our own communities - working together in domestic chores, participating in all community meetings, being close to the Broth-

In 2004 the young Brothers (those under the age of 35) from the District of Bilbao drew up a document containing "commitments" to the District that they would carry out, they said "supporting one another and helping one another to achieve this." From that document we have selected the propositions and commitments relative to association for the educational service of the poor.

ers and stressing the positive in each of them, sharing normal, daily living and promoting inter-personal communication. We will try to turn our community meetings into privileged times for encounter, mindful of the concerns and the joys of each person.

7. We commit ourselves to participate actively in the creation of new communities or in the openness and flexibility of structures and rhythms of those already in existence, so that there are basic possibilities for community outings involving Brothers, lay persons and deprived youth.



5.4 The point of view of the Brother Visitor

*Br. Jacques d'Huitemau,
Visitor of the District of France*

Association: it is an adventure offered. In the District of France a good number of lay Lasallians have decided to advance along this path. They have asked to commit themselves to this for a determined period of time. Already several of them have expressed their commitment in the presence of their family, their friends and their colleagues.

An element common to all these requests is that they take place within an often long itinerary made up of warm and enriching human relations with Brothers and Lay Lasallians. It consists of a presence among the young lived both as a profession and a mission.

This itinerary has not necessarily developed like a long, peaceful river. It may have been marked by a series of crises, including some linked to divergences of opinion on the running of Lasallian institutions and overcome by evidence of the importance of the mission, which comes first regarding types of organisation.

The decision to become committed is the outcome of a discernment which was, besides, asked for by the Chapter. This discernment is of necessity first made within the framework of the family: the partner and the children need to understand the meaning of the



step and be able to give their opinion. It might also involve persons met in the course of the itinerary or in the present framework of the mission.

When he receives a request about commitment, the Brother Visitor consults his Council which gives its opinion on the request. One may imagine that in the future the Associates will equally be directly involved in this discernment in a form which remains to be clarified with them.

The momentum comes from the associate who, rereading his life itinerary, sees there the mark of a God who is calling him or her to go farther along his or her spiritual path as well as the human and apostolic commitment to the young and the construction of a more fraternal bond with colleagues. This momentum is also that of the Lasallian Mission.

All have their place there, each in his or her own way. The only condition for participating fully is to root one's activity of teacher and educator in hope in every child and young person whoever he may be and in spite of difficulties.

But just as John Baptist de La Salle quickly understood that his work would only last in so far as men carried and took on all its dimensions, so the Lasallian work in France will not have all the dynamism and impact expected of it unless the Lay Lasallians become more strongly associated among themselves and with the Brothers, in the name of their common commitment in all the dimensions of the mission, of their adhesion to the vision of faith inherited from the Founder and the sharing of a passion for the "salvation" of the young in most difficulty.

Concrete means of supporting themselves along this road are what remain to be invented by the Associates, Brothers and Lay, themselves. This is what is at stake in the coming months, even if the first steps have been taken with the establishment of closer links between the associates and the communities. The tree which has been planted will be judged by its fruits.

5.5 Community efforts in Association

District of Andalusia, Spain

Each community has a section for this topic in the CAP document. The community's mission is expressed, with no problem, in terms of "educational shared mission."

First of all, the inner dimension of Association is emphasized. An attempt is made to revitalize community dynamics and bonds of union to favor relationships, living together, dialogue, leisure time, meetings with nearby communities.

In each school the Shared Mission Team is supported and promoted. Groups within the school, such as those involving teachers, parents, Scouts, among others, are invited to share their group project with the rest.

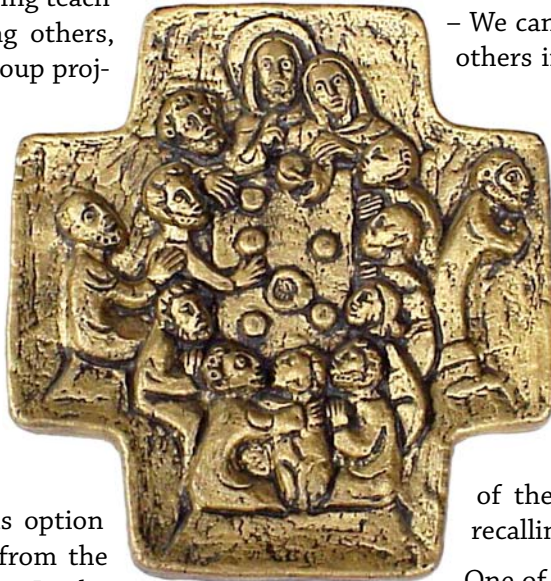
Each community of Brothers appreciated the importance of the MEL Assembly that was held during the summer of 2004 and the creation of a new Mission Council. Brothers and Lay colleagues participate in the Council with voice and vote.

There has been a conscious option to re-read community life from the point of view of Association. In this sense, some initiatives stand out, such as:

- Community commitment to be warmer and more welcoming to the lay staff at the center, especially towards those who are in an administrative or other leadership role.

The topic of Association has been a central theme since the last District Chapter. To underscore this fact, the 2004 - 2005 school year has been dedicated to the topic of Association

- There needs to be discussion, prayer, and celebration of Association on a more regular basis, all the while recognizing its centrality in our lives.
- The community takes on the commitment to study Institute documents about Association. The question for everyone is: As we deepen our understanding of our 4th Vow in our local situation, what should be our commitment?



- We cannot be a Gospel reference for others if among ourselves we are not united and fraternal. Promoting Association implies living Association.

- In several communities there are planned prayers and Eucharistic liturgies that are open to the educational community. Some members of communities have renewed their vows of association at the beginning of the academic year, as a sign of recalling Lasallian history.

One of the most important points in the District Program is to see that in each educational center there is a community of reference. As a result of this, small groups for sharing prayer have sprung up in which the Brothers play, for the moment, an significant role.

The 43th General Chapter says to the Brothers:

The Brothers welcome sharing with Partners, and particularly with those who desire to live according to the Lasallian charism, the contribution of their respective identities. They see in this a sign of spiritual and apostolic fecundity.

For this purpose they contribute in a creative and dynamic way to the setting up, and the development of different structures of association, assuming the role of alert and, if necessary, critical judges. The specific character of their contribution is based on:

- the total gift of their life,
- the witness of their community life,
- the experience of God as a absolute.

(Circular 447, p.10)



«Moses assembled seventy men from among the elders and placed them round about the Tent. Yahweh came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it on the seventy elders. Now when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.

But this they did not do again.

Two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad, the name of the other Medad.

However, the spirit came on them for they were among those who were registered though they had not gone out to the Tent.

As they prophesied inside the camp, a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"

But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would send his spirit upon them!"»

(Numbers 11:24-29)

6. Lasallian Formation:

A necessary path for Association

6.1 “Together” and “step by step” Formation Programs to Support Association

Greg Kopra has been the Associate Coordinator of Lasallian School Programs for the District of San Francisco since 1999. He is responsible for coordinating and facilitating programs of Lasallian adult formation in District works. He lives with his wife Maria and their son Tim in Napa, California.

*Greg Kopra
District of San Francisco*

The word *association* has been part of the Lasallian vocabulary since the beginning of the Institute. More importantly, the *experience* of being associated has been part of the reality of our Institute from the time the first Brothers began working intentionally as a team of educators for the benefit of their students - more than 300 years. The shape of this experience of association has evolved over the years. What were once referred to as “Brothers’ schools” are now referred to as “Lasallian schools.” The Brothers’ mission has become a mission shared by Brothers, other religious, and tens of thousands of lay men and

women. This “shared mission” is now evolving into “Lasallian Association for Mission.” How do programs of formation for Brothers and colleagues support this growing association? Let me begin with a story.....

Once Upon a Time...

My first experience of Lasallian formation came in June of 1991. The month before, I had decided to join the faculty and staff at La Salle High School in Milwaukie, Oregon. I was invited to participate in a five-day conference for religious studies teachers from the high schools of the District. “District”? What was a District? I was to begin the journey of discovery....

At the beginning of the workshop I met a Brother. We began to talk. He welcomed me to Mont La Salle and to the District. (There was that word again... District. What’s a District?) As we visited, the conversation turned to the declining number of Brothers in the District and in the Institute (“Institute”?) and the growing number of lay people involved with the schools sponsored by the Christian Brothers. This Brother, who I later discovered was the Visitor (“Visitor”? What’s a Visitor?), explained that the workshop I was attending was part of a series of workshops intended to, among other things, strengthen relationships among people in District schools.

At the end of the workshop, I felt energized and excited about my new work at La Salle High School, and I felt a kinship with 25 other Religious Studies teachers from Lasallian schools. It was so clearly a valuable experience for me to spend the week with these teachers, and yet it was the first time I had experienced such a gathering in 10 years of teaching in Catholic schools. I had begun my formation as a Lasallian.



Photo: Kelly Cline

Over the next few years, I began to hear and learn the story of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. I began to learn about the many and varied works sponsored by the Brothers throughout the world. What I heard gave words to what I had been looking for over many years. What I heard about Lasallian education resonated deeply with my own beliefs and best hopes for young people through education. After many years of searching, I had found an educational charism that fit perfectly with my beliefs and my person. The more I learned, the more I felt “at home” in Lasallian education. The more I learned, the more I came to realize that I was not living alone in this home - not at all alone! In fact, I was joined by many thousands of people who worked together to provide a human and Christian education to nearly one million students around the world. And, the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn. I was getting hooked.

Now, here’s the thing: I did not learn all of this by picking up books and articles on my own, though I did my share of research. Rather, I learned most powerfully about our heritage and charism by participating in formation programs sponsored by leaders at my school, in my District, and in the United States-Toronto Region. Local orientation programs sponsored by my District’s education office, workshops for religious studies teachers and for deans of studies, District retreats for teachers and staff, the first Lasallian Leadership Institute sponsored by the Region - these and many other gatherings began to shape me, invited me to reflect about my vocation as an educator, led me to prayer as I pondered God’s hand in all of this, drew me in step by step, leading me to deeper and deeper commitments.

Like a lump of clay, I was allowing myself to be molded into something more authentically myself than I had ever imagined possible. Moreover, these programs also served to help strengthen a sense of community among the participants, constantly reminding us that we were in this together, and that *together* we would be most effective in shaping the lives of the students entrusted to our care. Finally, these programs, combined with my daily experiences at La Salle High School, slowly - almost imperceptibly, at times - strengthened my



Photo: Thorben Ziemek (PhotoCase.com)

commitment to this group and this educational venture that we call Lasallian education. Often, my mind and heart hearkened back to De La Salle’s words:

Apparently, then, it was for this reason that God, who directs all things with wisdom and gentleness, and who is not accustomed to force the wills of [persons], but who wanted to lead me to take complete direction of the schools, did this, in a very imperceptible manner, and over a period of time, so that one commitment led me into the next one without my having foreseen this in the beginning.

De La Salle’s story was becoming my story. It is this heritage - this story - that forms the foundation of our formation programs today.

Important Elements of Formation Programs Today

Generally speaking, programs of Lasallian formation educate Brothers and colleagues about the Lasallian charism in such a way that they are able to integrate it into their personal and professional lives. Programs range from orientations for new personnel to advanced, intensive formation programs such as the Lasallian Leadership Institute and the Buttimer Institute. These programs seek to strengthen the commitment of participants to the mission and to engage them intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

In San Francisco District schools, the invitation to be associated with other Lasallians for the mission of human and Christian education is made



right away as well-formed administrators and directors of programs consider which applicants for job openings will be the “best fit” for the school. Once new employees and volunteers are identified and hired, they participate in an orientation to the Lasallian heritage - a time to “meet the family,” so to speak. For many of them, they hear the founding story for the first time. They are introduced to the language of the Institute - the terms we use daily almost without thinking (Institute, District, Lasallian, Visitor, Chapter, Association, etc.). They are invited to share in a spirituality of education, wherein they begin to reflect on their presence as more than a coincidence - as a calling to make a difference in the lives of persons “entrusted to their care.” And a question is planted - “Where do I fit in all of this? What is God inviting me into?” The question is planted, but not answered. Only time and experience will begin to provide an answer. This orientation is admittedly brief, providing only a cursory overview, only the briefest of introductions to the Lasallian family. But it is enough. For the time being...

One of the facets of the founding story that I find most compelling and most human is the reality that De La Salle only came to understand what God was calling him to in bits and pieces. Little by

little, as De La Salle reflected in prayer on his experience and the experiences of the first teachers, he came to see God’s gentle yet persistent presence in his life. He clearly admits that God would have lost him entirely if God had shown him the end result - the establishment of the Christian Schools and a life devoted to the salvation of poor and working-class children through education - at the beginning, when Nyel invited him to help him start a school in Reims. In De La Salle’s mind and heart, God was smarter than that; God showed him just one small piece of the design - the next piece, in fact. One can almost hear Nyel pleading with De La Salle, “*Please, Monsieur De La Salle, just one school. All I ask is for you to help me with your connections in the community.*” And De La Salle thinking to myself, “*Well, it is only one school. And all he wants is my connections. I can do that much.*” And so it began.

Why do I mention this? Because this belief that God meets us where we are and lovingly guides us over time to places we never imagined and to commitments we never thought possible also runs like a thread through our heritage and serves to inform our formation efforts. Little by little, step by step, honoring where people are in their faith journeys while at the same time stretching them to grow, realizing that association is not achieved overnight - this is the attitude we must take when designing formation opportunities for Lasallians. Gently, almost imperceptibly, yet persistently...

So, once the initial invitation has been extended - what then? It is time to allow persons to *live the story* for a period of time, accompanied by more experienced Lasallians at the local level. It is time to experience the reality of the mission, complete with challenges, successes, disappointments, fulfillment, and much hard work, all the time supported and encouraged and guided by others in the community. Slowly, perhaps without even realizing it, persons become a more active member of the Lasallian community. *Together and by association* - even before they hear the words, they have the experience.

It is important for us at the local and District levels to provide teachers, staff, and administrators with regular opportunities to gather for reflection and prayer, times to revisit those questions that

were planted at the beginning: “Where do I fit in all of this? What is God inviting me into?” Such experiences of prayer - of retreat - allow persons to put their experience in dialogue with the heritage and to deepen their understanding of and commitment to our educational and spiritual mission.

New teachers and staff at San Francisco District schools participate in a twilight retreat in the middle of their first year at the school. This retreat, of two hours’ duration, provides time for participants to reflectively review significant pieces of our mission (e.g., Recognizing the Presence of God, Special Concern for the Poor) in light of their real-life experience, brief as it has been thus far. Slowly, incrementally, persons make connections between the mission and their experience. Gradually, they discover their role in accomplishing this mission. Little by little, the Lasallian mission begins to resonate in their hearts. More and more, they begin to see, practically speaking, how they live the Lasallian mission in their daily interactions with those entrusted to their care. Not only do they begin to feel more connected to the broader mission, but also they begin to feel they are a part of the community of educators at their site.

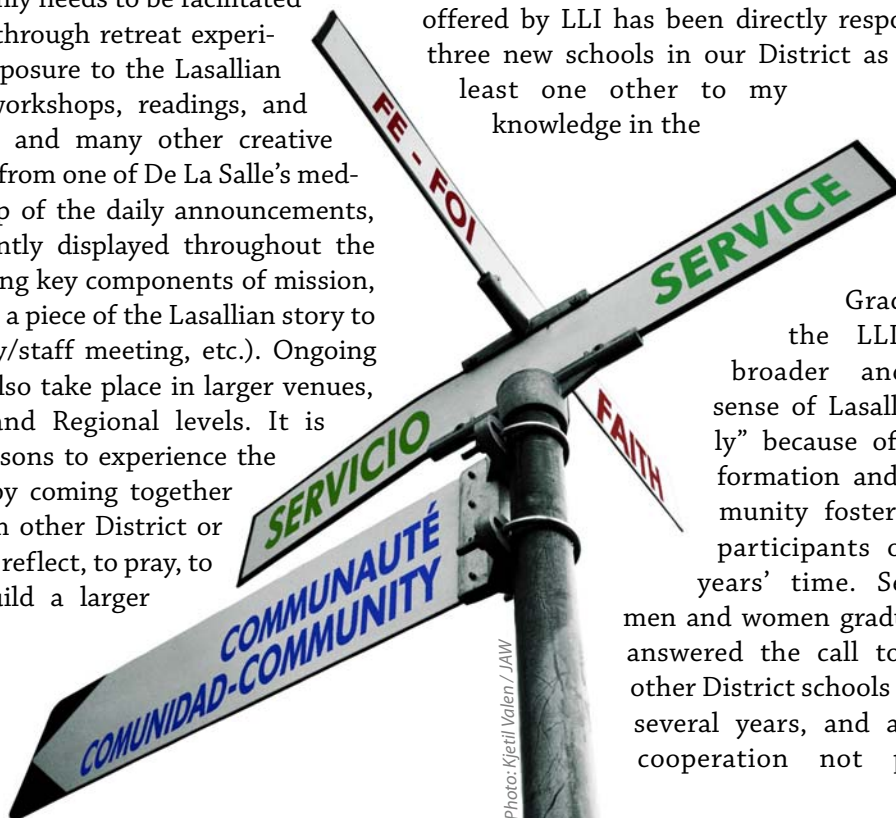
This growing commitment to mission and community certainly needs to be facilitated at the local level through retreat experiences, ongoing exposure to the Lasallian family through workshops, readings, and video reflections, and many other creative methods (a quote from one of De La Salle’s meditations at the top of the daily announcements, banners prominently displayed throughout the building articulating key components of mission, a prayer reflecting a piece of the Lasallian story to begin each faculty/staff meeting, etc.). Ongoing formation must also take place in larger venues, at the District and Regional levels. It is important for persons to experience the Lasallian family by coming together with persons from other District or Regional works to reflect, to pray, to share, and to build a larger community.

Such gatherings can be and often are pow-

erful experiences that strengthen a person’s commitment to a mission that, they come to experience, is shared by a rather large group of people around the world. People with similar responsibilities in Lasallian schools gather for a few days to pray, to share, to discuss. What’s working? What challenges are you facing? How do you respond to this question? What does it mean to be a Lasallian educator in our particular field? It is a time to network - realizing that, as always, the wisdom of the group far exceeds the wisdom of many individuals. It is also a time to be reminded of the mission we share - a time, once again, to ask ourselves those critical questions: “Where do I fit in all of this? What is God inviting me into?” Participants come away from these gatherings renewed, reenergized, inspired. And they bring all that energy and inspiration back with them to their local community, where everyone benefits.

One of the most influential Regional programs of formation to arise within the past ten years is the Lasallian Leadership Institute (LLI). More than any other formation program in my experience, the LLI has fostered a spirit of association that stretches beyond the boundaries of individual schools and agencies - sometimes even beyond the boundaries of Districts. The formation offered by LLI has been directly responsible for three new schools in our District as well as at least one other to my knowledge in the

Region. Graduates of the LLI have a broader and deeper sense of Lasallian “family” because of both the formation and the community fostered among participants over three years’ time. Several lay men and women graduates have answered the call to serve at other District schools in the past several years, and a spirit of cooperation not previously



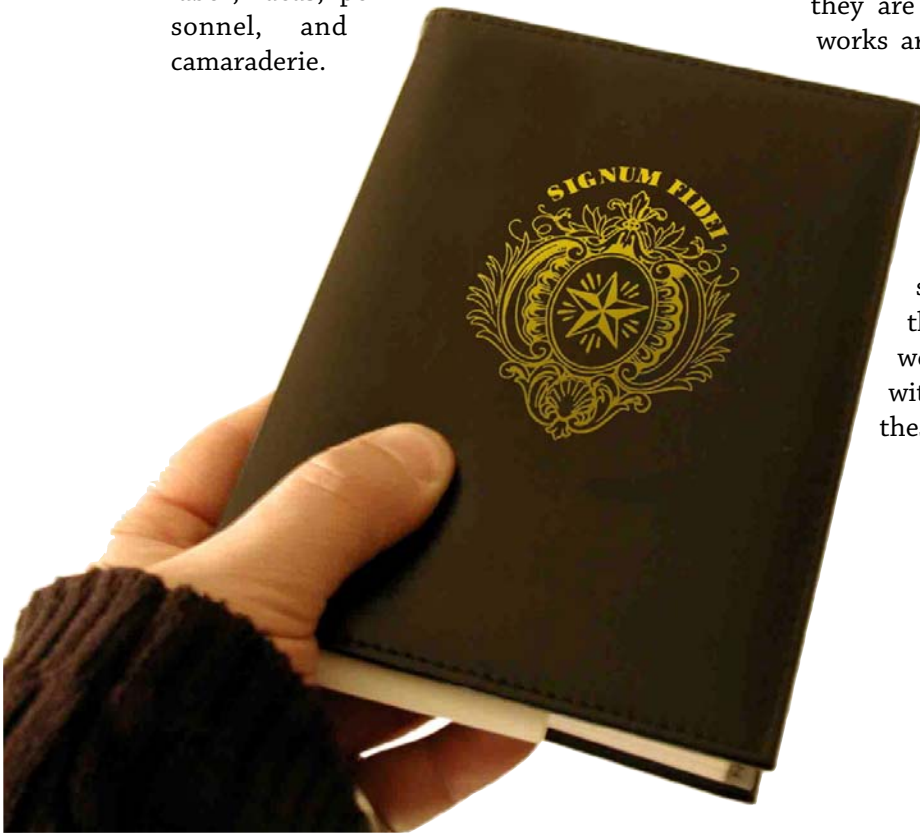
present to such a degree exists among schools that is nothing less than inspiring - established works, for example, working as older brothers/older sisters to new works, sharing labor, ideas, personnel, and camaraderie.

A Final Thought

I am convinced of the tremendous value of our formation programs in terms of advancing the Lasallian mission. Not only are our works surviving, they are thriving - and new schools and other works are being added to the family each year.

Such growth does not happen by accident. It happens because of the dedication and spirit and faith of many people who have been formed into one family - the Lasallian family - to continue to respond to God's call to love and serve and save young people, especially the poor, through education. We must and we will continue to cooperate with God and with one another in molding and fashioning these educational communities.

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6.2 International Lasallian Center (CIL)

The CIL program, as a structure for formation was, until recent years, reserved for the Brothers. However, even before the General Chapter of 2000, CIL welcomed other men and women Lasallians, thus establishing itself firmly in the new concept of Lasallian Association. For the 1998-1999 session, CIL organized a “Lasallian Studies Session,” a six-month program which was open to all Lasallian groups. Participants could attend one or more of the six modules of the session. The experience was very well received. It can also be said that it was the first experience, on the international level, of a Lasallian community made up of different identities: Brothers, Sisters, catechists, lay persons, married and single men and women.

The General Chapter of 2000 decided to organize two sessions during this intercapitular period devoted to those who would be involved in the Lasallian mission within the new context of Lasallian Associates. The first session, of five weeks’ duration, was held during October and November of 2004. The second session, of four weeks’ duration, will be held in October and November of 2005. Each of these sessions takes place within a broader context which takes into account the particular reality of each participant as the starting and ending point.

Each session has a first phase, which occurs prior to the international session, and which each participant carries out in his or her own place of origin (within a District or Region). The participant chooses a Lasallian work, one that is related to a school apostolate or not, and then assesses the way in which the Lasallian mission is alive in that work and how people should be formed to work there. But this is not done individually but as part of a group. Together the group observes, looks at the situation and draws up a report according to some criteria received from the CIL organizers.

The second phase, which occurs during the international session, facilitates the bringing together

“A specific form of this service of the Center of the Institute is provided by **The International Lasallian Center (CIL)** which aims to contribute to the living unity and revitalization of the Institute in the various cultures of the world. It promotes the spiritual renewal of the Brothers who take part in it and helps to prepare those who will be called upon to fill leadership roles in the Institute.” (FSC Rule 101i)

of experiences and reports, looking at contrasts, learning from each other, and being questioned by one another. From the CIL team and other experts





criteria are offered to shed light on and to assess the experience. The General Council is also involved in this phase. While all of this is taking place, by means of the Internet, each participant is in contact with a reference group to share what they have received and their own reflection, to receive reactions, and this entire process enriches the dialogue within the CIL group itself. Together, new ways of proceeding are suggested and guidelines for formation programs are given. Each participant returns to his or her place of origin with this new openness.

The third phase, within the District and in close contact with the reference group, has for its objec-

tive, to contribute to the reality of the richness received, and to contribute to renewal.

The participants of the 2004 session highlighted the following as regards what had enriched them: the living discovery of the international Lasallian world, the various service experiences for the poor in apostolates within an inter-ethnic and an inter-religious environment; the various ways of living as Lasallians, the witness of the Brothers, lay persons, and of married couples who participated in the session; a critical reflection and look at one's own work and the relativizing of certain concepts or ways of acting which formerly seemed absolutist; some underscored the assessment of the content that was received, others highlighted the lived experience; the awareness of new forms of relating between Brothers and lay persons; belonging to the same, extended Lasallian family throughout the entire world; the common, Lasallian spirit and culture in spite of differences of country and situations. The strength of spirituality was an ongoing discovery, as were the possibilities for association, the richness of the Lasallian charism and its commitment to the poor.

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6.3 The French Lasallian Centre

District of France

The French Lasallian Centre was founded in 1986 by Br. Patrice Marey and a team of Brothers, at the request of the Brothers Visitors and of the Association La Salle which grouped together 150 Lasallian educational establishments of the District of France. Its aim was to offer to those educators of our establishments who wished it, an initiation to the educational, pedagogical and spiritual current which came from John Baptist de la Salle.

Since its creation, the C.L.F. has been attended by 1800 persons. It receives 100 each year for a two-year course. This is made up of a total of 10 sessions – four two-day sessions and one session of three and a half days each year. The spreading out of the formation over two years seems important to us in order to allow the gradual evolution of minds and the appropriation of the Lasallian spirit.

The participants are heads of establishments, members of management teams, teachers, educators, those in charge of pastoral ministry and administration and services personnel. In order to pass on more easily the formation received, it is desirable that several educators from the same establishment participate together at the meetings.

So as to take into account the rapid evolution of society, of the school and of the people involved in the school, the content is reviewed each year. Work on the itinerary, life and work of John Baptist de La Salle remains central and constitutes the unique characteristic of the formation. This study is linked to the big questions which affect Society, the young, education in general and the Christian school in particular. The course calls upon specialists: sociologists, psychologists, researchers in the science of education, theologians, biblical scholars...to shed pertinent light on these subjects.

The formation therefore pursues four main objectives nowadays:

- to permit initiation to the Lasallian tradition and its present-day interpretation.
- to help in a better understanding of the role of the Catholic school in Society and in the Church.

- to allow the participants to take their place as educators in Society and in the Church.
- to help each participant to find and to occupy his true place in the education team of his establishment, in a Lasallian spirit.

The first year is centred on the historical context of J.B. de La Salle and his itinerary. It also allows for a study of the needs of the young and the appropriate pedagogical, educational and pastoral responses.

The second year is organised around the study of the diverse components of the Lasallian Education Plan of the District.

The method of work proposes talks, exchanges of ideas based on the experience of the participants, accounts of experiences, reading the writings of J.B. de La Salle and information about the Institute.

Each year there appears great satisfaction on the part of the participants. It concerns the content of the formation, the teaching methods used, the respect for persons in their diversity, the climate of fraternity and the feeling of Lasallian belonging.

The contribution it all makes on the personal level is undeniable to the point where many participants wish to pursue it further in one way or another.

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6.4 Buttimer Institute and Lasallian Leadership Institute

USA/Toronto Region

“Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies”

The Institute, named since its founding in 1987 for former Br. Superior General Charles Henry Buttimer, is a comprehensive formation and education program that studies the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Lasallian Mission.

It is a three-week, three-summer formative program that is lived in a community focused on study, prayer, and a sharing of experiences with others engaged in Lasallian ministry. Through the reading and examination of the original writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle and his contemporaries, participants are able to touch the energy of the Institute’s beginnings and become animators themselves of the Lasallian heritage in their own educational communities.

“Lasallian Leadership Institute” (LLI), USA

Established in 1997 to expand the partnership between colleagues and the Brothers in the Church’s ministry of education, the LLI is a pro-

fessional, comprehensive formation program for leadership within Lasallian institutions and ministries throughout the United States/Toronto Region.

The Institute functions on a three-year cycle that includes one week each summer and two weekends. It assists participants in integrating and promoting the Lasallian heritage in their personal and professional lives.

Participants are introduced to the central features of the Lasallian heritage, to a study of the Lasallian world today and its relationship to contemporary understandings of spirituality, education, management and community leadership.

Recently, the East Coast’s (USA) third cohort of the LLI finished its second year in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania with an examination of the journey of spirituality. It also took some time to be a part of preparing for November’s Regional Assembly on Association and Mission.

The group came together to focus in on the role of spirituality in one’s individual life, one’s community and one’s role as a Lasallian spiritual leader. Presenters Br. Fred Mueller, Mr. Greg Kopra and Br. James Joost led the assembly with individual reflections, small group discussions and large group processing.

One clear message rang out throughout the discussion –we must continue to build this mission together and all of our ministries must be connected within our Lasallian heritage from the colleges to the elementary schools. The LLI cohort provided a strong symbol of what our community can be if we all come together and build our future together.



6.5 The Lasallian Spanish Center

Region of ARLEP

CEL (The Lasallian Spanish Center) is an intense experience in Lasallian formation, of a period of three months, for Spanish-speaking Lasallian teachers (men and women), who come not only from Spain but also from Latin America. Its headquarters is in Madrid, and it began operations in 2000, shortly after the 43rd General Chapter.

CEL is related to another, simpler structure of Lasallian formation, CELAS, which the Region and the Districts of Spain make accessible to teachers from Lasallian centers since 1990, and in which more than one-thousand teachers have participated, one-fourth of whom are Brothers.

Each CEL group is made up of 20 persons: Brothers, lay persons, some Guadalupanas Sisters of De La Salle. Each week of work and being together begins on Monday at midday and ends on Friday at midday. In this way, the lay people who wish can return to their families for the weekend. But in not a few cases a good sacrifice is made on the part of the lay person and his family, when his place of origin is very far away and separation occurs for a prolonged period. During the course of the week the members of the group experience community life by prayer, by living together, by shared reflection, and their different identities are discovered and appreciated, whether religious or lay, man or woman. At the same time, they discover the richness of the charism that they share and the commitment from which they can build the common Lasallian project.

Brother Joaquín Gasca is the leader of the community, and Brother José María Pérez Navarro coordinates the formation program which presents Lasallian identity, and in which different experts, both Brothers and lay, take part. But there is no doubt that the best part of CEL, the experience that changes people most significantly, is the building of the new Lasallian community, Brothers and lay persons together, and from that experience they understand what it means to "be associated together for the educational mission of the poor." This is the challenge which the participants bring back with them to the places they came from, to recover the sense of association and to

The development and maturing of the new concept of Lasallian Association depends, in large measure, on formation, a formation which must be first-rate, but also wide-ranging, and which is itself based on the experience of association, that is to say, in the sharing and the building of a community to serve the mission. Formation which is limited to the intellectual transfer of content does not lead to association.

make it grow among their companions in the Lasallian mission.

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6.6 Lasallian Leadership Center

District of North Mexico

Programs in Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality, offered over the course of many years to District personnel, gave rise in the year 2000 to the “**Lasallian Leadership Center**” (CLL) and to a later program for “**Promoters of Quality Families**.” Both programs are offered to administrative and teaching personnel (Brothers and lay) from schools and universities.

The Lasallian Leadership Center (CLL) involves many formative activities which have been offered to Brothers and lay persons in the District of North Mexico for more than thirty years, and which have been growing along the lines of Association for Mission.

Currently the Lasallian Leadership Center's formation program comprises six full-time modules and assignments that are developed during the semester. The modules are carried out during one week at the beginning of each semester. These weeks of intense work and living together take place at the District's formation center. Three groups of Brothers and lay persons from schools and two groups from universities, about 100 participants in all, have experienced this program. The focus is in three areas primarily: Lasallian spirituality, the educational mission, and school and university administration. The program emphasizes attention to reality, the search and study of adequate responses to the educational needs of children and young people in the world today, the community

dimension, priority service to the poor and the development of personal leadership qualities to be put into service of the community.

One of the achievements of the program was the interiorizing of the Lasallian mission and charism, supporting Brothers and lay persons in their common commitment to Lasallian ideals. Grasping and living out association for mission has emerged as a lifelong process in educational communities. Among the most enriching elements, participants have highlighted: a deepened understanding of the Lasallian heritage, educational service lived as a ministry and as a vocation, dialogue and reflection on educational requirements in the world today, the updating of perspectives involving pedagogy, administration, and pastoral ministry, a greater understanding of Lasallian association, awareness of and commitment to building a world that is more just and in solidarity, a drive to promote small, Christian life communities, and the importance of ongoing formation.

Among the principal challenges for the Lasallian Leadership Center are the following: having a full-time team that can adjust to and renew the programs, ensuring that programs are as much for new teachers as for personnel from different educational, administrative areas, areas of pastoral ministry, to plan follow-up for those who have completed or who are following the courses, to make contact with other formation centers in the Institute, and to provide assistance for exchanges, coordinating the Center's activities with those involved in formation in our universities, to support the forming of small communities for growth in faith and in apostolic commitment in the Lasallian style.

The Leadership Center is for the District a preferential instrument to encourage and to consolidate Lasallian association and, in that way, to watch over the person of Brothers and lay persons and to continue extending and improving educational service of children and young people.

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6.7 What do we understand by “Lasallian Formation”?

European Lasallian Formation Commission

1. **Lasallian Formation is a process** that helps to interiorize the constitutive elements of Lasallian Identity. This also implies accompanying persons in their process of discovery. Lasallian formation offers guidance in forming Christians, it helps them mature spiritually and it helps them live out the Gospel. But it also offers to believers of other religions, the conviction that the Lasallian charism can also be in harmony with other ways of living out faith. Learning how to pray is an important part of the process.

2. **Discovering oneself:** Lasallian Formation is concerned with individual itineraries. It aims at personal conversion and growth by helping individuals to read the story of their own spiritual journey in the light of the story of SJBDLS. It invites people to continue their journey in the context of a shared itinerary in communion with others.

3. **Discovering the poor:** Lasallian Formation is about discovering “mission”. It is always related to the Lasallian mission of “the educational service of the poor”. This is not just a matter of raising people’s awareness of the needs of the young. It is also a matter of showing clearly how those needs were perceived and answered by SJBDLS as part of his response to the call of the gospel. Increased knowledge of the Founder should lead people to identify more with his charism.

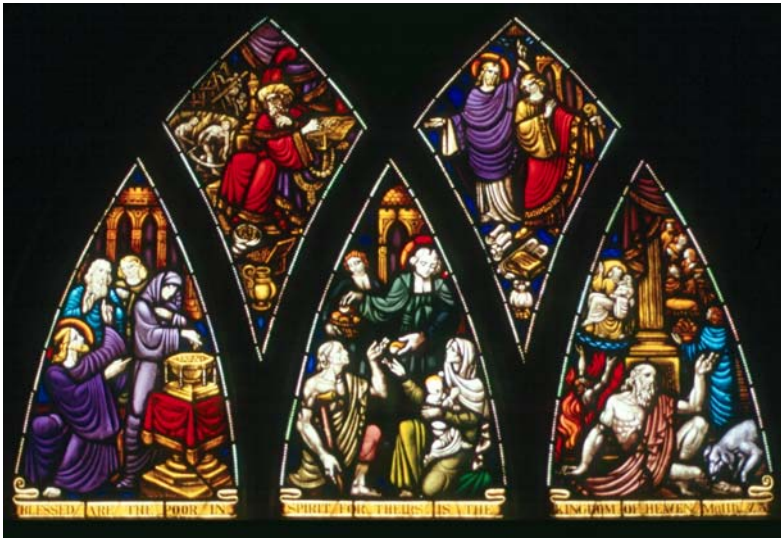
4. **Discovering communion as a way of life:** Lasallian Formation in its fullest sense is about communion. Individuals need to read their personal stories in communion with others who are on the same journey. Lasallian Formation should facilitate the formation of groups of people committed to living and working in association with others for the educational service of the poor. At this level, Lasallian Formation is the same for Brothers and for Lay Lasallians.

The European Lasallian Formation Commission made this document. It is entitled “*Basic Principles of Lasallian Formation*.” This could be a good starting point for reviewing our formation plan both at the local and District levels. Which of these principles are missing in our plans? How can we include them? According to one’s own culture, what else would one like to see included in a document on basic principles for Lasallian Formation?

5. **Lasallian Formation provides people with:** information about SJBDLS, especially his “itinerary”; with opportunities for reflecting on and discerning one’s own itinerary in conjunction with others; with experiences of “association”; with help in analysing one’s experiences; with assistance in learning to pray. Besides having a good knowledge of SJBDLS and of the educational problem areas of today, leaders of Lasallian Formation need to be able to relate well to other people.

6. **Lasallian Formation is not an end in itself,** but a means to an end. It leads people to discover the Lasallian ideal of educational mission by experiencing their professional activity as a lived ministry. This discovery takes place in the context of a process which starts with commitment and finishes in communion and association, viewed as an interior attitude rather than a structure.





7. Lasallian Formation involves accompanying people on their journey, enabling them to express their understanding of “where they are” and inviting them to go further. It also requires the accompanier to be ready to take a risk and be willing to “go with them”. This is best done through personal interviews, in which the formator is also willing to be formed. The process continues outside the formal sessions of a programme.

8. Lasallian Formation operates at three different levels: basic introduction programmes, programmes of further reflection for committed

individuals, advanced programmes for those committed to being “in association”. A given programme may involve a single category or several different categories of Lasallian people (colleagues, partners, associates, Brothers, Lay people). It is important to identify the target groups for programmes. To some extent the goal is to help people move from one level to another, but we must respect the categories in which people feel they belong and avoid giving a hierarchical order to the categories.

9. Lasallian Formation means accompanying people in the real world. Programmes must be aware of the realities in which we live, and based on an analysis of present day society. We need to produce tools for Lasallian Formation written in the language of today. Materials and sessions of Lasallian Formation must be organised, prepared and presented by teams which include Brothers and Lay Lasallians.

10. In schools, Lasallian Formation is especially important for heads and senior staff. Management style is crucial in determining whether a school or other establishment is a genuine Lasallian community which has a formative influence on those who are part of it.

