

PONENCIAS

THE INSTITUTE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS AND ITS COMMITMENT AROUND THE WORLD*

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1. Global Institute

The Institute today consists of about 1000 institutions and 78 countries. Among those 1000 institutions, there are more than 300 projects for a young people and children at risk staffed by 4500 Lasallians. Over 400,000 young people are involved in these 300 ministries. Think about that. We say there is between 900,000 and one million students in our La Salle schools globally. Over 400,000 are children and youth in very risky situations. What are some of these projects?

In the Ivory Coast, in West Africa, there is a residence and school for street children. In the Cameroons, also in West Africa, there is a long-standing project for the pygmies. I was just in Holland last week, and I met a Brother who I was with in the Philippines in the 1970's and 1980's. He is 82 years old and after a few years in the Philippines, he went to the Cameroons and he started this program. The pigmies as many minorities throughout the world were isolated not integrated in society and faced many challenges. Part of it was their inability or having access to an education that related to their reality and prepare them to enter the mainstream of society. In order for something to happen, they needed something very basic. Translating their alphabet, their words in a way that they could learn to read and go to school. This Brother was the one who created the tools of an alphabet for the pygmy population in Cameroons and it continues to this

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** Superior General. <http://www.lasalle.org/en/who-are-we/government-animation/>

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day, not only in Cameroons, but also in other parts of Africa where there is a pygmy population, such as the Congo.

In Ethiopia, there is a program for students affected with HIV. Also in Ethiopia, there are a number of agricultural programs allowing the students and the faculty to grow the kinds of crops to produce fruit, not as only for themselves, but for sale. In Meki, they produce milk and cheese. As you know, one of the challenges in our world is education for young girls in certain parts of the world. We have a strong presence in countries educating young women. Now I would like to spend a minute on a particular project you may not be familiar. South Sudan, as you know, is the newest country in the world. About 10 years ago, approximately 65 religious congregations made a commitment to provide health and education to this newest nation. It broke away from Sudan where there was fighting and where the civil war still going on. Yet the 65 congregations are present either physically or through financial assistance in this country. What we are involved in, La Salle, is educational centers for teacher training. We train teachers to go into the public schools. Some of the other congregations, especially the sisters, are addressing nursing, health care and trauma healing, which need education.

As you know, we conduct schools of all kinds; many are gratuitous, charging no tuition. In Thailand for example, there is a Bamboo school actually made of bamboo. For many years, the Brothers and partners in Australia have operated a kids' help line. This is a national program for kids who are feeling troubled, depressed, and maybe even suicidal. They know there is a place they can call and get counseling and guidance over the telephone. The unique feature of this program's success in working with young kids across all over Australia is they have built up a database, where the government of Australia goes to understand the situation of young people at risk in Australia. It is not only a program of assistance and help; it is an advocacy program for young people at risk. Moreover, they have had an impact in some of the laws passed in Australia relative to the protection and the rights of children. Lasallian works in Papua New Guinea, an area that is isolated, benefits from a variety of different kinds of education. In Vietnam, things are happening in a positive vein today. In 1975, with the fall of Saigon, the Brothers of course had to flee Vietnam. Many of them did not, but they could not to be directly involved in schools. Nevertheless, they stayed involved in education in storefronts providing various kinds of educational work. Two years ago, the government of Vietnam allowed the Brothers to open a new school. The authorities promised next year, 2016, permission to open another school. Therefore, Vietnam as a country is opening up; the government is becoming a little bit more relaxed with its people and the Brothers. There are 100 Brothers in Vietnam today; young Brothers are now involved with formal education. The Brothers have also

opened a school in Cambodia. In Pakistan, there are also varieties of educational programs preferentially oriented to young women and girls, who, like many, do not always have educational opportunities in certain parts of the world. The Brothers in the Lasallian works have been in Pakistan for about 50 years. There was a tragic civil war in Sri Lanka with many children as soldiers between the two main ethnic groups there Sinhalese and Tamils. The Brothers are both Tamils and Sinhalese. We are one of the few congregations where we have a single province of Tamils and Sinhalese together. Many religious congregations have to have two separate provinces, a province for the Tamils, sisters and priest and brothers and a province for the Sinhalese. Another unique venture, Brothers have La Salle presence in the Middle East from a century and a half. In Israel, we have three schools; on the West Bank, we have a university and a school. In Jaffa, there is a primary and secondary school with Jewish, Muslim and Christian students. The faculty is also comprised of Muslim, Christian and Jewish teachers all working together.

We all remember the earthquake a few years ago in Haiti. The world community quickly responds with money, clothing and food. This presents additional challenges in the case of these natural catastrophes. Countries contribute equipment to rebuild, but in many places of the world, Nepal is the latest example, the infrastructure in the country does not exist to absorb all the help. Therefore, a lot of the work, the supplies, the food and the clothing goes to waste. After a while, when another catastrophe happens in another part of the world, Nepal is forgotten. When the devastating earthquake struck Haiti, the General Council asked, what happens a year later when another catastrophe happens in some other part of the world and Haiti is forgotten? Our response was that if we are going to respond, it should be with the long-term impact in mind. We made a decision to establish a school. We built a new school, and, like many of the efforts today, we did the project in collaboration. A congregation of Haitian sisters, ourselves, some other people created a school. The sisters and we collaborated with a school and a health clinic that is now functioning.

Those of you from the United States are familiar with the St. Miguel school network for at risk middle school students in the urban areas. Again, the Brothers ask, where do you go? Where is the need? How can we respond? In this case, the Catholic Church in the United States follows the people where they go. When the people leave the cities, the Church creates schools out in the suburbs. However, those left in the cities or the new immigrants coming into the cities may not have the same opportunity I had when I was a student. Brothers do not always believe me when I say that in Philadelphia, where I was from, we paid no tuition. No catholic student in the archdiocese of Philadelphia paid tuition to attend an elementary or a secondary school. In the 1960's, the archdiocese of Philadelphia educated

300,000 students and charged no tuition. Most of those kids were in urban areas. We walked to school five blocks away. When you move to the suburbs and schools go there, and those left behind are without education. The St. Miguel school movement is a Lasallian response to that need.

In France about 30, maybe 40 years ago, they started mobile education for the gypsies. The gypsies do not stay in one place. In response to their needs, we created a mobile education unit that follows them. Just as in the case of West Africa, projects are not just simply formal education, but also tied to the land, to the environment, to the culture to help produce responses for the kinds of basic needs people have.

That is a very fast overview. I apologize for going so quickly and I am not getting a chance to reflect on each of the photos in the programs, but I wanted to welcome you to the La Salle network that is a little bit broader than what you might have thought. It is true what Mother Teresa said, "We are just one drop in the ocean but the ocean would be poor without that drop." Single drops form rivers and oceans and in times of drought, every drop counts. In the La Salle world of today, we need to put together all of our drops. Each of you is a drop that can make a difference. You are part of this worldwide La Salle network. What do the slides say to you? Think about it. What do the slides say to you? The network is very vast and dynamic in how it responds to issues, and in how we come up with solutions. The network really cares about international calls for assistance and about solving those challenges. The network is about the long term versus the short term. I am not sure we always respond quickly enough or we always solve the problem, but I think we do not take full advantage of our vast network as much as we could. Brother John Johnston, former Superior General once said, "With our numbers, we are incredible source of power for good." For me, today, for that to continue to happen and for these kinds of creative projects to happen, we need to bring our various networks into greater synergy. What do I mean by that?

One network, the global network, of course, is the La Salle mission, the center of the Institute and all of our schools, all of our works... International collaborative research projects are studying some of the things you already know about in the more than 80 countries where La Salle is present. There is also a network called the International Association of Lasallian Universities. It represents 73 universities worldwide. Another network, called the Union of Former La Salle Students Association. It is a global network of local alumni associations around the world and who have created an international organization. Another network is comprised of men and women familiar with our schools, who have come together to take a public vow. They are married, single, priests, sisters who have taken a vow to come together as a virtual community, to engage in projects similar to some

of these I have mentioned. There are about 2000 members. I do not know how many chapters there are around the world. We also have the movement of La Salle Volunteers. We need to bring these networks into closer coordination and collaboration to continue to be creative, to continue to respond to needs that will continue to emerge. Think about La Salle volunteer movement around the world. They are people your age. You have the idealism, you have the energy, you have the creativity, you have the ideas, and you know how to work on social media. You have the ability to contribute to the network in your own way. Connecting globally with other young people and other voices, as you are doing here, right now. One of the projects we are looking at this moment is this vast growing network of volunteer programs that we have. We are analyzing what we can do. As you can see, we are looking at possibilities for students in the northern hemisphere and students in the southern hemisphere to exchange, as they already do in a limited way, through programs of one year, programs of six months, and programs of summer immersion. This happens in a number of places, but there are still all kinds of opportunities to be developed. Think about that, think about the volunteer movement and participate in it. In the United States, we have had a program for about 26 years. It started as a volunteer program, university graduates spent one or two years living in community with the Brothers and working with the Brothers in an inner city project, for example. Over the years, about 700 young people have participated in the program. The unexpected benefit, the unanticipated outcome of that, is how many of them continue to stay with the La Salle movement. In the United States today, about 170 former La Salle volunteers are full time faculty members and staff in schools across the country. I think eight or nine of them are now headmasters or principals of schools.

In Mexico and in other places, as well, there are vibrant volunteer programs. Bringing creative ideas to the surface and trying them out, throwing things against the wall to see what sticks, is a good thing to do. You do not know where it is going to lead. You do not know how much good it will do, but we have to try to experiment with new options.

I am going to stop there. Before I go to the next part, are there any questions?

*Can you explain more about the La Salle volunteer program?
Is it just for education?*

Well, they do different kinds of things, but it is very much about education. It can be a combination of formal education and informal, but essentially, it has a connection to education because that is our identity.

What did you have in mind? My specialty is nutrition...I am most familiar with the volunteer programs in the United States. Part of the ministries of the Brothers in the east coast are programs for juvenile delinquents, for cases under sentence. In residences or treatment centers, nutrition is very much a part of the education that goes on with that. One of those programs in Rhode Island is a program of family services. It is for the entire family. They reach out to the family because when you are working with kids in trouble with the law, or whatever, it is not just the kid. It is not just the individual; it is the whole network. It is the entire family structure. Therefore, nutrition is very much a part of that.

Can we participate in all the programs around the world? I know there are La Salle Volunteers in North America and South America. I looked that up and it says they have a very limited space for student to be able to go internationally... Do you think they can expand what people can do to use these other programs around the world and send volunteers there to help the Brothers?

The possibility does exist; each program has their own identity, their own focus, and their own way of doing things. The ones in the United States stay national for several reasons. Earlier, they did go internationally, but the experience was demanding for a young person just graduating from a university to go overseas. In the case of the United States, they went to Kenya or one of the islands in the Caribbean where the Brothers have a school. The challenge was adjusting to a new kind of world, adjusting to a new kind of culture, and adjusting to living in a community with all these people. It was difficult for some young people volunteering for just a year. Because of that, the program did not continue internationally. However, in Europe there are programs where the young people in France, in Spain, go to countries in Africa for a whole summer or a month. Our schools and programs in the province of the west coast, in San Francisco, send young people on immersion programs in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam where we have our schools. There are different kinds of programs, depending on the resources they have.

2. Biblical Reflection

As a way of addressing your theme of Leadership, I will begin with a passage from Scripture. Many years ago, I attended a retreat where the presenter was one of our Lasallian scholars, an excellent Brother. He gave a wonderful reflection on the passage of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that I want to share with you now. The passage is from the gospel of Luke and it can be divided into five parts. The first part is the longest. The two disciples are talking about all that happened in Jerusalem the last couple of days. They are very sad and very downcast. They are very depressed because they were disciples of Jesus who they believed was the Son of God. They have been with him for three years and they thought he was the Messiah that was going to bring back the kingdom of Israel. They followed him. They gave up everything. They gave up their work, traveled with him. He had inspired them. Now Jesus is crucified and dead. These disciples are now leaving Jerusalem where it all happened and going out to Emmaus, which is a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem. In this first part of the passage, the two disciples' mouths are open; they are speaking about all that happened. All their hopes, all their dreams that they placed in the person of Jesus seems to be lost. He is gone, crucified. All their hopes for the kingdom of Israel, the restoration of the kingdom, all their hopes they put in this man, all their dreams they had with this man, seem to be lost. That is what they are talking about on the road to Emmaus.

In the second part of the passage they encounter a stranger, a stranger meets them on the road and hears them speaking. He asks them what they are talking about. They begin to tell him and he asks for more information. They tell him that he must be the only person in Jerusalem who does not know what has been happening these last couple of days. Then they tell this stranger, who they see now, about their hopes and dreams and the stranger says, wait a minute, and let me tell you what the scriptures are saying about the Messiah. Now these two disciples' mouths are closed and their ears are open as they listen to this stranger speak to them about the scriptures. They are amazed at how much this stranger knows about the Bible, the Scriptures, the story of salvation history, what the Messiah is all about, and what the Messiah is supposed to be. Their mouths are closed, while their ears are open.

They are approaching the town of Emmaus and the stranger gives the impression of that he must continue walking. We now go to the third part to the story. The third part is the shortest, just one sentence. It is a simple prayer that the disciples say to the stranger. "Come, stay with us." The stranger does, and he goes into the house where they are and sits down for a

meal. This is the fourth part. The stranger takes the bread and breaks it. As soon as the stranger breaks the bread, the two disciples finally recognize the stranger as Jesus. Just three days ago, on Thursday, at the last supper, Jesus created the sacrament of the Eucharist when he broke the bread in front of the disciples and passed it. Now, the two disciples' eyes are open. They finally recognize the stranger, as Jesus. They say to each other, were not our hearts burning when he spoke to us about the Scripture on the road? They heard once again the good news the gospel from Jesus. Once you hear the good news, it burns in your heart. Then comes the fifth and final part of the passage. They get up and rush back to Jerusalem to announce to the rest of the disciples and the apostles that Jesus is alive.

Leadership

Leadership depends on how it functions, on how it operates, on what kind of environment you find yourself. There is leadership in the business world, where the main goal is to sell your product and be successful in selling that product. There is leadership in the nonprofit world, leadership in the community. For me, leaders first need to understand the people for whom they may work. Each of us has our own dignity as persons. As leaders, we need to be aware of each of the people in the organization, in the community, in the school, in the university. Whatever it is, we need to recognize each individual as persons with value in their own right. A leader like Jesus on the road to Emmaus respected the two disciples. He may have been frustrated because he had been with them for three years and they still did not understand the message. Nevertheless, he respects them as persons and he is present to them. A leader is present to the people; a leader is present with the people. Jesus was present with those two disciples, he accompanied them on a road to Emmaus. A leader pauses. Jesus could have said right away, listen, you are getting it all wrong, but he did not say that right away. He said tell me more about what you think. Why do you think it is this way and not another way? He paused and he listened before speaking. A leader is patient. As leaders, we want to see things done. As I said in the beginning, when we respond to needs, I am not sure we respond quickly enough at times, but we need to be able to step back...listen to what he or she thinks and reflect upon what is right. A leader needs to be present with the people in the organization. A leader needs to be respectful of what they contribute, no matter what the project happens to be. For me, leaders need to be present with the persons and must pause before offering their own ideas.

Similarly, leaders need to be patient and open about exploring another way of doing things. I am fortunate to have Councilors, who are all leaders

in their own right and who accept collaborative leadership, collaborative conversation, and collaborative reflection. I think, for the most part, this helps us move forward in a good way. Presence, patience and occasionally pausing, these are some qualities of leadership. You can write and you can read books that will give you all kinds of qualities. I think though, the qualities I mentioned are those that I know I need to be attentive to in this particular world that I have been asked to serve at this present time.

3. Questions

What has been the biggest disappointment as superior general?

I have not been Superior long enough; it has only been a year. A personal disappointment is that I lacked the languages. We are an international institute and our three official languages are French, Spanish and English, and of course, Italian. I am very poor at languages. That is a personal disappointment because it limits my ability to hear and to understand what you, Lasallians, and my Brothers may be saying to me. Sometimes I need someone to translate and, as good as a translation is, it is not the same as speaking to someone. For me that is a major disappointment.

*How do you get all the information from around the world?
Is there any team that gets that information for you?*

We have a Communications Service with responsibility to share Institute information. In 2007, we changed the structure of our government at the international level so that five of the general councilors live in the five main regions of our Institute: one in North America, one for Central and South America, one for all of Africa, one for Europe and Middle East, and one for all of Asia. The information comes that way. We have meetings with the leadership each year in different parts of the world. I go to those meetings and we get information that way. As Superior, I visit all of our works. Getting the information is not a problem. Understanding the information and finding the knowledge within the information, that is the challenge.

With your experience as a Superior of the Institute, what are some of your ideas that could help us get more students excited about being at La Salle institutions or maybe understanding that they are La Salle when they do not know what it is?

First, I want to start with being patient. I say that, because this conference you are participating in now, did not exist a few years ago, but now it does. Things are happening but not fast enough for any of us. Nevertheless, I think we can do it by creating these kind of opportunities and these kind of networks that meet on a national or international level and begin to paint a picture of a global La Salle network. The International Association of La Salle Universities and the International Association of Former Students are two other examples or organizations that did not exist before, but now do. I guess we need to be patient and keep moving ahead with the various kinds of creative things we are doing. The La Salle Volunteer movement in the United States, which I am most familiar, started in the 1980's. These young people, as La Salle Volunteers, are in the communities with Brothers for one to two years. They prepare the meals with them; they pray with them. They have formation experiences. These young people have innovative experiences and they continue in La Salle mission. I share your frustration, but I know that never in our history have we ever had so many ministries and so many students in our schools, as we do today.

Our Brothers are very important to the Institute. Do you think that the Institute in the future is going to cope with fewer vocations, since the Brother is such a central thing? Do you believe that the mission should continue without the presence of the Brothers in those countries, such as United States and Europe?

For me, and I think for many, a positive reflection about the vocation of the Brothers, or sisters, or priests, is the realization that vocations are not limited to priests, brothers and sisters. All of us have to exercise that vocation. I think that the La Salle formation program has had a better response compared to others through sharing its vision of spirituality. That is the response to the reality today. It is a good response because many of the faculty and many of the teachers who participate in our various programs say they always had a vocation, but did not have the means to express it. By participating in our formation program, they gain a language for what was always there, but they did not know how to express. This has been a positive response to a crisis in terms of numbers. The concept of vocation has expanded and will continue to expand. We should be incredibly active in promoting brothers' formation, sisters' formation, and priests' formation.

We try very hard to do that. I think there is a great need for us to be there to meet the needs of young people.

This brings us back to some of the things we were talking about creativity and how to get out the message. That is again, where people like yourselves, all of us, participate and contribute in activities. In thinking differently about how to respond to a reality, if you always think the same way, you go with the same solutions. That is why you need to come from a different approach. The second part of the question concerns understanding what a charism is; it is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church. It belongs to the Church; it does not belong to the person who the Spirit led to found a new religious congregation, such as St. La Salle did in creating schools for young people. Charism can continue whether or not there is a decline in vocations; it is up to the Holy Spirit.

I ask you, when and why did you decide to become a member of the La Salle community as a student, teacher, or volunteer? What is the biggest lesson you have learned as a Lasallian? I recommend you remain open to the unexpected. Do not be afraid of the unexpected. At the age of 25, I was getting ready for my final vows and I decided to go to the Philippines. I was there for 11 years. Those were the happiest 11 years in my life. I learned more than I taught. Do not be afraid of the unexpected.

Next project?

As a governance structure, we are organized so that what can happen at the local level does happen at a local level. Fortunately, there is good leadership around the world. At our last General Chapter in 2014, we challenged ourselves to go beyond the borders, to go to the peripheries, to go to the deserts, to go to the boundaries of society and to go beyond our borders, whether they are personal or geographic borders. For this reason, projects are happening in many parts of the world. New initiatives of Lasallian ministries are responding to real needs. For example, we want to have a more effective network, to collaborate with others. Our most recent project is with the Marist Brothers, another congregation of teaching brothers founded in the 19th century. Together, we are going to open a non-formal education project for the refugees in Syria and Iraq. If it works, we will replicate it in other parts of the world where there are refugees. We are calling it the Fratelli Project. Fratelli is “Brother” in Italian.

The La Salle community is becoming more diverse and with more faith backgrounds. Do you think that the La Salle community should take part in faith dialogue?

The La Salle congregation does take part in those dialogues. Again, being a congregation that is in many countries around the world, we are in countries where we are the minority, for instance Egypt, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and India. We welcome anybody into our schools. In those previous countries, the majority of the faculty are not Christians or Catholics. They are either Muslims, Hindus or Buddhist. We have been in those countries for 100-150 years.

In the 1920's, there was a very famous American philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead. He once said if you want to teach John and Mary mathematics, it is not how much mathematic you know, it is how much you know John and Mary. I think is a La Salle is about relationships. Our role as educators is to get to know the person behind the label student and for the student to get to know the person behind the label teacher. I think one of the greatest gifts of La Salle is about relationships. If you do not know your students, who they are and where they come from, you are not a teacher and not a Brother

As Pope Francis said in his latest encyclical on the environment, we all have one common home, we are all human beings and that is our starting point. Many people inspire me when I see what they do for others.

No question, a statement.

How can you as student leaders help us in creating a platform to enhance our international Lasallian network? Become involved in the regional conference of young Lasallians. I would love you to take that initiative, contact other young people, and share your ideas. The very purpose of the International Council of Young Lasallians is having people from different parts of the world get to hear different understandings and different approaches. You have more experience with the social network than I do, so tell me how to do that... You tell me of ways of connecting more efficiently and more effectively. I welcome your ideas.

Thank you very much!