

Johnston, John. "Seven Hallmarks of a Lasallian School." Presentation at the Lasallian European Congress, Strasbourg, March 1994. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (2011).

© Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Readers of this article have the copyright owner's permission to reproduce it for educational not-for-profit purposes, if the author and publisher are acknowledged in the copy.

Seven Hallmarks of a Lasallian School

John Johnston, FSC, Superior General (1986 – 2000), *Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*

*[An address given by Brother John at the
Lasallian European Congress at Strasbourg in March 1994.]*

Introduction

My response to your invitation to participate in Euro La Salle 1994 and to address the Congress this morning was immediate and enthusiastic. I am particularly happy to be here today since prior commitments prevented me from participating in the first Congress four years ago.

Since the initial Congress, Europe has witnessed developments and changes that are nothing short of astounding. Cardinal Martini says that the experience of post-communist Europe parallels the desert experience of Hebrews following their exodus from Egypt. It is an experience characterized by an absence of clear direction, by a certain crises of identity, and by profound fears, all of which are contributing to a resurgence of nationalism, ethnic and racial tension, and egoism. The implications of this experience for personal and family life, for political life, for the economy, for the Church, for education – and, consequently, for our Lasallian mission of human and Christian education in Europe- are enormous.

The Congress, then, is highly significant. For each of us it is certainly a stimulating experience of ongoing formation. But the Congress is more: it is in itself a "Message to Europe." The message is that we Lasallians have something important to contribute to the future of Europe and that we are committed to making that contribution.

During the past two days highly qualified and representative young people have communicated to the Congress their convictions, hopes, fears and plans for the future. We have reflected with competent and experienced resource persons on many of the major issues that confront us. Together we have wrestled with pertinent and challenging questions concerning culture, values, faith, meaning and happiness. And we have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of our response as Lasallians and to ask ourselves what we have to do different and better.

The World of the Institute

Your presence at the Congress is a sign that expresses the communion that already exists among Lasallians in Europe and at the same time nourishes that communion. My presence among you – as a non-European and as representative of the Lasallian Family throughout the world- is a sign that expresses the communion that characterizes our international family and, I hope, nourishes that communion. I am using the word "communion" deliberately. I am rather certain that you have "sensed" that "communion" during these days. You come from eighteen different countries. Most of you have met for the first time. And yet, you know – because you have experienced it – that there is "something" that binds you to one another. That something is what we call the

“Lasallian charism.” It is a gift that John Baptist de La Salle received from the Holy Spirit for the service of the Church and of the world. That gift has been transmitted by his disciples through three hundred years of history. This charism continues today to unite, inspire, and give direction to the Brothers and a great number of other educators.

Our Mission in the World Today

In his remarks to the members of the 42nd General Chapter last May, Pope John Paul II acknowledges with approval that our contemporary mission is one that is lived by the Brothers as well as by lay men and women trained as teachers, catechists, and pastoral workers who want to follow the methods and objectives which mark the “Lasallian Charism.”

Our mission is truly a “shared mission.” It is a mission exercised by Brothers, lay men and women, priests and members of other religious institutes. We are members of what we call the “Lasallian Family”: a communion of persons charged by God with the mission of human and Christian education in the world today. That is another way of expressing “Lasallians... without frontiers.” In his document on the participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church, the Pope says that the Church is called to be a “communion of persons,” but a communion which in its very nature is directed to mission: the mission of generating communion. The Church is called, therefore, to be “a communion which generates communion.”

In the same way our Lasallian Family is called to be a communion of persons within the Church, a communion which generates brotherhood and sisterhood in the exercise of the mission of human and Christian education. Lasallians... without frontiers: Lasallians committed to helping young people in eighty-one countries develop themselves fully as human persons and to learn to live as brothers and sisters; Lasallians dedicated to the construction of a world where all can live in peace and justice.

We exercise a mission in a striking variety of educational institutions: pre-school, elementary, secondary, university preparatory, technical, professional, engineering, agricultural teacher training, university... There are residential programs for young people of various age groups. There are programs for the illiterate, migrants, itinerants, physically and mentally handicapped, youth with learning disabilities, youngsters with behavioral problems. There are pastoral centers offering a variety of religious and apostolic activities. There are centers for sport and other forms of recreation and social activities.

Our educational service is offered not only to Catholics, but also to thousands of youngsters who are Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Shintoist, Confucianist, or members of traditional religions. We work in countries which are extremely poor, in countries tormented by violence and even war, and in countries with political frameworks ranging from highly favorable to totally opposed to our educational mission.

My Personal Experience

During the past eighteen years I have been privileged to meet literally thousands of Lasallian youth throughout the world. I have been able to observe the differences that exist among the youth of the world: differences in race, ethnic identity, culture, language, religion, economic

levels, political freedom, educational opportunities... But what always impresses me as I listen to young people and watch them play or engage in conversation is that youth everywhere are essentially the same. Their differences are real and must be taken seriously, but they are secondary in importance. As young people growing from childhood through adolescence to maturity, they experience similar joys, fears, dreams, frustrations, and problems. They wrestle with the same questions concerning the meaning of life, human love and relationships.

Young people everywhere are the same because we are all the same. We are all children of the same God. As a consequence, we are all brothers and sisters.

But how obvious it is that we don't live the way brothers and sisters should live. There is so much injustice - injustice which inevitably provokes rebellion - exploitation, crime and political corruption, scandalous absurdities such as starvation, hunger and homelessness. The current plethora of ethnic, tribal, nationalistic and religious conflicts, together with the resurgence of racism and xenophobia in nearly every corner of the globe is a major disappointment of this decade.

I believe that those of us who constitute this international communion we call the Lasallian Family – that is to say, Lasallian... without frontiers – can contribute and are in fact contributing significantly through our educational services to the construction of a world where all can live in dignity, justice and peace. We can – and must – form young people who are not only trained very well academically or professionally, but also are prepared and motivated to participate actively and creatively in the task of building a more just society.

Our Lasallian mission, therefore, is to live – without frontiers – as brothers and sisters committed to generating communities throughout the world, communities which in turn generate other communities. An idealistic vision? Of course it is. But I am convinced that God is calling us to nothing less. The current setbacks and disappointments - which are certainly affecting our schools and our young people in Europe - should challenge rather than discourage us, challenge us to renew our commitment to work, through human and Christian education, for universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

John Baptist de La Salle said that the purpose of the institute is to give a Christian education to the young and that for this purpose the Brothers keep schools. Our schools are, therefore, instruments to help us accomplish the purpose of the Institute. But the school which is the ordinary instrument of the mission of the Institute is not just any school. It is a school with certain characteristics. Let us now reflect on those characteristics which are constitutive of a Christian school which is truly Lasallian.

Characteristics of the Lasallian School

De La Salle did not leave us a definitive list of the characteristics he considered essential for the Christian schools he founded. For this reason published lists of characteristics can vary somewhat in content, order and number. I have made a list of seven and, for practical purposes, have placed them in a certain order. In practice the characteristics are inter-related. It is the integration of these characteristics which gives the school its “Lasallian” identity.

But I must confess that I suspect that our Founder is not at all happy with the expression “Lasallian School.” He is probably saying this morning: “I founded *Christian* schools and my successor is talking about *Lasallian* schools.” We should take this observation seriously. We must never forget that a Lasallian school – whatever its nature or level – is essentially a *Christian* school, but a Christian school in which a certain number of clearly defined characteristics are given prominence.

1. Respect for each person as a unique person

As you may know, John Baptist de La Salle prepared sixteen meditations for the use of the Brothers during their annual retreat. But it is clear from the title page that these meditations were intended not only for the Brothers but also “for the use of all persons engaged in the education of youth.”

Because De La Salle considered the annual retreat to be a very important week of prayer and evaluation, we can be sure that the choice of reflection the Founder made for these days is significant. It is particularly interesting and enlightening to examine the meditation the Founder prepared for the first day of the retreat.

In this meditation De La Salle, inspired by St. Paul, says that God wants all persons to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. But the “persons” he has in mind are not persons in the abstract. At the moment of composing these meditations, the Founder could look back on many years of experience with the Christian schools and with the children who frequented them. What he is saying in this meditation is that God wants all such children to come to knowledge of the truth and be saved.

But, he writes, God cannot truly desire this without providing the necessary means, that is to say, without giving the children the teachers to assist them. Therefore, God “enkindles a light in the hearts” of certain persons, calling them to give their lives to teaching children. You, the Founder say to the Brothers clearly and unambiguously, you are such persons. Look upon yourselves, therefore, as ministers of God.

Let’s reflect upon this meditation in the context of the Congress. God wants young people to know the truth. He wants them to develop themselves as human persons, developing fully the gifts they have received. He wants them to be saved. De La Salle is referring primarily to eternal salvation, but we need not limit our interpretation to that meaning. God wants young people to be liberated from all that is holding them back from full development. Because God wants them to know truth and be saved, we can say that young people have the right to knowledge and salvation.

But, De La Salle says, if the rights of young people are to be honored, they need teachers. Therefore God calls certain persons to be teachers. It is clear, therefore, that De La Salle considered the role of teacher to be vocation. Teaching is, of course, an occupation, a manner of earning a living. But it is more than that. De La Salle is saying to all of us today that God, in his Providence, that is to say, in his love and concern for young people, has confided them to our care. They have the “right” to grow as human persons. We have the “duty” of assuring that their rights are honored. But this “duty” is not onerous. It is a gift from God. God “confides” –

“entrusts” – young people to our care. We have received a tremendous responsibility, but a responsibility which is also a privilege.

The first characteristic of a Lasallian school is therefore respect, reverence even, for each student as a unique person. Canon Blain, biographer of the Founder, says that the term “school masters” was in no way adequate to describe the early followers of De La Salle and their relationship with the pupils. He said that the Brothers chose the name “Brothers” not only because it expressed very well the union they considered important, but also because it expressed the relationship they wanted to have with their pupils, a relationship of elder brothers.

We Lasallian teachers are called to be brothers and sisters to the young people God confides to our care – whatever their race, ethnical heritage, language, religion, economic class, economic ability or personal talents. They came to visit us with questions, convictions, perplexities, concerns, hopes, fears, frustrations... We must meet them “where they are” – not where we think they should be, not where we were when we were their age, not where our past pupils were in the 60’s and 70’s and 80’s. We must meet them where they are today. As their elder brothers and sisters we must respect them, accompany them, and walk with them side by side.

2. Spirit of Community

The second characteristic flows from the first. A healthy spirit of community must permeate Lasallian schools. The *Declaration* of the renewal Chapter of 1967 expressed it well:

“The school will be a living community where young people, coming from different social and family backgrounds, educate one another by mutual understanding and respect, openness of mind in dialogue, acceptance of the uniqueness and limitations of each, growth in the spirit of service, and the practice of justice and fraternal charity” (46.2).

But that paragraph needs to be completed. This “living community” includes not only the students. All those involved in the school – administrators, teachers, staff personnel, Brothers’ community – are constitutive members of the school community.

Earlier in this talk I spoke about our mission among young people of significantly different cultures throughout the world. But the fact is that we have increasingly complex ethnic and religious situations in European society and in many of our Lasallian schools. We must today meet the challenge of creating communion in “multicultural” situations.

Multicultural Situation

Let me share with you a personal experience. At the end of my ten-year term as Vicar General, I was asked in an interview what was the most significant thing I had learned from my contact with the Lasallian mission in some eighty countries of the world. The question was easy for me – because among the many lessons I had learned, one stood out over all the others: from personal observation I became deeply aware of the depths of convictions and feelings associated with ethnic and religious differences as well as the hatred and propensity for violence which exist. As a “southerner” in the United States, I grew up with the injustice of racial discrimination and I think I understand it. Nevertheless, I did not expect to find, and was not prepared for, similar problems stemming from ethnic and religious differences.

Several years later, a Superior General, I sent a message to an assembly of young Lasallians in Europe in which I expressed my conviction that *the* challenge at the beginning of the new millennium would be living together in “multicultural” situations. But never in my wildest imagination did I think that problem would explode as it has. That people only a “stone’s throw” from where I live – people in ex-Yugoslavia, people who lived as neighbors for years – could suddenly turn on one another out of fear and hostility rooted in historical events, I never would have believed possible.

The Church has defended the right of people to identify with their cultural heritage and has consistently condemned discrimination and other forms of social injustice against ethnic and religious groups. But the Church has also insisted that the common good must be respected.

Our schools today have to help young people discover their own cultural roots, establish a sense of belonging, and at the same time become aware of the riches of other cultures. But our schools must do more. They must help young people to recognize and confront prejudices they might have towards other racial, ethnic, or religious groups. Young people must be encouraged to participate actively in finding just solutions to the enormous challenges resulting from immigration in Europe today. They must be encouraged to commit themselves to struggling with and for all those who suffer discrimination.

Lasallian educative communities must be communities which in their very nature are oriented towards service. Our school communities must never become what sociologist Robert Bellah calls “enclave communities,” groups which promote a certain sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among their own members, but admit no responsibility for those outside their own “life-style enclave.”

A strong spirit of community must characterize our Lasallian schools, a spirit of community that manifests itself in what John Paul II calls the virtue of “solidarity”: “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 40).

3. School of Quality

The General Chapter of 1993 strongly reaffirmed our commitment to the human and Christian education of young people and adults, particularly of those who are poor, a position Pope John Paul endorsed and encouraged in his address to the Capitulants: “Your mission is important and difficult; you must accomplish it at a time of considerable change in society... May the Christian education of youth remain the essential characteristic of your work... in all circumstances be teachers... by your word and example.”

The Church clearly recognizes its responsibility to be present in the world of education in order to affirm to the values that are genuinely human, and at the same time, to challenge the human to go beyond itself. The Church wants to help young people understand that there is more to life than the human person can see with reason alone.

We Lasallians exercise this mission of the Church when we awaken in young people a serious attitude towards life; when we help the experience the autonomy of personal thought and learn to

use their liberty to overcome their prejudices, preconceived ideas, and social pressures, and to place their intelligence and training at the service of others; when we teach them how to listen, understand, trust and love; when we instill in them a sense of trustworthiness, justice, brotherhood and sisterhood (*Declaration, 41*).

It is precisely for the purpose of exercising this mission of human and Christian education that we “keep schools.” As we all know, De La Salle insisted that the school be a place where learning really takes place. With this end in view, he devoted considerable energy to developing effective methods and techniques and to training the Brothers as competent teachers. Moreover, he insisted that the curriculum of the schools be adapted to the needs and capabilities of the children.

A school that is authentically Lasallian is, therefore, a school of quality. Whatever its nature and whatever the age and ability of its pupils, it must be characterized by excellence. The Lasallian school is a school where young people really learn, where cultures, values and faith are effectively transmitted.

Culture, Values, Faith

The words culture, values and faith are not easy to define. Unless we take the time to arrive at a common understanding of their meanings, we run the risk of fomenting confusion rather than enlightenment. Among the six definitions my dictionary gives for culture, the following are the most pertinent: the act of developing the intellectual faculties; enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training; the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes the capacity to learn and transmit knowledge to succeeding generations.

The word “values” is perhaps even more difficult to define. Certainly the word expresses what we consider to be good rather than evil, desirable rather than undesirable. The question, of course, is how one determines what is good, evil, desirable or undesirable. Your European civilization has been shaped by commonly accepted values, many of them Christian in origin or development. But a number of these traditional values are challenged today. Furthermore, many of our contemporaries claim the right to determine their own values. Nevertheless, there seems to be increasing recognition today of the fact that authentic societies cannot survive without commonly held values.

It is perhaps easier to arrive at a common understanding of “faith.” Most people, it seems to me, are at ease with its triple meaning of belief in God, belief in one another, belief in oneself. I am sure that these three concepts have served as excellent points of departure for your reflection on Lasallian schools today. Taken separately and together they remind us that our schools must cultivate in our young people a thirst for the truth and help them grow in their capacity to think clearly.

Commitment to the Truth

Unfortunately, concern for the truth is not clearly evident in contemporary life. I am frequently dismayed by what appears to me, even among people supposedly educated, a careless and apparently indifferent approach to truth, even to accuracy of facts. What seems to me to be lacking is a commitment to an objective quest for truth, wherever that quest leads and whatever

the consequences. Freedom of expression is increasingly hampered by the concern to be “politically correct.” The preoccupation of the media to “sell their product” leads to self-serving selectivity of information and even to distortion of the facts. The moral relativism that permeates society today is another complication. One declares something to be true because one wants it to be true, or because one thinks that it is logical or “just” that it be true.

I want to insist that these reflections are pertinent for every Lasallian educational institution, whatever its nature and level. Without exception our centers must be concerned with cultivation of the human spirit and with “growth in the ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments, and to develop a religious, moral and social sense” (*Gaudium et Spes*). In speaking of professional schools, John Paul II has made this pertinent remark: “Students are challenged to pursue an education that combines excellence in humanistic and cultural development with specialized professional training” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 23). We have many outstanding professional, technical, engineering, and agricultural schools in Europe, schools that are responding to real needs. But it is very important that sufficient attention be given to humanistic and cultural development in these schools.

All of our schools must include adequate opportunities for learning, and development in art, music, drama and sports. I want to make a special plea here for training in foreign languages. I have said that our schools must be centers where real learning takes place. Permit me to speak very frankly. I have been impressed very positively with the high quality of language teaching in a number of our schools. Conversely, I have been dismayed to find in too many schools that young people, after years of study in a particular language, cannot communicate orally in that language.

Lasallian schools must be characterized by their quality.

4. A School that is Christian

The *Rule* of the Brothers states with no ambiguity that the school which is the “privileged instrument” for accomplishing our mission is a school which is Christian, that is to say, is “a sign of the Kingdom,” a “means of salvation,” and is “accessible to the poor” (*Rule*, 3). But given the variety of situations in which our Lasallian mission is exercised today, including our mission in Europe, in what way can our schools, or should our schools, be Christian?

First of all, it must be said clearly that the *Rule*, in fidelity to the Founder and to the living tradition of the Institute, asserts that the “principal function” of the Brothers is the work of evangelization and catechesis (*Rule*, 15). On the other hand, according to the *Declaration*, the teaching of religion has never been dissociated from the rest of education. There has always been an effort to unify the work of evangelization with growth in education and culture (*Declaration*, 40).

We work today – throughout the world and specifically in Europe – in an extraordinary variety of educational institutions and in a wide diversity of what the Pope has called “situations” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 33). We have youth – often in the same school – who are “living” their Catholic faith and those who are not; youth who are Christians but not Catholic; youth who are non-Christians; youth who are indifferent or even hostile towards all “organized” religions.

While we acknowledge the complexity of these situations, we nevertheless have to ask ourselves seriously if we are giving sufficient priority to the creation of schools that correspond, as far as possible, to the school described in the *Rule*. In our endeavor to respond creatively and effectively to this obligation, I think that we can find very helpful guidance in the orientations the Church provides today for the presence and mission of the Church in inter-religious situations. The Church considers “dialogue” and “proclamation” to be two distinct expressions of evangelization. I think that both dialogue and proclamation should be very evident in our Lasallian schools today.

“Dialogue” is given a broad interpretation. We can identify at least six ways that our young people – whether Christians or non-Christians, believers or non-believers – can engage in dialogue:

1. *Fraternal Relations*: I have already developed this aspect of our Lasallian mission. But it needs to be stated clearly that when we as men and women who believe in Jesus Christ promote fraternal relations among our young people, regardless of their religious beliefs, we are evangelizing;

2. *Human Promotion and Education*: when we, as committed Christians, work for the intellectual, moral, and physical development of the young people in our schools we are evangelizing;

3. *Promotion of Justice*: when we strive to sensitize our young people to the questions of social justice and to encourage them to commit themselves to the construction of a more just society, we are evangelizing;

4. *Prayer*: when we make possible and promote various forms and celebrations of religious expression and of prayer among our young people, we are evangelizing;

5. *Informal “Dialogue”*: when we communicate with our young people through the signs and symbols which identify the school as Christian, then we, men and women who believe in Jesus Christ, share our faith with young people in informal conversation – while manifesting total respect for them in their belief or non-belief, we are evangelizing;

6. *Formal “Dialogue”*: when we organize lectures, seminars, group discussions on topics relating to our faith as Christians, we are evangelizing.

But to affirm that to dialogue in these various ways is to evangelize is not to say that evangelization is limited to dialogue. The Church is missionary in its very nature and must, therefore, evangelize by proclaiming Jesus Christ. More than once in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul insists that young people have the right to hear about Jesus Christ and that we Christians have the duty to respond to that right. But more than once also, he insists, and even employs italics for emphasis, that we must propose, never impose, Jesus Christ.

We propose Jesus Christ because we believe that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We believe that he reveals what being human really means, as well as who God is and how he relates to us. It is our love for young people that makes us want to share our knowledge of Jesus Christ

with them. Of course, we must, as the *Rule* suggests, find the “right moment” and “use the appropriate language to speak of Jesus Christ” (*Rule, 15*). I think, however, that the fact that impressive numbers of young people in Europe are actively engaged in Christian movements, groups, and assemblies – including, those with the Pope – and that in some countries of Europe thousands are participating in voluntary sessions on the Bible and on prayer, is a clear indication that many young people are open to receiving the message of the Gospel. We must take them “where they are”!

Proclamation, therefore, requires us to provide Catholic pupils opportunities for religious education, whatever the level and whatever the nature of the school. We must make available, if not obligatory, religion courses taught by teachers who are theologically and pedagogically qualified. As I reflect upon the religious education programs in our schools in Europe, I am conscious of the variety of approaches that exists. I hope that you have had opportunity to exchange information and to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs.

Proclamation also requires us to provide pastoral programs animated by theologically qualified personnel. I am very pleased that those responsible for the pastoral ministry in our schools are well represented at this congress. I think that we need to provide “pastoral centers” where young people can find information on issues that concern them: religious, moral, social, economic, physical; centers where counseling and spiritual guidance are available; centers where seminars, conferences or discussions are organized. Those in charge of these centers are frequently responsible for promoting the religious dimension of the school: prayer life, periodic opportunities for celebration of the Eucharist and for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, retreats, youth assemblies, and the organization of youth groups.

This last point has special importance. I think that it is essential that we provide structures to enable those young people who are striving to live their Christian faith to form groups of prayer and apostolic service with similarly motivated young people.

5. Solidarity with the Poor

You are all well aware that solidarity with the poor is an essential dimension of the tradition of the Institute and therefore of our Lasallian mission today. We Brothers, in fact, profess a special vow of association for the educational service of the poor, a vow which obliges us to conduct schools or other centers of Christian education that are accessible to the poor.

Who are the poor? *The Rule* is clear: the economically deprived, victims of social injustice, delinquents, the marginalized and neglected, those who have learning difficulties, and those who suffer from personal, social and family problems (*Rule, 40*).

I think that it is important to state explicitly that education, as I have described it, must be made available to the poor. Many economically poor youngsters are extremely talented intellectually. They have a right to develop their God-given talents and abilities. We must be careful to avoid forcing the economically poor into a special category, as if economic poverty were equivalent to a lack of ability to learn. We need to open the doors of opportunity to those who have become marginalized by circumstance.

But solidarity with the poor obliges us to take very seriously another directive: when we work with students from families that are more or less well-off we must instruct them in their duties and responsibilities with regard to social justice and universal charity (*Rule, 40*). Our schools need to offer young people programs which: 1) enable them to know and understand the injustices that exist at every level of society; 2) learn the social teachings of the Church; 3) have the opportunity to serve the poor, the sick, the aged; 4) participate in follow-up discussions and evaluations. In some parts of the Institute our Lasallian schools have developed impressive programs of education for justice. In other parts, too, little has been done.

I have long advocated that each of our schools be an “impact center,” that is to say, a center which “reaches out” to the poor around it and responds creatively and effectively. The possibilities for service are almost unlimited: literacy programs – in the school or in other centers; terms of volunteer teachers and young people to work with street children; night classes for school drop-outs; Lasallian youth groups to respond to the needs of the sick, the aged, the neglected, etc. Many of our schools “reach out” even to the poor of other countries by providing financial assistance. Some even send young people, teachers, former students, parents, and friends for service in needy countries during vacation periods.

Solidarity with the poor is not an accidental or secondary aspect of a Lasallian school. It is an essential characteristic.

6. Teachers: Men and Women of Faith and Zeal

When De La Salle insisted that his teachers manifest in a particular way the virtues of faith and zeal, he obviously had in mind the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The situation today is, of course, significantly different from the situation he knew. He could not have anticipated that a future General Chapter would express the conviction that it is obsolete to consider the Brothers to be “the only authorized agents of the Institute’s mission” and that “shared mission constitutes an integral part” of the vocation of the Brothers (*Chapter Circular, p.43*).

But, of course we are still learning to live shared mission. Our experiences throughout the world and specifically in Europe are quite diverse. Once again I express my hope that you have had ample opportunity, formal and informal, to share your positive and less positive experiences.

We have in the Lasallian world today three categories of Lasallian schools: 1) those with a community of Brothers, a Brother headteacher, and a large number of lay men and women; 2) those with a community of Brothers, a lay headteacher, and a large number of lay men and women; 3) those with no Brothers at all, a lay headteacher, and a large number of lay men and women. But for any of these schools to function authentically, they must be integral components of a “Lasallian School Network” with structures which assure accountability, evaluation and animation.

I want to state very clearly my conviction that we should maintain in our networks those schools – and only those schools – which are seriously committed to implementing the characteristics upon which I am reflecting.

Teachers in Lasallian Schools

To succeed in creating schools that are authentically Lasallian, we must have competent and dedicated teachers, men and women who are committed to working together creatively and constructively. The teachers and staffs in our schools – Catholic or not – must understand the identity of the Lasallian school and agree to promote or at least respect that identity. Whoever is responsible for hiring teachers must make very clear to applicants that all teachers in a Lasallian school are expected to recognize and respect its distinctive identity (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 25–26).

It is certainly not necessary that every teacher be Catholic. Nevertheless, I am personally convinced that in order to create a school that is truly Lasallian we need a solid corps of men and women who are transparently committed Catholics.

7. Organized Around the Story of De La Salle

Many, if not all of the six characteristics I have described, are probably characteristics of other religious institutions engaged in the mission of human and Christian education. What is important is not that we be different, but that we be authentic. In other words, we define our identity in terms of who we are, not in terms of who we are not. Nevertheless, what does indeed differentiate the Lasallian school from other Catholic schools is that it is organized around a remarkable and inspiring story, that of John Baptist de La Salle.

Our experience of recent years indicates clearly that many of our partners find, like the Brothers, great inspiration and enlightenment in the story of this man who was so moved by the need the poor children of his day had for education that he changed completely the direction of his life, entered into two “worlds” that were entirely new to him – that of the poor and that of education – and founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Our experience reveals to us the truth of the article of the *Rule* which states that the “Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators” (*Rule*, 20).

Conclusion

Lasallians...without frontiers: an international communion of men and women committed to building brotherhood and sisterhood through the human and Christian education of youths and adults, especially those who are poor. I close with the passage from the biography of the Founder to which I referred earlier. The author has in mind, of course, the Brothers. But when he says “Brothers,” you can say “Lasallians.”

If the name of *schoolmasters* had been acceptable up to this time, it was no longer proper, now that they had joined together to form a single body. That of *brothers* was the name that fit them best. For this reason, they chose it.

This name reminds them that as Brothers they owe each other mutual proofs of tender but spiritual friendship; and that considering themselves as the elder brothers of the children who come to be taught by them, they should exercise this ministry of charity with truly loving hearts” (*Blain, Ch. 3, Vol. 2, Book 2*).