

Hines, Susan R. "Lasallian Research: An International Movement Calling Scholars to Create New Knowledge Around Faith-informed Research Priorities." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 5, no. 2 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota: 2014).

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Lasallian Research: An International Movement Calling Scholars to Create New Knowledge Around Faith-informed Research Priorities

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Introduction

Good evening; Buenas noches; Bonsoir; Magandang gabi. I am deeply honored to provide the opening keynote for the Second Annual Symposium on Lasallian Research at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. I was present at the 2012 Symposium along with 43 Lasallian scholars representing institutions of higher learning from the Lasallian Region of North America, commonly referred to as RELAN. Those in attendance included educators, academic administrators, university presidents, school deans, and leaders from RELAN's central and district offices. From that three-day session, I along with Maura Thompson Hagarty and Brother Fredrick Mueller published a white paper discussing that precedential event in the fourth volume of the digital publication *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*.² The intent of this presentation is to review the preliminary research agenda formed at the 2012 symposium and give perspective as to how it fits into a global Lasallian research movement. It is my hope that this 2013 symposium will provide energy to continue the momentum that began at the 2012 symposium.

One year ago today, Lasallian scholars keenly interested in the possibilities and potentialities of Lasallian research gathered as we are today to contemplate, deliberate, formulate, and accelerate a twenty-first-century Lasallian research agenda. Reflecting upon those three days I have come to realize the importance of that groundbreaking conference. It has become readily apparent to me that I was part of a community of Lasallian leaders, scholars, and practitioners in the midst of a historic moment. We were to become part of an international Lasallian research movement that would shape the next iteration of our Lasallian story.

International Lasallian Research Movement

In January 2013, the executive board of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) came together to put forth a five-year research agenda for universities throughout the Lasallian world. The resulting white paper was authored by Dr. Arnulfo Azcarraga in collaboration with Brother William Mann, and published in *AXIS*.³ "Lasallians in the World Solving Real Problems of the World: Research Agenda of the International Association of Lasallian Universities" calls "Lasallian scholars located in all the continents of the world [to] commit themselves to . . . put teaching, research, and community engagement *in the service of society* – as a full expression of their active faith." The IALU Research Agenda aims for "Research to contribute to positive, meaningful, lasting, and inclusive growth in society" through

Adapted from the author's presentation titled "A Response to the White Paper from the 2012 Symposium on Lasallian Research," Second Annual Symposium on Lasallian Research, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Campus, Minneapolis, MN, October 27-29, 2013.

collaborative research among Lasallian institutions worldwide, promoting a system of resource sharing, and maintaining awareness of the needs of society. The two strategic research themes which emerged from the meetings were: 1) food, nutrition, and health; and 2) sustainability and the environment – two areas that are in grave need of social service and change throughout many of the critical social, political, economic, and cultural regions of our world.

Just two days before the 2012 RELAN Lasallian Symposium, members of the 2012-2013 Research Policies Preparation Team of the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL) put forth and received approval of a newly created Regional Policy on the Advancement of Knowledge.⁴ The vision set forth by this policy is that by the year 2020 Lasallian institutions of higher learning that make up the Latin American region will be recognized for the generation, appropriation, and application of knowledge produced by these regional universities. This policy aligns with the Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America commonly referred to as PERLA, which began in 2011 in response to the need to overcome debilitating poverty through strident educational efforts.

Overview of the 2012 RELAN Lasallian Research Symposium

It is evident that the 2012 Symposium on Lasallian Research at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, as well as this and future symposiums play an integral role in this global Lasallian research movement. The inaugural 2012 symposium, similar to the RELAL and IALU research meetings, was developed in response to the Superior General's persistent call for leaders in higher education throughout the Lasallian network to come together and actively engage in research as a means to advance the Lasallian educational mission. In the opening keynote, "The Call from the Institute for Lasallian Research," Brother Robert Schieler introduced nine topics in most need of research as identified by the 2006 International Mission Assembly and the 44th General Chapter (2007):⁵

- Association
- Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue
- Evangelization and catechetics
- Immigration
- Lasallian pedagogy
- Multi-cultural education
- New forms of poverty
- New information and communication technologies
- Rights of the child

Lines of research were further developed in Dr. Mary Catherine Fox's presentation titled "Capturing Our Time for Theirs: Considerations for the Context of Our Future" to include:⁶

- Stories of contemporary Lasallians
- Women in the Lasallian world
- The role of technology in Lasallian education
- Cultural forms of twenty-first century Lasallian pedagogy
- Lasallian memory and identity- individual and institutional

- Works of Lasallian art and music
- Viability, sustainability, and accessibility of Lasallian schools and ministries
- Measuring impact of ministries, catechetical, and formation programs

While respecting the need for international research, Brother Robert emphasized the need to establish, disseminate, and stimulate research priorities relevant to the needs of the Lasallian Region of North America. He invited those in attendance to work toward determining key priorities as a product of the symposium. Additional encouragement was put forth to university department chairs, deans, and faculty to communicate Lasallian research priorities to young scholars, from a wide variety of disciplines, looking for a research niche.

Armed with this encouragement we set forth to engage in various research presentations provided by Lasallian scholars on topics including:

- Lessons from Lasallian Christian Brothers for lay theologians
- Lasallian charism and women in Lasallian higher education in the United States of America
- De La Salle's formation practices as they inform faculty development today
- A Lasallian Leadership Institute experience
- Connecting Lasallian principles of practice to educational research
- First-generation college students in Lasallian higher education

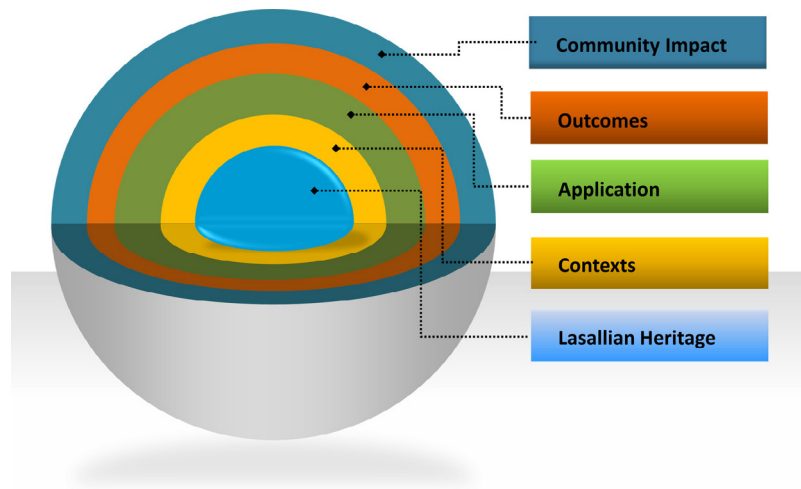
Stimulated by the presentations and motivated to begin our task of shaping the RELAN research agenda, rich discussions ensued among the various small groups over two-day afternoon and morning sessions. What emerged from these vibrant discussions was the laying of a preliminary foundation. This was done by addressing three foundational questions: 1) What is Lasallian Research? 2) What is its nature and scope? and 3) What are our research priorities?

What is Lasallian research? Given the complexities of this question, a clear definition is yet to be articulated. There was general agreement that although research conducted on the history of the Institute is valuable, it is time to expand our scope to topics that are relevant to today's social issues. In doing so, Lasallian research will encompass a variety of contexts, methodologies, purposes, and forms, thereby requiring additional reflection and discussion. Perhaps a clear definition will be one of the outcomes from the 2013 symposium.

What is its nature and scope? Given the complex nature of twenty-first-century Lasallian research, symposium leaders worked towards creating an emerging model of Lasallian research with the intent of providing a visual representation conceptualizing its complex nature and comprehensive scope. The model is a multi-layered sphere that builds upon a core representing the Lasallian heritage. Emanating from the core are four layers.

- Layer 1: *Contexts* – settings and institutions in which the Lasallian heritage has been and continues to be lived out.
- Layer 2: *Application* – how the Lasallian heritage is lived out in new contexts.
- Layer 3: *Outcomes* – the results of the application of Lasallian heritage.
- Layer 4: *Community Impact* – the influence of Lasallian heritage beyond Lasallian settings and institutions.

An Emerging Model of Lasallian Research



Within each layer lies the possibility of exploring a variety of topics from multiple disciplinary perspectives as well as geographic scopes including local, regional, national, and international regions.

What are our research priorities? Through small group discussions and a collective prioritization process, eight priorities for research were identified:

- Adult formation, education, and teacher training
- Assessment of Lasallian education outcomes
- Issues of the young
- New forms of poverty
- Sustainability of the Lasallian mission
- Technology and pedagogy
- The relationship between those involved in the Lasallian mission and the Catholic church
- Women and the Lasallian mission

Several research questions were created for each priority, as well as the formation of research groups interested in furthering particular lines of research. Many participants committed to either conducting or taking action to promote research in their priority area of interest.

2013 Research Presentations

The strategy set in motion by the 2012 inaugural symposium on Lasallian research and IALU's adoption of a five-year research agenda has gained momentum as evidenced by the exemplary research being presented at this year's symposium. The ten research projects being presented during breakout sessions represent studies originating from the 2012 symposium in addition to the IALU agenda.

Three international Lasallian scholars presenting at this symposium represent the countries of France, Mexico, and the Philippines. Two of the three sessions advance the strategic research

themes from the 5-year IALU agenda. Dr. Philippe Choquet, President of Institut Polytechnique La Salle in Beauvais, France, will facilitate a dialogue on an initiative to research food, nutrition, and health issues in the world. Dr. Roberto Vazquez, Research Director from Universidad La Salle in Mexico City, Mexico, will facilitate a dialogue on an initiative to research “sustainability and the environment.” Additionally, Dr. Juanito Cabanias, Director for Academic Services and General Education at De La Salle Health Sciences Institute in Cavite, Philippines, will share findings from his analysis of the development and implementation of a scholarship program aimed at providing full scholarships to 20% of the students attending the institute. The IALU research leaders will hold a post-symposium workshop Tuesday afternoon.

The remaining breakout sessions represent Lasallian scholars from the United States, many of whom were present at the 2012 symposium. Three presentations address aspects of Lasallian pedagogy. From Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, Dr. Elizabeth Seebach, Department Chair of Psychology, and Dr. Lori Charron, Professor of Communications, will discuss an approach to Lasallian online pedagogy. Dr. Monica Fitzgerald, faculty in the Liberal and Civic Studies department at Saint Mary’s College of California in Moraga, will discuss a Lasallian pedagogical approach to student engagement. In addition, Dr. Rich Germundson, Associate Director of the Ed.D. in Leadership program at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, will discuss an application of the Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher⁷ to doctoral student leadership competencies.

Four presentations focus on aspects of Lasallian association and mission. Dr. John Wilcox, Professor Emeritus from Manhattan College in New York, will discuss a project called “The Mission Community.” Dr. Greg Kopra, Director of Formation for Mission for the District of San Francisco, will share his research project on Lasallian Association for Mission. Dr. Linka Holey, Associate Vice President and Academic Dean at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, will share insights regarding dimensions of conflict in relation to the creation of association. Additionally, Dr. Paul Christiansen, Assistant Dean of the Graduate School of Business and Technology at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, will review new forms of poverty based on findings from his ongoing research.

Other Ongoing Research

As you can see, the twenty-first-century Lasallian research movement has been launched and many Lasallian scholars throughout the world are taking action. In spring 2012, the Pacific Asian Regional Conference (PARC) held the first Lasallian Women’s Symposium brought women from regions in Asia, India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand together in Thailand to discuss ways to identify, discuss, and respond to emerging needs affecting the poor – especially girls and young women in these various regions.⁸ The keynote by Trish Carroll, former Director of Lasallian Education Services in Melbourne, Australia, discussed her groundbreaking research on women who influenced the life and work of De La Salle. Julia Willie Jock, Principal of La Salle Secondary School in Kingston, Ontario, presented her work on Lasallian women today. The Superior General, Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, and General Councilor, Brother David Hawke, were in attendance and fully participated throughout the symposium.

One year after the 2013 PARC symposium, the first RELAN Lasallian Women's Symposium was held at St. Joseph's Camp on the Russian River in California.⁹ Women from various types of ministries and five Brothers were present to discuss challenges girls and women face today ranging from body image to finding their faith. Participants engaged in dialogue regarding Trish Carroll's Lasallian women research, Brother Gerard Rummery's presentation on La Salle's letters to women, and Dr. Roxanne Eubank's presentation on women in Lasallian ministries in RELAN.

Research topics are also being explored by several graduate students enrolled in the Institute for Lasallian Studies programs at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, a sponsor of this symposium. Scholars located at various Lasallian universities in the United States and throughout the world are delving into a variety of contemporary topics to create new knowledge able to inform our conceptions, actions, and the impact of our Lasallian work. For example, what is the impact of the Lasallian Volunteer Program on society and those involved? How does the program nurture Lasallian vocation and association for mission? How does it compare to similar international programs? Research topics and questions are vast, varied, and continually growing.

A Call to Action

As recently noted by Dr. Arnulfo Azcarraga:

By itself and in itself, the dissemination of knowledge is a contribution to society and remains a critical function of any University – Lasallian or not. [However when we] put our collective will, wisdom and action in studies that alleviate poverty; promote peace and social justice; protect welfare of women, youths at risk, and other vulnerable sectors of society; create wealth and resources to bridge various societal divides; provide models and avenues for stewardship of God's creation; and influence policy, governance, and the management of institutions – [our] research [can] secure positive, meaningful, lasting, and inclusive growth in society.¹⁰

This twenty-first-century international Lasallian research movement has the potential to transform societies and make the world a better place to live. It is our obligation as Lasallian scholars to collectively respond to the call and join the movement.

As you travel through this Second Annual Symposium on Lasallian Research, actively listen to our honored speakers Dr. Arnulfo Azcarraga and Brother Diego Muñoz, engage in the meaningful breakout sessions, involve yourselves in the small group discussions that will determine the future of our research agenda, and then determine how *you* will answer the call. It is through experiences such as this symposium that a commitment to new beginnings can lead to significant changes of which the enormity may not yet be seen.

Concluding Remarks

I close with a quote from Saint John Baptist de La Salle, one also written in the introductory pages of Dr. Kurt Schackmuth's 2012 dissertation, "An Exploration of the Experiences of First

Generation College Students in Lasallian Higher Education,” as he concluded doctoral studies at Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois:

God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity and whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.¹¹

May your present commitment to Lasallian research lead to another, in a way that initiates a significant change that you may not see at this new beginning.

Thank you; Muchas gracias; Merci beaucoup; Salamat po.

Notes

1. Susan R. Hines, Ed.D., is the director of faculty development and faculty in the Doctor of Education in Leadership program at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. She is an experienced college educator of 29 years combined with several years of practice and research in the field of faculty development. Her teaching focuses on courses in higher education and her research interest is faculty development evaluation. Dr. Hines received her B.A. in Educational Psychology from Metropolitan State University, and M.A. in Education and Ed.D. in Leadership from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota.

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