

## **IALU Awakening**

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Thank you for this honor that you show to me and, through me, to Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, the university presently entrusted to my leadership – an institution to which the Brothers of the Philippines once entrusted for their undergraduate studies your beloved Brothers Benildo Feliciano and Andrew Gonzalez, our distinguished former students.

Just a few months ago I was also overseas – that time in Italy – with a group of my university's trustees visiting the Vatican, the Brother's Generalate, touring and visiting Italy's churches and museums (and, of course, restaurants) and experiencing a bit of Italian culture. On that visit, I was particularly captivated by the marble sculptures of Bernini and Michelangelo.

At one point, our tour guide remarked that these incredible sculptures appeared to have been "carved like butter with a knife." And I recalled something that I once heard about Michelangelo's great sculpture "David." Michelangelo is said to have remarked that he did not attempt to impose form and shape on the marble. Rather, his work was that of freeing-up the essence that was within the block of marble waiting to be revealed. He was helping free a beauty that was already inside waiting to come forth.

This is an image which could, perhaps, help us to think about the students with whom we work. Our good efforts as Lasallian educators is less about imposing form and structure on the way they see and interact with knowledge and the world and more about awakening, nurturing, and empowering the gifts already within that wait to spring forth. The hope, dreams, and promise of our students are gifts waiting to be realized and shared – in their professions, lives, and civic engagements – for the good of the world.

However, for our purposes today, this is also an image that could help us think of the network of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU), a network of which De La Salle Dasmaringas, De La Salle Health Sciences Institute, and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota are members and for which I currently serve as president of the association. IALU is living a liminal moment -- caught between what has been and what might be (the vice president of the association recently said to me, "we are in the middle of the river") – a moment of extraordinary opportunity and promise if we are courageous enough to keep "moving toward the other shore" (to use his metaphor) or to grab this opportunity "with both hands and a full heart" (to use my own mixed metaphor).

Opportunities are presenting themselves to our network. Protagonists and initiatives are emerging - individual Lasallian educators and individual Lasallian institutions of higher education. Using another metaphor, IALU is starting "to stand up and walk." The 45th General

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A talk given at De La Salle University-Dasmaringas on the occasion of a university-wide convocation for the conferral on July 22, 2015 of the degree of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.

Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (in May and June 2014) recognized and affirmed, as never before, the value, contribution, and potential of the higher education network. This was affirmed with the appointment of a General Councilor of the Institute to accompany IALU [a former university rector] and recently proposed, concrete partnerships between the Center of the Institute and IALU.

We are not speaking here of the imposition of form and structure. Rather, we have the opportunity ourselves to awaken, nurture, and empower “the sleeping giant” of IALU (excuse my mixing and matching of a multiplicity of metaphors) – a global network of 61 Lasallian institutions of higher education that share a common heritage and belong to “One Family, One Mission.” To be quite honest, ours is a moment of opportunities, initiatives, collaborations, and partnerships; but it is, at the same time, one of resistance and obstacles.

At Encuentro XI – the triennial gathering of IALU presidents and rectors – held in Bogotá (March 2015) and at the recent meeting of IALU's board of directors held in Winona (July 2015), attention focused on two principal areas: collaborative research and enhanced internationalization.

Research is something that was spoken about at a Cuernavaca Conference (October 2008), at Encuentro IX in Philadelphia (June 2009) and at Encuentro X in Manila (March 2012). However, an evolving articulation of a common agenda was only approved by the IALU board of directors in January 2013 (an excellent contribution was made by Dr. Arnie Azcarraga of DLSU to this effort) and modified in January 2014 in light of the input and interaction around the topic at the Second Lasallian International Research Symposium (Minneapolis, 2013).

The three foci (or focuses, as I am more comfortable saying) of our common research agenda are: food, nutrition, and health; sustainability and the environment; and education and learning. By this agenda we hope to find synergy and challenge the Lasallian higher education network not just to have common research projects but – as an association and a network – to do something as Lasallians, with our common research, to contribute to healing a fractured and fragile world and to meet the needs of the poor -- especially children and women -- who are too often, even today as they were at the time of our Lasallian origins, trapped in the vicious cycle of exclusion, deprivatation, and victimization.

Not only do we as IALU now have a focused agenda, the network has begun the initiative of holding an annual Research Symposium -- which for now is being held each September in Minneapolis -- with 40+ people attended the symposium in 2012, 65+ were in attendance in 2013, and 130+ attended in 2014. A distinguished professor from Emory University and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine keynoted last year's symposium, and a professor who is a genetic scientist at Bethlehem University in Palestine and the Superior General of the Brothers will be this year's keynote speakers. (What about a future keynote speaker from here in the Philippines?)<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the initiative of a biennial Conference exploring teaching competencies and active methodologies in twenty-first-century higher education is now being held during the month of October in Cuernavaca. And the board of directors decided just last week to re-connect with the

Lasallian participants, who attended the Business Schools Conference held at De La Salle University Manila in February 2015, and ask them to explore further the document they prepared for IALU and which they entitled the "Manila Accord." And six Lasallian colleges and universities in the USA are actively preparing an inter-university, collaborative academic pilot program for students to be conducted at the Generalate of the Lasallian educational network in Rome, and it is their fervent hope that one or other of the Lasallian universities of the Philippines might want to become involved in the project. And the second international collaboration of IALU institutions in an online financial management graduate study program will launch in January 2016.

And just last week the Superior General of the Brothers, who we Americans might say "cut his teeth" as a young Brother here in the Philippines, asked IALU to partner with him and the Institute in fostering – as part of a five-year research project – the establishment of five or six inter-university research teams on topics such as twenty-first-century teaching/learning processes, citizenship and the defense of the rights of children, and sustaining spirituality amidst secularization. There is also the proposal of a multi-year research project about the processes of re-structuring implemented in the Lasallian world between 2002 and 2015. What is particularly interesting is that each coordinating team will be invited to participate in a seminar in Rome where the cost of housing will be covered; and the board of directors of IALU has already begun to wrestle with how to help find funding or subsidize travel expenses for research participants.

I know that I indicated that internationalization was the second principal area of interest in the IALU network, but I will need to leave that topic for another day. What is clear is that faculty, students, and administrators want exchange and collaboration to be a hallmark of our network.<sup>3</sup>

As I said earlier, this is a time of great opportunity/initiatives and of some resistance/obstacles. Systems theory tell us that the two fundamental principles of all living systems are: they want to change and they want to remain the same. Does our network have the will to change the way we have always done things if it means we might be able to do something greater together? Does your institution and my institution have the audacity to believe that we might be protagonists in this movement? Are we willing to seize the opportunities before us “with both hands and a full heart”? Will we initiate and reach out to forge network partnerships? Are we ready not only to ask about what "I" and “our institution” will get from this but to ask what "I" and “our institution” might contribute to it?

IALU, our network, is “a giant awakening” ... a gift coming to life ... for the good of the world. I hope as president of the association that I can count on you to help me nurture it, to empower one another to initiate and solidify partnerships -- not only but surely within our IALU network of colleges and universities. For IALU – this network of students and educators all around the world – is truly a hope, a dream, and a promise waiting for you – individually and collectively – to bring it to a more full and abundant life (Jn 10:10)!

Thank you for listening. Once again, thank you for the honor you confer on me today. I am both touched and humbled by your kindness.

## Notes

1. Brother William Mann, who received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Colgate Rochester Divinity School (1990), serves as the president of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota since 2008. He is a former Vicar General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2000-2008).

2. I suspect that the nine IALU Faculty Leadership Programs held in Rome each June have had an influential role to play here; an excellent contribution has been made to this effort by Dr. Roxanne Eubank and Joan Landeros.

3. In addition to the 4<sup>th</sup> Student Global Leadership Program (July 2015), the 9<sup>th</sup> Rome Faculty Leadership Program (June 2015), the 4<sup>th</sup> Minneapolis Lasallian Research Symposium (September 2015), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cuernavaca La Salle Forum on Lasallian Teaching Communities & Active Methodologies in Higher Education (October 2015), the Lasallian Business School Gathering in Manila at the International Conference on Catholic Social Thought and Business Education (February 2015), we are concerned here with the desire to find concrete ways to facilitate and foster the desired exchange of students and faculty between and among IALU institutions.