

## **The Call from the Institute for Lasallian Research**

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### **Introduction**

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you and for your initiative to organize this symposium. I am happy to be with you. I hope this gathering will stimulate a conversation leading to a regional direction if not a plan for Lasallian research on both our current reality and our heritage. Or to state it as you do in one of the identified purposes of this gathering, "to break open the possibilities of Lasallian research in twenty-first-century North America".

The occasion is also a welcome opportunity for me on behalf of all of us in the Region, Brother Álvaro and the General Council to thank Brother William and Saint Mary's University for hosting this event and launching the digital journal *AXIS*, which is making Lasallian research and doctoral dissertations more accessible to us. I wish also to acknowledge and thank the Lasallian Association of College and University Presidents (LACUP) for their leadership and guidance of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) Rome formation program, a very important initiative for the vitality of the Institute today.

I have been asked to address the call of the Institute for Lasallian research, particularly the priorities emanating from the 2006 International Mission Assembly and the 44th General Chapter in 2007.

### **Preliminary Remarks**

Before sharing what the International Assembly and General Chapter asked for in the area of research I want to take a quick walk down memory lane, inform you about a similar gathering as this in another Region of the Institute, and make three preliminary comments introducing my remarks. There is precedent for what we are about these days. In the summer of 1939, a conference was held at Manhattan College that would eventually result in the creation of the Christian Brothers Educational Association. That conference focused on our heritage and on the educational needs of the day. I found it interesting that among the committees established a publicity committee was included. The association would continue through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, ending in 1965. Conferences were occasionally held on the Saint Mary's University Winona Campus.

Studies that can be found in their annual proceedings include:

- 1947 survey of attitudes of students in three Christian Brothers' colleges towards recent social and political movements

- 1958 survey of the number of lay teachers in Christian Brothers' schools
- 1960 survey of 78 schools on the value of 25 extra-curricular activities
- 1961 survey of 62 schools on the use of modern teaching tools/devices/methods

In addition to the annual proceedings of the Christian Brothers Educational Association, two other publications were launched in this period. The *Lasallian Digest* began in the fall of 1958 and the last publication was in the summer of 1967. The *La Salle Catechist* was published from 1934 through 1968. Both publications shed light on Lasallian education and catechetics in the decades that constitute the midpoint of the twentieth century.

Two days ago, a gathering similar to ours concluded in Bogota, Colombia. The Lasallian Region of Latin America established a team with a first task of designing a research policy for their Region. In shaping this policy, the following fields of research have been identified: democratization of knowledge, new technology, quality education, education that promotes sustainable human development, and education that respects human rights, especially of children and youth. Lastly, at a meeting this past July in Miami, the Executive Secretariat of IALU called for the establishment of a collective and collaborative research agenda among Lasallian universities.

### **And now the preliminary comments to the purpose of my remarks today . . .**

First, we should keep in mind that recommendations from a worldwide body with ministries in 80 countries will be broad and, at times, more applicable for one or more sectors of the Institute than others. Second, and relatedly, suggested Institute priorities for research topics from an international assembly and/or General Chapter may have more immediacy for a particular sector of the Institute.

Third, and more fundamentally, I think it important to point out the growing awareness and appreciation of the role of higher education in the life of the Institute today. We know this has not always been the case. If I could over-simplify our history, up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Institute was very much identified with primary education. The twentieth century saw the emergence of secondary education – boys only in the first half of the century – as increasingly central to the Lasallian educational mission. Initially, this transition from primary to secondary education was not always well-received by the Brothers. I know for example there was some consternation in one district that left its 13 parochial elementary schools in 1926 and 1927 to staff two Diocesan high schools. There was further grumbling in the mid-1930s when the Visitor told his principals not to expect any new Brothers for the schools for several years as the novices would no longer go directly into ministry but to university to obtain their Bachelor's degrees.

Will our universities have a more prominent place in the twenty-first-century Lasallian world? At the seventh Encuentro in Barcelona in 2004, Brother Álvaro said:

My presence among you is intended to be a sign of the importance our Institute gives today to higher education and an act of faith in its enormous possibilities. In the history

of the Institute, the growth of Lasallian universities in almost all the regions of the world is without precedent and is a sign of the times, which we cannot ignore.<sup>1</sup>

In the eight years since, he has remained consistent in his statements of support for Lasallian higher education and its increased prominence throughout the Institute. His words, his presence and presentations at each subsequent *Encuentro*, his visits to university campuses, and his remarks at the IALU formation program in Rome have inspired hope in the higher education community. Joan Landeros, Director of the Center for International Education at Universidad La Salle in Mexico, appreciated that sense of hope from Brother Álvaro when she wrote in the opening article of Institute Bulletin 252 on Higher Education in 2010:

Lasallian education has passed the threshold into a new millennium and a new age of interconnection. . . . Hopefully, this threshold will mark the beginning of an energized international commitment of Lasallian higher education to create a network which will sustain the worldwide educational community.<sup>2</sup>

### **What the Assembly and Chapter Asked**

With the above in mind, I turn to what I have been invited to speak on: In regards to research, what did the Assembly and Chapter ask for?

According to the first orientation from the 2006 International Assembly, the call is for collaboration with institutions, Lasallian and others, and especially higher education to conduct research in the areas of: 1) new information and communication technologies; 2) challenges for spiritual and Christian education; and 3) new kinds of family.

*Orientation 7* encouraged research about the needs of today in order to help those with responsibility for the Lasallian mission to better serve those entrusted to their care. Such research should develop a methodology for social analysis that includes knowledge, skills, experience and action; respond to local needs, especially new forms of poverty; and include research into best practices from local situations in multicultural education, and ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue in order to identify common, effective pedagogical principles and practices.

While not an explicit reference to research, *Orientation 5* asked ministries to assess and renew their educational programs (in the areas of pedagogy, pastoral ministry, organizational structures and resource management) so as to make the elimination of poverty and the defense of the rights of children priorities. *Orientation 6* asked us to analyze and evaluate the diverse experiences of Lasallian association in order to highlight the essential elements and processes of association, with special reference to the five criteria stated by the 43rd General Chapter.

Finally, in *Orientation 8*, in the area of structures for mission, the assembly called for new structures to animate the Lasallian mission, which, in turn, would assess local, district and regional needs and identify local priorities for the Lasallian educational mission and evaluate whether current local, district, and regional governance/organizational structures meet identified needs.

In its various Lines of Action, the 44th General Chapter “makes its own, assumes and adopts, receives with enthusiasm” the orientations and work of the International Assembly. In addition to these research recommendations from the Assembly and General Chapter, at the *Encuentro* meeting in Brazil in 2007, Brother Álvaro suggested higher education undertake “specific research directed to society’s main problems, as well as Lasallian research which would offer new approaches on charism, spirituality, and Lasallian pedagogy.”<sup>3</sup>

In a similar vein, Brother Armin Luistro, former IALU President and current Secretary of Education of the Republic of the Philippines, said in 2010 in reference to Lasallian research:

Firstly, we can focus on the traditional Lasallian advocacies in education, poverty alleviation, and youth-at-risk with a focus on “social transformation.” Secondly, a major research priority that IALU universities should pursue is . . . research that refers directly to the context of a Lasallian university, i.e., what is the added value of a Lasallian university in a particular context or socio-historical milieu?<sup>4</sup>

In a nutshell then, these are research topics the center of the Institute is promoting:

- Association
- Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue
- Evangelization and Catechetics
- Immigration
- Lasallian Pedagogy
- Multicultural Education
- New Forms of Poverty
- New Information and Communication Technologies
- Rights of the Child

What will or should be priorities for our region is something this symposium can consider.

### **Kinds of Studies Needed**

Within this overarching context what kind of studies are needed? The Institute’s Office of Lasallian Research and Resources has identified studies that are both internal to the Lasallian world and external to our world as we interact with the larger educational reality. These needs include: studies of the people around De La Salle (Adrian Nyel for example), District and Region histories, micro histories of peoples and cultures, makers of history, generational and gender studies, oral histories and of course Lasallian pedagogy. Two good recent examples of micro-history and Lasallian pedagogy for today are Brother Terence McLaughlin’s new monograph *Silent Acceptance*, detailing Christian Brothers High School in Memphis breaking ranks with Southern culture and tradition when, in 1963, they opened their doors to black students; and Lisa Anne Vacca-Rizopoulos of Manhattan College, whose article “Lasallian Practices Offer Strategies for Understanding 21st-Century Students” is published in the current issue of *Momentum*, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) journal.

When the International Lasallian Studies Session (SIEL) was being developed, I constantly insisted to the organizers and the General Council that the letters and communication of invitation should not be sent exclusively to the Visitors looking for Brothers to attend the program. There are very, very few brothers out there who could become the new Miguel Campos's and Luke Salms. The communications needed, and continue to need, to be sent to our university Presidents and Academic Vice Presidents. Flyers and brochures should be going to the department heads in our universities. There, we may find young faculty who are looking for a niche in their research field. Lasallian research for them can be approached from the points of view of education, history, religion, sociology, spirituality, etc. - it is wide open to young staff looking to make a contribution in their field.

### **Challenges Identified by the Region's Delegates to the 2013 International Mission Assembly**

Moving from the needs identified by the center of the Institute, let us turn to possible Regional needs. In preparation for the May 2013 International Mission Assembly in Rome, each Region is reporting on what has been accomplished since the 2006 assembly and what challenges the Region is facing today. Here are just a few of the preliminary challenges identified by our delegates that may benefit from research.

- The financial viability, sustainability and accessibility of our schools and other ministries
- Measuring the effectiveness of our ministries over the long term. Are we doing what we say we're doing? How can we show mission effectiveness using objective quantitative measurements or qualitative data?
- What is the impact of technology on Lasallian culture? Does it affect the sense of community in our schools, universities and other ministries? Is there a digital divide among our ministries?
- How will Lasallian identity be maintained in forming future generations of educators?
- How effective are our catechetical programs?

Allow me to make some brief remarks on this last bullet. From the Institute's inception the Brothers have been told their principal function is that of catechist. Under the leadership of Brother John Joseph McMahon (1873 – 1942) of the then-St. Louis District, the publication *La Salle Catechist*, mentioned above, was launched in 1934 (it ceased publication in 1968). This was the very first catechetical magazine in the history of the Institute. And, of course, we are familiar with Saint Mary's Press and their innovative history in the field of Religious Education publications. Father Gerard Sloyan, principal renovator of the catechism previous to the Second Vatican Council, recognized the Brothers of the Christian Schools as the religious who contributed the most to the renewal of the catechism in the United States.<sup>5</sup> What about today? Is there a Lasallian approach to catechetics? Is one necessary? More basically, what is happening in the religion curriculum of our schools? And what can we learn about our students and religious education programs from research such as the National Study of Youth and Religion that Christian Smith and colleagues wrote about in their two books, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* and *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*?

## **Why Undertake Research?**

We undertake research not only to increase the quantity of our knowledge but to deepen the quality of our understanding. Both are certainly important for the Institute today given the rapidly changing demographics of the past several decades, the increased diversity of populations, programs and faiths within the ministries of the Institute, and the roles of the state and the Church in determining aspects of a school's curricula and certification of its programs. Reflecting on this reality of the Institute in our lifetime, former Superior General Brother John Johnston said in response to a question during his August 1998 presentation at the New York District Assembly, "The Institute is rapidly approaching a radical discontinuity with its past." We may agree or disagree with Brother John and his perception. But the possibility is certainly worth pondering and delving into more deeply, and to my mind, makes the need for quality research even more compelling. And this raises concerns.

## **Concerns**

For whatever reason, in one of the more significant periods in the life of the Institute and the Church, Brothers' communities and Districts over the last several decades have not been as faithful or effective in keeping records and submitting annual reports – house histories – to District archives and to Rome.

This may result in a critical gap when the time comes to research this period or write a history of it. Thankfully, our District archivists and others have been building a collection of oral histories. Also, we do have anniversary table books from numerous schools and universities. Can we augment this effort? And what kind of structure questions are needed to help ensure the acquisition of information that will contribute to a quality history of this period? What kind of studies are needed to understand what is happening and what we hope will happen in Lasallian classrooms and schools and universities today and going forward? This is but one more reason why your gathering is so important.

Our District archivists asked me to remind you of their availability to you as they house all of the historical collections of the life of the Institute in the United States and Canada. These collections are extensively catalogued and the staff are well prepared to assist with and handle the needs of serious Lasallian research and researchers who wish to address the history and influence of movements, people, programs, spiritualities and personalities in the Institute, society and culture. A French Spirituality collection is available at Saint Mary's College in Moraga and a collection of contemporary Lasallian research is now housed at Manhattan College.

## **Conclusion and Going Forward**

I am confident that when we depart on Tuesday we will have identified some next steps. These can be incremental or we can dream big; big in terms of the Brothers who established the Christian Brothers Educational Association in 1939; big in terms of early initiatives that led to the creation of Saint Mary's Press in the 1940s; big in terms of Christian Brothers Services and Christian Brothers Investment Services that matured in the 1980s; and big in terms of the Christian Brothers and Lasallian Publications projects of the 1980s and '90s that not only made

primary Lasallian texts available in English for the first time but contributed to the creation of the Buttimer and Lasallian Leadership Institutes. Whatever is decided I hope it represents a first step on a path to greater things for the Lasallian heritage in our Region and for the mutual benefit of the Institute.

I mentioned the book *Silent Acceptance* by Brother Terence McLaughlin, and I would like to end my remarks with a paragraph from its concluding chapter that reflects why I think quality research on the contemporary Lasallian education scene is so important today:

Our Brothers' membership across the country has been in a state of decline for the past fifty years. A blip in membership here and there from time to time indicates no significant trend for new membership into the future. We Brothers are realistic and accept what is happening to our once-flourishing congregation. We Brothers in Memphis [and I would add Lasallians] have a choice to make. We can just let things happen and fade out of the educational marketplace or we can review what we now have in place, strengthen what is good, and, by our expertise and encouragement, help others who will be carrying on the Lasallian vision into the future. The status quo and silent acceptance must not be an option.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, initiatives such as this symposium demonstrate our commitment to carrying the Lasallian mission into the future.

### Notes

1. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, quoted in Joan M. W. Landeros, "The Lasallian International University Network: Progress and Promise," *Lasallian Centers of Higher Education Bulletin*, no. 252 (Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, IALU, 2010), 5.

2. Joan M. W. Landeros, "The Lasallian International University Network: Progress and Promise," *Lasallian Centers of Higher Education Bulletin*, no. 252 (Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, IALU, 2010), 5.

3. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, quoted in Joan M. W. Landeros, *Lasallian Centers of Higher Education Bulletin* no. 252 (2010), 11.

4. Armin Luistro, FSC, "A Global Challenge for Lasallian Universities," *Lasallian Centers of Higher Education Bulletin*, no. 252 (2010), 19.

5. José María Pérez Navarro, FSC, "The Teaching of the Catechism in Lasallian History," *MEL Bulletin 17* (Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, April 2005).

6. Terence McLaughlin, FSC, *Silent Acceptance*, (Br. Terence Publications 2012), 86.