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## Lasallian Leadership in a Rapidly Changing Culture

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Thank you for inviting me to join you in sunny and warm Orlando for the 2017 Lasallian Association of Secondary School Chief Administrators (LASSCA) Conference. I am honored to be in the company of Dr. Marcia Chatelain,<sup>3</sup> Dr. Ann Garrido,<sup>4</sup> and Sister Mary Angela.<sup>5</sup>

The topic of your conference – Lasallian Leadership in a Rapidly Changing Culture – gives me the opportunity to share with you a few reflections from my perspective as Superior.

First and foremost, I would like to state that the chief administrator's leadership style must be firmly rooted in his or her commitment to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. This conviction is a consequence of the administrator's mandate to be a Minister of God and Ambassador of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Leonard Doohan, in his book *Spiritual Leadership: The Quest for Integrity*, writes:

The heart of leadership is not discovered in new skills – although they will be needed, nor in a new paradigm of dealing with others – although that will result, nor in the acquisition of new techniques of collaboration, team building, and consensus discernment – although they will be required. Rather, the heart of leadership is a changed attitude toward others, a conversion, a new way of looking at the world. Leadership is not achieved by “adding on” to our administrative know-how but by journeying inward and discovering values in one's own heart. The only acceptable leadership today is spiritual leadership.<sup>7</sup>

In my recent *Pastoral Letter: One Call, Many Voices*,<sup>8</sup> I reminded the Brothers that “the protocol by which all will be judged”<sup>9</sup> is found in Saint Matthew's account of the Last Judgment.<sup>10</sup> Jesus clearly states that our conversion must be to the Kingdom of God and result in a changed attitude and a new worldview toward the poor. The Lasallian chief administrator must incorporate ongoing conversion, new attitudes toward the poor, and a “from-the-bottom-up” worldview into an effective leadership style.

Yours indeed is an awesome responsibility and an exciting challenge. You are expected to be inspired by the Gospel, nurtured by the Christian community, and guided by the values of Lasallian pedagogy. Recall that Lasallian pedagogy and Lasallian spirituality are intimately associated, and Christ is the center of both.<sup>11</sup> Whether you minister in Toronto, Chicago, or Los Angeles, your students, faculty, and educational community want you to be brimming over with energy, contagiously enthusiastic, courageously concerned with the wellbeing of all your students – whatever their socio-economic situation – and with alleviating the plight of the poor.

It seems to me that you can only do this if you are prayerful, reflective, and conscious of the presence of God permeating everyone and everywhere.

From my pastoral visits around the Lasallian world, a frequently surfacing concern has to do with how well our leaders assume their responsibility and respond to the challenge. My interactions and conversations indicate to me that chief administrators – and this will come as no surprise to you – often over-manage and under-lead their educational communities. This is a concern frequently expressed by the chief administrators themselves. And it applies to the Superior as well!

From our own experience, we know how easy and tempting it is to become immersed in the “daily grind” of ensuring that the school runs well. A well-run school is, of course, a characteristic of Lasallian education; and the chief administrator is ultimately responsible for ensuring a compassionate and effective formative environment.

When feasible, however, I would like to suggest – and I know that you would want to do this – that for the chief administrator management should be the exception, not the rule. At all levels of governance, we must strive to push decision-making as far down as possible. I believe that the principal duty of the school leader is to guarantee that the school is a place where the Kingdom of God is experienced.

You must help the students – indeed the entire educational community – to experience the Kingdom as an event where good things happen to the young, the poor, and the vulnerable. We have to convey the reality of the Kingdom as offering insight into God’s way of being and acting, and what the world would be like if everyone followed God’s example.<sup>12</sup>

The creation of a “Kingdom environment” in a school is hard work. A Lasallian leader must make time for reflection, conversation, prayer, recreation, and study in order to have the necessary vision and energy to motivate and inspire the school community to be inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to vulnerable and poor young people. Each leader must determine the extent to which management issues can be delegated to others. If this is not done, the chief administrator runs the risk of becoming an articulate and popular but ineffective leader.

Echoing Leonard Doohan, I would say that the litmus test for Lasallian leadership is the extent to which it cooperates with Jesus in the creation of “Kingdom spaces” within the context of the Lasallian school.<sup>13</sup> Lasallian leadership wherever it occurs – Memphis, Milwaukee, or Metairie – demands that the chief administrators be aware of their call to conversion to the Gospel and the poor.

I think it is now clear to you why I believe the chief administrator should entrust many of the necessary details of the running of the school to others. It is so you can lead more and manage less.

Another concern that surfaces during my visits to our worldwide Lasallian Family is the continuing transmission of our distinctive way of forming young people. RELAN<sup>14</sup> provides shining examples of how to strengthen and improve our mission of human and Christian

education. LASSCA, the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies, the Lasallian Social Justice Institute, the Lasallian Leadership Institute, the Brother John Johnston Institute of Contemporary Lasallian Practice, and the Huether Lasallian Conference clearly respond to this concern.

At the local level, too, we find wonderful programs that foster Lasallian leadership. The De La Salle *Signum Fidei* Institute at La Salle in Cincinnati, *El Otro Lado* originating in Tuscon, and the Region's *Spring into Action* are just a few of many excellent programs designed to inspire young people to be proactive, Gospel-driven leaders.

I am increasingly aware that each of the five Regions of the Institute<sup>15</sup> is a culturally complex reality that must develop its own styles of Lasallian leadership. A shared concern of leaders in all the Regions is effective conflict resolution. I am sure Ann Garrido has provided you with many valuable insights in this regard.<sup>16</sup>

The different ways conflicts are resolved are culturally conditioned. Values such as saving face, direct and clear confrontation, subtle suggestion, and personal versus group strategies determine the way conflicts can be respectfully and effectively dealt with. Your own multicultural RELAN demands that you be sensitive to a multitude of values, techniques, and strategies. I am sure you know from whom to seek professional advice about this important matter.

I will limit myself to indicate that when a Lasallian leader is called upon to resolve a conflict, the guiding principle must be to procure the glory of God as far as one is able.<sup>17</sup> This is not meant to be a pious evasion of real-life problems, but rather a reminder that the keystone of Lasallian education is precisely to procure the glory of God by working for the well-being of the children and young people entrusted to our care.

Our rapidly changing cultural realities require new strategies and paradigms for conflict resolution. In our case, these new approaches must rest on and reflect the firm foundation of our commitment to Jesus and his Kingdom. Once again, I hope you can see why I challenge chief administrators to be women and men who have frequent contact with the Word of God and are filled with the spirit of faith and apostolic zeal.<sup>18</sup> I hope, too, that you can appreciate why I offer you a guiding principle and not a specific technique. The underlying principle can be applied anywhere – in Providence, Saint Paul, or Pasadena. The technique must be specific to the particular circumstances of a concrete place – inner-city New York, Concord, or Browning, Montana.

The most urgent challenge for chief administrators is not the capital campaign, student recruitment and retention, faculty contracts, or scholarships for the poor. All of these issues are important, labor intensive, and essential to providing a first-class Lasallian Catholic education. However, your first duty – indeed the duty of every one of us – is our progressive conversion to Jesus and the Gospel. The quality and effectiveness of our personal and communal responses to Jesus' proclamation – "Repent and believe in the Gospel"<sup>19</sup> – will determine the effectiveness of our Lasallian leadership. After all, for the Lasallian teacher there is no separation between the professional journey and the spiritual journey.<sup>20</sup>

The more you announce the Gospel to the poor and welcome the vulnerable and excluded to your schools, the more – slowly and imperceptibly – you will find yourselves transformed and revitalized as Lasallian chief administrators, having put on the new self, created in God’s way.<sup>21</sup>

In this brief reflection, I have shared with you the following food for thought:

- Lasallian chief administrators are expected to be spiritual leaders; that is, women and men guided by the Holy Spirit, nurtured by the Word of God, and on fire with the spirit of faith and zeal.
- Lasallian leaders are encouraged to lead more and more and manage less; your first duty is to create places where the Kingdom of God is experienced.
- Lasallian chief administrators are invited to inspire others – students and faculties – to touch hearts through the Lasallian way of being and doing.
- Lasallian chief administrators are called to engage in progressive conversion to Jesus and the Gospel.

Yours indeed is an awesome, exciting, and life-giving ministry. Thanks to you, RELAN’s network of secondary schools is providing children and young people with safe and welcoming places to experience community, solidarity, and outstanding academic and social opportunities. Because of your vision and hard work, Lasallian ministries in Canada and the United States are offering students educational experiences of God’s Kingdom.

Please remember to take care of yourselves! While it is true that exercising leadership is an expression of your aliveness, please keep in mind that “. . . your life juice – your creativity and daring, your curiosity and eagerness to question, your compassion and love for people – can seep away daily . . . ”<sup>22</sup> It is important to take time – plenty of time – to refresh, recreate, and relax with your family and friends. We are all counting on you!

Personally, and in the name of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, I thank you for being beacons of Christian hope for your local Lasallian families, enthusiastic bearers of the Good News, and outstanding Lasallian educational leaders.

I offer a special word of thanks to LASSCA officers,<sup>23</sup> who, on your behalf, invited me to join this LASSCA conference and who exemplify the spirit of Lasallian leadership.

Here in Rome,<sup>24</sup> the Brothers of the General Council and I are currently gathered to reflect on our fraternal life, the vitality of the mission, and our role as leaders. Please keep us in your prayers.

Thank you!

## Endnotes

1. These remarks were delivered on 1 March 2017 during the annual conference of RELAN's Lasallian Association of Secondary School Chief Administrators (LASSCA), which was held in Orlando, Florida.

2. Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, was elected Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 2014. He earned a doctorate in educational administration at the University of Pennsylvania.

3. Marcia Chatelain, PhD, is a noted speaker and "scholar of race and ethnicity in America."

4. Ann M. Garrido, DMin, is an associate professor of homiletics at Aquinas Institute of Theology in Saint Louis, MO.

5. Sister Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, JD, is an expert on Catholic school law.

6. These are images from John Baptist de La Salle's "Meditations for the Time of Retreat." Cf. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Lasallian Publications, 1994), pages 432-472.

7. Leonard Doohan, *Spiritual Leadership: The Quest for Integrity* (Paulist Press, 2007), page 12

8. Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, *Pastoral Letter: One Call, Many Voices* (Rome, 2016).

9. "The protocol by which all will be judged" is a phrase often used by Pope Francis.

10. *Matthew* 25:31-46.

11. Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, *Touching the Hearts of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools* (Christian Brothers Publications, 1999), page 123.

12. Cf. José Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation* (Convivium Press, 2015), pages 99-100.

13. Cf. Doohan, page 2.

14. RELAN is the acronym for the Region of Lasallian North America, one of five Regions of the worldwide Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

15. These five are: Lasallian Region of Pacific-Asia (PARC); Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL); Lasallian Region of Europe-Middle East (RELEM); Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN), exclusive of Mexico that forms a part of RELAL; and Lasallian Region of Africa-Madagascar (RELAF), exclusive of Egypt and Sudan that form a part of RELEM.

16. Ann M. Garrido, DMin, made a presentation on the preceding day of this conference on the topic of “Honoring the Person while Facing the Challenge: Tips for Talking in Times of Change.”

17. Cf. “Formula of Vows” in *Rule and Foundational Documents* by John Baptist de La Salle (Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 204.

18. Cf. “Rule of 1705” and “Rule of 1718” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chapter 2.2 and chapter 2.9 on pages 16 and 19.

19. *Matthew* 1:14.

20. Cf. Van Grieken, page 123.

21. Catholic Relief Services, *A Moment of Grace: Prayer for Refugees* (www.crs.org).

22. Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002), page 225.

23. Brother James Butler, FSC, president; Ms. Cheri Broadhead, vice president; and Ms. Denise Jones, immediate past president.

24. These remarks were delivered in Orlando by video from Rome.