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The Five Core Principles of Lasallian Schools: Their Origins, Integration with Catholic Identity, and Resonance Today

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"The things which really come first are the things which we are accustomed to think come last,"
*G.K. Chesterton.*³

Introduction

The question of identity is one that defies an easy answer, whether it is asked about persons or about institutions. While identity may primarily be an operative and dynamic element that is only active in daily experience, it is also one of those things that becomes more understood as it is engaged, as it is reflectively and responsibly engaged. The identity of a person emerges during the course of conversations, shared experiences, and time. Similarly, the identity of groups of persons who share a common interest, purpose, or set of goals emerges gradually and over time, according to one's exposure to, and within, that particular group.

The essential substance of specific identity is something that is ultimately a mystery. It may be there first, but it is usually understood last. As with any mystery, identity deals with what might be called "depths of meaning." By nature, such depths defy being easily understood, because such is part of their nature. The theologian, Herbert McCabe is helpful when he compares this sort of thing to the appreciation of Shakespeare's plays. Depths of meaning, he says, are not found.

In a play, when you watch it for the first time; you have to learn to understand it, and you cannot take short cuts to the depth . . . [A]s we understand a mystery it enlarges our capacity for understanding . . . [W]hen it comes to reaching down to the deeper meanings, there is no substitute for watching or taking part in the play itself. The mystery reveals itself in the actual enactment of the play. It is very hard to put the meaning of *Macbeth* into any other words, and that is why literary critics are always harder to read than plays; it all seems so much more complicated. This is not because critics are trying to make things difficult. Nor is it that the deep meaning is itself something complicated. It is something simple; the difficulty lies in bringing it up from its depth. When you try to bring deep simplicities to the surface you have to be complicated about them. If you are not, then you will simply have substituted slogans . . . for the truth.⁴

The identity of a Lasallian school deals with such "deep simplicities," more acquired through experience than through description. They have to be brought to the surface with some complexity to ensure they won't simply be slogans instead of genuine invitations into an

engagement with a truthful reality. This brief essay will survey some of the history of attempts to do just that – describe the identity of Lasallian schools – along with the emergence of the most popular set of identity markers, commonly called the “Five Core Principles of Lasallian Schools.” These five core principles will then be viewed in relationship with similar Catholic school identity markers that come from relatively recent Catholic Church documents. We will then see that the five core principles have also come to articulate an accessible set of pathways for Lasallian students to recognize, appreciate, and promote their personal experiences in a Lasallian Catholic school. Finally, some questions and concerns will be raised for future consideration by both students and scholars.

The History

It is important to know something of the context within which the *Five Core Principles of Lasallian Schools* came about. While this is not an exhaustive survey, even a brief overview is helpful.

The first major contemporary effort to articulate defining characteristics of Lasallian schools came from the Regional Education Committee of Christian Brothers (RECCB) of North America in 1984, when they “determined to synthesize his [De La Salle’s] concepts in one document which would be brief, clear, informative, and challenging.”⁵ Two years of work, with input from scholars and educators from 80 institutions, culminating in a 1985 workshop with 150 participants, led to the 1986 document entitled *Characteristics of Lasallian Schools*. In that document, three major components – the teacher as minister of grace, association, and the management of schools – were described through statements based on quotations from De La Salle, specific articulated goals, and suggested activities for implementation.

A year later, in 1987, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian School’s Secretariat for Education in Rome published a document entitled *Characteristics of a Lasallian School Today*. It was “intended for the whole Institute.” It was written by a group of 21 assembled European Brothers and consisted of eight sections, each of which began with a global statement which was then followed by specific numbered relevant points. The section titles were: 1) *attentive to the needs of the young*, 2) *especially the poor*. . . , 3) *they associate*, 4) *in a fraternal atmosphere*, 5) *in order that the school “should function well,”* 6) *in order to exercise their educational ministry*, 7) *in the Church*, and 8) *in creative fidelity to the charism of the Founder* . . .⁶

Five years later, in 1992, the basic elements of what came to be known as the *Five Core Principles* made their appearance at a workshop for student leaders of the San Francisco District; and by 1993, the *Five Core Principles* in their present form were documented. A more detailed history of this is in the next section of the essay.

In 1994, Brother John Johnston, FSC, superior general of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, gave an address at the Lasallian European Congress held in Strasbourg, Germany. In it, he states that:

De La Salle did not leave 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.⁷

The seven characteristics that Brother John highlights are: 1) *respect for each person as a unique person*, 2) *spirit of community*, 3) *school of quality*, 4) *a school that is Christian*, 5) *solidarity with the poor*, 6) *teachers: men and women of faith and zeal*, and 7) *organized around the story of De La Salle*. Each characteristic is well developed in the presentation, with citations from De La Salle himself, Institute documents, and other sources.

In 1995, Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, in his Boston College dissertation articulated ten operative commitments of Lasallian schools, based on an analysis of De La Salle’s *Meditations*⁸ and of the early operational handbook, as it were, for the schools, *The Conduct of Schools*.⁹ These results were subsequently made more generally available by the author in *Touching the Hearts of Students*.¹⁰

In 1997, Brother Luke Salm, FSC, wrote an essay called “Characteristics of Lasallian Schools” in which he speaks about some of the history behind this topic, including his own initial list of six characteristics enumerated in 1980 at a lecture at Manhattan College. He states,

In the conviction that the six characteristics proposed in 1980 have yet something to contribute to the ongoing discussion, this present essay will review and to some extent update the reflections that were made at that time.¹¹

The six characteristics are then enumerated and explained in Brother Luke’s unique and thorough style. The characteristics he identifies are: 1) *sensitivity to social needs*, 2) *importance given to religious education*, 3) *commitment, in association, to teaching as a vocation*, 4) *quality education*, 5) *emphasis on the practical*, and 6) *a unique role in the Catholic Church*. He ends his essay by stating that “Other schools, no doubt, manifest many of these same qualities. But taken together they seem to describe that elusive something that we call a Lasallian school.”¹²

In 2005, the Christian Brothers Conference in North America assembled a regional group of Lasallian representatives to articulate what came to be called the *Goals of Lasallian Ministries*. Previous documents and resources on the topic were studied, reviewed, adapted, and newly articulated in this document. The results became the basis for similar documents developed by each of the individual Districts of the Region. After a general statement highlighting the fact that Lasallian ministries “respond to the needs of those entrusted to their care,” the document provides five statements: 1) *we are animated by and foster a spirit of faith and zeal*, 2) *we create and sustain respectful human relationships in community*, 3) *we exercise a preferential option for the poor*, 4) *we instill Gospel values*, and 5) *we develop and maintain diverse programs meeting recognized standards of excellence*. Each goal is followed by a list of specific implications in each area for a Lasallian ministry.

In 2006, there was a *MEL Bulletin* from Rome, written by Brother Frederick Mueller, FSC, entitled *Lasallian Schools and Teachers: A United States Perspective*. After an overview of the

historical elements and contexts that had been part of the effort to deal with this topic of characteristics in the Lasallian world, the author includes nine “basic Lasallian guidelines which, taken as a whole, would define ‘Lasallian’: 1) *concern for the young as unique persons with real needs*, 2) *preferential option for the poor*, 3) *communion with the Church*, 4) *social conscience and advocacy of social change with an emphasis on the rights of the child*, 5) *inspiration in the Gospel*, 6) *spirit of faith and zeal*, 7) *formation of a community of faith*, 8) *programs of excellence*, and 9) *an educational plan linking evangelization and sound human development and emphasizing catechesis and pastoral work in multiple contexts open to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.*”¹³

There have been further documents from schools, Districts, and other Lasallian entities that speak about the unique characteristics of a Lasallian institution, but the few cited here will be sufficient to provide the context for better understanding the development of the *Five Core Principles*.

The Five Core Principles

The genesis of the *Five Core Principles* came from a first-time student leaders workshop held at Christian Brothers Retreat House in California for 41 high school juniors, all new student leaders, and their school moderators from nine Lasallian schools of the District of San Francisco. Organized by the office of education, the workshop was led by Gery Short, Brother Ronald Roggenback, FSC, and Kevin Murphy. As part of the three-day program, there were sessions about leadership styles, communication skills, planning skills, and a panel discussion with seniors and directors of student activities.

One other session, called “Lasallian Characteristics,” was held on the morning of the second day. For this session, Brother Ronald Isetti, FSC,¹⁴ a history professor at Saint Mary’s College of California, gave a presentation. Referencing a pivotal 1967 document, *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*,¹⁵ he identified six characteristics and listed them in a handout¹⁶ for the student leaders. Each characteristic was accompanied by a short explanatory paragraph:

1. ***Concern for the Individual***: Needs of the individual are primary and precede rules and regulations.
2. ***Academic and Intellectual Freedom***: An atmosphere of freedom is present that encourages each student to take responsibility for his or her own growth and to take an active part in the life of the school. Especially with regard to religious instruction, no student is coerced but expected to follow one’s own conscience.
3. ***Inclusive Community***: A united community where diversity is respected, where no one is left out, and everyone finds a place. Individuals within the school community recognize and accept one another’s limitations.

4. ***Respect for All Persons:*** A concerted effort by the school, especially with regard to curriculum and school policies, to address all forms of prejudice and to respect the dignity of all persons.
5. ***Concern for the Poor and Social Justice:*** Especially through the curriculum and outreach programs, the school demonstrates sensitivity toward the poor and those suffering from injustices. In general the community, especially the students, are encouraged to get involved in assisting the marginalized.
6. ***Quality Education:*** An education is provided that prepares the student not only for a job and college, but for life.

This presentation was well received by the students. An April 6, 1992, letter from Gery Short to Brother Ronald states:

As the evaluations indicate, your presentation was greatly appreciated. Your presentation was concise, clear, and your invitation to dialogue with the students was well appreciated. As was evident by the exchange, you created much food for thought. I hope that a follow-up poster or summary, that of the characteristics of the *Declaration* which you highlighted, will serve as a reference for student leaders in the District throughout the upcoming school year.¹⁷

The idea of having a set of short, accessible Lasallian identity markers was an appealing one and became a future avenue for discussing the experience of students and teachers at Lasallian institutions.

It was in the following year, in a handout¹⁸ to participants at a 1993 Lasallian student leadership workshop at Camp Saint Joseph's on the Russian River, that the *Five Core Principles* in their present form were first articulated, with each core principle including a short explanatory paragraph and a reference to the text that had been the inspiration for the original list.¹⁹ While Brother Ronald was not on the schedule as a presenter, "Lasallian Characteristics" were.²⁰

Core Principles of a Lasallian School

1. ***Faith in the Presence of God:*** Belief in the living presence of God in our world. Prayer and regular reminders of God's presence is a prevailing spirit of the school. All are taught to discover how God is active in one's life and to learn to see the world with the "eyes of faith."
2. ***Respect for All Persons:*** A concerted effort by the school to respect the dignity of all persons.
3. ***Inclusive Community:*** A united community where diversity is respected, where no one is left out, and everyone finds a place. Individuals within the school community recognize and accept one another's limitations.

4. ***Quality Education***: An education is provided that prepares students not only for a job and college, but for life. This education advances the students' abilities to use their talents to critically examine the world, contemporary culture, etc., in light of the message of the Gospel, and to take greater responsibility for their own education.
5. ***Concern for the Poor and Social Justice***: The school demonstrates a sensitivity toward the poor and those suffering from injustices. In general, the community, especially the students, are encouraged to get involved in assisting the marginalized.

This second iteration is largely the same as the list provided by Brother Ronald Isetti, FSC, in 1993. The descriptions for the characteristics that remained were somewhat changed, with some shortened and others expanded. Two characteristics from that previous list, "Concern for the Individual" and "Academic and Intellectual Freedom," were eliminated and a new characteristic, "Faith in the Presence of God," was added.

These *Five Core Principles (FCPS)* that first appeared in the 1993 handout remain the same and are used consistently as part of the District of San Francisco publications and activities in California and elsewhere for the last 25 years. The descriptive paragraphs have also remained exactly the same. It was only much later that the descriptions were adapted by others according to context and use. But the fundamental *FCPS* statements themselves remain the same throughout.²¹

It should be noted that besides their use at the student leadership workshops, these *FCPS* were initially largely unknown throughout the wider District of San Francisco, except insofar as student leaders brought them back to their home schools. Significant in this respect were the students from La Salle High School in Milwaukie, Oregon.²² A year after the introduction of the 1993 format, the students from Milwaukie who attended the workshop returned and met several times with their president, Mr. Timothy Edwards. The students wanted to apply what they had learned in some practical way for the benefit of the larger school community. The students eventually decided to create five banners and hang them in the main hallway of the school.²³ On those banners were short phrases that offered simplified representations of the Lasallian characteristics they learned about and discussed with the school's president.²⁴

The Milwaukie hallway banners quickly became popular at the school and began to show up in school photographs and in the District of San Francisco videos. Gradually, other Lasallian schools began to pay attention to these *FCPS* and regular reference to them gained momentum. Within ten years, not only were other Lasallian institutions in the District of San Francisco using the *FCPS* as a reference, they were beginning to be applied in creative ways by others. The Mission Council for the New Orleans-Santa Fe District, as a result of brainstorming ways for parents to learn more about the Lasallian charism and mission, came up with "The Five Core Meal" and held such a meal at Christian Brothers School in New Orleans in 2004, with parents from all four Lasallian schools of the New Orleans area in attendance. This was a public meal during which each principle corresponded with the appropriate food item(s): Appetizer (Faith in the Presence of God), Salad (Inclusive Community), Bread (Concern for the Poor and Social Justice), Main Course (Quality Education), and Desert (Respect for All Persons). A reflection, Scripture readings, Lasallian quotations, and conversation pointers / questions were associated

with each course, such that it became a time for sharing a meal, stories, and ideas on how to live as members of the Lasallian community.²⁵ These meals have expanded and proven to be both effective and popular, both at the high school and college level.

It is clear these particular five characteristics emerged and have persisted because they resonated with the experience of teachers and students in the schools. They rose to the top, as it were, and stayed there. The *FCPS* handout from 1993 was not a document that was corporately endorsed and subsequently integrated into an organizational structure. Instead, the popularity of this set of characteristics grew within the Lasallian organizational culture because they provided generally accessible focal points, meaning clusters, or touchstones for something that has always been very difficult to sufficiently describe or contain. As Gery Short, who has seen their development over the last twenty-five years, wrote:

I was never insistent that these characteristics become the norm for the schools or students. My attitude was that it was a tool, made sense, but if someone found another set that was better, so be it. As we know from history, these characteristics or a close version persisted. The students especially connected to them and found them useful. Even though several others . . . had published their set and all were valid, for some reason our set proved helpful with minor edits over the first few years.²⁶

In the last section of this essay, some examples of their wider adoption and further expansion will be provided. At this point, however, it is appropriate to connect these *FCPS* with the essentially Catholic nature of the Lasallian school, especially since their labels, on the face of it, do not include identifiable Catholic terminology. The observation may be made, however, that the mission vectors represented by the *FCPS* are remarkably consistent with those found in Catholic identity characteristics expressed within Catholic Church documents.

Integration with Catholic Identity

A Lasallian school is a Catholic school, a school that expresses its Catholic identity through the lens of the Spirit-led educational movement initiated and sustained by the life, vision, and spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Patron of All Teachers of Youth. The foundational documents, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices that define De La Salle's pedagogical spirituality continue to inspire and guide educators around the world in an authentically Catholic way and as part of our Catholic living tradition.²⁷

The *Five Core Principles (FCPS)* identified in the last section have come to express and describe the experience of many who are part of Lasallian educational communities, and in so doing they have led to questions as to whether these *FCPS* have any significant relationship to what it means to be an authentically Catholic institution. It is a valid question and a valid concern. The answer to the question must recognize two things: 1) that descriptions of similar things may be provided through different language clusters, and 2) that differences of degree are not the same as differences in kind. One may describe a flower through poetry, or biology, or biochemistry. All are accurate. And while the differences are in the kind of language used, the thing that is described, the flower, remains the same. It is not a better or larger or greater flower, except perhaps in the mind and heart of "the listener."

The language used in the *FCPS* labels is, except for the first one, relatively generic. The descriptions associated with each begin to concretize the label within a Lasallian Catholic context. In so doing, what might be called their “mission vector” is given apostolic shape, degree of importance, and intentional direction. A closer examination of these specific *FCPS* and their descriptors will show that in that respect they synchronize remarkably well with similar clusters of identity that have come from a document that intentionally highlights Catholic educational identity markers based on relevant Catholic Church documents.

In the booklet *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools*²⁸ by Archbishop J. Michael Miller CSB,²⁹ a succinct summary of Vatican documents on the topic of Catholic education is articulated. The booklet highlights “the major concerns found in post-conciliar Vatican publications on the subject”³⁰ and includes five essential marks of an authentically Catholic school. They are measurable benchmarks, based on Church documents, that form its backbone and inspire a Catholic school’s mission; they “help to answer the critical question: *Is this a Catholic school according to the mind of the Church?*”³¹

He sets the larger context by quoting Saint Pope John Paul II, who told a group of bishops that the Church’s institutions must be “Catholic in their self-understanding and Catholic in their identity.”³² And therefore, “It is precisely because of its Catholic identity, which is anything but sectarian, that a school derives its originality that enables it to be a genuine instrument of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”³³

The five specific marks, or characteristics, of a Catholic school highlighted by Archbishop Miller are these:

- inspired by a supernatural vision,
- founded on Christian anthropology,
- animated by communion and community,
- imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and
- sustained by Gospel witness.

These marks of a Catholic school, upon closer examination, appear to align – in the thoughtful, focused and well-nuanced language of the Church – with mission vectors that lie behind the *Lasallian Five Core Principles*.

Inspired by a Supernatural Vision

This essential Catholic school mark appears to align with the Lasallian core principle of *Faith in the Presence of God*. Education is described by the Church as a process that forms “the whole child” toward being good citizens of the world, loving God and neighbor, enriching society with the leaven of the Gospel, and fulfilling their destiny to become saints. Catholic schools must transmit the full truth about the human person, created in God’s image and called to life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. As such, there is an emphasis on the inalienable dignity of the human person, above all on their spiritual dimension.³⁴

The Lasallian core principle of *Faith in the Presence of God* includes in its 1993 descriptor, “All are taught to discover how God is active in one’s life and to learn to see the world with the ‘eyes of faith.’”³⁵ This core principle is embodied in the invocation “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God,”³⁶ which is an invitation to see all things with the eyes of faith, putting Jesus Christ at the center of our ministry, in how what we teach, how we teach, how we interact with our students and each other, the environment we create in our schools, and how we attend to the religious and spiritual lives of our colleagues and students. This principle is rooted in a deeply held Catholic Christian belief in sacramentality and the sacramental principle.³⁷

Founded on Christian Anthropology

This essential Catholic school mark appears to align with the Lasallian core principle of *Respect for All Persons*.

The Church highlights that “Catholic educators should have a sound understanding of the human person that addresses the requirements of both the natural and the supernatural perfection of the children entrusted to their care.” Repeatedly the Holy See’s documents emphasize the need for an educational philosophy built on a correct understanding of who the human person is.³⁸ The Christian concept of the person “attributes to the human person the dignity of a child of God . . . It calls for the fullest development of all that is human.”³⁹ Christ is *the* teacher in a Catholic school, and the Gospel spirit pervades the school. Education is not a commodity. The Catholic school “sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons”⁴⁰ centered around the model and presence of Christ.

The Lasallian core principle of *Respect for All Persons* includes in its 1993 descriptor, “A concerted effort by the school to respect the dignity of all persons.”⁴¹ De La Salle in his meditations tells his teachers to “recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them.”⁴² We affirm that all share in being created in God’s image; and our educational endeavors are designed and implemented with that in mind, recognizing a student’s unique gifts and talents. All have an essential dignity befitting a daughter or son of God and deserve to be treated as such.⁴³

Animated by Communion and Community

This essential Catholic school mark appears to align with the Lasallian core principle of *Inclusive Community*.

The Church highlights that as a community of persons and a community of faith, Catholic schools propose an alternative model to that of an individualist society, one “rooted both in the social nature of the human person and in the reality of the Church as the home and school of communion.”⁴⁴ This community is chiefly manifested in four areas: the teamwork manifested within a warm, familial school climate, especially in schools with consecrated religious, “experts in communion”; the cooperation, mutual trust, and ongoing dialogue between educators and Church leaders; the personal accompaniment of, and rapport with, students in a friendly atmosphere; and a pleasant and familial physical environment illuminated by the light of faith (chapel, prayer, etc.).

The Lasallian core principle of *Inclusive Community* includes in its 1993 descriptor, “A united community where diversity is respected, where no one is left out, and where everyone finds a place.”⁴⁵ The Lasallian tradition of being “Brothers” to one another, and older Brothers to their students is extended today to all Lasallian educators, older brothers and sisters to their students, and associated together in relationships nourished by mutual esteem, trust, respect and friendliness.⁴⁶ The relationships to be built, together and with students, is welcoming and inclusive, like brothers and sisters to one another. Psychological, social, cultural, religious, cognitive, and physical diversities should be considered an opportunity and a gift, recognized and embraced.⁴⁷

Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout Its Curriculum

This essential Catholic school mark appears to align with the Lasallian core principle of *Quality Education*.

The Church highlights that an integral Catholic education aims to develop gradually the growth of the whole person, “every capability of every student: his or her intellectual, physical, psychological, moral, and religious capacities.”⁴⁸ A Catholic school must be constantly inspired and guided by the Gospel and the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, deriving “all the energy necessary for its educational work from him.”⁴⁹ “Catholicism is ‘a comprehensive way of life’ that should animate every aspect of its activities and curriculum.”⁵⁰ It must foster a love for wisdom and truth, and it must prepare students to relate their faith to their particular culture and live it in practice.

The Lasallian core principle of *Quality Education* includes in its 1993 descriptor, “An education is provided that prepares students not only for a job and college, but for life. This education advances the students’ abilities to use their talents to critically examine the world, contemporary culture, etc., in light of the message of the Gospel, and to take greater responsibility for their own education.”⁵¹ Lasallian educators manifest this, adapted to the needs of their students, through the curriculum (both human and Christian, as described in the Brothers’ *Rule*), pedagogical methods, professional development and formation of educators, school environment, policy, and attention to the whole person.⁵² “Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise.”⁵³

Sustained by Gospel Witness

This essential Catholic school mark appears to align with the Lasallian core principle of *Concern for the Poor and Social Justice*.

The Church highlights the critical and vital witness of a Catholic school’s teachers and administrators, since they “reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior.”⁵⁴ “Catholic educators are expected to be models for their students by bearing transparent witness to Christ and to the beauty of the Gospel.”⁵⁵ Church documents “pay a great deal of attention to the vocation of teachers and their participation in the Church’s evangelizing mission.”⁵⁶

The Lasallian core principle of *Concern for the Poor and Social Justice* is not as focused on the witness of school administrators and teachers, but rather on the witness of teachers and students outwards, “a sensitivity toward the poor and those suffering injustices.”⁵⁷ As the Congregation for Catholic Education notes, “In particular, schools would not be a complete learning environment if, what pupils learnt, did not also become an occasion to serve the local community.”⁵⁸ Lasallian Catholic schools were founded to provide a transformative education, informed by Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the teachings of the Church, for young people from poor and working class families. This includes educating them to their Christian responsibility of care and concern for others in need. This core principle is rooted in the deeply-held Catholic Christian commitment to social justice and concern for those in need, one that leads to concrete action on their behalf, whether in terms of those admitted to the school or in terms of the developed sensitivity of students toward the marginalized.⁵⁹

The Five Core Principles Today

Over the course of the last fifteen years, these *Lasallian Core Principles* have gradually become more embedded within our wider operational framework on the District level.

In or around 2003, Carole Swain, vice president for mission at Saint Mary’s College of California, edited the descriptions for the *FCPS* to a sentence descriptor for each principle. That edited version was subsequently disseminated within the college community on posters, cards, and other means. These have been shared with students, parents, teachers, and others since that time. There is also a Spanish translation that is used at the college’s parent orientations.

At the District of San Francisco’s Mission Assembly in 2006 – an assembly consisting of some 150 Brothers and Lasallian Partners – one of the approved priority statements formalized the adoption of these principles for the purpose of enhancing the Lasallian climate and culture of the schools of the District. The statement reads:

To enhance the Catholic Lasallian culture and climate of the apostolate, each local institution, with the support of the District Office of Education, will advance our mission among all its students through the intentional use of the Core Principles so that all students can articulate and actively live the mission.⁶⁰

The result of this Mission Assembly priority statement was that a much wider group of Lasallian leaders and teachers began to pay attention to these specific core principles and to find ways of integrating their incorporation within their own institutions.

In the 2007-2011 Action Plan for the District of San Francisco, one of the priorities was to “Make intentional use of Lasallian core principles among students, helping students know, articulate, and live the mission.”⁶¹

The 2011-2014 District of New Orleans-Santa Fe’s Strategic Plan encouraged others to “build on the successes of spreading the Five Core Principles” and articulated a “five-core-rubric for personnel evaluation and curriculum choices.”⁶²

The most work done with the *Lasallian Five Core Principles* has been in the development of the latest iteration of an assessment instrument for Lasallian schools in the San Francisco New Orleans District, called the Lasallian Catholic Assessment Process (LCAP). In 2016, through the efforts of the District Office of Education, this school assessment instrument was redesigned in such a way that the Five Core Principles, which had been part of its organizational framework since 2002, became a more central, measurable element in the process. As a result, there are now nineteen very specific indicators for each of the five core principles, with those indicators further broken down into specific measurable or observable areas of evidence, which themselves are examples of the kinds of evidence that is being sought. The indicators themselves show how carefully each of the core principles has been applied to specific school contexts. Here is an example from the LCAP document, illustrating only the indicators of the first Lasallian core principle, along with an example of the specific observable evidence for just this one of those indicators.

Faith in the Presence of God: We believe in the living presence of God in our students, our community, and our world.

- a. A Lasallian Catholic school promotes Catholic identity by presenting and embodying the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, tradition, and teachings in everything it does.
- b. A Lasallian Catholic school has a clear and visible affiliation with its Lasallian heritage and demonstrates a consistent practice of Lasallian principles.
- c. Educators in Lasallian Catholic schools see their work as a vocation, animated by the Holy Spirit. They demonstrate a spirit of faith and zeal as they give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through their words and actions.
 - i. Vocation programs and leadership formation in the school and the District guide students in discerning their God-given vocation in life.
 - ii. Retreats, service and immersion programs, career programs, and other experiences provide students with the opportunity to discover their gifts and talents and how they can be used to respond to the needs of the world.
 - iii. Students have the opportunity to hear and reflect on individual vocation stories, especially from faculty, staff, administrators, and the De La Salle Christian Brothers.
- d. All Lasallian Catholic schools are united by a common mission and vision, rooted in the heritage of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, that is accomplished by working together and by association. All members of the school community see themselves as part of the larger Lasallian Family.
- e. A Lasallian Catholic school recognizes its responsibility to work with the diocese and local parishes to deepen the religious participation and commitment of those in the school.⁶³

The rest of the document is similarly organized, with a set of indicators for each core principle, and with each of the indicators further detailed into specific observable actions or activities. Such a structure is familiar to anyone who has ever gone through a school accreditation process in the USA. Currently, the LCAP document is one of the most thorough expressions of the Five Core Principles to date.

Recall, that it was an interest in the elements of Lasallian identity, one of those “deep simplicities” Leo McCabe wrote about which defy easy definition, that led to the 1992 and 1993 lists of Lasallian characteristics. Those characteristics, during the course of twenty-five years, were more and more adopted by students and administrators as their meaning and application came to be experienced in the schools and talked about more widely. It wasn’t until recently that these various movements led to this LCAP document, one that both describes more fully and represents more deeply the Lasallian identity that was the elusive object of the original effort to speak more clearly about the nature of that identity. We had to take our time and be complicated about bringing Lasallian identity to the surface, and now we have something that is much more than a collection of mere slogans. We have the real beginnings of a true and reliable definition of “Lasallian Identity” for our contemporary context, and one that will undoubtedly continue to evolve further in the future.

Observations and Questions

Observations

First, it is important to know that District administrators involved in this entire process believe that these Lasallian Core Principles are neither definitive nor timeless. Gery Short writes:

They evolved or developed organically. Over a few years we settled in on the set we have today . . . there was a certain trust and openness to naming these characteristics. If they proved helpful and could be seen as legitimate than we went with them. Other lists were valid, ours seem to connect and persist . . . [and] if longevity and use are any indicators of validity, the five we landed on must be recognized as such.

Second, Greg Kopra, director of formation for mission of the District of San Francisco New Orleans, has been a witness to the development of these *FCPS* for many years and was a major contributor to the LCAP document referenced above. He writes:

It has become clear that these five core principles are in sync with core Catholic beliefs and commitments – what Thomas Groome refers to as “Catholic depth structures.” I am not of the opinion that these five “core principles” define us or even distinguish us – rather, they help to describe what we do and why we do it. Other articulations of core commitments . . . add to the conversation and enrich it. These five “core principles” have found their way into mainstream formation work with students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, entire school communities, in CLASP⁶⁴ and then LCAP,⁶⁵ etc. As such, they give us important, helpful common language that helps to focus our efforts and challenge us as we move forward.

Third, the five core principles were clearly based on that pivotal Lasallian document *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*. This gave them a solid provenance and credibility from the start. The roots were deep and sturdy, and so it shouldn’t be a surprise that they have persisted as long as they have.

Questions

First, would it be helpful to include a reference to Jesus Christ or the Church in at least one of the core principle labels?

This was a concern that I had expressed in 2007 to the Office of Education. The 2005 *Regional Goals for Lasallian Ministries* document includes the specific goal of “We instill Gospel values.” However, I came to see and now realize that as a Catholic school and charism, Jesus Christ undergirds, permeates, and inspires the entire spectrum of concerns and activities in a Lasallian school; and it would be a devaluation of that reality were we to make it a single item among many. Christ is at the center of the whole cluster of core principles and is evident in the indicators and evidence related in the LCAP document.

Second, has our emphasis on the Five Lasallian Core Principles in this age of secularization and disaffiliation actually encouraged our students to move in the direction of secularization?

This question came to me from Charlie Legendre, director of evangelization & catechesis for the District of San Francisco New Orleans, who recently attended a three-week session at the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, exploring the study of and approach to faith formation in the twenty-first century. The question was based on the presentation by one professor, Didier Pollefeyt, who focused on the Melbourne scale of five kinds of Catholic school identities,⁶⁶ the first of which is “Christian Values Education” in which efforts are made to create a link between values and Christianity. Didier’s prevailing message was:

That Christian values education does not impede secularization. In fact, depending upon the circumstances, Christian values education may actually support movement toward secularization. Christian values education is that type where a particular value is focused upon and an attempt is made to connect that value with the Christian tradition, thereby trying to bridge the gap between Christianity and culture. The data indicate that, where students have a strong faith and practice, connecting the value to Christianity is possible. However, where there is a diminished confessional identity, the student is not able to connect the value with the Catholic faith. The students take away the value but not the faith.

Christian values education is popular because, many times, the values present an easy, inviting common denominator to which students (and faculty) can easily relate. Christian values education does not, however, present the particulars of the Christian tradition.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council asked religious congregations in 1965 to return to the original spirit of their institutes and adapt them to the changed conditions of the times.⁶⁸ In the Lasallian world, this led to the 1967 document entitled *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, a document that has remained insightful, visionary, and surprisingly relevant even until today. It was the source and basis for the development of the Five Lasallian Core Principles in 1992-1993; and it evidently continues to shape the substance of what we mean by

contemporary Lasallian Catholic educational ministry, given the way in which those core principles have come to provide a common language and touchstones for what we mean when we speak of being Lasallian today.

Brother John Johnston said in his 1994 talk in Strasbourg,

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.⁶⁹

Over the years, there have been many articulations of such characteristics, or goals, or operative commitments. The one group of statements that appears to have gained general credibility through longevity and wide use is the Five Lasallian Core Principles. These principles do not describe the experience of Lasallian ministry entirely, but they seem to lead others into the most fruitful conversations about that ministry. They do not exhaust the possible ways that one might have conversations about Lasallian ministry and its future, but they seem to focus on the relevant areas that invite ongoing attention. And their language does not at first appear to address the essentially Catholic character of Lasallian schools, but their engagement within Lasallian schools quickly leads to all those central elements of Catholic education that the Church cherishes and proclaims in its own documents.

As with the Gospel itself, the Holy Spirit is present in the human encounter with the text, which may speak about the same event or reality from different perspectives. Some of this dynamic appears to be part of the history of the Lasallian Five Core Principles, and we can be thankful that they continue to provide an accessible way to focus our efforts and challenge us as we move forward.

Be satisfied with what you can do, for this satisfies God, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God's grace than you imagine.⁷⁰

Endnotes

1. This essay was delivered as a paper at the International Lasallian Research Symposium held at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in September 2018.

2. Brother George Van Grieken, who holds a PhD in religion and education from Boston College, and currently serves as the director of the Lasallian Resource Center in Napa, California. He was recently appointed as secretary coordinator of Lasallian research and resources for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, effective September 2019.

3. Cf. G. K. Chesterton [<https://www.chesterton.org/the-philosophy-of-islands>].

4. Herbert McCabe, "A Long Sermon for Holy Week" in *New Blackfriars* 67 (1986), page 56.

5. Regional Education Committee of the Christian Brothers, *Characteristics of Lasallian Schools* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1986).
6. Brother Léon Lauraire, FSC, et. al., *Characteristics of a Lasallian School Today* (Rome: Secretariat of Education, 1987).
7. Brother John Johnston, FSC, “Seven Hallmarks of a Lasallian School.” Presentation at the Lasallian European Congress, Strasbourg (March 1994). Cf. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (2011), pages 53-64.
8. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC, and Brother Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994).
9. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* by John Baptist de La Salle and edited by Brother William Mann, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996).
10. Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, *Touching the Hearts of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1999).
11. Brother Luke Salm, FSC, “Characteristics of Lasallian Schools.” Cf. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2017), pages 95-101.
12. Salm, page 100.
13. Brother Frederick Mueller, FSC, *MEL Bulletin #32: Lasallian Schools and Teachers: A United States Perspective* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2006), page 9.
14. Brother Ronald Isetti, FSC, left the Institute in 1995 but remained as a professor at Saint Mary’s College. Now retired, he has written extensively about the history of the San Francisco District and biographies of significant Brothers.
15. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967).
16. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
17. Letter from Gery Short to Brother Ronald Isetti, FSC, on April 6, 1992. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
18. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
19. Cf. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*.
20. See the Agenda for the “Preliminary Meeting with Students” (March 4-7, 1993). Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.

21. The student leadership workshops continued to be held through 2004, using the same handout as the one used in 1993, after which there was a transition to annual week-long gatherings of Lasallian Student Leaders during the summer instead of leadership workshops during the school year.

22. Today the name of the school is La Salle Catholic College Preparatory.

23. The leadership of one of the students, Kathy Fisher, is to be noted. In a letter to her from Gery Short on October 31, 1994, he writes: “Since the Student Leadership Workshop, I have been receiving reports of your regular meetings with Mr. Edwards, your presentation to the faculty last spring, your influence in changing the Helping Hands program, and the addition of a second event. Last week when I visited, I noted the banners in the main hall which Mr. Edwards indicated you are greatly responsible for developing.” Letter available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.

24. Email from Gery Short to Michael Krussel on June 10, 2013.

25. <http://www.delasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Five-Core-Meal-Outline.pdf>

26. Email to the author on September 12, 2018.

27. Cf. Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, “‘To Touch Hearts’: The Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle.” An unpublished doctoral dissertation, UMI Dissertation Services, Boston College, Boston, MA (1995).

28. J. Michael Miller, *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools* (Sophia Institute Press, 2006).

29. Archbishop Miller has worked in the Vatican’s Secretariat of State (1992-1997), has served as Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education (2003-2007), and presently serves as Archbishop of Vancouver in Canada.

30. Miller, page viii.

31. Miller, page 17.

32. Miller, pages 18-19.

33. Miller, pages 18-19.

34. Miller, pages 20-21.

35. Cf. 1993 Handout at the Student Leadership Workshop of the District of San Francisco.

36. Cf. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 2015), #64.1.

37. SFNO District, *Lasallian Catholic Characteristics & Practices* (2016-2017), page 1. Part of the Lasallian Catholic Assessment Process. Provided by the Office of Education (SFNO).

38. Miller, page 22.

39. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (Vatican City, 1982). Cited in Miller, page 23.

40. *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (Vatican City, 1997). Cited in Miller, page 24.

41. Cf. 1993 Handout at the Student Leadership Workshop of the District of San Francisco.

42. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, page 179.

43. *Lasallian Catholic Characteristics & Practices* (2016-2017), page 3.

44. Miller, page 28.

45. Cf. 1993 Handout at the Student Leadership Workshop of the District of San Francisco.

46. *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (Vatican City, 2014).

47. *Educating Today and Tomorrow*.

48. Miller, page 42.

49. Miller, page 43.

50. Miller, page 44.

51. Cf. 1993 Handout at the Student Leadership Workshop of the District of San Francisco.

52. *Lasallian Catholic Characteristics & Practices* (2016-2017), page 4.

53. *The Catholic School* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (Vatican City, 1977), #34.

54. *The Catholic School*, #43. As cited in Miller, op cit., page 53.

55. Miller, page 59.

56. Miller, page 53.

57. Cf. 1993 Handout at the Student Leadership Workshop of the District of San Francisco.
58. *Educating Today and Tomorrow*.
59. *Lasallian Catholic Characteristics & Practices* (2016-2017), pages 7-8.
60. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
61. District of San Francisco Action Plan, 2007-2011. Priority C. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
62. District of New Orleans-Santa Fe Strategic Plan, 2011-2014. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
63. Available at the Archives of the San Francisco New Orleans District in Napa, CA.
64. The Catholic Lasallian Assessment Process of the San Francisco New Orleans District.
65. The Catholic Lasallian Assessment Process of the San Francisco New Orleans District.
66. Cf. Video explanation available on YouTube.
67. Email from Charles Legendre, AFSC, on September 6, 2018.
68. *Perfectae Caritatis* (Vatican City, 1965), #2.
69. Johnston, page 4.
70. *The Collection of Various Short Treatises* by John Baptist de La Salle and edited by Daniel Burke FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993), page 80.