

## **One Woman's Lasallian Journey**

Frances DiAnna Kinder

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, our role model, lived and taught in the seventeenth century and inspired many students and teachers. He was a man before his time with insight and wisdom. He himself was inspired by many people in his life, including women. Even though his bodily presence is absent today, there is an energy which seems to emanate from all those who call themselves Lasallian. His work continues in our secular world today; the effects are personal for every individual, community, and association.

This essay depicts the journey of a Lasallian student who went on to become a faculty member at a Lasallian institution in the northeast part of the United States. The joys and challenges of possessing this association with our Founder and the Lasallian heritage are discussed. Overtime, *The Twelve Lasallian Virtues*, given to us by our Founder in 1706, are developed through the experiences Lasallian students and faculty share together. The impact of this association helps to illuminate an energy in our spirit to continue the work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle in our personal lives and in our communities.

*"By these events, I began to take an interest in this project."*<sup>2</sup>

As a working mother of four children, I felt called to further my education and complete a baccalaureate degree in nursing. It was a difficult task to take on academic responsibilities while raising four children and working as a nurse in a hospital. I was searching for an institution where I could achieve flexibility and, at the same time, get to know my instructors. The time was before the age of computers and web classes, and this meant leaving my family on evenings and Saturdays to attend classes. I had already achieved an associate degree in nursing and graduated from a small Catholic college in New Jersey. I was attracted to a Lasallian institution due to the spirituality the institution offered and the flexibility of adult school. The baccalaureate in nursing program also had a wonderful reputation with rigor.

As I attended classes, I met many De La Salle Christian Brothers, who were kind and very caring toward each student. I loved to get away from the responsibilities of work and children to attend to my classes. I enjoyed solitude and the stimulating conversations with my fellow nursing colleagues and instructors. This was my first experience with a De La Salle Christian Brothers' Institution. I graduated after five years of taking one class at a time and was proud of my education and institution. I witnessed students performing service locally and globally. I felt a part of a large family and felt like I could return anytime and feel comfortable.

My new credentials aided me in becoming a nurse manager and educator in a neonatal intensive care unit. As time passed, I obtained a graduate degree as a pediatric nurse practitioner. I enjoyed many roles as a professional nurse, and my education helped me to become an excellent advocate

for my families and patients. The Lasallian virtues guided me to be a role model to other nurses and students with whom I worked. Humility, prudence, patience, and gentleness are important assets in the roles for which I was responsible. My Lasallian education had an impact on my nursing practice.

One day, I discovered an opportunity to become a faculty member at a Lasallian institution. I responded and found myself interviewing back at the university that I attended and loved as a student. I was hired and started my new position as a faculty member in the school of nursing and health sciences. As a Lasallian alum, I was lucky to become a Lasallian faculty member. As a student I saw the mission come alive, but now as a faculty member the experiences have expanded and deepened for me. The first day as a faculty member, I entered my office to find a small piece of paper taped to my computer saying, “This is where you were intended to be.” I was surprised by this small message on my computer and thought to myself, was this meant to be?

As time went by, I found myself more devoted to the mission of the De La Salle Christian Brothers and Saint John Baptist de la Salle. The mission of the University has become extremely important to me and is evident in the work I do as a pediatric nurse practitioner and as a member of the Lasallian community. The Catholic values and mission of the university match my own personal, spiritual, and professional beliefs. During my journey at this institution, I continued to grow and learn in all areas of my life while reflecting on the Lasallian virtues. I have been transformed by the faculty and students and feel enlightened by the Lasallian charism. Thus, I have decided to live out my teaching career with my Lasallian family. The following are examples of living the mission, experiencing the energy from our Founder, and infusing the Lasallian virtues as a faculty member.

*“Guided in all things with wisdom and serenity”<sup>3</sup>*

Attending the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) Leadership program in Rome was a life-changing experience for me. During the program, I was immersed in the Lasallian heritage, pedagogy, and mission that inspired me and deepened my commitment. This experience changed my life as a person, educator, and Lasallian. There were 53 participants from 24 Lasallian universities and 8 countries. Brother Superior General Robert Schieler, FSC, with other Lasallian faculty from Rome and around the world, addressed the participants and ignited a spark of ideas in our minds. I really felt the association with my global colleagues, and the passion grew from our discussions and reflections. By sharing ideas with my Lasallians colleagues, I became passionate about participating in projects such as the LUCE (Lasallian University Collaboration and Education) project and the International Lasallian Research Symposium. I was so thankful for the opportunity to attend the Rome program, and I continue to move forward with the projects and ideas that were ignited in me during the experience. This was the start of my collaborating and networking with other Lasallians across the globe as directed by *The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*.<sup>4</sup>

I felt my greatest sense of “living the mission” when I volunteered to travel to Haiti with a delegation of faculty and students from different Lasallian schools. I was sponsored by the District of Eastern North America (DNA) to travel to Port-au-Prince to determine how my

Institute could collaborate with the mission and initiatives of the De La Salle Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Immaculate Conception (an Order of nuns who collaborate with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools). I was so touched by what I experienced that I published an article in *The Pennsylvania Nurse* journal describing the suffering of the Haitian people.<sup>5</sup> I also wrote about the De La Salle Christian Brothers' mission and their accomplishments of building a school and health/nutrition center in Haiti. I witnessed firsthand the work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle while the Brothers were teaching in the newly built school. The children in the school were filled with laughter and happiness. It was obvious that they felt that they had some normalcy in their lives.

When I arrived back to La Salle University after that first trip to Haiti, I felt the virtue of zeal, "to feel the fire and live my life with intense love." Meetings took place in my university to discuss more involvement from students and faculty for the quest of the mission in Haiti. I harbored so much passion about these new initiatives and was excited about being a part of the Lasallian Family. To inspire others about the Brothers' and the Sisters' work, I made a presentation about my trip in an "Explorer's Café,"<sup>6</sup> along with another faculty member who had traveled to Haiti. I wanted the entire Lasallian community to know about the mission in Haiti and explore how we as a community could become involved.

During my second trip to Haiti, I was accompanied by two faculty members, a nursing student and administrators from the District of Eastern North America Office to view the completed Health/Nutrition Center and explore additional possibilities of how all of us as Lasallians could further participate. Prior to leaving on this trip, I presented pictorial slides from my first trip to nursing classes to promote a Student Nurses Association of Pennsylvania (SNAP) fundraiser for Haiti. The SNAP organization raised eight hundred dollars in two short weeks by selling shirts. In Haiti, the money was disbursed to the school nurse and to the Sisters of Immaculate Conception for supplies in the new Health/Nutrition Center/school. While in Haiti a discussion commenced with the Sisters regarding future partnerships with the nursing program at La Salle. We discussed their mission, which was aimed at empowering women through health education and employment. We observed the Sisters helping people from the community learn life skills. Skills, which were learned by the men and women, such as embroidery and sewing. To assist the Sisters, our delegation brought several items (apron and shirts) back home to discuss the development of a plan to help market these items for the benefit of the Haitian people. During this trip, we also obtained an additional list of needed supplies from the school nurse. These items were subsequently gathered, and the nursing student who accompanied us on this delegation returned to present the items to the school nurse. Empowerment and education are two components of the Lasallian model. They are basic to the spirit of De La Salle and are the impetus to the Lasallian global experience.

*"In an imperceptible way and over a long period of time"*<sup>7</sup>

Recently, I embarked on a week-long trip to the Lasallian Generalate in Rome with eleven nursing students. This trip was conceived out of an inspiration I had while attending the previously referenced IALU program in 2015. I wanted to inspire the students by having them experience<sup>8</sup> the same zeal I did while staying at the Generalate and learning about our Founder.

The students took care of sick children at the nearby Bambino Gesù Hospital. They enjoyed listening to lectures on evidence-based practice projects, quality improvement, and nursing education. We visited the nursing simulation lab, and the students had a chance to interact with Italian nursing students. The exchange in ideas and knowledge was important, and the students recognized the differences in health care between the two countries. A collaboration was made with the Lasallian school, Pio IX, in Rome. The students taught the school children health promotion lessons in English and made presentations to the teachers and high school students on the risks and dangers of the Internet, followed by a reception in which we all enjoyed Italian food. Our students learned about the lives of the Roman children. There was a spirit of association as brothers and sisters in One La Salle. Our students returned home with a new sense of Lasallian community that goes beyond our borders, and they were very inspired learning about our Founder.

In addition to experiencing the mission globally, I also witnessed the Lasallian mission in our local communities during public health clinical site visits to the undergraduate nursing students. As a clinical public health faculty member, I work with the students to care for the vulnerable population at the backstretch of Philadelphia Park Racetrack and at a Philadelphia school/daycare/health center. I witness the Lasallian mission firsthand while students are practicing public health. At the backstretch of Philadelphia Park Racetrack, students screen for hypertension and diabetes. The students engage in teaching sessions with the residents using educational activities and provide information about diabetes, nutrition, hypertension and healthy living. As part of the community-based learning service project, students initiated a Lenten drive and, as a consequence, contributed much-needed items to the center. At the local school/daycare/health center, students teach pregnant women about nutrition, parenting skills, safety, immunizations, and prenatal care. Students also minister to the children in the daycare and teach lessons such as hand washing, anti-bullying, fire safety, nutrition, and exercise.

As I watch the students in these communities caring for vulnerable populations, I see the impact this experience has on them. Their attitudes and moods change to non-judgmental and more caring ones. As I am transformed by my experiences, so too are the students. I believe we are all touched by the charism and spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. I feel a sense of accomplishment when a student successfully educates and, therefore, empowers the vulnerable souls of the local or global community. “The work is yours.”<sup>9</sup> As a team we feel a sense of solidarity and association with one another.

*“One commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.”<sup>10</sup>*

Another way of learning and living more fully the mission of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is by having been a member of the District of Eastern North America (DNA) women’s retreat. I participated on the retreat planning committee and have attended the retreat almost every year in Narragansett, Rhode Island. At one retreat, a presentation was shared with the group depicting the work of the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Haiti. The presentation was called, “Lasallian Women: Companions on the Journey, Women That Serve.” The women on the retreat were intrigued and eager to help. The discussion promoted ways that Lasallian women could be involved in living the mission of the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

According to *The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*,<sup>11</sup> a Lasallian university is a place where dialogue can take place about culture and faith in order to improve human relationships and understanding. Pedagogy can be investigated and infused in the minds of students while experiencing the mission of De La Salle. Opportunities to collaborate with other Lasallian networks across the world enrich and strengthen bonds toward the purpose of our roots. I have begun to collaborate with other Lasallian institutions on research endeavors and will continue to promote this activity.

The *Twelve Virtues of a Good Lasallian* promote a model which can be used throughout life for faculty and students.<sup>12</sup> The virtues can be used in many ways, such as for reflection, in pedagogy, with strategic planning, and in responding to the challenges which face us. The challenges of living in a secular society can be transformed by using this model while developing curriculum and using pedagogical strategies in the class. Our Lasallian education is practical, and can be steered this way.

Finally, in the examples of ways of living the mission provided in this essay, one can tease out the virtues that are being practiced by faculty and students. The virtues can be used as a guideline when teaching students different generational approaches to learning. Technology must be updated to accommodate the students' preferences and learning styles and meet them where they are so they can learn successfully. Pluralism must be embraced and not just tolerated. Interfaith groups should be created to deal with these challenges to promote dialogue to aid in the understanding of each human being. Being a Lasallian means to be inclusive, it does not always mean being a Catholic, but it does mean having the humility to always see the good in others. As a Lasallian educator, I keep in mind the Catholic tradition and roots; and I hope to inspire people through empowerment and education. I hope the energy I emanate can provide peace and comfort to all people and spark an interest in our Lasallian Family. By emanating hope through the virtues, education and empowerment, I hope to touch the lives of my students and, therefore, influence positively the future practice of nursing. As a Lasallian alum and faculty member, I have opened my eyes and ears and was touched by the spirit of our Saint; and I learned that silence, to hear the cries of others, has a benefit in my practice as a teacher and nurse.

## **Endnotes**

1. Frances DiAnna Kinder is an assistant professor of nursing at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA. She graduated with an associate degree in nursing in 1980 and decided to go back for her BSN as a working adult several years after practicing as an RN. She completed her BSN at La Salle University in the RN-BSN program and then decided to attend Gwynedd-Mercy College for her MSN to become a pediatric nurse practitioner. She then finished her PhD in nursing at Widener University.

2. The headings that appear in italics throughout this essay evoke the memory of Saint John Baptist de La Salle's own journey of engagement with the work now called the Lasallian educational mission. As De La Salle wrote: "*It was . . . by these two events . . . that I began to take an interest in the schools for boys . . .* Indeed, if I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would have ever made it my duty to live with them, I

would have dropped the whole project . . . It was, undoubtedly, for this reason that *God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity*, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. God did this *in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.*” Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context” in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, issue 1 (2017), page 35.

3. Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context,” page 37.

4. Cf. *Circular 469: The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2014), section 3.22.

5. Cf. Frances DiAnna Kinder, “Haiti from the Eyes of a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner” in *The Pennsylvania Nurse* 69, no. 1 (2014), pages 24-27.

6. An “Explorer Café” is an informal, interdisciplinary forum that brings the La Salle University community together for engaging, interactive discussions on thought-provoking topics.

7. Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context,” page 37.

8. Cf. Brennan O’Donnell, “Annotation of *American Catholic Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Critical Challenges*” in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, issue 3 (2015), page 46.

9. “The work is yours” is an expression attributed to De La Salle and now “owned” by Lasallian educators around the world.

10. Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context,” page 37.

11. Cf. *Circular 469: The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*, section 3.22.

12. Cf. *The Twelves Virtues of a Good Teacher (1785)* by Brother Agathon Gonlieu, FSC (Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 2008).