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## Living Out the Lasallian Values: Religious Educators' Experiences in Lasallian Formation

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### Introduction

When Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers responded to the challenge of establishing Christian education for youth at risk, the schools became the "sign of God's kingdom and instruments of salvation." As inheritor of the Founder's legacy, "all Lasallian educators are considered formators by virtue of their participation in the Lasallian experience of education and formation. Moreover, those who enable persons to acquire vision, values and practices through activities initiated by the campus ministry, social action, guidance counseling and Lasallian Family offices are considered in a more formal sense as Lasallian Formators" (LSF).<sup>2</sup>

In South Luzon La Salle Schools, some Religious Educators (RE) are tapped as facilitators to conduct Lasallian formation. It is reasonable because as Religious Educators, it is expected that they know how to handle a formative and experiential activity. The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) asserts that "the Religious Education program of a Catholic school is the core of its curriculum."<sup>3</sup> Hence, as Lasallian Religious Educators, they must envision themselves as important components in a holistic formation. Guided by the Lasallian values of faith, service and communion, they must follow Lasallian spirituality in that they should be committed to uphold a deep respect and love for all, especially "for the last, the lost and the least."

In the book of Brother Luke Salm, FSC, *The Work is Yours*, the need for Christian education and the formation of the Brothers are highlighted.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the charism of De La Salle led the Brothers to realize that they share the traditions they inherited from the Founder.

In the study of Michael Krussel, "Brothers for Life: An Experience in Lasallian Formation for Students," he came up with a curriculum of formation designed for high school students and faculty to facilitate retreats, prayers and services for younger students.<sup>5</sup> This project takes root in the writings of De La Salle, which state that students in Christian schools should receive an education that moves students toward full and abundant lives and not just an accumulation of numbers and facts.

Likewise, in a dissertation entitled "The Perceived Influence of Lasallian Mission Formation Programs on Participants from the District of San Francisco New Orleans,"<sup>6</sup> the need for formation is highlighted. This dissertation investigated the perceptions of Lasallian Catholic school faculty and staff regarding their mission formation experiences in the San Francisco New Orleans District of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

## Statement of the Problem

My study explored the experiences of Religious Educators as facilitators in Lasallian formation in South Luzon La Salle schools. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the Religious Educators in living out the Lasallian values of the formation? How are these experiences described?
2. What is the meaning of these experiences through a phenomenological reflection?
3. What are implications of these experiences in their personal and professional lives?

I focused my study on Religious Educators, Religion and Christian Living Teachers (CL) who have been conducting the Lasallian Formation Programs in South Luzon La Salle Schools. Two Religious Educators – or had been REs and facilitators – for each of the following schools were studied: De La Salle University Dasmariñas; De La Salle University Health and Science Institute; De La Salle Zobel in Alabang (Vermosa Campus), and De La Salle Lipa.

## Methodology

It is a qualitative study with phenomenology<sup>7</sup> as a specific method. Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experiences.<sup>8</sup> This approach represents a new empiricism, which “contrasts with traditional empiricism, in that emphasis is on the concreteness of “lived experience” and openness to modes of consciousness.<sup>9</sup> To clearly state the process of doing phenomenology, I used Moustakas’ presentation on conducting human research.<sup>10</sup>

*Table 1. Profile of Co-Researchers*

Name	Nickname	Age	La Salle Schools in South Luzon	Years in Service	Description
Geamph Hate	Gigi	46	DLSU Dasma	18	“prayerful facilitator”
Rowel San Sabastian	Baste	48	DLSU Dasma	19	“living witness in sign of the times”
Jay Flores	Jay	33	DLS Zobel Vermosa	6	“walking servant”
Christine Vanerayan	Tin	35	DLS Zobel Vermosa	4	“missionary heart”
Myra Patambang	My	53	DLSHI	24	“ a brain-designer”
Neil Stephen Benter	Neil	43	DLSHI	8	“formed formator”
Montano Agudillo, Jr.	Don Don	44	DLS Lipa	21	“shepherd formator”
Wilfredo Bleza	Ka Bleza	52	DLS Lipa	24	“holistic formator”

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

I personally approached the co-researchers to conduct an in-depth interview or story telling in conversational manner.<sup>11</sup> Questions about their profiles, educational background, journey in RE and LSF, significant and non-significant experiences and implications to their life were asked. The data collected was transcribed and became the subject for data analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

Even before I started the in-depth interview, I practiced “epoche”<sup>12</sup> as an invitation to enter into a reflection setting aside all biases. I arrived at the following full descriptions. *The First Thematic Reflections*. After reflections on the narratives, thematic reflections emerged as fruits of stories and sharing of my co-researchers. I focused on the significant and striking stories and then put a title to each story describing my co-researcher. *The Second Thematic Reflections*. Five (5) themes emerged from the individual structural descriptions, which can be found also in the first thematic reflections. I clustered them into a group as a whole. This composite structural description represented my co-researchers as a group and was used to understand how they experienced phenomenon. *The Eidetic Insight*. From the first and second thematic reflections, all the individual textural and structural descriptions were grouped and themes were integrated. *Symbolic Symbol and Synthesis*. This summarized the whole of the experience used to develop a symbol about their experiences.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***The First Thematic Reflections***

These are the fruits of stories and sharing of my co-researchers. Sample significant statements and meaning of these sample experiences are stated.

*Table 2. The First Thematic Reflections*

Significant Statements	Meaning
I was tapped to be a formator.	My co-researchers agreed that they were tapped and invited to be part of a team because of their job as Religious Educators.
I was influenced, yet inspired.	My co-researchers were influenced by the heads, De La Salle Brothers and friends. But inside the formation team, they were inspired to respond.
It is not mine; it is God’s work.	All of them realized that it is God’s ministry in the Lasallian context.

I was formed and was satisfied.

My co-researchers expressed the feeling of satisfaction both in the RE and LSF. In giving the formation, they are also formed.

It is a holistic formation.

They all agreed that all aspects of a human person must be formed. Formators must be holistic, too.

### ***The Second Thematic Reflections***

An analysis of the experiences of the participants revealed a thematic structure. Five themes emerged from the individual structural descriptions. These are Personal Encounter, Mission, Destiny, Commitment, and Satisfaction.

*Theme 1: Personal Encounter.* The first common theme from the individual structural descriptions is the Personal Encounter. This can be classified into three sub-themes: encounter with God, encounter with the Founder, and encounter through an influence of De La Salle Brothers.

- a. *Encounter with God.* My co-researchers shared their intimate experiences and personal encounter with God. This is precisely the reason why they are led to Lasallian formation.
- b. *Encounter with the Founder.* The man behind the success of a Lasallian education is the Founder himself. They all agreed that it is impossible for every formator to teach the Lasallian story if they have not encountered De La Salle in their life.
- c. *Encounter through the Influence of De La Salle Brothers.* My co-researchers were greatly influenced by the De La Salle Brothers. The presence of the Brothers made an impact on their personal and professional lives.

*Theme 2: Mission.* The second common theme is mission. Co-researchers were fully convinced that it was God himself who made a way for them to see that what they are doing is a mission. It is God's work. In this sense, the "ad intra" and the "ad extra" of the mission is implied. After seeing the mission within, it must be shared with others.

*Theme 3: Destiny.* The third common theme is the expression of every co-researcher that it is a destiny of every RE to be part of the formation. They felt that they are destined to do the mission. This can be classified into two sub-themes: an edge and advantage and a fit with the formation.

- a. *An Edge and Advantage.* It is characterized by a conviction that it is an advantage of RE and CL teachers to be in the formation. Those who are not teaching religion may be effective, but it is more convincing to see RE and CL teachers doing the formation since they are in line with the teaching of Christ.
- b. *A Fit with the Formation.* The participants agreed that it is easy to conduct a formation when you are trained as an RE.

*Theme 4: Commitment.* It has become a passion for my co-researchers to commit themselves for the greater glory of God. This is the fourth theme. This can be classified into two sub-themes: commitment to the Church's teaching and commitment to the legacy of De La Salle.

- a. *Commitment to the Teaching of the Church.* Since De La Salle's life is not separable to the life of Jesus, they are convinced that behind the success of La Salle is Jesus and so they must stand by the Church's teaching in conducting the formation.
- b. *Commitment to the Legacy of the Founder.* My co-researchers expressed a strong commitment to the Lasallian mission.

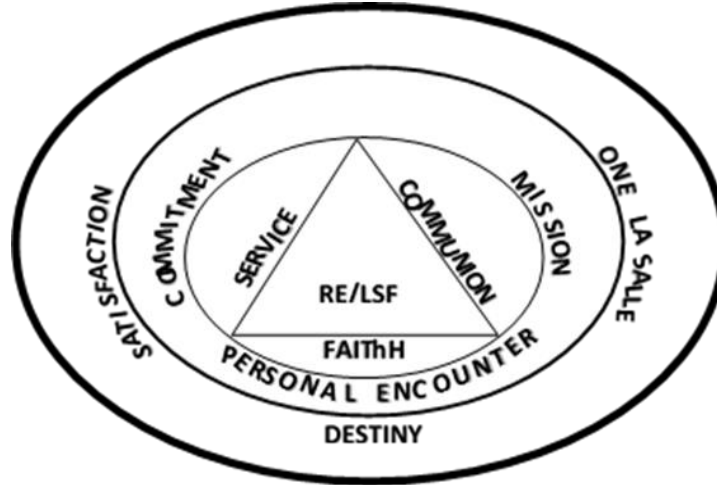
*Theme 5: Satisfaction.* They consider satisfaction as one of the decisive reasons for staying in the formation. This is the fifth theme identified in the experiences of my co-researchers; and it may be grouped into the sub-themes: social/emotional, spiritual, and intellectual.

- a. *Social/Emotional.* It is a feeling of acceptance in the group of formators, acceptance as a formator by the listeners/formandi, and the acceptance by the community of La Salle. They are warmly welcomed into the formation team, and they feel the gift of persons in the modules.
- b. *Spiritual Satisfaction.* Just like the encounter with God, my co-researchers feel spiritual satisfaction when they are in the formation. They talked about their experiences about God in conducting the formation.
- c. *Intellectual Satisfaction.* The more they are challenged to study and read the life of the Founder this gives rise to be creative and knowledgeable to improve the formation.

### ***The Eidetic Insight***

As a sacred task, being Religious Educators and Lasallian Formators is inseparable. RE can provide the content and process for a continuing Lasallian formation. The Religious education and the Lasallian formation are the most systematic approaches to concretize the Lasallian ministry in living out the core values of faith, service and communion in mission. These can be means to define Lasallian and Catholic identity. The following postulates may strengthen this insight. *The value of faith.* Lasallian education is imbued with this value, which enables persons to interpret, judge and evaluate realities in the light of the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> This confirms the experiences of my co-researchers in their encounter with God and De La Salle. Seeing these realities with the eyes of faith. *The value of service.* Lasallian education is marked by zeal, the whole-hearted giving of oneself to the service of others in gratuity and generosity, in creativity and fortitude, in compassion and commitment.<sup>14</sup> This affirms the participants' desire to be persons for others and that everything they do be a ministry. *The value of communion.* Lasallian education is exercised as a communion in mission marked by the fraternal spirit.<sup>15</sup> This is expressed in their experiences. They can work and collaborate with others.

## *Creative Symbol and Synthesis*



*Figure 1. The Three-Fold Lasallian Values of RE/LSF in Lasallian Formation*

The illustration presents an overview of the three constitutive values of the Religious Educators in conducting the Lasallian formation. The values of faith, service and communion serve as facilitator in connecting the experiences of co-researchers. In living out the value of faith, personal encounter and destiny are interconnected. In living out the value of service, commitment and satisfaction to do the work are in line with it. Finally, in living out the value of communion, mission and One La Salle collaboration are linked.

### **Implications for Their Personal and Professional Lives**

As they live the values of faith, service and communion in conducting the Lasallian formation, my co-researchers experienced different implications. They all wanted their children to be Lasallians. These values also influenced every member to be an active churchgoer and embrace the Church's teaching. They said that personal life must be a wellspring as well as recipient of all inspiration and aspirations in pursuing the Lasallian mission. My co-researchers' prayer and spiritual life improved a lot. They expressed the feeling that they are not just giving formation but that they are being formed both in RE and LSF. Expectations, however, become harder. Some expect them to be credible in ministry. They must walk the talk wherever they may be. Some of them were called "Brothers" in the school, and they became more conscious of their behavior. In giving Lasallian input, my co-researchers gave ample time for preparation to be confident to handle the formation. Significantly, the value of service to the community has been given great emphasis. To carry the name "La Salle" is a hard thing to do; but when my co-researchers learned to love and embrace De La Salle's story, carrying out the values and virtues has become an easy task.

## Endnotes

1. Gladiolus M. Gatdula is an associate professor in the religious education department of the College of Education and a Lasallian formator in the university Lasallian Family Life Office at De La Salle University Dasmariñas in the Philippines. [Dr. Gatdula expresses her gratitude to all co-researchers of this study for their openness and willingness to share their Lasallian experiences. She also would like to thank De La Salle University Dasmariñas, the College of Education, and the university research office for all their support in the realization of this research.].

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