

---

## **Lasallian Accompaniment and Lasallian Spiritual Direction: A Proposal**

Vincent Pelletier, FSC, MA, MEd<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

When Saint John Baptist de La Salle met the schoolmaster Adrian Nyel in 1679 at the door of the Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Rheims,<sup>2</sup> he had no idea where that encounter would lead him. Many Lasallians in our day have had that same type of experience. When they first began their employment in a Lasallian ministry,<sup>3</sup> they did not realize that the encounter with others in this new employment would eventually lead them "by imperceptible design"<sup>4</sup> to a commitment on their part to the Lasallian mission<sup>5</sup> and charism.<sup>6</sup> Like De La Salle before them, many Lasallians have found themselves, little by little and over a period of time,<sup>7</sup> growing in their commitment to the mission; and as these Lasallians have deepened their involvement and commitment, many have often sensed a need for a deepening of the spiritual foundations that help make us "Lasallian."

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is, as a consequence, making great efforts to provide various levels of Lasallian formation for all those who work in Lasallian ministries. The North American Region of the Institute does a good job on the regional level in programs to train Brothers and Lasallian Partners in the Lasallian charism. The four Districts of the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN)<sup>8</sup> are making good efforts in ongoing Lasallian education and formation with a variety of quality programs and initiatives. On the level of the individual ministries, it seems to be "hit or miss." Some ministries have very well organized and functioning programs, and some ministries have nothing to support the ongoing formation of Lasallians who have either participated in Regional or District programs or who still need to be introduced to the Lasallian charism (such as new board members, administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students).

One key area that does not seem to have been addressed with serious enough attention is Lasallian accompaniment on the local level. Ongoing accompaniment of individual Lasallians who are sensing a need for more personal guidance if they are to continue to deepen their association as Lasallians is called for. What is being proposed here in this essay is a vision of and concrete proposal for Lasallian accompaniment and spiritual direction in RELAN. The exigency of addressing this need to accompany Lasallians, on a regular basis and at the local level, will, without any doubt, continue to require further exploration and development.

Since the time of the first International Assembly for the Lasallian Educational Mission (AIMEL) in 2006, a strong call for initial and ongoing formation and accompaniment has been growing all throughout the Lasallian Family.<sup>9</sup> The 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Brothers in 2014 heightened the Institute's focus on the necessity of good Lasallian formation and accompaniment.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the updated guide for formation entitled *Lasallian Formation for Mission* reaffirmed this commitment.<sup>11</sup> Yet, this area of Lasallian accompaniment is, so to

speaking, still a work of charting the unknown. There are few, if any, experts in the current context of shared mission who have studied Lasallian accompaniment and practiced Lasallian spiritual direction on a *professional* and regular basis. Consequently, we approach this topic as interested seekers who, often without benefit of *experts* who have put this together for us, propose to chart a course into this unknown field; and so we should not be surprised if we feel, on occasion in the process, a bit like De La Salle's man of great faith "who puts himself out on the high seas without sail or oars."<sup>12</sup>

What follows here, then, is an initial attempt to outline an approach to enhance the practice of Lasallian accompaniment. The sole intention of making this proposal is to invite and trigger a broader exchange and discussion around this important topic in the hope that something positive will result from our efforts.

The presentation of the proposal will unfold in three parts: an explanation of the idea of *accompaniment*, an exploration of the practice of *spiritual direction*, and a consideration of the notion of *discernment*. A few specific remarks about broadening the base of discussion about the proposal will be provided in the *conclusion*.

## **Accompaniment**

It is important to begin this reflection with an overview of the social reality of accompaniment, so that we might have a context into which Lasallian accompaniment fits and, more specifically, into which Lasallian spiritual direction fits, in the broader topic of Lasallian accompaniment. Lasallian accompaniment and Lasallian spiritual direction are not free-floating concepts; they fit into a broader reality. In consequence, our approach will be that of going from the overall – the mega – to the particular.

So how might we define "accompaniment"? The definition proposed here is that accompaniment should be understood as "an on-going, caring attention to another person." It is not a "one-off" kind of thing. We all know that Jesus accompanied the disciples over the course of several years and that Saint Paul accompanied the early Christian communities on a regular basis. There is, as we can see, a pattern to good Christian accompaniment.

## ***Exploring accompaniment***

The reality of "accompaniment," anthropologically speaking, is a normal part of social interaction and growth. In the family, one spouse accompanies the other spouse. Parents accompany their children. Siblings accompany each other. Within friendship, friends accompany one another.

In the Catholic Church, Church leaders are called to accompany Catholics of all ages. Bishops are called to accompany both priests and the Christian faithful.<sup>13</sup> Pastors are called to accompany the faithful in a variety of ways. The Christian faithful accompany each other. As Pope Francis reminds us all:

The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious, laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Exodus* 3:5).<sup>14</sup>

Religious Life in the Catholic Church is a society of accompaniment. Major Superiors accompany the local superiors; and for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, local community directors accompany Brothers in their community and Brothers in community accompany one another.

Schools are also centers of accompaniment. Administrators accompany faculty and students. Teachers and other educators accompany one another. Teachers and counselors accompany their students. Students accompany one another.

Generic accompaniment is broader today than in the past model of older accompanying younger and superior accompanying inferior; and a newer and unexplored area is the role and influence of social media within the understanding of accompaniment. Just because we may not yet have any data on this does not mean we cannot be conscious of its influence. How much accompaniment, especially of young people, is in reality being done via the internet and social media?

This understanding of accompaniment includes the physical, psychological, professional, social, cultural, and spiritual. It is holistic. Every aspect of life and social interaction is influenced, negatively or positively, through various forms of accompaniment.

Before we can address Lasallian accompaniment, we need to have a clear grasp on this much broader understanding of accompaniment that touches every aspect of our social being. Some accompaniment is simply social and a normal part of living in various social settings. Some accompaniment is based on a more *professional* capacity. Most often we see ourselves as the person who accompanies. However, it is also normal to want to be accompanied.<sup>15</sup>

And let’s not forget in this regard the admonition of Saint John Baptist de La Salle that while the youngsters entrusted to our care “need good guides and visible angels” to help them advance in Christian living,<sup>16</sup> so too do his Brother teachers need the help of others “to guide them on the way to heaven externally, as God’s spirit guides them internally.”<sup>17</sup>

The person who sees himself or herself only in the position of the one who accompanies and is not comfortable in being in the position of being accompanied, needs to reflect a bit on what is going on inside of himself or herself. The person who is not comfortable in being in the position of one who receives accompaniment is not really the person who is ready to accompany another person. This can be a potential stumbling block for those of us who view our service as primarily that of helping others in our various educational ministries.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Exploring accompaniment of Lasallians***

What has been presented so far is pretty much a standard and accepted social understanding of accompaniment. Now we move into less well charted waters. There are no clear paradigms or models for us to call upon; but within this broad understanding of accompaniment, there are

more specific applications and experiences of accompaniment that can help guide our reflection on the promise and possibility of Lasallian accompaniment and spiritual direction.

*De La Salle was accompanied by others on his journey*

Saint John Baptist de La Salle is for us a man who modeled Lasallian accompaniment. De La Salle allowed himself to be accompanied.<sup>19</sup> Each Lasallian who chooses to engage in this exchange and discussion about Lasallian accompaniment, as it is proposed here, needs to commit to further study and reflection on the paradigm of how De La Salle himself modeled Lasallian accompaniment to and for his Brothers.

When we look at the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, we see that he was accompanied by others in ordinary events of his life; and at other times, we see that he was accompanied in key moments when he was faced with making critical decisions that would change the direction of his life and work. An example of his being accompanied in the ordinary ways of life can be seen when Lasallian scholar Brother Michel Sauvage writes:

At Saint Sulpice, and later under the direction of [Canon Nicolas] Roland, he had been formed by the spirituality and the missionary fervor of the vigorous Church of 17<sup>th</sup> century France, by movements inspired by Bérulle, Olier, Bourdoise, and Vincent de Paul. He understood that the priesthood committed him to a personal search for God.<sup>20</sup>

Brother Michel goes on to give us another example of De La Salle's understanding of himself being accompanied when he quotes the early biographer Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain:

It was these two events, namely by my meeting Monsieur Nyel and by the proposal made to me by Madame Croyeres that I began to take an interest in the schools for boys. Prior to this I had never given them a thought.<sup>21</sup>

Another life-changing experience of accompaniment for De La Salle was when he was challenged by the first Brother teachers concerning his wealth. The “game-changer” came in the fall of 1682 when he was confronted by his teachers. They said to him:

You speak with inspiration amid your ease, for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance. You enjoy security and protection against indigence. If our work fails, you risk nothing. The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you. We own nothing.<sup>22</sup>

Later in his life, when he had left Paris and was living in Parmenie in the south of France he sought the advice of and was accompanied by Sister Louise when he was being asked by the principal Brothers to return to Paris and, again, take over the leadership of the Institute.<sup>23</sup> From his early life up to events toward the end of his life, De La Salle found himself being accompanied by those around him.

*De La Salle accompanied his disciples on their journey*

Furthermore, the man who allowed himself to be accompanied became a master in the accompaniment of others. We have numerous examples of De La Salle accompanying his Brother teachers and other people. We cite here just a few examples.

Brother Gabriel Drolin had been in Rome for some two years when in October 1704, De La Salle wrote to him stating:

I do not understand why you say that you have taken up residence where you are to cut down expenses . . . I do not know if it is because you fear putting yourself entirely in the hands of Providence . . . Place more trust in God . . . It is not my intention to starve you or let you starve to death.<sup>24</sup>

In a later letter on February 11, 1705, he writes to Drolin saying:

You have to be led by the Spirit of God and motivated by great zeal. It seems to me that you have not enough of one or the other.<sup>25</sup>

A third example of De La Salle's clear accompaniment of a Brother in need is when he writes:

You must take care not to be disheartened by the trials you experience, my very dear Brother. On the contrary, you should humble yourself at the sight of your weakness and have recourse to God, in whom and through whose help you can do all things. Firm courage and a little generosity will enable you to overcome all your difficulties.<sup>26</sup>

De La Salle did not, however, limit his accompaniment of others only to the Brother teachers. In a series of undated letters to a laywoman, we read:

Faith is the way by which God wishes to lead you to himself, and by following this way you will please him most ...<sup>27</sup>

The Most Blessed Virgin lived her whole life by the spirit of faith, and it is this spirit that God wants you to have. This is why you would derive much benefit from asking her in prayer to lead you to Our Lord along this way which is one most pleasing to him ...<sup>28</sup>

Look on everything with the eyes of faith. You must never fail to do this, no matter what the reason. Viewing things with the eyes of faith will earn for you in one day more good, more interior application, closer union with God, and greater vigilance over yourself than a month of those penances and austerities to which you are attracted.<sup>29</sup>

As we explore the relatively uncharted waters of Lasallian accompaniment we find in De La Salle our "true north:" a man who sought accompaniment, allowed himself to be accompanied, and was a true master of personal accompaniment to others, both Brothers and lay people.

*How might we define “Lasallian accompaniment”?*

The term “Lasallian accompaniment” does not yet seem to have been sufficiently well defined by the Institute. As we begin, we might start with trying to reflect on how we would define it. A starting point might be to ask ourselves how we would explain the term “Lasallian accompaniment” to a Lasallian administrator, board member, teacher, or student; and here it is important to note that we are not only speaking about personal accompaniment. Accompaniment might also include a kind of group or social accompaniment.<sup>30</sup>

Our proposition, then, is that two types of Lasallian accompaniment are probably needed:

1. a general sense of accompaniment such as has been described above, but limiting it to informally accompanying a colleague within the context of the Lasallian charism.
2. a more *professional* (or formalized) kind of Lasallian accompaniment in which Lasallians with a more specialized preparation would guide other Lasallians in an ongoing and clearer understanding of how a particular Lasallian lives the charism in his/her present and local situation. This would include information, explanation, and guidance (but not necessarily spiritual direction).

In a recent presentation at the Lasallian International Center (CIL) in the Mother House of the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Rome, Father Jesús Sastre told those listening that “all accompaniment is founded on discipleship, a faith living in transcendence as opposed to living by human values.” Father Sastre went on to say that the criterion of accompaniment is a life of faith and discipleship.

Accompaniment is a form of faith formation; and faith formation is, in this context, the accompaniment of an educator (disciple) along the path of vocational discovery. When accompanying a Lasallian in discerning and deepening his/her vocation, it is really a question of how best as a Lasallian and disciple of Jesus of Nazareth to use the gifts and talents that God has given me in following and serving God and God’s people.<sup>31</sup>

The view presented here is that Lasallian accompaniment is both a walking with and a supporting of others along the path of discipleship. Lasallian accompaniment attends to the faithful fulfillment of God’s will<sup>32</sup> as expressed through personal fidelity to the Lasallian charism and mission. A board member, administrator, counselor, teacher, or student will, each in their own fashion, live out that fidelity through various modalities of accompaniment.

Now that more and more Lasallians in our ministries have had opportunities for Lasallian formation and as ministries are beginning to provide more on-going formation in the ministry setting, evidence grows of the desire of some individuals to be accompanied in their growth as Lasallians. This is what has led to the realization articulated here concerning the need to train Lasallian Partners and Brothers to accompany others, through ministry and personal prayer, to grow in their personal relationship with God.<sup>33</sup>

## **Spiritual Direction**

A natural outflow of the discussion of Lasallian accompaniment is the consideration of Lasallian spiritual direction; but before looking at Lasallian spiritual direction, we will look first at spiritual direction in general.

Spiritual direction is a work of fearsome responsibility. Saint John of the Cross has some harsh words for incompetent direction: “It is a thing of no small weight, and no light crime, to cause the soul to lose inestimable blessings by counseling it to go out of its way . . . And thus, one who rashly errs, being under an obligation to give reliable advice . . . shall not go unpunished, by reason of the harm he has done. For the business of God has to be undertaken with great circumspection and with eyes wide open.”<sup>34</sup>

### ***Exploring spiritual direction***

Spiritual direction is, first of all, about relationships and about companionship. We say that we love God and that we want to deepen that love. We say that we want to serve God, but do we really mean what we say? If we are honest and serious, the long tradition of the unfolding of Christian discipleship suggests that we often need a spiritual guide to help us to be honest with ourselves and with God. This help is

given by persons called, gifted and skilled. As a ministry, spiritual direction presupposes that it is practiced in response to an urging of grace and employs those gifts of grace granted for doing the ministry. It is neither a self-appointed nor an ego-propelled enterprise. Yet, so that the gifts might be more fruitfully activated and utilized, there is a responsibility to seek appropriate training and supervision. It then becomes more likely that a gifted person can help a graced self emerge.<sup>35</sup>

Spiritual direction is, as we have already said, about God’s relationship with us. It is also about our relationship with God and, for Christians, this means that it is about our relationship with ourselves, about God’s relationship with our neighbor, and about our relationship with our neighbor.

Relationships, whether with God or with others, are developed gradually. In each relationship, we pass through a number of fairly predictable phases. We move from knowing about a person to knowing a person. Relationships between two people pass from the expression of ideas, to the expression of opinions, to the expression of feelings, and to the expression of personal feelings. The process is the movement toward becoming vulnerable. When I share an idea and the other does not accept it, “I” am not rejected. However, when I share a personal feeling and the other does not receive it positively, “I” risk feeling rejected. Our relationship with God passes through the same steps. We do not normally begin by being vulnerable and trusting God. Step by step, we learn to trust God and become more vulnerable and more open to trusting God. As we learn through our experience to risk and to trust God, we become more vulnerable to God. As we become more vulnerable, God invites us to risk more, to trust Him more and again become more

vulnerable. The cycle goes on and on, and we discover ourselves deepening more and more in our loving relationship with God.

### *Why is there a need for spiritual direction?*

Our relationship with God and God's relationship with us is very similar to our relationships with other people. However, sometimes we can get confused and lost and not understand what is going on in our relationship with God who is both present and transcendent; and therefore we need a guide, someone who can help us see where we are and guide us in deepening our relationship with God.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, one of the masters in the area of guiding people, describes it in this way. He tells us that God desires to have a deep personal relationship with each person. However, although people are created to have this personal loving relationship with God, there are things that distract us from moving toward God. Saint Ignatius calls these things that lead us astray "evil spirits."<sup>36</sup> Saint Ignatius tells us that when the evil spirit sees a person seriously trying to deepen their relationship with God, the evil spirit will do everything that it can to distract, discourage, and lead the person down another path that does not lead to a deeper relationship with God. When the person who is seriously trying to deepen this relationship experiences the intervention or interference of the evil spirit, they can easily get confused and lost. If they try to deal with the evil spirit by themselves, they can easily get mixed up, distracted, or lost.<sup>37</sup>

Noted Jesuit scholar Father William Barry says, "spiritual direction's purpose is to help real people to relate more consciously to the real God."<sup>38</sup>

### *Exploring spiritual direction for Lasallians*

After this brief overview of spiritual direction in general, we can now look at a specific form of spiritual direction within the context of Lasallian spiritual accompaniment. What follows is primarily addressed to Lasallians who have had some training and experience as spiritual directors and who are interested in seeing how these skills can be used as a "Lasallian spiritual director."

At this point, an experienced spiritual director might ask oneself, on entering the picture of Lasallian accompaniment as has been presented, what role do I have to play as a trained spiritual director in all of this? Do I as a trained spiritual director have any specific role to play as a Lasallian who accompanies others within the way of accompaniment that we have been speaking about? Another way of posing this question might be, how do we as spiritual directors fit into the culture of Lasallian accompaniment in a local ministry? This could, of course, lead to the question of where does Lasallian spiritual direction fit into this discussion of accompaniment?

### *Preparing Lasallian spiritual directors*

Lasallian spiritual direction is, for me, the heart of the matter; and so how might we define Lasallian spiritual direction? I would, first of all, define spiritual direction as that one-on-one



interpersonal interaction, namely a private meeting, in which one person seeks the guidance of another who is recognized by both parties as having been formally trained in guiding another in his/her deepening that personal relationship with God.

The initiative for any form of spiritual direction must come from the individual; it is not the spiritual director who takes the initiative. This is essential; this is critical. It is the individual who is seeking to deepen his/her personal relationship with God. If this is not present as the motive, then whatever else is taking place is not spiritual direction.

Within this context, the role of the spiritual director is to assist the person who seeks direction in deepening his/her personal relationship with God. This is an unequal relationship. The focus is on the person's relationship with God and God's relationship with the person. The focus is not on the person and the spiritual director. A difference between counseling<sup>39</sup> and spiritual direction is that one is focused on a problem, or on one's growth, and the other is focused on a person's relationship with God.

As we examine the specific topic of Lasallian spiritual direction, the following guideposts are proposed as a few initial assumptions.

- The Lasallian must seek spiritual direction; it is something not required or imposed.
- See what is going on in the Lasallian's personal relationship with God.
- See what else is going on in the Lasallian's life (family, social, ministry, studies, health).
- Guide persons, especially through personal prayer, to deepening their relationship with God within the framework of his/her Lasallian ministry.
- The Lasallian chooses his/her spiritual director.
- Focus on the Lasallian charism as the basis for this particular kind of spiritual direction.
- The spiritual director must have a regular practice of personal prayer; one cannot ask another to pray if the director is not himself or herself praying.

What is said above gives us an initial framework for good spiritual direction. This might be a specific approach to spiritual direction that we can call Lasallian.

Good Lasallian spiritual direction is to assist another Lasallian to live a fulfilled life through living the charism and exercising the Lasallian mission and through a deepening of a personal relationship with God through personal prayer.

A few key questions come to mind as needing further consideration within the broader exchange and discussion being proposed. Would it be fair to say that only a Lasallian can be a Lasallian spiritual director? How do we foster or be a catalyst for Lasallian accompaniment within ministries (or within Districts), and how do we foster Lasallian spiritual direction? When we focus on accompaniment we need to be clear who we are accompanying, what are we accompanying them to, and what is their level of readiness.<sup>40</sup> And a final question is, who is doing the talking? The session of Lasallian spiritual direction is not a time of lecturing or teaching; it is a time of deep listening.

At the beginning, Lasallian spiritual direction may involve a certain amount of instruction, clarification, and sharing of information. Both parties need to have a clear understanding of expectations, roles, and objectives. There might be a need for instruction on methods of personal prayer, processes of growth in personal prayer, role and value of devotional prayer, formal prayer (Divine Office), and personal mental/interior prayer.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, there will be a need for an emphasis on the Lasallian focus of our ministries/apostolates in personal prayer, as it is presented by Saint John Baptist de La Salle especially in the “Meditations for the Time of Retreat.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition, it would be helpful to expose Lasallians to the “veritable ocean” of Lasallian material freely available on the internet and to be clear that spiritual direction, if it is to be helpful, needs to be regular (monthly or at least bi-monthly).

## **Discernment**

At this point, one could be asking oneself about how all of this might be connected to the question of discernment. Lasallian accompaniment naturally flows into the area of discernment; but discernment is not automatically a part of either Lasallian accompaniment or Lasallian spiritual direction as envisaged here.

### ***Concerning discernment***

Discernment addresses how the Spirit acts to invite us to deepen our relationship with God when a choice will lead a person deeper in this relationship. Spiritual discernment is founded on a personal relationship with God. Without an on-going personal relationship with God, built on the foundation of a regular prayer life, we cannot really use the term “discernment.” We cannot call it discernment unless there is prayer. In discernment, what one looks for is the energy that drives the choice. Is the energy of the Spirit or of human weakness? Here clarity of motives comes in because too easily there is mixed energy driving the choice.

The general meaning of the term discernment is sharp accurate insights that, with wisdom and grace, allow us to see the truth of things as God sees them. Most of us half-see reality or our vision is warped by bias or prejudice or emotions (fear). Discernment is to see into the heart of things.

Discernment is allowing ourselves to see things from God’s point of view. Discernment presupposes that a person is in a personal prayerful relationship with God. Discernment is not about a particular decision. Discernment is a way of living in relationship with God.

Discernment does not simply mean to “decide” about simple matters like, for example, “if I’ll have cake or pie.”<sup>43</sup>

Most of us think that we make choices for pure motives. In fact, it is rare that we do anything with a clear motive. Most often what we do is influenced by a combination of motives that influence us. We also like to think that our motives for acting are purely rational. However, most often, our actions are highly influenced by our feelings. For example, a person is asked to take on

a new responsibility. The person may refuse the opportunity because they are afraid but will give another reason for declining. Discernment helps the person to clarify motives. Discernment includes the process of discovering what drive within us is leading us to make this decision.

The beatitude “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8) is about discernment. Discernment is not simply a technique for making decisions. Rather, it is our attempt to listen to God revealing Godself to us. Discernment results in making decisions within the context of a personal relationship with God, nourished regularly by prayer. It is a search to understand more clearly. Discernment is not an exercise; it is a way of life. Discernment is the experience we go through to see things through God’s eyes. The questions we are asking is, how does God see things? What or how does God feel about something? What does God think about something?

For one spiritual guide (Saint Ignatius of Loyola), discernment meant “spiritual insight that leads to wise decisions.” Saint Ignatius writes:

This time (of discernment) is very privileged because the discernment of spirits which is called for, is an entrance into understanding, a language of God spoken within our very being.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Concerning Lasallian discernment***

When one Lasallian accompanies another, there will be moments in which deep discernment of “the will of God”<sup>45</sup> will most probably be addressed; and so a Lasallian who accompanies another needs to know and understand the dynamics and processes of Lasallian spiritual discernment. If not, harm can be done.

As a person becomes more involved in seeing employment as more than a job and grows in seeing his or her involvement as both ministry and Lasallian vocation, new questions may arise that call for a discernment and decision-making process. The person can resolve the issue by simply deciding what seems to be best; or as the person deepens his or her relationship with God, the person may recognize the need to involve God in the decision-making process. When a person involves God in the process, we call it discernment. “Deciding” is a horizontal process; it is between the person and what is to be decided. “Discernment” is a triangular affair; it involves the person, what is to be decided, and God.<sup>46</sup>

We know that this was the habitual practice of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He resolved in “Rules I Have Imposed on Myself” to unite his “actions with those of our Lord” and tried to “make God’s perspective and intentions his own” and that he waited “for the promptings of Providence before acting.”<sup>47</sup> However, he also understood that “it is a good rule to worry less about knowing what ought to be done than about doing perfectly well what is already known.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As we come to the conclusion of our consideration of the accompaniment and spiritual direction of Lasallian Partners and Brothers who desire assistance in their spiritual growth in their life and

ministry, we once again propose a robust exchange and dialogue about the idea of an enhanced experience of Lasallian accompaniment and spiritual direction in RELAN. Further reading on the topic will be important, and the endnotes for this essay suggest significant resources. A brief bibliography for those seeking further readings on the topic of accompaniment and spiritual direction is also provided.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, there is not much available to read that specifically focuses on the topic of Lasallian discernment.<sup>50</sup>

Without doubt, professional training will be essential; and some guidelines and principles have been suggested. Perhaps we Lasallians can, by working “together and by association,” pool our energies and our expertise and help deepen the spiritual foundations that help make us all “Lasallian” and facilitate the progressive adoption of “the fundamental spiritual attitude of a disciple of Saint John Baptist de La Salle: abandonment to God in the footsteps of Christ, for a community service of evangelization and education accessible to everyone, while giving preference to the poor and young people.”<sup>51</sup>

We acknowledge that all of this is from the perspective of a male of a certain age, who is also a vowed religious Brother. Furthermore, it is a very Christocentric view of accompaniment and spiritual direction; but the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, and hence our starting point, is fundamentally Christocentric.<sup>52</sup>

The proposition being made in this essay calls for exchange and dialogue. These ideas are intended as a discussion “starter” and not a discussion “ender.” There is a need for lay Lasallian Partners (women and men) trained and experienced in spiritual direction to join the discussion and to share their wisdom and insights. Christians from other ecclesial communities<sup>53</sup> and lay Lasallian Partners from other belief traditions have much to contribute to this exchange of ideas from their own experiences of accompaniment.<sup>54</sup> The Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Lasallian educational network embrace the pluralism and diversity of our lived Lasallian experience. Ours is a “Gospel pilgrimage open and receptive to the different creeds and cultures of our world.”<sup>55</sup>

This brings us to the practical issue of who takes the initiative in promoting Lasallian spiritual direction with various Lasallians within the ministries and Districts of RELAN? When one person is invited to walk with another person, it is a grace. When one Lasallian is invited to accompany another Lasallian, whether student or peer, it is a blessing for each.

## Endnotes

1. Brother Vincent Pelletier, who is a Brother of the Christian Schools, has worked around the world for many years as a spiritual director and formator. He earned an MA in African Studies from Saint John’s University in New York City and an MEd in Counseling from the University of Rhode Island. In addition, he has attended the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and has received a Certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development in Cambridge, MA. Recently, he helped author *Meditations for the Time of Retreat: A Lasallian Home Retreat* (Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 2020).

2. Cf. *The Work Is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* by Luke Salm, FSC (Romeoville, IL: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989), pages 31-46 (Beginnings in Rheims – 1679-1688).

3. The individual schools, colleges, universities, and other agencies that make up the Lasallian educational network are often referred to as *ministries*.

4. Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context” by Gerard Rummery, FSC in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2017), pages 27-63.

5. Cf. *The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission* by Brother Superior and General Council (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997).

6. Cf. *Lasallian Studies #13: The Lasallian Charism* by the International Council for Lasallian Studies and translated by Aidan Marron, FSC (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2006).

7. Cf. “The Memoir on the Beginnings: Text and Context” in *AXIS* #8.1 (2017), page 37.

8. The four Districts that comprise the Lasallian Region of North America, which is one of the five international Regions of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, are: District of Canada Francophone, District of Eastern North America, Midwest District, and San Francisco New Orleans District.

9. Cf. *Report of the International Assembly 2006: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission* (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2006), page 38 (Area of Emphasis #1: Formation and Accompaniment).

10. Cf. *Circular 469: The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* by Brother Superior and General Council (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2014), pages 36-43 (Formation and Accompaniment to Be Disciples and Apostles).

11. Cf. *Lasallian Formation for Mission: A Pilgrim’s Handbook* by Secretariat of Formation (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019), page 56 (Building a Culture of Accompaniment).

12. Cf. Meditation #134.1 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC and Augustine Loes, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994), page 246.

13. For an understanding of the expression “the Christian faithful,” see *Code of Canon Law*, Book II: The People of God, Part I: The Christian Faithful (Vatican, 1983), #204 to #208.

14. Cf. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* by Pope Francis (Vatican, 2013), #169 to #173 (Personal Accompaniment in Processes of Growth).

15. “Unpublished Paper on Accompaniment” by Paulo Dullius, FSC, presented at a CIL Session at the FSC Generalate in Rome. He writes, “Somehow, all of us want to be accompanied, especially in specific moments and delicate situations,” page 5.

16. Cf. Meditation #197.1 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, page 441.

17. Cf. Meditation #91.1 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, page 315.

18. Acknowledgement for the above concepts is due to Paulo Dullius, FSC, for material from his “Unpublished Paper on Accompaniment,” which was presented at a CIL Workshop in 2016.

19. Cf. “The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)” by Michel Sauvage, FSC and translated by Luke Salm, FSC in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle* by editor Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), pages 221-246.

20. Cf. *Ibid*, page 232.

21. Cf. *Ibid*, page 234.

22. *Ibid*, page 236 (quoting Blain, Vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 11 in *Cahiers Lasalliens 7*, page 188).

23. Cf. *The Rendez-Vous on the Hill: Parménie 1714-2014* by Jean-Louis Schneider, FSC (Paris: District of France, 2014).

24. Letter #14 in *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Colman Molloy, FSC and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988), page 65.

25. *Ibid*, page 68 (Letter #16).

26. *Ibid*, pages 210-211 (Letter #90).

27. *Ibid*, page 234 (Letter #115).

28. *Ibid*, page 234 (Letter #116).

29. *Ibid*, page 235 (Letter #117).

30. Here specifically we are thinking of associative groupings like the Rhode Island Lasallian Association Group (RILAG) and the Philadelphia Area Lasallian Ministries (PALM) group in the District of Eastern North America (DENA).

31. “Unpublished Paper on Accompaniment” by Paulo Dullius, FSC.

32. Recall the words from the first paragraph of the “Formula of Vows” of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and twelve Brother teachers on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity in 1694: “I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory *as far as I will be able and as you will require of me*” (emphasis added). Cf. *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 204.

33. DENA is in the process of developing a training program; and “The Spiritual Accompaniment Formation” program will begin in fall 2020 in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

34. *Spiritual Direction* by Alan Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Seabury Press, 1982), page 124.

35. “Basics in Spiritual Direction” by Shaun McCarty, SJ in *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers* by Robert J. Wicks (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), pages 61-62.

36. As we find in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “God is infinitely good and all his works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures and above all to the question of moral evil” (Vatican, 1992), #385.

37. *Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening: A Handbook for Training Spiritual Directors* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, 2004), pages 3-6.

38. Ibid.

39. Many good and worthwhile types of counseling are readily available: marriage and family counseling, guidance and career counseling, pastoral counseling, addiction counseling, mental health counseling, and so on.

40. “Unpublished Paper on Lasallian Accompaniment” by Vincent Pelletier, FSC presented at an international program in the Mother House of the De La Salle Christian Brothers (Rome, 2013).

41. Cf. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* by John Baptist de La Salle and translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC and Donald Mouton, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1995).

42. Cf. Meditations #193 to #206 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 432-472.

43. Cf. “Dwelling in the Presence of God” by Vincent Pelletier, FSC (Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 2020).

44. *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, edited by David Fleming, S.J (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1978), #176.

45. Recall again the words of the “Formula of Vows” of 1694: “I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory *as far as I will be able and as you will require of me*” (emphasis added).

46. The following are a few areas of concern that could call for discernment by a Lasallian: the balance between personal (married) life and Lasallian ministry, the movement from the role teacher to that of administrator, the movement from Lasallian ministry to another ministry for family reasons, being a member of the Catholic Church, faith issues, or being a Lasallian and sexual identity.

47. Cf. “Rules I Have Imposed on Myself” in *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 200-201 (Rule #5).

48. Cf. “Rules I Have Imposed on Myself” in *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, page 201 (Rule #14).

49. Cf. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* by William A. Barry, SJ and William J. Connolly, SJ (New York: Seabury Press, 1983); *Inviting the Mystic Supporting the Prophet: An introduction to Spiritual Direction* by Katherine Marie Dyckman, SNJM and L. Patrick Carroll, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); *The Art of Christian Listening* by Thomas Hart, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); and *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers* by editor Robert J. Wicks (New York: Paulist Press, 1995).

50. Cf. “Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit: Criteria for Discernment” by Miguel Campos, FSC in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, 2012), pages 47-66; and “Communal Discernment of Our Lasallian Future” by Timothy Coldwell, FSC in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 10, no. 1 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, 2019), pages 47-66.

51. Cf. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 2015), #92 on page 79.

52. Cf. “Religious Life in France during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” by Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC and translated by Augustine Loes, FSC in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, page 57. “Lasallian spirituality develops its fundamental orientation from this Christocentrism. Sharing in the mystery of Christ and uniting with him are at the heart of De La Salle’s *Meditations* for his disciples.”

53. For example, see *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* by Episcopal priest Margaret Guenther (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), pages 90-91. “While the symptoms of spiritual malaise and imbalance bear careful attention, not everyone is ‘pregnant’ – not everyone is a candidate for spiritual direction, at least not at every stage of life. There are those who are religiously observant and content with their spiritual lives as part of a worshipping community . . . But there are those who feel that something is happening to and within them . . . feel impelled to explore their spirituality . . . sense a call, not necessarily a vocation to ordained



ministry, but simply the awareness that God expects them to do something with their lives . . . They feel fruitful, joyous, and expectant – and they don't know what to do about it.”

54. Cf. *The Joy of Religious Pluralism: A Personal Journey* by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), page 170. “We should recognize, with joy and gladness, the Religious Other as *other*, as a different but truthful and valuable manifestation of God, from which we should humbly and gratefully learn, because ‘God is greater than our hearts’ and because ‘our concept of God is ridiculously small.’”

55. *Lasallian Reflection #6: You Are a Part of the Miracle* by Brother Superior and General Council (Rome, 2020), page 24.