
Lasallian Formation for Mission in the Context of Interreligious Learning

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The aim of Lasallian formation for mission is the formation of *religious identity*,² specifically the Lasallian identity. But with today's multi-cultural and/or multi-religious realities, Lasallian education is challenged to be exceptionally comprehensive in understanding other cultures and religions. The transmission of faith in Catholic religious education should not, given the nature of inclusivity specifically articulated in the Lasallian principles of education, be limited to one's own faith. *Religious education*³ in Catholic schools cannot ignore the plurality of immanent worldviews and religions in the classroom, the school, the immediate social environment, and the world at large.

Focusing on the model of religious education (RE) in La Salle Academy-Iligan, a Catholic institution where there is an emerging issue on *religious plurality*,⁴ a research project was undertaken to review the existing conceptual structure of the school's RE curriculum and introduce an experimental religious education curriculum using the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework recently proposed by the Institute.⁵ In developing the specifically Lasallian identity of the school, the design of the interreligious learning (IRL) recognized the knowledge, feelings, and attitudes of students toward their own religion and toward the religion of others. Evaluating the aim of Lasallian formation for mission in the context of *interreligious learning*⁶ summons a shift in perspective and addresses the issues in diversity and plurality. Some explanation for the rationale, methodology, and findings of this project will be presented in this paper.

1. Background of the Project

Catholic education today is inspired by the general principles enunciated by the Second Vatican Council.⁷ A Catholic school exists for the development of the whole person. It has as its aim the critical communication of human culture and the total formation of the individual. This indicates a learning content that is fundamentally "a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life."⁸ While it is a common understanding that the mission of the Catholic Church in establishing a school is evangelization, the proclamation of Christ's Good News of salvation to all, the process needs to be cognizant of the encounter with differing cultures. Hence, the Church establishes her schools because she considers them as a privileged means in promoting the formation of the whole person since the school is the center in which a specific concept of the world, of the person, and of history is developed and conveyed.⁹

Throughout history, the Church has involved itself in the ministry of education by providing religious education in its Catholic schools. With the advent of cultural pluralism, the Church continues to reaffirm her mission of education to ensure strong character formation; and Catholic schools are, in many parts of the world, increasingly insistent in their attempts to combat religiocentricism¹⁰ and uphold the principle of plurality in the face of cultural and religious differences. As a result, religious education curricula offered in Catholic schools have encouraged

students to co-exist and cooperate with the realities of other world religions, allowing young people to be formed by value judgments based on a specific view of the world and to be trained to take an active part in the construction of a diverse community. Carl Sterkens points out a critical question about this reality. He says,

Religious education in church schools cannot ignore the plurality of immanent worldviews and religions in the classroom, the school, the immediate social environment and the world at large. This plurality poses certain practical problems for religious educators: how can either teachers or pupils maintain their commitment to their religious tradition, yet remain sufficiently open in dialogue with other religious traditions?¹¹

In the Philippine educational system, religious education has always been associated with Christian religious education.¹² The Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE), through its National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (NCDP), emphasizes that the aim of religious education is the

effective proclamation and instruction of the faith, leading the Christian community toward a fuller, more mature and proper commitment to, and life in, Christ.¹³

With this line of thinking, several Catholic institutions in the Philippines, specifically the Lasallian schools, have identified Religious Education (RE) or the Christian Living (CL) subject as the “core curriculum” of the institution.

The Religious Education curriculum in La Salle Academy (LSA), a Lasallian Catholic school in Iligan City, Lanao del Norte, Philippines, is considered as the core of the curriculum. Since the school opened in 1958, the school has been forming students with a balanced knowledge in all areas of scholarship in the light of the Gospel and engaging everyone in the community in a living relationship of communion with the Triune God – recognizing other faith traditions as expressions of the human search for self-actualization. In particular, the task of the RE department has been *to provide the formation of students, as well as emphasize moral education through the Christian Living subject.*

A critical look at the general objective of LSA’s RE curriculum gives an identifiable approach to that of the interreligious learning model of education. The school desires to equip the students with a balanced knowledge in this area of scholarship and to engage learners in a living relationship with God – recognizing other faith traditions as expressions of human self-actualization. Here lies the existence of *dialogue of religions*¹⁴ and, in this case, the most pervasive is the Christian-Muslim dialogue. In a theoretical sense, Carl Sterkens provides the general aim of an interreligious learning model of education:

The interreligious model aims at developing competence in dialogue about religious traditions. Such competence entails cultivating the capacity to change perspectives and has cognitive, affective, and attitudinal aspects. Cognitive aspects refer to the acquisition of knowledge and insight regarding religious traditions and worldviews. Affective aspects refer to involvement with these traditions. Attitudinally, this model aims at willingness to communicate and at fostering respect for one’s own and the other religious traditions.¹⁵

Despite all attempts at inclusivity, as a Lasallian Catholic school, LSA maintains its Catholic quality, namely its reference to a Christian formation centered on Jesus Christ. Parents of non-Catholic students are well informed that their children are not exempted from taking the CL subject as part of their academics. In some Catholic related activities like the Eucharistic Celebration, Confirmation, and Marian Month, non-Catholics have two other options. First, to join the choral group that sings during these institutional activities and whose aim is to further give non-Catholic students an actual orientation on how the ceremony is conducted. Second, to attend a lecture in the library whose aim has been to give neutral orientation about different religions and secular worldviews.

This practice continues to cause conflicts with some parents, especially the Muslims. There is always the demand to also recognize important religious activities during Ramadan,¹⁶ like the recitation of *Shahada* (profession of faith) and performing *Salah* (ritual prayers during Ramadan). The students are separated when religious and moral issues are dealt with. Such deprivation of a common space for dialogue and exchange of existential views has been dissatisfactory for some teachers as well as for some students.

Within such a context, religious education must come to terms with a set of completely new challenges . . . Given this framework, the question of how to teach a course on Christian religious education that takes into account both the identity of the school and the Christian religion while considering the plurality of students has become a major challenge for today's teachers and students of religion.¹⁷

With the growing multi-faith and/or multi-cultural mix of students, La Salle Academy-Iligan is facing the challenges of plurality similar to the experiences of many other Lasallian schools worldwide. Consequently, this study examined the implications of formation through Lasallian education and explored the attitudes and beliefs of the learners with regards operating a Catholic Christian curriculum with the presence of other main religions (particularly Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and non-Catholic Christianity which are all present in Iligan City and the neighboring Lanao municipalities, as well as philosophy and secular world views). The study attempted to engage the teachers and school leaders in a reflection to improve the existing formation program and/or religious education curriculum, hoping to uncover the problems, points of convergence or integration, and possible paths of collaboration in the future. Cultural understanding, tolerance, dialogue, and identity building are in focus. At the same time, the integration in the formation or curriculum document was viewed in the light of an essentialist understanding of the culture in Lanao del Norte, which means that the cultural heritage is seen as something given and absolute, something to be handed over to the next generation, almost as it is. Lasallian education should be able to be more open, by encouraging a deepened knowledge of the religious traditions and cultures surrounding it and in which it is integrated.¹⁸

The project, it was hoped, would provide information and insights that will serve to enrich the formation of Lasallians regardless of religious background both in Iligan City and, by means of this paper, in other sectors of the Lasallian educational network. The plurality of beliefs among the students in a CL subject is a challenge to the construction of unity and common values. There might very well be a tension between the need of Catholic schools like La Salle Academy-Iligan

to build up a feeling of unity and common values among students, teachers, and parents and – on the other hand – expectations of religious freedom and tolerance toward diversity and otherness. The discourse about recognizing the “religion” or “faith” of others is important here. Only with such recognition can we justify a Lasallian formation that is aligned to “faith seeking understanding” and a realization of understanding the religion or faith of others as important in appreciating the human experience.

The study aimed to generate insights on how to establish a good connection between theory and practice. At the outset, this study reviewed what the Church advances in its current teaching about Catholic education:

Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians. There are, in fact, countries in which the vast majority of the students are not Catholics – a reality, which the Council called attention to (*Gravissimum educationis*, 9). The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognized by the Church (cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, 2, 9, 10, 12 *et passim*). On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in Christian education; this is its rights and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law (*Code of Canon Law*, 748.2).¹⁹

At a theoretical level, there is a need to discuss cultural and religious plurality in a Catholic school like La Salle Academy-Iligan, where some non-Catholic students are required to take up RE or CL as an academic subject. On the one hand, in a region like Lanao del Norte, racism, hatred, the idea of “we” and “the other” and “rido culture”²⁰ are seemingly being tolerated; on the other hand, values like knowledge, understanding, respect, tolerance, and dialogue are promoted in La Salle Academy-Iligan.

2. The Project

Statement of the Problem

This project focused on the main question, “*What is the aim of Lasallian formation for mission in the context of interreligious learning in La Salle Academy-Iligan?*”

More specifically, this study applied the interreligious learning using the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework to further explore how to deal with religious plurality in an academic context and improve ways to make the curriculum or Christian formation operational in a religiously mixed context. Applying the theories about the relationship between religions in religious education using the perspective of the interreligious model,²¹ the inquiry formulated specific questions from the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework about the cognitive, affective, and attitudinal conditions for the formation of religious (Lasallian) identity of students in La Salle Academy-Iligan. The following were the main questions:

- a. does integrating *Lasallian Formation for Mission* with the interreligious learning model in La Salle Academy-Iligan contribute to the students' knowledge of their own religious traditions and other religious traditions?
- b. does implementing *Lasallian Formation for Mission* based on the interreligious dialogue model in La Salle Academy-Iligan promote the development of students' feelings about their own religious traditions and other religious traditions?
- c. does applying *Lasallian Formation for Mission* on the interreligious learning in La Salle Academy-Iligan promote the development of students' attitudes toward their own religious traditions and other religious traditions?

Significance of the Study

The study is important for a Catholic school like La Salle Academy-Iligan (and perhaps all other Lasallian schools in Mindanao) in its educational policy, which reflects a double aim of unity and diversity as expressed by the slogan “Unity in Diversity.” The study is important for teachers and school leaders who are willing to

provide an education to the youth in a culturally and religiously diverse society of Lanao del Norte and Northern Mindanao, as a whole.²²

Even the citing of both positive and negative results of the dialogue – if only to announce to the Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities in Lanao del Norte that such collaboration in understanding their respective “faiths” is possible – is viewed as a potentially positive development.

Consequently, the study identified existing problems and stumbling blocks of a school system that is aiming at taking the social, cultural, and religious challenges seriously. Despite the deep differences in terms of historical and contemporary political inclinations of particularly two cultures (Mindanao Christians and Muslims), there are remarkable common features between them when it comes to religious diversity in school. Teachers and school leaders already have to deal seriously with new challenges of plurality, emerging from the new social and political situation in Mindanao, i.e., to build a nation – and a school – of unity as well as of diversity and tolerance.

This study project, by its very nature, was intended to advance awareness of how students in “basic education” dealt with plurality. The interplay between curriculum and classroom activities is more complex than often assumed. Discussions about school subjects are often based on the written curriculum and on the assumption that the curriculum is actually carried out in every detail. However, the reality in the classroom is not all the time identical to the written curriculum (especially in Mindanao where actual killing, bombing, and kidnapping due to cultural and religious differences occur just a block away from the school). This study looked, therefore, into what kind of interaction was taking place between the written curriculum and curriculum practice. Furthermore, it attempted to enrich the school with a sense of how the philosophy of plurality in the curriculum is reflected in the classroom.

This perspective also brings to Catholic Religious Education a broader perspective in its transmission of faith, a view that it must not be confined to its own four walls but must be open to other faith traditions.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research project was, then, to investigate the aim of the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework in the context of the application of the interreligious model in La Salle Academy-Iligan.

Against the background of a very broad treatment of the religious education curriculum in La Salle Academy-Iligan, the specific objectives of the investigation being undertaken were the following:

- a. to describe and contrast the confessional religious education curriculum or Christian Living program of La Salle Academy-Iligan and the application of the interreligious learning model;
- b. to analyze the nature of the dialogue between different religious traditions and worldviews present in the application of the interreligious learning model;
- c. to expose the learners to the integration of the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework and the interreligious learning model and map out the cognitive, affective and attitudinal conditions of the learners based on their experiences;
- d. to discuss and interpret the cognitive, affective and attitudinal conditions of the learners in the light of *Lasallian Formation for Mission*;
- e. to prove, based on the emanating change of perspective within a Lasallian identity, the aim of *Lasallian Formation for Mission* in the context of the interreligious learning model; and
- f. to recommend ways on how to implement the findings of this inquiry to address the need for a sound program of action in an emerging pluralized religious education condition.

Scope and Limitation

As Lasallian scholar Antonio Botana²³ has asserted, Lasallian identity is a charismatic way to live in communion with others for the mission. Lasallians acquire this identity dynamically when they are, regardless of religious upbringing, progressively molded with others with whom they live. The inquiry that was undertaken emanates, therefore, from the hypothesis that the development of a Lasallian identity can be promoted by presenting a curriculum based on interreligious dialogue between religions and worldviews. The possible shifts of perspective can be attributed to the influence of the curriculum.²⁴ This study looked, then, into the experiences of the students in the implementation of the religious education curriculum at La Salle Academy-Iligan. The study was limited to the fourth year junior high school students for the School Year 2020-2021. They comprised six sections with a total population of 288 students; and this group was chosen for the following reasons:

- a. they were already in the last phase in the Christian Living program implementation, and thus most of them had fully covered and experienced all the expected learning contents and outcomes of the curriculum;
- b. the batch had a better mix of the Christian-Muslim population (71 percent Catholic Christians, 18 percent Muslim, and 11 percent non-Catholic Christians)²⁵ and had a higher degree of *multi-religiosity*²⁶ compared to other year levels in the school; and
- c. they had a higher percentage of perceived developed religious identity having undergone, more or less, nine (9) years of process differentiation and integration in the Christian Living class from grade one to grade nine.

The investigation attempted to test and study the validity of the theories about the development of identity, including religious identity. Lawrence Kohlberg refers to this as personality development that includes the cognitive, social, and moral domains.²⁷ Hence, in exploring the development of the religious identity or Lasallian identity of the respondents in this project, the use of cognitive, affective, and attitudinal aspects was employed. Another aid in the measurement of religious identity was the use of differentiation and integration of experiences. Here, the research applied the Bell Measure for Religious Identity.²⁸

Reconstructing the background of the respondents, as well as gathering information about the respondents, was limited only to the allotted time of interaction. The researcher relied mainly on the openness and honesty of the respondents. As mentioned previously, the researcher distinguished between the three aspects of the development of the respondents' identity based on a cognitive, affective, and attitudinal analysis. One obvious limitation to an interreligious model based on dialogue between religious traditions was that among high school students, their cognitive, affective, and attitudinal development may not be sufficiently advanced to allow a proper understanding of their religious traditions. This was also the reason why the researcher avoided involving the lower levels (specifically grades one to four), given the consideration that the interreligious dialogue conducted in the secondary levels cannot be equated with the religious communication of primary school pupils. This problematic is already presented in the work of Carl Sterkens in a research he conducted with the primary school pupils in the Netherlands.²⁹

Although the projected sample for this study was the whole senior high school, generalizing the whole data for this study proved somewhat problematic due to the foreseen oversampling of Christians in the class (about 82%). The under sampled group was the Muslim (constituting about only 18%). The reality of this sampling already provided, ahead of time, some insight into how religious identity would function in them. The study proposed, however, that religious identity was a separately measurable domain, which does not rely on who is the majority. Introducing a formative curriculum, in this case *Lasallian Formation for Mission*, in the context of an interreligious model designed to measure Lasallian identity, elucidated this perception. As Rito Baring writes,

When religious instruction is crafted as a legitimate venue to address religious plurality, issues of identity enter into [the] discussion. This impression is born of the understanding

that religious instruction should take into consideration the uniqueness of specific cultural identities that could be undermined by an indiscriminating instruction.³⁰

Review of Related Literature

A review of related literature – which focuses on a Catholic Christian formation and interreligious learning (IRL) or the interreligious model of education, as well as the relevant areas of discussion that cover interreligious dialogue, religious plurality, religious identity, and to some extent, the general aim of religious education and formation – provided a sense of the theoretical underpinnings of the present study on the relationship of the *Lasallian Formation for Mission* framework and the interreligious model of education. The review explored historical developments, problems and obstacles, points of agreements, and the main underlying themes. Brief annotations³¹ of a few of the works that were reviewed are deliberately included in this paper as they provide a meaningful backdrop for understanding the rationale and the context for the project undertaken.

- a. Jacques Dupuis SJ, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

In this book, the author attains three important objectives. He provides a comprehensive summary of Christian appraisals of religious pluralism from the earliest sources up to the eve of Second Vatican Council. He simplifies texts of the Council and subsequent Catholic documents on interreligious dialogue and then offers challenging evaluations and provocative suggestions for the current theological discussion on religious pluralism, the significance of Jesus Christ, and salvation.

What makes this book significant to the present study is the author's treatment of positive attitudes toward other religions. The author speaks of the unity, identity, and uniqueness of Christianity over other religions but at the same time, he claims it also becomes its unavoidable historical limitation:

The God of Jesus is a symbol of openness, not of closed-ness. Here Christianity has a positive relationship [with] other religions, but at the same time its uniqueness is nevertheless maintained, and ultimately at the same time the loyal Christian affirmation of the positive nature of other world religions is honored.³²

Recently, many scholars have brought up the relational unity of Jesus Christ's uniqueness with other world religions. This book mentions a translation of the classic scholarly analysis of Claude Geffre:

Without compromising the absolute commitment inherent to faith, Christianity can be considered as a *relative* reality; not, however, in the sense in which “relative” is opposed to “absolute,” but in the sense of “relational.” The truth to which Christianity witnesses, is neither exclusive nor inclusive of all other truth; it is related to all that is true in other religions.³³

In this sense, the Church fully accomplishes her mission when she works with other world religions at the construction of the Kingdom of God, in the aim of justice, peace, reconciliation, and the fraternity of all peoples. *Lumen Gentium (LG)* teaches that the Church is not only the sacrament of the Kingdom that is coming; she is also “a kind of sacrament or sign of the intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”³⁴ This is where the present study finds the relevance of a dialogue, in the context of interreligious learning with the brothers and sisters who may be strangers, as an integral part of the Church’s mission. It is not only preliminary to the mission, because this dialogue is already, in its way, a dialogue of salvation.

- b. Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

This book gives reference to how the Catholic Church sees non-Christian religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Section II discusses interreligious dialogue based on the document *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*. The declaration significantly notes that

irrespective of their origin, people ask themselves similar questions about the meaning of life, the existence of good and evil, sorrow and happiness, and similar matters of deep human concern. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of the hidden power which hovers over the course of things and often results in peoples developing a profound religious sense.³⁵

This is significant in the present study as it indicates certain basic elements in the questions to be formulated to capture spiritual insights of the non-Christian religions, without, however, entering into doctrinal details. This reaffirms that other religions also strive to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own way, by proposing ways and teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. One of the most important statements in this book can be found in the way *Nostra Aetate (NA)* expresses the understanding of the relationship of the Catholic Church with other world religions in the post-conciliar era:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing [that is] true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all [people].³⁶

The author of this book explains that the declaration calls on Catholics to dialogue and collaborate with the followers of other religions. The process of dialogue and collaboration must be carried out with prudence and love and in witness to Christian faith and life. This is, at the time of its promulgation in 1965, a completely new approach to interreligious dialogue on the part of the Catholic Church. This is a positive attitude toward other religions where there is no room for condemning what is not compatible with Christian teaching and understanding.

In many ways, this book contributes loads of insights into a dialogue that is of particular importance today, especially with the Muslim world. While one may find only the slightest concern to Hinduism involved in the present study, the Muslim composition in the study is

crucially relevant. This book outlines the history of the relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Lights and shadows mark the discussion; and unfortunately, there are readily identifiable painful moments. But whatever the past was, today there is a pressing need for sincere reconciliation among all believers in the one God.

- c. Rito V. Baring, “Plurality in Unity: Challenges in Religious Education in the Philippines” in *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Association* 106-5 (2011), pages 459-475.

This article identifies the challenges of “religious education” in the Philippines, which is pressed with issues on the growing plural conditions in the classrooms. By exploration, the author discusses possible solutions to address these issues along the following lines:

the need for consistency between doctrine and educational practice, the urgency of the resolution to address the thin dividing line that distinguishes evangelization and plurality, and the need for integrating inter-faith dialogue in religious and values formation.³⁷

This article is of value in our current investigation of the term “religious education,” which has typically in the Philippine educational system been associated with Christian religious education. This thinking contributes to the impending challenges in secularizing the place of religious instruction in the academe. The author laments that the growing plural conditions in the country’s educational system remain until now not discussed and are not integrated into many schools. The author adds that dialogue must be an urgent Christian agenda in Philippine religious education.

The contentions presented by the author in this article are important in the current study. First, the area of interreligious dialogue can blend well with an interreligious model of education at the level of the academic environment to confront the realities in Mindanao. Although dominantly Christian, several schools in Mindanao have increasingly become pluralized. This challenge is not only true in government schools but also in private institutions. Second, the attitude of the learners toward the “other” religion leads to the difficulty of finding unity in society. There is often the inclination of the learners to judge others who do not belong to “their kind,” and this leads to indiscriminate attacks or criticisms against certain faith traditions. With interreligious dialogue as a method in the educational curriculum, a healthy exchange of faith experiences may happen. The author echoes what the first plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in 1974 called for: “Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God.”³⁸

- d. Armado Picardal CSsR, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Mindanao” in *Asian Christian Review* 2, #2 & #3 (2008), pages 54-72.

The main objective of the author of this article is to share his experiences involving the development of the Christian-Muslim dialogue in Mindanao. The article outlines an overview of the Muslim-Christian relationship in the Mindanao context. Most significant is the author’s experiences in using inculturation as a tool in observing Christian-Muslim dialogue taking place at the grassroots level, within movements and groups composed of Christians and Muslims (such as *Silsilah*), and among religious leaders.

The article is important in the present study as it underlines possible approaches in understanding other religions, cultures, and traditions. The article presents six cases where the dialogue of life, the dialogue of prayer and celebration, the dialogue of creed or faith, and the dialogue of action for peace and development are applied. Furthermore, in terms of education, the author interestingly describes the approaches in teaching the basics of Islam or the Qur'an, basics of Christianity or the Bible, and principles of interreligious dialogue to the Christian-Muslim community in Mindanao.

By recognizing the limitations of the effort in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Mindanao, the author underscores the need to replicate what has been achieved in the case studies presented in the article. There is a need to reach out to other communities in Mindanao. The author further points out:

While the dialogue of life, action, prayer, and celebration are prevalent, the dialogue of faith or theological exchange leaves much to be desired. This is an area that needs to be developed further. This means that Muslim scholars and Christian theologians and educators need to come together and explore areas of convergence while respecting differences.³⁹

This is a timely call to consider and to further study the integration of Lasallian education and the interreligious model of education, particularly in Mindanao.

For a few additional annotations of works that were reviewed, please see “Appendix: Additional Annotations of Related Literature.”

Methodology

Using the Descriptive Evaluative Study method, the project first described the particular religious education situation in La Salle Academy-Iligan by way of presenting a Curriculum Evaluation Study adopting the empirical research method of Carl Sterkens⁴⁰ where a certain level of quantitative approach was employed (like reports on the frequencies, averages, and percentages based on a survey). This included real-life phenomena that entered into the investigation like the students' characteristics: gender, age, religious self-definition, church attendance and prayer pattern, their estimation of the importance of religion at home, their belief in God, and their reading of the Scriptures.

Without going into all of the details of *project design* and *evaluation design*, let it suffice to say that, for theoretical considerations and adjustments of scale construction, the measuring instruments underwent a trial run before the actual instructing-learning-testing-observation process. The objective here was to reproduce the structure of the Conceptual Structure RE questionnaires schematically.

Another important dimension in investigating the aim of Lasallian formation for mission in the perspective of the interreligious learning model in La Salle Academy-Iligan is the contributory role of the *Lasallian pedagogical framework*⁴¹ in shaping the aim of religious education in the school. The question of the Lasallian Institute's role in molding the religious identity is reflected

in the following educational principle that guides the Lasallian educational network in the Philippines:

Lasallian education experiences are dynamic processes that challenge learners to realize their full potential by promoting self-knowledge and critical thinking . . . encouraging collaboration and dialogue in an environment that is fraternal and laden with respect . . . and impelling learners to translate their knowledge into actual practice for the betterment of [the] society.⁴²

The research adopted the five domains enabling the *Lasallian Formation for Mission*⁴³ approach in interpreting descriptively the interreligious learning from the RE Curriculum evaluation. Guided by the Lasallian educational principle mentioned above, the five domains guided this investigation in all formation and engagement implementations. The communitarian perspective in understanding the aim of religious education in the school was observed in two levels: (1) the classroom engagements and (2) outside of the classroom engagements. To promote concurrence with, and observance of, commendable goals of the school's educational curriculum's impact in the community or society at large, substantive knowledge about the "life" of the students and teachers in the community was observed.

Soon after the appropriate meetings with the La Salle Academy-Iligan administration were concluded in May 2020, the implementation phase began. The final two phases of the project – interviews, implementation, and evaluation & findings and analysis – were completed in August 2020; and the findings were subsequently shared with the LSA-Iligan school community.

3. Findings of the Project

The purpose of introducing the Lasallian Formation for Mission-Interreligious Learning (LFM-IRL) module was, as noted previously, to explore ways to make the curriculum or religious formation operational in an interreligious learning context. The researcher did this by proposing a module that evaluates the students' cognitive, affective, and attitudinal conditions for forming the students' religious identity. The measurement tools used included content that hoped to promote and strengthen unity in diversity.⁴⁴ The methodology was inclusive, participatory, and adaptive to the context of each person and group. The language used was understandable and friendly.⁴⁵

Overall, the respondents related better to Christianity and Islam's key concepts in the posttest than in the pretest. The experimental group respondents (those who completed the LFM-RL module) learned more about the curriculum's key concepts relating to Christianity and Islam in the posttest than in the pretest. The conceptual group respondents (those who took only the existing CL module) barely progressed in their scores in the measurement relating to Christianity and Islam in the posttest. In the regression analysis of the curriculum's influence in understanding the fundamental concepts of Christianity and Islam, the effect in the change of posttest results indicated that the infusion of the experimental module contributed to the significant difference in the average cognitive score of the respondents.

The results of the investigation led the researcher to believe that integrating a curriculum which covers different beliefs provided more opportunity for changing perspectives – allowing the

students to understand better other faith traditions, have more positive involvement with these religious traditions, have greater engagement with their own religion, and have lesser or minimal prejudice with other faiths. The high multi-religiosity of each class created an environment where Christian students judged the Muslim students less negatively. Interestingly, the scores on the measuring instruments indicated a decline of religiocentrism in both the Christian and Muslim respondents. The emphasis on inclusion and the multi-cultural context in the Lasallian Formation for Mission module was pivotal in concluding that the religious formation using the experimental LFM-IRL module was more inclusive of persons with all their differences. The module was likewise more open to the wealth of multi-cultural and multi-religious contexts.

The research valued the process of determining respondents' religious identity through a dialogue of faith that included an analysis of what "respect for difference" actually means. The respondents reported that they strongly conform to their religious traditions, beliefs, and practices but were open to finding acceptable viewpoints to life itself. The factors contributing to these religious identity statuses appeared to be the strong religious oral traditions (faith narratives) and the importance of religion in their home upbringing. It appeared that church attendance, prayer patterns, belief in God, and scripture reading patterns have not significantly contributed to their religious identity.

The challenge of multi-cultural and multi-religious diversity has always been present in La Salle Academy-Iligan. More than ever, the reality attracted dedicated and professionally competent educators from various Christian faiths and other religious creeds to fulfill the Lasallian mission. The role of the teachers was critical in this investigation. Over a certain period, the teachers implemented the review of the lessons based on the existing conceptual curriculum and the teaching-project using the experimental LFM-IRL module. These teachers' contacts with the respondents did not provide the researcher with a piece of striking information on whether the teacher's religious orientation influenced the students' performance.

The research groups' performance, regardless of the curriculum and worldview groupings, showed that the existing religious education curriculum of La Salle Academy-Iligan has helped in the students' identity formation. However, the introduction of the module modeled from the Lasallian Formation for Mission framework in the context of interreligious learning aided significantly in increasing the students' knowledge and in developing a more positive attitude toward their own religion and other faith traditions.

Overall, the introduction of the interreligious learning module adopted from the Lasallian for Mission framework had a significant effect on the cognitive, affective, and attitudinal conditions of the students' religious formation in La Salle Academy-Iligan. Future investigation on the theme could replicate the research in a Lasallian school where students' dominant population is made up of non-Catholics. Pertaining to the interreligious or IRL curriculum content, future studies could increase the equal religious status contact (to include other major religions) but with consideration to various levels of multi-religiosity per classroom during the implementation. Lastly, future research on the topic could create a training module for teachers in implementing the Lasallian Formation for Mission-Interreligious Learning curriculum.

Appendix: Additional Annotations of Related Literature

1. *Our Common Way Forward: Faith Encounters in Social Action IV* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Archdiocesan Pastoral Center for Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in South East Asia, 2001).

This is a timely book especially in understanding the state of interreligious dialogue in Southeast Asia, and how the local Church and the educational system particularly in Mindanao are responding to the conflict. The book's section on the evaluation of interreligious dialogue in the Philippines notes that

long before interreligious dialogue started, the Catholic schools in Mindanao always had students coming from different religions. But at that time, the dialogue was not yet a value that had to be pursued.⁴⁶

Dialogue is considered as an exchange of ideas in *Our Common Way Forward*; and Archbishop Fernando R. Capalla writes in this book,

Although the exchange of ideas is necessary, the basic thing in dialogue is your presence to the other person, the dialogue partner. The quality of that presence is characterized by mutual acceptance, respect, sensitivity, listening, patience, and even asking forgiveness for the mistakes of the past. It boils down to real human relations and the capacity to communicate ideas.⁴⁷

This book provides the researcher with a wider vision of the skills needed in formulating the framework of the current study. The section of the book that provides reflections of the Church in dialogue with Muslims enriches the present study through the following ideas:

- *dialogue of life*: This level of interreligious dialogue puts forth the idea of an open and neighborly spirit and of sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. In terms of the present study, this level of dialogue happens in small groups or focus-group discussions, which will lead to knowing each other in daily life, where students of different faiths experience the common situation, with its ups and downs, anxieties and hopes; and thus common concerns emerge in the school community level.
- *contextual analysis and reflection*: This level will explain the condition of life and offer ethical orientations for common wellbeing. In relation to the research, this level of dialogue takes seriously the reality of life and challenges the researcher to take responsibility, as well as an ethical choice, in the conclusion. Here, there is a need to collaborate with other disciplines for a better understanding of the complex reality. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the analysis and reflection from the findings of the study become the source by which to read the signs of times and offer a responsible incitement to the school community.

- *dialogue of religious experience*: This level can happen in the basic interfaith community. In terms of the study, this will occur in the classroom learning experience through the CL classes. The students live in “open integrity.” Open integrity means that the learners know where they stand and open themselves to other religious traditions. They share their experience of faith, their prayer, their religious symbols, and their ways of searching for and following God or the Ultimate. In this level, learners take part in the collective memories of the faith and religion of others.
 - *dialogue of theological exchange*: This level presents the scientific approach in understanding the respective religious heritages, and at the same time the appreciation of the spiritual values of others. In this dialogue, the Trinitarian experience meets the Islam experience. Concerning the present study, presenting parallels between Jesus and Alqur’an can draw the interpretation of the attitude of the learners in understanding their respective religious heritage. The meeting point is the *Kalam Allah* (the word of God) rather than the *Kitab Allah* (the Scriptures).
2. Didier Pollefeyt (editor), *Interreligious Learning* (Leuven/ Paris/ Dudley, MA: Leuven University Press, 2007).

This book is a collection of research that tackles issues on interreligious learning (IRL). In general, this book significantly asserts the possibility of IRL on the basis of fundamental respect for the irreducible and unique alterity of the other. The editor opens with the relationship of religious education with the opportunities and challenges of IRL. It gives a view on how religion has become increasingly relegated to the private sphere and how people become less connected in any univocal way with either religious traditions or religious institutions. Part I of the book is very significant to the present study as it provides the concept, process, and context of IRL. The three stages in understanding IRL from the standpoint of religious or theological education will help unravel, name, and describe what happens when a Christian learns about another religion.

Hans-Georg Ziebertz’s article in the book, “A Move to Multi? Empirical Research concerning the Attitudes of Youth toward Pluralism, and Religion’s Claims of Truth,” contains a conceptual model that differentiates mono-, multi- and inter-religious models. Judith A. Berling’s article, “The Process of Interreligious Learning,” addresses the challenges in interreligious learning. Herman Lombarts’ article, “The Impact of the Status of Religion in Contemporary Society upon Interreligious Learning,” explores the impact of IRL in the deepening of the beliefs and traditions of one’s own particular religion.

Part IV of the book proposes a pedagogical approach to studying IRL. Danny Wildemeersch’s and Hugo Vanheeswijck’s article, “Reconsidering Dialogue in Intercultural Learning and Education,” implies that education is expected to contribute to the development of dialogical attitudes based on positive experiences of respect, equality, equity, justice, and environment. In Part V’s “Religion and Identity,” the author explores the relationship between identity styles and some elements of religious behavior. This part provides perspectives on one’s belief in God as opposed to identity statuses, religious experiences as opposed to identity statuses, and religious cognitive styles as opposed to conceptions of God.

The book further acknowledges the richness of recognizing other religions in IRL. The very nature of the diversity may be tantamount to the reshaping of the aim of religious education. The author quotes Francis Schüssler Fiorenza saying, “Different religions constitute different forms of life with diverse shared practices, customs, and institutions.” He asks, “How is an understanding of other religions possible when one does not share the practices, customs, and institutions of those beliefs? Understanding human beings and religions across lines of difference is a challenging task requiring sustained and careful effort.”

3. Carl Sterkens, *Interreligious Learning: The Problem of Interreligious Dialogue in Primary Education* (Brill/ Boston/ Leiden/ Köln, 2001).

Carl Sterkens writes that the increasing plurality of religions and worldviews in Western society has major implications for religious communication in both public and private settings. This book presents a study that explores the consequences of religious plurality for religious education in primary education. The author methodologically explores the answers to the question: to what extent is a pedagogic model in which pupils are encouraged to participate in an interreligious dialogue adequate for coping with this religious plurality? To address this question, the author discusses the following research questions: what are the cognitive, the affective, and the attitudinal effects of the interreligious model for religious education; and can this model be legitimized? These questions are considered in the context of a discussion of the meaning of religion and an elaboration of the aim of religious education in this thesis.

Both Chapter 2: “Theories about the Relationship between Religions in Religious Education” and Chapter 3: “The Aim of Religious Education” respectively complement the purpose of this present study. Chapter 2 offers three models for dealing with plurality in education: a monoreligious, a multireligious, and an interreligious model. The chapter likewise presents research by Johannes A. van der Ven and Hans Georg Zieberts involving pupils and teachers of religious education, which provides empirical support for the distinction among the three models. An understanding of such helps the present study in evaluating the aim of the interreligious model. In all indications, Chapter 3 provides the present study with a general view of the aim of religious education. More specifically, the chapter emphasizes the interreligious model with a view to a further exploration of how to deal with religious plurality in an educational context. Here, the author sees that religious education is a formation of religious identity. The application of this assertion resulted in a project in which all pupils in a particular interreligious model of education were encouraged to alternate between religious auto- and allo-perspectives. The procedure in the project is relevant to the current study.

In Chapter 4, Sterkens presents a curriculum evaluation study that dealt with the implications of religious plurality for religious and philosophical education in primary schools, particularly in the Netherlands. The evaluation is instrumental in the discussion on the formation of religious identity in education. The author’s attempt to respond to the philosophical-pedagogic debate on religious education results in a theological reflection, in which he deals with issues relating to the religious perspective of the interreligious model of education.

As shown by the title of this project, the current investigation is an attempt to evaluate the religious identity of the CL students who are exposed to an interreligious learning model. Sterken’s

application using emotional, cognitive, and attitudinal evaluation shows convergence in the methodology of this study especially in clarifying and analyzing the aim of religious education.

4. Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

The writer explores the increasingly pluralistic character of Western society, both in terms of multiculturalism and the intellectual plurality of late modernity which is affecting the religious education curricula in schools. He challenges schools to reassess the provision of religious education and looks at how they might adapt in order to accommodate students' diverse experiences of plurality. The book is very relevant to the present study as it offers a critical view of approaches to the treatment of different religions in contemporary education, devises approaches to teaching and learning, and formulates policies and procedures that are fair and just to all.

Beginning with a contextual overview of the religious, social, and cultural changes of the past fifty years, the book goes on to illuminate and assess six different responses to the challenges posed by religious plurality in schools. Conclusions are drawn from the various positions explored, identifying what the character of religious education should be and how it should be taught, and addressing the issues raised in policy, practice, and research. Moreover, the book argues for a pluralistic approach to religious education:

A plural approach to religious education can make an important contribution to intercultural education, citizenship education, and values education, especially in terms of understanding various aspects of social plurality in relation to the experience of the individual students. This social plurality combines traditional and modern or postmodern dimensions, connecting local, national, and global elements. By participating in discussions related to these issues, students should be helped to examine their own and their peer's assumptions and reflect upon their own identities.⁴⁸

Religious education offerings should be able to address questions on cultural and religious identity. While this research intends to explore if there is a relationship in the way students see and understand "religious culture and tradition" both in the school and society levels, the author's conclusion that "religious education should explore with pupils their [own] sense of identity in relation to place, personal and family elements"⁴⁹ can be a very helpful benchmark in studying the aim of religious education.

5. Edwin Cox, *Changing Aims in Religious Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

The book describes the impact of secularization, rather than religious plurality, on the theory and practice of the subject "religious education." The author describes four principal characteristics of a "religiously educated person."⁵⁰ First, the person would have "acquired certain information about religion." Second, the person would have an "appreciation of the function of religion in the lives of individuals and the ordering of society." Third, the person would be "able to make informed and discriminating decisions based on conscious criteria, about religious beliefs and religious

practices.” And fourth, the person would be “conscious of what he believes, the reasons for those beliefs, and their effect on his choices and actions.”

In many ways, the findings in this book have value in the investigation of the impact of religious education to the knowledge, feelings, and attitudes of students about their religious traditions and other religious traditions. The author further points out that religious education should not be thought of as giving pupils religious certainties but as helping them to act responsibly in the age of religious uncertainty.

6. Policarpos Karamouzis, “Religions, Education and Democracy: The Necessity of Inter-Religious Education in the Modern Public School System” (2009). Retrieved December 12, 2014 from http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/images/pdf_files/srpski/godina3_broj1/polikarpos%20karamouzis.pdf.

This article raises two very important concerns about religious education that are relevant to the present study: the inquiry on the necessity of the presence of religious education in the modern school and the question on the aim of religious education in modern society. The role of the school is generally to create thinking citizens. The author puts together arguments about whether through the knowledge of religion people can understand the presence of religion as an integral part of human society and culture. He underlines six principles⁵¹ of religious education specifically in the state school: (1) the school’s approach to religion is academic, not devotional; (2) the school strives for students’ awareness of religions, but does not press for student’s acceptance of any one religion; (3) the school sponsors the study about religions, not the practice of religion; (4) the school exposes students to the diversity of religious views, but does not impose any specific view; (5) the school teaches about all religions, but it does not promote or denigrate any religion; and (6) the school informs students about various beliefs, but it does not seek for students to conform to any particular belief.

The author further expounds on the necessity to teach religious education not only to present religions but also because students need to understand the differences between religions and incorporate this understanding as part of a pluralistic society.

The article contains a very remarkable platform in accommodating different opinions about religion through Comparative Religious Education (CRE). This is a type of education curriculum that focuses on: (1) the ability to understand others; (2) the critical attitude toward traditional social roles; (3) tolerance in the face of opposing opinions; and (4) the development of communicative ability in students. CRE complements the present study in trying to understand the human dimensions of studying religion, which is important in tracing the roots of religious prejudices of domination and imposition.

Endnotes

1. Brother Rey E. Mejias, who belongs to the Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD) of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and lives in the Philippines, earned a master’s degree in Lasallian

Leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. What is presented here draws upon his capstone project for that degree.

2. *Religious Identity*: a specific type of identity formation. Particularly, it is the sense of group membership to a religion and the importance of this group membership as it pertains to one's self-concept.

3. *Religious Education*: a curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of the students at the school and of society; and prepares the students for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life.

4. *Religious Plurality*: this refers to the belief in two or more religious worldviews as being equally valid or acceptable. More than mere tolerance, religious pluralism accepts multiple paths to God or gods as a possibility and is usually contrasted with "exclusivism," the idea that there is only one true religion or way to know God.

5. Cf. Secretariat for Formation, *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim's Handbook* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019).

6. *Interreligious Learning*: the process of learning another religion where the learners become better at understanding other religions, engaging their distinctive languages and practices, and become clearer about their own ideas and positions.

7. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (Vatican City, 1977), #70.

8. *Ibid.*, #35 to #37.

9. *Ibid.*, # 8.

10. *Religiocentrism*: an exclusively positive attitude toward one's religious group (religious in-groups), combined with negative attitudes toward other religious groups (religious out-groups).

11. Carl Sterkens, *Interreligious Learning: The Problem of Interreligious Dialogue in Primary Education* (Brill/ Boston/ Leiden/ Koln, 2001), page 47.

12. Rito V. Baring, "Plurality in Unity: Challenges in Religious Education in the Philippines" in *Religious Education: The Official Journal of Religious Association* 106-5 (2011), page 463.

13. *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* (2007), page 110.

14. *Interreligious Dialogue or Inter-Faith Dialogue*: a conversation of two (or more) believers of different religions or living faiths.

15. Sterkens, pages 63-64.

16. Muslim Holy Month.

17. Didier Pollefeyt (editor), *Interreligious Learning* (Leuven/ Paris/ Dudley, MA: Leuven University Press, 2007), XVI.

18. Herman Lombaerts FSC, *MEL Bulletin #29: De La Salle at the Heart of Contemporary Multi-Cultural and Multi- Religious Society*, translated by Keith Watson FSC (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2006), page 36.

19. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Vatican City, 1988), #6.

20. *Rido* is a Maranao term commonly used to refer to clan feuds. It is characterized by a sporadic outburst of retaliatory violence between families and kinship groups, as well as between communities. It can occur in areas where there is a perceived lack of justice and security. It is considered one of the major problems in Mindanao because apart from numerous casualties, *rido* among the Maranao has brought about serious problems in their society. Cf. G. Alaya-ay et.al., “Rido Culture: Its Impact on the Maranaos’ Contemporary Educational Aspirations” in *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 3*, #11 (2013), page 1.

21. Sterkens, chapter 2 passim.

22. *La Salle Academy Handbook* (Iligan City, Philippines: La Salle Academy, 2000 edition), page 6.

23. Cf. Antonio Botana FSC, *Lasallian Essays #4: Basis for a Present-Day Model of the Lasallian Family* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2008), pages 59-60.

24. Sterkens, page 126.

25. Statistics were provided by the Registrar’s Office of La Salle Academy-Iligan for enrollment data of third year junior high school students for School Year 2019-2020 (the incoming fourth year for School Year 2020-2021). The information was retrieved on April 25, 2020.

26. *Multi-religiosity*: a socio-cultural context marked by the religious plurality and the possibility of detaching oneself from the perspective of a particular tradition.

27. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development* (San Francisco, 1984), pages 395-425.

28. David Matthew Bell, “Religious Identity: Conceptualization and Measurement of the Religious Self” (Atlanta, GA: Emory University dissertation, 2009), pages 201-205.

29. Sterkens, page 96.

30. Baring, page 470.

31. Cf. *Appendix* for a few additional annotations of related literature.

32. Jacques Dupuis SJ, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), page 387.

33. Dupuis, page 388.

34. *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Vatican City, 1964), #1.
35. Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), page 129.
36. Cf. *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Vatican City, 1965), # 2.
37. Baring, page 472.
38. *Ibid.*, page 469.
39. Amado Picardal CSsR, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Mindanao” in *Asian Christian Review* 2, #2 and #3 (2008), page 72.
40. Sterkens, pages 125-186.
41. *Lasallian Pedagogical Framework*: a framework that focuses on transformative learning where knowledge does not exist as a given truth before the process of learning. Students develop knowledge as a result of their inquiry, action, or experimentation.
42. *Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family* (Mandaluyong, Metro Manila: De La Salle Philippines Communications and Resource Center, 2003), page 14.
43. “The Five Domains: Enabling Lasallian Mission” in *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook*, pages 67-68. The five domains are: (1) seeing with the eyes of faith; (2) prayer and spiritual practice; (3) growth in freedom; (4) association and fraternity; and (5) solidarity and care for the world through education.
44. *MEL Bulletin #51: Formation for the Lasallian Mission, A Common Frame of Reference* (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools), page 4.
45. *Ibid.*, page 12.
46. Archbishop Fernando R. Capalla, “An Evaluation of the Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Philippines” in *Our Common Way Forward: Faith Encounters in Social Action IV* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Archdiocesan Pastoral Center for Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in South East Asia, 2001), page 64.
47. *Ibid.*, page 67.
48. Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), page 141.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Edwin Cox, *Changing Aims in Religious Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), pages 119-120.

51. Cf. Charles Haynes, *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), pages 111-125 *passim*.