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## **Lasallian Women's Needs Assessment Survey Report**

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### **Introduction**

The following is a report of the Lasallian Women's Needs Assessment survey findings to identify what women in the Lasallian Family need in order to fulfill their commitment to mission called for by the Secretariat of Association and Mission in November 2021. We are pleased to share that over 4,500 women from all Regions<sup>6</sup> participated. What follows is a report of the findings for CIAMEL,<sup>7</sup> the General Council of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, AIMEL<sup>8</sup> delegates, and all in the Lasallian Family. The story of Association and the Lasallian Family continues to unfold; and it is graced with the wisdom, commitment, and contribution of women who are a part of it. May this be another step in ensuring their voices are heard.

### **Methodology**

The following outlines the process used in designing and administering the survey.

- A long-standing goal for the Secretariat of Association was to understand the experiences of, and to better accompany, women in the Lasallian Family. Brother Paco Chiva and Ms. Heather Ruple Gilson, Co-Secretaries of Association, identified the need to survey women in the Lasallian Family in order to understand what women need to fulfill their commitment to mission. They sought expertise in the area of survey research and established a research team composed of Sue Hines, EdD, Elizabeth E. Seebach, PhD, LP, Mary Catherine Fox, AFSC, PhD, and Heather Ruple Gilson, MED.
- The research team met via Zoom over several months and established a process for creating and administering a valid and reliable needs assessment survey. The International Council of Lasallian Association and the Educational Mission (CIAMEL) endorsed the project.
- Focus groups were conducted with women (CIAMEL members or their delegates) from each Region of the Institute using open-ended questions to inform the design of the needs assessment survey.
- From these representative conversations, questions were created that fell into the following six categories:
  1. Contribution: The need for an awareness of the contributions made by women in the Lasallian Family to Mission.
  2. Formation and Professional Development: The need for formation and professional development to support women's abilities to fulfill their commitment to the mission.
  3. Accompaniment: The need for support and promoting a sense of belonging.

4. Representation: The need to have a voice and representation on decision-making bodies.
  5. Cultural Aspects: The need for cultural inclusion, relevancy, and dignity.
  6. Work-Life Balance: The need for supporting and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, including the effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- A 30-question survey was created, using 29 Likert scaled (strongly agree- strongly disagree) questions, and one open ended response along with demographic information.
  - The survey was piloted and received IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota.
  - On 1 November 2021 the survey was launched via email. The email inviting participation was sent to Visitors, Regions, District Offices, the network of Association contacts, and other groups and stakeholders encouraging wide distribution. The link was also shared on Institute social media platforms and the Institute website. Participants were encouraged to forward survey invitations to other women in the Lasallian Family to expand reach. The survey closed on 22 November 2021.

## Responses

The following outlines the responses we received, to inform findings of what women need in order to fulfill their commitment to mission.

A total of 4, 520 responses to the survey were received which represented 7.5% of the women in our global Lasallian Family at the time. The largest number (50.5%) of responses were from women in RELAL, followed by RELEM (18.4%), PARC (15.6%), RELAN (12.0%) and RELAF (3.5%). Table 1.1 displays the response distribution by Region.

*Table 1.1 Response distribution by Region*

Region	# responses	% responses	Total # women	% region's total # of women
RELAL	2,281	50.5%	16,306	14.0%
RELEM	830	18.4%	25,855	3.2%
PARC	706	15.6%	11,847	6.0%
RELAN	544	12.0%	5,004	10.9%
RELAF	159	3.5%	1,279	12.4%
Total	4,520	100%	60,291	7.5% (of all Regions)

It is important to note that the results predominantly represent the voices of teachers, age 41-45, teaching in primary and secondary school settings with either 2-5 years’ experience (PARC; RELAL) or 6-10 years’ experience (RELAN; RELEM; RELAF) who are married with children at home. These demographics are the age, experience, position, and family circumstances of the majority of the respondents.

Table 1.2 Response distribution by demographics

Age	18-25	26-35	36-45*	46-55	56-65	over 65
# responses	180	1,043	1,372	1,225	567	67
% responses	4.0%	23.4%	30.8%	27.5%	12.7%	1.5%

Years at Institution	0-1	2-5.	6-10**	11-15.	16-20.	20-25.	over 25
# responses	392	1,116	887	678	483	418	459
% responses	8.8%	25.2%	20.0%	15.3%	10.9%	9.4%	10.4%

Position	Administrator***	Faculty/teacher	Staff	Pastoral/retreat work	Childcare/sister/other	Volunteer/retired
# responses	651	2,709	821	81	183	63
% responses	14.4%	60.1%	18.2%	1.8%	4.1%	1.4%

Ministry	School	University	Dist/Reg admin	NGO	Non-formal ed.	Social service	Other <sup>+</sup>
# responses	3,217	1,039	72	73	21	18	50
% responses	71.6%	23.1%	1.6%	1.6%	0.5%	0.4%	1.1%

Marital status	Married/ partner	Single	Separated	Divorced	Widowed	Unknown
# responses	2,702	1,139	142	273	88	146
% responses	60.2%	25.4%	3.2%	6.1%	2.0%	3.3%

Family caretaking	NA/prefer not to say <sup>§</sup>	Supervising siblings	Parenting children at home	Parenting & assisting extended family	Assisting older relatives	Assisting adult children
# responses	1487	101	1,148	826	505	388
% responses	33.4%	2.3%	25.8%	18.5%	11.3%	8.7%

\*Predominantly 41-45 years old

\*\*Years at Institution reported by PARC & RELAL 2-5 years; RELAF, RELEM, RELAN 6-10 years

\*\*\* 119 = Chief administrator; 532 = Mid-level administrator

<sup>+</sup>Other = Retreat Center, Childcare Agency, Others

<sup>§</sup>NA/prefer not to say/Other = combined

## **Findings**

The following are the major outcomes of the survey findings and some synthesis of the open-ended comments.

### ***Contribution***

Respondents noted a need to better know the role of women in Lasallian history (the founding story and beyond). This was a more significant need for those in RELEM (1 of every 5 respondents) and in RELAN (1 of every 2) and especially those working in universities (1 of every 2) and Schools (1 of every 2) in RELAN. The majority of women recognize the unique contributions of women, believe that women are shaping the future at their institutions, and feel appreciated for their individual contributions. However, in RELAN 1 of every 3 women aged 18-30 do not feel appreciated for their individual contributions.

The open-ended comments supported these findings indicating mixed reports of feeling “valued,” “supported,” and “at home” at their institution. Several also reported experiencing “patronizing,” “dismissive,” and “condescending” comments from leadership and a biased appreciation for the contributions of men over women. This quote is one example of this mixed experience,

The idea that women's leadership is weak and men's leadership is strong still persists in our countries. For many years I was not even taken into account for any activity. It took the arrival of a Brother with an idea of inclusive leadership and horizontal decision making for me to be able to develop my full potential and vocation in the different areas. In the teaching area women are more taken into account, but in the administrative area it is much less.

### ***Formation & Professional Development***

Professional Development surfaced as a significant need for women. Collectively, many (77%) reported that professional development at their institutions met their needs. However, women in RELAN (2 of every 5) and RELAF (1 of every 7) reported that their professional development needs were not being met. This was reported as a greater need for those in staff positions in RELEM (1 of every 2) and RELAN (1 of every 3), as well as teachers (2 of every 5) and administrators (2 of every 5) in RELAN. Significantly, a high percentage (83%) of respondents reported a desire to participate in a women’s Lasallian Leadership Program with the highest interest among those in administrative positions (chief administrators and mid-level administrators). While women reported being able to identify other women to serve as Lasallian mentors, the majority (81%) also reported a desire to participate in a mentoring program, with the majority being those in administrative positions. It is promising that 85% of women reported having access to Lasallian Formation opportunities.

The open-ended comments provided further insight into the desire for and type of professional development and formation programs. Several indicated the need for women's leadership programs to support the advancement of women leaders, and various training programs. Suggested training topics included gender equity, pedagogy, Lasallian spirituality, technology skills, the role of women in our Lasallian history, women's health and wellness, and training and formation for new recruits. There was also strong urging to provide family-friendly formation programs (e.g., childcare options) and work environments to enhance the ability for young mothers to engage. The following quote from a woman leader illustrates this need,

(I have been) allowed to climb and be considered for key positions. However, I think that there should be a more specific program that considers women as capable of occupying more important positions, and to have training and national and international participation . . . and to share with other women of the Lasallian Family.

As well as this quote from a working mother,

I think women should be considered and promoted for top positions in Lasallian institutions . . . to support this, think about how to make professional development opportunities available for people with small children. If formation programs or other retreat programs offered family housing or youth programming at the same time, you would see many more young people and women able to participate in them.

### *Accompaniment*

Overall, women who responded felt accompanied well in the Lasallian Family. Many (79%) felt Brothers have empowered women to participate in the mission. It is notable that in RELAL (1 of every 8) and RELAN (1 of every 5), with the highest number in RELAN being those in staff positions, did not feel Brothers have empowered women in mission. In addition, the majority (92%) of women reported feeling trusted by their colleagues. Women reported feeling supported in their vocations at their institutions with the exception of 1 of every 5 women in RELAN. It is encouraging that 94% felt a sense of belonging to the Lasallian Family and 89% reported that the Lasallian Family promotes the dignity of women.

The respondents' comments provided a more nuanced picture of accompaniment in regards to spiritual, professional, personal, and financial support. Many noted appreciation for "their Lasallian community" and the ability to "embrace" and "grow (their) spirituality" and felt "empowered," "supported," and "loved" by their Lasallian Family. These sentiments were sometimes countered with numerous concerns about a just wage and equitable salary and, at times, the lack of support as represented in these two comments, "Pay equality is an important part of gender equality. As Lasallians, we need to promote equal pay and leadership opportunities for all women" and

In general, the women who participate in the Lasallian mission in my institution support each other, however, some Brothers (few) and collaborators (men) who are in leadership positions, or who are responsible for some departments, do not recognize the work of women and even hinder it.

## ***Representation***

In terms of representation and voice in decision-making, many respondents (85%) indicated women were able to express themselves in decision-making processes. However, globally 1 of every 8 teachers disagreed. Regionally, 1 of every 11 respondents in RELAF and about 1 of every 3 from RELAN disagreed, with the majority of those in disagreement being women 36-45 years old. 85% of respondents felt that women's voices were being included in decision-making processes in their institutions; yet, 1 of every 10 respondents in RELAL and 1 of every 8 in RELAF disagreed with this. In terms of policies for gender equity 76% reported that policies were in place. However, 1 of every 3 respondents in RELAN and 1 of every 6 in RELAF disagreed. Globally, 1 of every 6 of those employed for 6 -10 years and 11 -15 years disagreed that gender equity policies were in place. Lastly, 74% reported leadership positions are attainable to them at their institutions. Yet, 1 of every 6 disagreed. More notably, of those in staff positions (1 of every 4) and of teachers (1 of every 5) disagreed, indicating that leadership positions were not attainable to them.

This mixed perspective was also seen in the open-ended comments. There were reports of women's voices being heard as members on boards of directors and in institutional leadership positions and gradual progress being made towards increasing women's involvement and collaboration. Conversely, there were multiple reports of a long institutional history and continuance of male dominance in leadership roles and decision-making processes. This quote exemplifies these sentiments:

The greatest strength is that the Lasallian charism has a strong feminine component in the sense of giving birth to, making it grow, caring for and promoting the life of children, youth and persons in general by means of a humanized and humanizing education. The weakness is that the Western patriarchal model has prevailed for a long time and, although more space is given to women (and many times we are the ones who contribute and execute valuable and innovative ideas and projects), the decisions are still in the hands of masculine structures not only in the reality of their members and procedures established in an excessively traditional way, but in the sense and the logics that permeate those structures and procedures, even though nominally, there are women who are part of them.

## ***Cultural Aspects***

It is promising to see that 90% reported that their cultures accept women in top leadership roles. However, 25% reported that cultural barriers exist that hinder their ability to contribute to mission. This was most commonly reported in RELAF (43%), PARC (31%), and RELAL (27%). While the average level of agreement decreased as age range increased, 91% reported feeling that their cultural identity is honored in the global Lasallian Family. In terms of the Lasallian Family responding to the needs of young women in their societies, 84% agreed. It was more common for Young Lasallians aged 18-25 in RELAN (2 of every 5), PARC (1 of every 7) and those aged 31-35 in RELAF (1 of every 8), who felt that the Lasallian Family is not addressing the needs of young women in their society. It is reassuring to see that 94% reported that Lasallian spirituality connected with their own spirituality.

The open-ended comments regarding culture provided a more layered perspective, including national, organizational, and social group cultural norms with a focus on the barriers that impact women's commitment to mission. These included experiencing a culture of patriarchalism, misogyny, shifts to conservative Catholicism, and cisgender privilege. Several noted the need to share these in the open-ended comments indicating that the survey questions did not reveal these nuanced cultural concerns. These comments included statements like:

I believe that being a young teacher and seeing from the perspective of experience, we are under the influence of expectation vs. reality; they want to appear [to be] so many good and beautiful things, but . . . we have been and continue to be beaten by misogyny and machismo. Opportunities and spaces are given because they must meet the numerical requirements, but it is so notorious that when a woman gives a good contribution, on many occasions she is ignored and [when] a man takes up the idea, [he] is supported and applauded.

I think these are hard questions to answer because the 'institution' has multiple levels. Within my department I feel 100% supported. Half of our faculty is female, and the male faculty is aware of ways in which academic institutions tend to expect more service from women. When it comes to the larger institutional culture at my university, I am very concerned. We have had female leadership leave because of sexism . . .

These questions don't get to the root of the issue. Yes, women have opportunities at my institution and other Lasallian institutions, but they are treated differently. There is an unspoken, but prevalent attitude and practice that prefers and embraces men, creating a good old boys culture.

### ***Work-Life Balance***

Work-life balance surfaced as a need with 41% of respondents, indicating it was difficult to balance family commitments with work. By Region 50% in RELAN, 42% in RELEM, 41% in PARC, 36% in RELAF, and 34% in RELAL reported this difficulty. More specifically, teachers (2 of every 5), those who are married (2 of every 5), and respondents parenting children at home (1 of every 2) reported this the most. It is important to consider that 53% reported choosing *family commitments over mission*. However, by Region, *commitment to mission over family* was reported by 51% in RELAF, 33% in RELEM, RELAN, and RELAL, and 30% in PARC. Globally, 36% of married respondents reported this as well.

This divided perspective of work-life balance was often addressed in the open-ended comments. While some respondents reported a positive picture giving credit to family and ministry support, and their efforts to integrate family and commitment to mission, others highlighted significant difficulties, stress, and strain. This quote by a teacher with children illustrates the work-life challenges,

Since we have become more technologized and even more so with the pandemic, our workload has tripled and our time for our family has been reduced; our mental, emotional and physical health has been affected. Our families and personal lives pay the price for our

after-hours workloads. Our spiritual life and health is affected. Household chores don't wait either and we try to do our best in all areas to remain productive and competitive in the workplace. Tiredness and exhaustion is felt [by my] co-workers . . . and employees [are] afraid of losing their job . . . if they lose their health (physical, emotional, and mental).

Those who were single without children also noted a workload inequity between working parents and single people as illustrated by this quote:

Many times for those of us who are “young” because we are not married or do not have children yet, we have been loaded with many activities. We are sometimes overloaded and this causes burnout and sometimes boredom [with] many activities. Personally, it has happened to me; and it is ugly to feel tired and not fully enjoy [my work] . . . I guess they trust me, although it is very exhausting.

### ***COVID-19 Pandemic***

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had a significant impact on women’s abilities to fulfill their commitment to mission. Of the Regions, it was most commonly reported in RELAF (64%), PARC (53%), and RELAN (34%); while less reported in RELEM (23%) and RELAL (18%). More specifically, this was reported by 1 of every 3 respondents parenting children and 1 of every 3 parenting children and extended family. 65% reported they *did not* have to reduce their workload during the Covid-19 Pandemic due to competing family responsibilities. However, those from RELAF (45%) and PARC (36%) reported having to reduce their workload due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Globally, 1 of every 5 single (unmarried) respondents and 1 out 3 of respondents parenting children reported this. It is hopeful to see that 83% reported women’s perspectives are included in how their institution responds to COVID.

### **Limitations of the Project**

- Language: The survey was only available in the official languages of the Institute (French, Spanish, and English).
- Access: Internet access to complete the survey was a challenge for women in several Regions.
- Distribution: As the survey was distributed in multiple ways, it is unclear if all women in the Lasallian Family were given the invitation to participate. There was also not equal representation of all Regions and demographic groups.
- Cultural understanding of response items: While every effort was made to ensure cultural resonance, with respondents coming from across cultures, some response items may have had different meaning, depending on context.

### **Possible Next Steps**

- Continue to unpack the data and direction found in the written responses.
- More in depth study of responses by comparative demographic data.



## Recommendations

- Use the findings to inform projects of the Secretariat of Association and Mission, and share the findings with other Secretariats and Services of the Institute and relevant decision-making bodies of the Lasallian Family; and further examine the data to uncover and inform future efforts in order to support women in the Lasallian Family to fulfill their commitment to mission.
- Establish mentoring/ networking programs for women in the Lasallian Family that are culturally responsive to support and accompany the formative and vocational journeys of women with particular attention to supporting women in a healthier work-life balance.
- Develop, with a representative group of experts, a leadership development program that is culturally responsive, potentially with an online modality, for women in the Lasallian Family.
- Invite Districts and Regions to reflect on the accessibility of formation programs offered to Lasallian Partners with a particular attention paid to inclusivity, to women with families and children, and consider inclusion of the role of women in the Founding story and beyond in Formation programs.
- Invite Ministries to evaluate and ensure Professional Development opportunities for all members of school and ministry communities with attention paid to teachers and administrators.
- While the Lasallian Family has made great strides in addressing the needs of young women in our schools with initiatives like Lasallian Women of Hope, and ministries directly serving women and girls, more study is needed to understand gender issues and needs in our ministries.
- Invite Ministries, Districts, and Regions to ensure representation of women's voice on decision-making bodies, and to take account of policies that deal with ensuring gender equity, childcare and parental responsibilities, harassment, women's health and wellness, and equitable remuneration. As the Lasallian Family emerges from the pandemic, there is a need to acknowledge the fatigue and stress of women in the Lasallian Family as indicated by the data.

## Conclusion

The Lasallian Family has much to celebrate in the findings of the study. There are also things that surfaced as needs for respondents. These needs can be seen as opportunities for creative responses, more inclusivity, and new avenues to secure mission sustainability. As a Lasallian Family, we continue to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, to the continual call to respond to the needs of young people and students at the margins, and to be ministers and ambassadors of Christ to one another and to our students. As women are the majority of “workers in the field,” it is

encouraging to see the deep commitment, passion, joy to be part of the Lasallian Family, faith, and zeal for mission captured in open ended comments like “I am happy to be part of the Lasallian community. I am proud of my Lasallian identity. I aspire to touch more lives. Saint John Baptist de La Salle inspires me to perform my best as a teacher,” “I am a very proud woman to be part of the great Lasallian Family, first as a student and now as a teacher and mother!” and “La Salle is my home.”

The open-ended comments also illustrated the gratitude respondents felt to be invited to participate in the survey. There were an overwhelming number of comments like, “Thank you for this step forward,” “Thank you for this space,” “Thank you for taking our opinion into account,” and “Thank you for this initiative. Opportunities like this make us heard and valued.”

As one of the respondents said, “We are making progress, but we have a lot of work ahead of us.” Together and by Association we move forward to accompany Lasallians well, and to, ultimately, ensure our Lasallian Mission.

Live Jesus in our Hearts!

## **Endnotes**

1. The authors want to acknowledge and thank all of the women who participated in the survey and those who supported its development. We want to thank all of the Lasallians – Brothers and Partners – who supported its distribution, in particular Brother Robert Schieler FSC, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2014-2022), and Brother Paco Chiva FSC, Co-Secretary of Association in Rome.

2. Heather Ruple Gilson serves as Co-Secretary of Association in the Secretariat of Association and Mission for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. She also serves as Coordinator of Mission Initiatives for the District of Ireland, Great Britain, and Malta. Heather is a graduate of Saint Mary’s College of California and a Lasallian Volunteer alumna. She has been working in the Lasallian Family for over 20 years. Heather is an experienced Lasallian Formator and has a passion for Vocation Ministry, Association for Mission, and advocating for the voice and role of women and girls in the Lasallian Family.

3. Susan R. Hines serves as a professor in the Doctor of Education in Leadership program at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota and for 12 years served as the past director of faculty development. Her content expertise is assessment, instructional designing, faculty development, and research. Susan’s research interests lie primarily in faculty development evaluation and women’s leadership. She received her BA in educational psychology from Metropolitan State University (Minnesota) and her MA in education and her EdD in Leadership from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota.

4. Elizabeth E. Seebach serves as a professor for the psychology and social sciences department at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota and as an active clinical psychologist. Beth is interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning, body image, Lasallian pedagogy, and issues related to mental health of children and families. Her doctoral work in clinical psychology

and postdoctoral work in pediatric neuropsychology led to both her academic career and a clinical practice, working with people with a wide range of mental health issues, including eating disorders, effects of trauma survival, depression, anxiety, concomitant health issues, and brain trauma sequelae. Beth replenishes her spirit through music-making and art-making.

5. Mary Catherine Fox, professor emerita at Saint Mary's University holds a BA in theatre and an MS in telecommunications from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and a PhD in higher education from University of Minnesota. She was honored with affiliation to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 2014 and awarded the Brother John Johnston Award of the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN) for distinguished service in 2021. She has served the Brothers of the Christian Schools as staff and faculty for the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) Leadership Program in Rome and for the Brother John Johnson Formation Institute and in many and varied District, Regional, international, assembly, Chapter, and committee roles. She has keynoted Midwest District congresses and is frequently honored to be asked to speak and/ or facilitate numerous events on Lasallian themes for various Lasallian ministries and formation programs. Her particular focus is the provenance, practice, and promise inherent in the Lasallian tenet: together and by association.

6. The five geographic Regions of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the international Lasallian educational network are: RELAF (Lasallian Region of Africa), RELAL (Lasallian Region of Latin America), RELAN (Lasallian Region of North America), RELEM (Lasallian Region of Europe & Mediterranean), PARC (Lasallian Region of Pacific Asia).

7. International Council for Lasallian Association and the Educational Mission.

8. International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission.