

Lasallian Research Seminar on Catechesis and Evangelization

Brother Ernest J. Miller, FSC, D.Min.¹

The religious dimension was at the heart of the Christian Schools established by Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the early Brothers. The mission to provide a human and Christian education to children, especially those who are poor, was carried out through schools in which "the religious nature of education, the religious preoccupation of its curriculum, and the fundamental religious purpose of its establishment" were underscored.² Educating in faith *for faith* is a constitutive dimension of the founding, prophetic vision of Saint La Salle. Thus, with new challenges arising to our apostolic mission, we must undertake a thoroughgoing reassessment and discernment of our catechetical methods, attitudes, curriculum, and formation. The 46th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (46GC), in May 2022, identified seven paths of transformation. Pathway One, "Building a Fraternal World through Education, Evangelization, and the Promotion of Justice," calls us to recover and renew our commitment to catechesis (religious education) and evangelization. As a way of helping us to respond to this call, the Generalate's Office of Lasallian Heritage and Research sponsored a Lasallian Research Seminar in October 2025 in Rome. One of five seminars scheduled from 2024-2028 on key topics from the 46GC saw over forty participants – scholars and practitioners in the field – gather from all five Regions for five days.

In his opening remarks to the seminar participants, Brother Carlos Gomez, FSC, Vicar General, notes that catechesis is a "fundamental pillar of the Lasallian educational mission, its history since its foundation, and the primary vocation of everyone who calls themselves Lasallian."³ He exhorts us to imagine the seminar as the forerunner of an international movement to renew and revitalize catechesis and evangelization in a Lasallian mode.

The seminar was designed as an open space that centered conversation on an examination of the back and forth between life and theory. The goal was not to reach decisions but to generate ideas, to foster consensus where possible but to respect disagreement. Though we recognize a great tradition of Lasallian catechesis, we have witnessed a dispersion and disorientation of catechetical instruction and practices, questioned and abandoned by some Lasallian communities. To expand on this reality, Brother Carlos aptly observed,

Without wishing to be self-flagellating, this fundamental mission has been greatly weakened in our educational proposal. In many places it has disappeared from the curriculum, in others it has been replaced by courses on "Christian values" or simply "values" or the history of religions. Some programs of preparation for the sacraments also survive, as well as religious language that does not necessarily reflect a comprehensive evangelizing approach that combines the message of Jesus with a commitment to the promotion of justice, peace and integral ecology. *If anything requires a lot of leaven, attention, and renewal, it is the catechetical ministry within our proposal to the world that aims to be transformative and evangelizing.*⁴

The contemporary societal context forces us to rethink how we do catechesis: religious pluralism, new migrations, “a first generation of unbelievers” in many contexts, “a spiritual awakening” in many others. The expression “kerygmatic catechesis” (in the context of a new evangelization that is entirely kerygmatic is gaining ground as Pope Francis teaches in *Christus Vivit*) or a “catechesis in a missionary key” (Directory for Catechesis 3-4).⁵

Important ecclesial texts provide the stage setting for dialogue, debate, and discernment on how we do catechesis. Pope Saint John Paul II, in *Cathechesi Tradendae* proposes two objectives for catechesis: to bring the initial faith to maturity and to educate disciples of Jesus Christ (community, life, mission). The recent *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) takes up the path envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. Although based upon the previous directories (1973 and 1997), the new directory goes further by spotlighting the theological issues and concerns expressed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (*On the Evangelization of Peoples*), and drawing deeply from scripture and Pope Francis’s *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*). In addition to ecclesial texts, there are important texts within the Lasallian canon to consider, especially *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (chapters seven and eight), as well as the vast scope of scholarship in the field of Christian religious education.

To conclude, I offer these thoughts. Educating in faith carries a double contemplation. Thomas Groome, a Boston College theologian and scholar in religious education, directs us to examine closely the double notion of both *what* we are trying to do as educators and *why* we are trying to do it. He writes, “The educator’s *intentionality* – our being conscious and very deliberate about *what* and *why* we are doing what we do – is key to effective education in faith.”⁶ If such intentionality is not made clear to the learners, then the teaching and learning environment risks becoming an ineffectual space. Teachers have the exhausting task of creating a dynamic space for teaching and learning that includes but extends beyond curriculum content and pedagogy. They must take responsibility “for building a space that values the integrity of the content, the learner, and the praxis – the implications of the Christian faith for faithful living.”⁷ On that point, the Lasallian tradition, articulated with particular clarity by De La Salle, is unequivocal: the Lasallian educator is called to “teach and touch hearts” so as to nourish the spirituality of learners for a *lived* faith. Rooted in a rich tradition, the Lasallian approach to catechesis and evangelization must maintain its fundamental identity: of humanizing, liberating, and evangelizing.

¹ Ernest J. Miller, FSC, D.Min., serves as the founding director of the District of Eastern North America’s Adrien Nyel Project, a ministry designed to animate the vocation for teaching within the Lasallian charism. Prior to taking on that role in September 2022, he served as vice president of mission, diversity and inclusion at La Salle University in Philadelphia. He has previously served in other District leadership roles and as a teacher at several Lasallian secondary schools. Brother Ernest has presented at numerous conferences, workshops and retreats on Lasallian historical and educational themes, the Catholic social tradition, human rights and religious brotherhood, among others.

² George Van Grieken, FSC, *MEL Bulletin No. 65: Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle and the Early Brothers* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, December 15, 2025).

³ Carlos Gomez, FSC, “Opening Remarks,” Lasallian Research Seminar on Catechesis, Casa Generalizia, Brothers of the Christian Schools, February 23, 2025.

⁴ Ibid. (emphasis added).

⁵ Lasallian Research Seminar on Catechesis Abstract, 2025.

⁶ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Growing and Educating Disciples—A Contemporary Road Map for Families and Educators on Enduring Christian Beliefs* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 91.

⁷ Elizabeth Caldwell, “Religious Instruction Homemaking,” in *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*, ed. Jack L. Seymour (Nashville: Abington Press, 1997), 81.