In 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, St. Paul wrote about God who works all things in all persons, and of the gifts of the Spirit being manifest in others. These words of St. Paul give me a perspective about teaching.

From the quiet influence and support of my family, the many of the teachers I had in elementary school, the Christian Brothers who first taught me at Seton-La Salle High, and professors at La Salle University and Villanova University all have been guides from whom I learned ideas as well as styles of teaching.

The initial years of formal studying have given way to ongoing lessons from so many others. Colleagues with whom I have taught, administrators who have set direction and provided professional development opportunities, parents who have shared stories about their children, and the students from my chemistry classes or on a track or cross country team have left lasting impressions and given those gifts of the Spirit as mentioned by St. Paul.

Teaching for many of us is a two way-street. We give of ourselves. Sometimes there may be situations and moments where what we are trying to achieve with our students doesn’t work as planned. Praying and thinking about the situation may bring us a new tactic to use.

Very often I have been surprised and on occasion inspired by what a young person may accomplish. In all of these moments, I become the learner. I receive their gifts.

Living within the Brothers’ community there are many moments of support that we give to each other. When we come together for prayer or for the Liturgy, there is a strength and bond we have as Brothers within our community and with our Lasallian Partners. When I work in the classroom, their gifts and influence support me. I don’t walk into the classroom alone. Regardless of our faiths, we, and our colleagues share in the effort to continue the work begun by John Baptist de La Salle.

One final reference to gifts that I think about relates to the phrase De La Salle used in the “Meditations for the Time of Retreat” referring to students as being “entrusted to your care.” When parents entrust their daughters and sons to our teaching, I view those young people as gifts whom we teach and from whom we are taught.

I grew up in a household with little cash but one rollin’ in love of others. My mechanic-father was perpetually stopping to help stranded drivers (much to the chagrin of his seven children), mom volunteered at the hospital or school or was cooking for someone in need, and we frequently spent evenings helping Father with projects around the school, rectory, or halfway house. I never dreamed of being a teacher growing up, but I did have a strong institution that a life spent on others was a life well spent. As I begin my 27th year in the classroom next month I can see my vocation, a common one perhaps, in retrospect. What I longed for in my youth was a place where all that I was, spiritually and intellectually, with my temperament, upbringing, and physical condition, could be most useful for the Kingdom of God. In other words, to the presence of good in the world.

Lasallian schools are the places where we bring that good into the world. Kids need adults around to help them grow up. We bring good into the world by being some of those adults. They need us to learn to calculate and write, to sculpt and act, to work together as a team, to learn when and how to fix things they mess up, and to learn how to work under pressure. Personally, one of the most appealing aspects of teaching is helping young folks explore how to use their free time well, especially in service to others. Whether helping flip pancakes for the hungry, driving the tutoring van to the elementary school, helping haul kids to the Food Bank, organizing the school’s team for the Run to Feed the Hungry—providing opportunities for kids to help others is a way we can help them learn to bring good into the world. And, just maybe, they too will find a hint of a vocation.

-Dr. Holly Peterson, Religious Studies Instructor, Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, CA

“Young people need good teachers, like visible angels.”

(MTR 5.1 [Med 197.1])
Ecclesiastes (Verse 1): “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.”

A “Vocation” is sometimes defined as Calling, an Aptitude, or a Talent... and sometimes less idealistically, as a job or a specific career. However, the premise of “Teaching as a Vocation” transcends these descriptions.

Most individuals can vividly recall the teacher that shared or gave something of meaning – whether or not in an academic or educational setting. Our earliest teachers, be they family, friends, or “formal educators” that made a significant difference in our lives, did so because they were a “special or gifted teacher.”

Mastery of a subject matter does not make a teacher. Although teaching as a discipline may perhaps be learned, studied, or refined, that “gift” – an ability to truly teach or reach an individual is as a result of a Vocation. The service to the student requires dedication and acknowledgment that “There is an appointed time for everything…” and your time is to teach.”Teaching as a Vocation” is one of God’s many gifts to teacher and student alike.

When I reflect on the beginning years of my journey as an educator, I think back to the fifth grade when I knew I wanted to teach PE. Even when my high school biology teacher said I “could do better than that” my desire to teach did not sway. Back then, I can’t say that I saw this as a vocation. It was just what I wanted to do. When I got my first full-time teaching position at St. Michael’s over 20 years ago, I loved it! Who wouldn’t? I got paid to play games most of the day. Even teaching science to seventh graders was fun. So, although I had learned about St. John Baptist de La Salle from my first principals, I did not make the connection that what I was loving to do as a teacher was the same as what I was being called to do as a vocation.

I recall my “Ah-Ha” moment. I was at a workshop for promoting vocations with Brothers and other teachers from all the schools in the New Orleans-Santa Fe District. After hearing the vocation stories from these dedicated men, I was inspired. At the end of the weekend, I told my small group that if I was male, I would be a Brother. This was the first time I realized that I had the same passions for enriching a child’s life as these men who vowed their life to this work. Within a few months, I attended the first session of the Lasallian Leadership Institute and my passion and understanding has continued to grow ever since.

It has been many years since I moved out of the gym and into different positions at St. Michael’s. I have discovered that the more I learn about the Lasallian mission and the dedication to “teaching minds and touching hearts,” the more I know that the work I do is truly a vocation. God has put me here for a reason and I continue to open myself to His guiding hand as I strive to carry on the work that St. John Baptist de La Salle started so many years ago. His vocational story of God leading him step by step continues to inspire me on my vocational journey as an educator.

-To touch the hearts of your students is the greatest miracle you can perform.”

(Med 139.3—feast of St. Peter)