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**“Together and by Association”  
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Giving glory and honor for God’s goodness and mercy.

How fitting for us to gather in this time of Pentecost. Perceptibly or imperceptibly, the conference organizers chose to summon us together in this Spirit-filled time that completes the saving events of Easter. Thus, it is instructive to note the significance of Easter and the Spirit as we reflect on the meaning of “together and by association” for those who minister in a school, university, retreat center or printing house in the Catholic and Lasallian tradition.

The legacy John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers bequeath to us today began on Easter 1680. Michel Sauvage, FSC, one of the foremost interpreters of the Founder, sets the context for us: “This date marks the beginning for the upheaval of the entire internal universe of De La Salle. It marks the perceptible taking hold of a process of interior and social liberation which [brought] him to a point where he had neither the intention, the desire, nor the courage to go by himself.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, together and by association, a fundamental characteristic of Lasallian charism and identity, emerges for De La Salle in Easter. Together and by association—at least the term—was born in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This explains why the Brothers’ vow of association—our first vow—is indispensable to our identity.

Brother Michel points out “the unifying principle of all the spiritual teaching of De La Salle is found in his teaching on the Holy Spirit. For De La Salle, it is the Spirit who leads him to an ever more profound

knowledge of ... the living God who saves. It is the Spirit that gives him his special charism.... It is the Spirit who leads the Brothers as it had led him to see the most urgent needs of [children and] young people. It is the Spirit who sends the Brothers to [them] with the enthusiasm, the hope, and the power to enter into combat against the injustice of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

In faith and hope, we trust the Spirit leads and sends us today, Brothers and Lasallian Partners, together and by association, into the mission field of Christian education and evangelization.

Alvaro Echeverria, FSC, former Brother Superior General, asserts: “In the context of the globalized world in which we live today, [association for the educational service of those who are poor] involves **excluding no one and being concerned principally about those who are excluded.**”<sup>3</sup>

With the prologue complete, let me pause to say I am pleased to be here. It is always a privilege when one is invited to offer some thoughts to somebody. This occasion is my first time addressing institutional advancement officers as a group. [Hereafter, institutional advancement as IA.]

Having taught in some well-regarded La Salle secondary schools in the DENA, and having served on some well-positioned governing boards in my district, I know why you do what you do and for whom you do it. Yet, I cannot claim proficiency in how you do what you do and the way you do it. We give thanks for your competency in the multifaceted field of institutional advancement and your commitment to ensure the longevity of Lasallian education and evangelization for the reign of God Jesus inaugurated.

With the opening meditation on Easter and the Spirit in view, this talk seeks to set out a broad perspective and interpretative frame in order to better appreciate the challenge that comes from witnessing the value of together and by association in daily ministry.

To achieve this purpose, I will have three movements: 1) providing a primer on the nature and purpose of Lasallian association; 2) identifying four markers to ground association; 3) closing thoughts, and then hopefully some comments and questions.

To anchor the conference theme, I begin the first movement by drawing on chapter 15, verse 58 in Paul's First Letter to the Christians in Corinth:

“Be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

De La Salle and the first Brothers most days were like the Apostles Peter and Paul, faltering as often as they flourished in God's work. That's why we must thrust aside the pious, sanitized view of De La Salle and the Founding Story that often holds sway. Let us not forget their reality: they had to contend with crises, conflict and stumbling blocks to conduct the Christian and Gratuitous Schools in the early years.

In 2010, the Institute promulgated Circular 461 “Associated for the Lasallian Mission...An Act of Hope.” This text is our most authoritative statement on association. It points out that “we recognize in today's quite different context the same factors...present at the origins of the [Institute and Lasallian education]: 1. crisis/crossroads, and 2. the eyes of faith/hope in the future.”<sup>4</sup>

Circular 461 puts forward five fundamental elements to “identify the experience of Lasallian association and promote unity in the ongoing, dynamic process of association across the Institute's Districts and Regions.”<sup>5</sup>

1. Association exists for the mission.
2. Association implies being a member of a community for the mission.
3. Association results from experience and is a dynamic journey, not an acquired status.

4. Association stems from faith, vocation, and state of life.
5. Association presupposes a freely made commitment.

Here, I will limit my focus to the first one: Association exists for the mission. The Circular reads: “The immediate and ultimate goal of all Lasallian association is our educational mission. There is no point in talking about association unless the discussion focuses on this mission. These reciprocal and dynamic realities of association and mission make explicit the Lasallian approach to faith, [justice] and community.”

According to 461, associated for mission supposes a participation in a collective Lasallian identity...framed in three fundamental dynamics.”<sup>6</sup>

1. De La Salle is our life-model and spiritual guide. He is the touchstone for discernment.
2. Brothers and Partners have co-responsibility for mission. Both the Brothers’ vocation and other Lasallian vocations are needed.
3. Association transcends any one ministry or circle of people.<sup>7</sup>

As the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter puts it,

“The Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called to do.”<sup>8</sup>

Second movement.

Like use of the term Lasallian, we must be careful association does not simply become a cliché. Therefore, I put forward four broad markers for your contemplation and response. They are proposed in light of association exists for mission.

1. Ministry is what we do

First and foremost, see your work as ministry. De La Salle emphasized that what we do as educators is an apostolic ministry. Like teachers and other educators in the school, university, retreat center, or publishing house, see yourself as ministers engaged in a Catholic and Lasallian educational community.

## 2. Publicness

Considering the publicness of your role, IA staff should take up mission education and formation for ministry. I hope you are afforded opportunities for some initial education and formation on the local or District level. If not, you should holler for it. Thereafter, take up participation in the Region's or Institute's programs, including the Brother John Johnston Institute for Contemporary Lasallian Practice, the Buttimer Institute for Lasallian Studies, or the International Lasallian University Leadership Program. It is a worthwhile investment.

These programs offer a learning process whereby you can begin to achieve a level of proficiency in elaborating what Lasallian education and evangelization is, as well as integrating and living association.

I urge movement towards intentionally employing the phrase "Lasallian education" or "Lasallian education and evangelization" in your ministry's oral and print communications. I agree with the view that we are not about pretentiousness and prestige for the sake of status. Yet, false humility has no place. We are about achieving excellence in the whole realm of Christian education. So, joyfully and unapologetically tell your ministry's story which is part of a bigger historical narrative now into its fourth century.

## 3. Relationships in community

De La Salle emphasized the constancy of relationships in community. Thus, consider how you contribute to building community not only with alumni/ae and benefactors, but also within your ministry itself. How aware are you of what is happening across academic departments, co-

curricular and extra-curricular activities? Do you join the wider school or university community in its diverse array of activities?

To what extent do others beyond IA know how IA works? There are myths and misperceptions about what IA does. To dispel myths and misperceptions, active and conscious participation in the larger community probably helps. Developing a wide-ranging web of respectful and productive relationships within the campus community is as important as developing them beyond the campus community.

#### 4. Giving for mission

Each Lasallian ministry seeks to achieve the purpose of the Institute, to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially those who are poor, in different ways. Where it still prevails, arresting the “Brothers’ Boy” attitude as a reason for giving is necessary and prudent. Effecting such a change must be done carefully and strategically. Bring the cherished experiences of older alums into conversation with the current articulations and expressions of the La Salle heritage. While challenging to shift attitudes and motivations, giving **for mission** as lived in your La Salle ministry today is fitting and sensible in order to sustain fundraising beyond the “Brothers’ Boy.” Earnestly take up the task to provide alumni/ae, other donors, and parents a fresh, deeper perspective of the Institute’s mission and the distinctive character of Lasallian education today.

To conclude, the way of living Lasallian association and the way of doing Lasallian mission are inseparable ways. It is up this undivided road, this steep road, Brothers and Partners must travel and toil. Association and Mission are undivided in the bold faith-filled and spirit-filled vision of John Baptist de La Salle. They cannot, therefore, be divided in our purpose, our action, and our life.

The gifting of the Spirit comes to us as individual persons and as a community of faith. Every generation needs a Pentecost. Convoing Vatican Council II, John XXIII, a great and wonderful Christian and (Lasallian) Saint, prayed for a new Pentecost in our day. His prayer is

coordinate with Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermonic words, the "fierce urgency of now."<sup>9</sup>

Strengthen your association with one another as you strengthen your association with the Pentecost Spirit. Like the disciples in the Upper Room, we need the Spirit to help us overcome fears, to overcome locked doors, to overcome indecision. We need the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit to breathe new life in us to act with holy boldness.

Lasallian education and evangelization are to be ever vital and vibrant for God's reign now. To that end, association for mission must hear the echo in the liturgical invocation De La Salle uses in his meditation for the Vigil of Pentecost: "Send forth your Holy Spirit to give us a new life and you will renew the face of the earth."

Giving glory and honor to almighty God.

1 The Gospel Journey of St. John Baptist de La Salle, Center of St. Louis of the French, Rome, 1984, trans. Luke Salm, FSC, 7.

2 *ibid.*, 17

3 Associated with the God of the Poor, Pastoral Letter, 25 December 2003., [http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/cartas\\_pastorales/2003\\_cpast\\_en.pdf](http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/cartas_pastorales/2003_cpast_en.pdf)

4 Circular 412,17

5. *Ibid.*, 23

6. *Ibid.*, 24

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Bulletin of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, No.239, July 1993.

9. <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/christianityfortherestofus/2011/01/martin-luther-king-jr-fierce-urgency-of-now.html>