

Contributions of the De La Salle Christian Brothers

The Brothers have been in education much longer than the years that were honored at the recent event. The first ones were the De La Salle Christian Brothers, who came to Montréal in 1837, and from there expanded to just about everywhere in North America. These years honored at the symposium were outlined to mention the fact that the Brothers, no matter from which congregation, played a prominent role in improving public teaching in high schools in the Québec State, mostly but not exclusively in the larger cities.

One very important thing to know though and that explains why the Brothers (and also the Sisters, of course) were so involved in public school teaching, is that the education system was based on religion: the schools boards were either Catholic or Protestant! A school board, for example, would ask a congregation to take charge of a given school, and the community was in charge of everything, including hiring the teachers, etc.

We, as De La Salle Christian Brothers, for example, had very few private schools; beside the Juniorates, which were indeed private high schools (and we had, at one moment, in the late 1950s, six of them at the same time in Québec...), the Brothers only had two private schools in all four Districts: the *Académie de Québec*, in Québec City, and *Mont-Saint-Louis*, in Montréal; absolutely all the other schools the Brothers were in charge of were public schools and, of course, those schools did not belong to them. Incidentally, the notion of Diocesan schools never existed. However, religion was taught in all schools and there was a campus minister in each of them.

In 1964 the public education system was completely changed and modernized, including the creation of large school boards in charge of generally very large secondary schools (ordinarily two to five of them in each board, with 700 to more than 2,000 students in each school), of a new primary level of six years (instead of seven), of a public university network (at least six of them were opened between 1966 and 1970) and finally, of a new “college” level that did not (and still does not) have anything to do with university degrees: the college level (which can be public or private) offers a university-preparatory two-year program or a technology-centered three-year program (which normally does not open university doors). Religion was also taught everywhere in primary and secondary schools, since all the boards were still, in that new system, either Catholic or Protestant. It changed drastically though, a few years ago, as all the boards became either French or English, with no more religion being taught.

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