



THE TEACHING MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

People often mistake Alan Parham for a priest. He may wear a black shirt and a special brother's collar that looks similar to a priest's Roman collar, but he is not a priest. He is a brother, who belongs to the congregation called Brothers of the Christian Schools (F.S.C.), also known as the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

The brothers are big believers in education. Their mission is to provide a Christian education to the young, especially the poor. Their founder Saint John Baptist De La Salle, a French priest, saw the need in the late 17th century for this kind of religious congregation because of the number of poor boys who didn't have futures because they lacked an education. In order to educate them, De La Salle needed a group of dedicated teachers. That is how the Christian Brothers came into being.

Now, there are about 5,000 of the brothers around the world, and in the diocese their presence and influence are known at the following places: Lewis University in Romeoville, Montini High School in Lombard and the La Salle Retreat Center in Plano.

Brother Parham's journey toward being a brother has been an interesting one. He thought about becoming a Trappist monk and entered a monastery when he was 26. He stayed for six years, but never made his final vows. He then became a teacher and taught in Columbia, South America, for a while. But the call to religious life still beckoned to him.

He approached the Christian Brothers at age 40, hoping to enter their order. He received his final vows several years later, in 2001. He said most men are drawn to becoming a brother because of a need to see teaching more as a ministry.

"Often, young men who are teaching in a Catholic school, or are studying to be teachers at Catholic schools, begin to realize that it could absolutely be a ministry for them," said Brother Parham, the associate director of vocations for the Christian Brothers of the Midwest. "And our community life is supportive of that. Very often, we work with a lot with college students who are thinking about that. But sometimes there are young men who are single, they're teaching in the Catholic schools, and they begin to think, 'I would like to have a little bit more of a commitment to this.' They begin to consider the possibility of our community, especially if they know the brothers."

He said collaboration is key to the brothers. He used the phrase "association for the education service of the poor" when describing the brothers' charism.

"We work together to serve those educational needs," Brother Parham said. "Association is an extremely important word for us because it also means collaborating with lay people who also work in our schools and ministries. So it's not just the brothers; we believe it is very important to share our charism."



The Year of Consecrated Life was announced last year by Pope Francis. It began during the First Sunday of Advent during 2014 and will end on Feb. 2, 2016. In the months ahead, the magazine will be celebrating the year with articles focusing on consecrated life.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS, GO TO [HTTP://WWW.BROTHERSVOCATION.ORG/](http://www.brothersvocation.org/). IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT A POSSIBLE VOCATION, EMAIL BROTHER PARHAM AT APARHAM@CBMIDWEST.ORG.