

# Discussion Questions for Selected Lasallian Publications

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## **Publications**

*Meditations for the Time of Retreat*

*Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an Act of HOPE*

*The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*

## ***Meditations for the Time of Retreat*** **St. John Baptist de La Salle**

First published circa 1730 in France, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MTR) is a collection of 16 three-part reflections composed by Saint John Baptist de La Salle for use by the Brothers on their annual end-of-school retreat.

Based on Scripture – particularly the Pauline letters – and earlier writings by De La Salle – particularly *Conduct of Schools* and the *Rule of the Institute*, this work moves its readers through a carefully crafted sequence of meditations that call them into a dialogue with both God and their own ministerial story. The goal is the readers' prayerful and challenging encounter with the true nature of their lives and their work as, in today's language, Lasallians.

As historian and scholar Brother Miguel Campos, FSC wrote in his Introduction to the 1975 edition of *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*:

These meditations go to the heart of the life of the Brothers by inviting them to consider, in the spirit of faith and zeal, the lived experience of their Institute, the experience of God discovered in their own day-to-day relations with students. When De La Salle invites the Brothers to consider their work in the Christian Schools, he is not engaging them in considerations that are historical, theological, or pedagogical. He is not urging the Brothers with abstract reasons derived from theological or pedagogical theories, nor even from the Bible. Rather, he invites the Brothers to deepen their understanding, through contemplation and prayer, of the purpose of their being Brothers, not what they are living for but for whom they exist as Brothers. The Founder is helping them both to study the substance of their daily experience in the educational service they provide and to see the Gospel dimensions of this service and of all that it demands. (p.19)

## Reflection/Discussion Questions

### **FIRST MEDITATION: *That God in his Providence has established the Christian Schools***

1. In what ways do you experience God's presence in your school? In your work?
2. What does it mean to you to be a person of "knowledge and zeal" to your students?
3. What feelings does "be an instrument of salvation to your students" stir in you?

### **SECOND MEDITATION: *On the means that must be used by those who are responsible for the education of children to procure their sanctification***

1. In what ways do you make your school a good place for students to be?
2. What does the word "ministry" mean to you?
3. How might a person teach "habits of virtue" to students?

### **THIRD MEDITATION: *That those who teach the young are cooperators with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls***

1. What are the ways in which you discern God's will in your life?
2. What is "the letter which Jesus Christ dictates to you"?
3. How do you see yourself as a cooperator with Jesus Christ ?

### **FOURTH MEDITATION: *What must be done to be true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children***

1. What impedes you the most in reaching out to challenging students?
2. Do you study the Gospel so as to make it come alive in your work?
3. How do you bring your students and work to your prayer each day?

### **FIFTH MEDITATION: *That those chosen by Providence for the education of children must fulfill the functions of Guardian Angels for them***

1. What does it mean to you to do whatever God "requires of you" to secure your students' well-being?
2. What means do you give to your students to help them to understand, appreciate, and practice the maxims of the Gospel?
3. What does practicing "care and vigilance" mean to you?

### **SIXTH MEDITATION: *How in the education of youth the function of the Guardian Angels is fulfilled***

1. In what ways do you link your prayer and your work?
2. What does it mean to you to be "zealous for the good of those in your care"?
3. Which of the dispositions listed in the third point do you find the hardest to inspire in your students?

**SEVENTH MEDITATION: *That the care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church***

1. What does it mean to you that your work "has been entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers"?
2. Do you see yourself as a person in a line of persons doing God's work of salvation that goes back to the Apostles themselves?
3. What does it mean to you that your work is entirely dependent on the grace of God?

**EIGHTH MEDITATION: *On what must be done to make your ministry useful to the Church***

1. What does "catechize and instruct the poor" say to you?
2. How do you lead your students to "receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit"?
3. What does "put students on the road to heaven" say to you?

**NINTH MEDITATION: *On the obligation of those who instruct youth to have much zeal to fulfill well so holy a work***

1. What does it mean to you that "God has established you in your work"?
2. How do you "have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in the instruction of these children"?
3. What does it mean for you to tell parents, "Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves"?

**TENTH MEDITATION: *How a Brother of the Christian Schools ought to show zeal in his work***

1. What does it mean to you that the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools was the destruction of sin?
2. What does it mean for you to inspire your students to "love poverty"?
3. How do you make sure that your words to your students are in harmony with your actions?

**ELEVENTH MEDITATION: *On the obligation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to reprove and correct the faults committed by those whom they are charged to instruct***

1. What does it mean to you to correct your students out of a desire for their well-being and salvation?
2. What does it mean to you that "folly is tied to the neck of children"?
3. What does it mean to you to be "accountable for students' souls"?

**TWELFTH MEDITATION: *On the way in which we must reprove and correct the faults of those whom we are guiding***

1. How do you prevent anger and impatience from entering into your correction of students?
2. Do you bring the day's corrections of your students to prayer?
3. What do you believe are the results that corrections of your students "ought to have"?

**THIRTEENTH MEDITATION: *That as a teacher you must give an account to God on the way you have done your work***

1. Do you examine yourself and your work before God?
2. Do you understand that devoting yourself to the salvation of your students is also how you work out your own salvation?
3. Do you understand how your work with your students also builds up the Church?

**FOURTEENTH MEDITATION: *On matters related to his work on which a Brother of the Christian Schools must give an account to God***

1. What do you think it means to "procure God's glory and to give children the spirit of wisdom, the insight to know him, and to enlighten the eyes of their hearts"?
2. How is it possible for your responsibility for your students to extend beyond classroom instruction?
3. What is the significance of "the intention and the manner" of what you say and do to your students?

**FIFTEENTH MEDITATION: *On the reward that those can expect even in this life who have instructed children and have fulfilled this duty well***

1. Are you content that the rewards mentioned in the first point are sufficient for the unconditional commitment that you are asked to make to the service of your students?
2. Is it enough for you if those that you teach lead lives of value and worth?
3. What do De La Salle's words in the third point say to you about the relationship between faith and Lasallian ministry?

**SIXTEENTH MEDITATION: *On the reward that a Brother of the Christian Schools should expect in heaven, if he is faithful in his work***

1. Do you see your ultimate happiness and fulfillment as vitally connected to the work that you do with your students?
2. How do you see the state of your present commitment to your Lasallian ministry?
3. What do you see as the future of your association with the Lasallian mission?

***Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of HOPE***  
**Circular 461**  
**General Council, Brothers of the Christian Schools**

*Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of HOPE* (Circular 461) was published in September of 2010 by the General Council of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It is one in a series of letters, or “circulars” regularly distributed to Brothers and also, more recently, to Lasallian Partners. Historically, the purpose of these circulars has been for the Superior General and his General Council to address topics that are both timely and important to the Institute, the Lasallian Family and, of course, the Lasallian mission.

Circular 461 focuses on the issue of association. This foundational characteristic of the Institute and of the Brothers’ consecrated life now must fill its traditional role in a steadily expanding and changing context. This requires that association must be clearly understood, well-understood, and creatively lived. The document addresses this through its Introduction and six chapters:

1. Association: A Fundamental Characteristic of the Lasallian Charism
2. Fundamental Elements of Lasallian Association
3. Lasallian Association: Common Characteristics Experienced in Different Ways
4. The Need for Discernment
5. The Lasallian Family
6. Fostering Association

This passage from the document’s Introduction serves to summarize both its content and purpose:

Association is a fundamental trait of the Lasallian charism. In this circular we highlight the essential aspects of Lasallian association by examining its lived reality, defining its relevant terms, and discerning its guidelines. We discuss various ways to advance the concept of association locally, regionally, and globally. We conclude by examining what it means to say, “I am associated with the Lasallian mission. I belong to the Lasallian Family,” and provide some concrete recommendations for consideration. We believe that a comprehensive look at the make-up of the Lasallian Family will enhance and complement an understanding of association. (Circular 461, 1.7)

## Reflection/Discussion Questions

### Introduction

1. What does the story about De La Salle Teacher Training College graduates suggest to you about the nature and realities of association?
2. How would you complete this statement: "I am associated with the Lasallian Mission. I belong to the Lasallian Family. Because..."
3. What do you see as the strengths and as the challenges of the world-wide diversity of the Lasallian experience?
4. How does the Introduction either speak to or challenge your own concept of vocation?

### Association: A Fundamental Characteristic of the Lasallian Charism

1. What strikes you most about the story of the origins and early evolution of association for mission?
2. In what ways do you think the Brothers' founding story informs how today's Lasallians might best the challenge leading the mission through changing and challenging times?
3. "The Lasallian mission, the human and Christian education of young people 'far from salvation,' has no future unless built upon the fundamental traits of Lasallian association, both among the Brothers, and among all other Lasallians, who commit themselves in various forms to the Lasallian educational mission." What excites you about this statement? What makes you uncomfortable? What questions does it raise for you?

### Fundamental Elements of Lasallian Association

1. Consider each of the five elements of Lasallian association. Which seem to be the most present or accessible in your own situation? Which seem to be the most distant or unattainable? Which just perplex you?
2. In what ways are you committed to the mission of serving the poor? In what ways are you committed to the mission of being a transforming presence in your society?
3. "Associating with the Lasallian mission requires integration of the fundamental elements of the Lasallian charism in their personal, community, and professional life." What does this statement say to you? What questions does it raise for you?

### Lasallian Association: Common Characteristics Experienced in Different Ways

1. "Inspired by the Founder's writings and experience and by the living tradition of the Institute, Lasallians regard education as a process of integral human formation." What implications does this statement have for you as a teacher? As an administrator?

2. How would you explain how “association for mission” goes beyond the idea of just “association”. In what ways do you see yourself being in “association for mission”?
3. In what ways do you see “unity in diversity” reflected among your Lasallian colleagues? In what ways do you see it reflected among the Lasallian ministries in your District and beyond?

### **The Need for Discernment**

1. What does the dynamic of association look like in your locale? What appear to be its strengths and its challenges?
2. What are your thoughts on the future of association within the Lasallian family? What needs or concerns do you feel should drive its evolution?
3. Consider Brother Antonio Botana’s suggested criteria for discerning Lasallian association. (p. 44 ff) Where do you see yourself according to the criteria? What would you need in order to grow in those areas?

### **The Lasallian Family**

1. The Circular suggests that the ultimate vision and purpose of association is “to join in the bounty of multi-cultural, multi-religious and innovative ways of belonging to the Lasallian Family.” What is your sense of where things stand now in this regard?
2. What implications does the image of “Lasallian Family” have for you?
3. Consider the suggested “models” for Lasallian family. (p.51 ff) Which one(s) resonate with you and why?
4. Consider the listed Lasallian Family challenges. (p. 55 ff) What things do you feel can be done in your locale to address these challenges?

### **Fostering Association**

1. A statement to the Brothers from the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter reads: “We have become more aware of our responsibility to be heart, memory, and guarantors of the Lasallian charism for all Lasallians. At the same time, we rejoice when other Lasallians take on this responsibility.” What do the words “heart, memory, and guarantors” say to you?
2. In an expanded model of association, what do you see as needed, both in the short-term and in the long-term, in order for all Lasallians to be “heart, memory, and guarantors” of the Lasallian charism?



## ***The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*** **Brother Agathon, FSC**

*The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* was composed by Brother Agathon, FSC, who was Superior General of the Institute 1777-1795. It was first published in 1785 and eventually translated from the original French into numerous languages in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The work was written to the Brothers as a circular letter, intended for their own instruction and edification. Taking the 12 virtues that Saint John Baptist de La Salle had himself recommended in several of his own books, Brother Agathon undertook to re-present the virtues in light of the new times and new experiences of the Institute. As he explained in his Introduction to the letter:

We do not intend to speak of these virtues in theory; we are satisfied — and must be satisfied — with simply making an application of these virtues to the end we propose to attain; and it is in this perspective that we will consider them in the pages that follow.

Here is the order to which we will conform. We will explain the true character of each virtue, the particular traits proper to it, and the defects opposed to it. Thus we are going to offer you a series of tableaux, as many as there are virtues to consider. In beholding these, an intelligent and attentive teacher will easily perceive what he needs to do and to avoid in order to make his teaching more effective. (*The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, 2008, p. xi)

In time, *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* would gain significant popularity both within and outside of the Institute. For those not associated with the Lasallian mission, *Virtues* offers a simple set of ideals that teachers can apply either separately or together to their professional performance. However, for those in the Lasallian mission, *Virtues* is much more. According to Lasallian historian and scholar Brother Gerard Rummery, FSC in his Preface to the 2008 edition:

The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher (*Les Douze Vertus d'un bon Maître*), by Brother Agathon, the fifth Superior General (1777–95) of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is, in my view, after the monumental text we know as *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, the most significant work in education in the Lasallian heritage. Some one hundred years after the first schools, it affords a kind of benchmark by which to judge the fidelity of the Institute to the founding vision. (2008, p. 1)

## Reflection/Discussion Questions

**Gravity (Seriousness) is a virtue that regulates the exterior of a teacher conformably to modesty, politeness, and good order.**

1. What does this quote from Parker Palmer say to you?: “Whoever our students may be, whatever subject we teach, ultimately we teach who we are.”
2. What are the different ways in which you seek to “set the tone” in your relationships with your students?

**Silence is a virtue that leads the teacher to avoid speaking when he should not speak and to speak when he should not be silent.**

1. What does this quote from Chaim Potok say to you?: ““I’ve begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own.”
2. In what ways can the modes of your communication impact your students’ personal and academic formation?

**Humility is a virtue that inspires us with low sentiments of ourselves; it attributes to us our just due.**

1. What does this quote from Ernest Hemingway say to you?: “There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”
2. What are the ways in which you can mentor students in understandings of humility that serve to affirm and not diminish their sense of self-worth?

**Prudence is a virtue that makes us understand what we need to do and what we need to avoid.**

1. What does this quote from C.S. Lewis say to you?: “(Christ) wants us to be simple, single-minded, affectionate, and teachable, as good children are; but He also wants every bit of intelligence we have to be alert at its job, and in first-class fighting trim.”
2. In what areas of your ministry would you consider prudence to be of the greatest importance?

**Wisdom is a virtue that gives us knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly.**

1. What does this quote from Paulo Coelho say to you?: ““The simple things are also the most extraordinary things, and only the wise can see them.”
2. What are the things that you do that lead your students to view all things with the eyes of faith?

**Patience is a virtue that makes us over-come, without murmuring and with submission to the will of God, all the evils of this life, especially the cares inseparable from the education of youth.**

1. What does this quote from Rainer Maria Rilke say to you?: “Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything.”
2. From where does your impatience with students usually stem? What things can you do to address this?

**Reserve is a virtue that makes us think, speak, and act with moderation, discretion, and modesty.**

1. What does this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer say to you?: “In other times it may have been the business of Christianity to champion the equality of all; its business today will be to defend passionately human dignity and reserve.”
2. In what ways does your demeanor with your students serve as a response to the incivility to which they are so often exposed in society?

**Gentleness is a virtue that inspires us with goodness, sensitivity, and tenderness.**

1. What does this quote from Brennan Manning say to you?: “Our identity rests in God's relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ.”
2. What are the challenges that you face in finding within yourself and then expressing compassion for your students in their worst moments?

**Zeal is a virtue that makes us procure the glory of God with great affection.**

1. What does this quote from Israelmore Ayivor say to you?: “Don't be discouraged when someone says you can't do it. You might have been the only one sent to do it.”
2. What do you see as your role in realizing and stewarding the Lasallian mission?

**Vigilance is the virtue that makes us diligent and painstaking in fulfilling all our duties.**

1. What does this quote from Stephen Grosz say to you?: “Being present, whether with children, with friends, or even with oneself, is hard work. But isn't this attentiveness -- the feeling that someone is trying to think about us -- something we want more than praise?”
2. What do you think are the different places and ways in your world in which you are called to be vigilant?

**Piety is a virtue that makes us fulfill worthily our duties toward God.**

1. What does this quote from Saint Augustine say to you?: “If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.”

2. How would you say that your spirituality is not only expressive of your experiences and vision but also inclusive of those of your students?

**Generosity is a virtue that makes us voluntarily sacrifice our personal interests to those of our neighbor, conformably to the example of Saint Paul, who said that he was "not seeking my own advantage but that of many so that they may be saved." (1 Corinthians 10:33).**

1. What does this quote from John Bunyan say to you?: "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."
2. How would you say your own example and the tone of your work help to cultivate a spirit of generosity within your students and within your school?