

**Justice in the World and the Mission of Lasallian Education Today:
Enacting the Common Good
LACU Livestream Symposium
April 7, 2021**

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us
as constitutive dimensions of the preaching of the Gospel.”

-Justice in the World

“Preach by example and practice before the eyes of the young what you wish them to accept.”

-St. John Baptist de La Salle, Med.99.2

After attending the virtual “Lasallian Education and Justice Symposium” on April 7, I’ve been reflecting on and praying about my role as a teacher and mother. As the mother of a white, eighteen-year-old young man, I have never had to worry that he would lose his life during a routine stop by police. That is systemic white privilege. We are losing generations upon generations of beautiful black and brown boys. Our brothers and sisters of color in the Lasallian family and around the country are mourning and weeping.

It has been almost two weeks since the symposium. In that time, police have killed another young black man in Minneapolis. Daunte Wright. I mentioned his name in prayer in my classroom the other day and some of my students had no idea who he was. As a white Lasallian educator speaking now to my white colleagues, we don’t have the luxury of waiting to speak up or act. Action on behalf of justice really is who we are called to be. We need to do better because our silence is complicity. In the words of Brother David Darst, “Neutrality is not possible.”

So, what does speaking up or acting look like in the context of my Lasallian classroom or yours? For me, in the last week or so, that has meant saying Daunte Wright’s name. When a student of color recently confided in a journal that he is struggling, it meant writing a thoughtful and heartfelt response back to him. It meant letting him know that God loves and created him just as he is and then proving it to him by “having his back” and referring to racism as a sin in class discussions. Or when a white student writes a reflection and indicates that he believes our last election “was stolen,” reminding him of the truth that our elections are fair and just. The work of justice sometimes involves confronting lies. It is always about truth telling.

Most of us have spent the year teaching in some capacity behind a screen in a virtual or hybrid format. During this crazy and challenging year, it is tempting to “stick to

content.” But we need to hear the words of Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, anew. “Business as usual was not acceptable to Jesus or to John Baptist de La Salle...we are consistently and persistently called to upset the usual way of doing things.” (Pastoral Letter to the Brothers, 2020)

As Dr. Carol Ann Gittens reminded me, this work of invitation, cultivating relationships, creating safe spaces, truly listening, becoming more aware of my own biases, and sitting in prayer with that discomfort requires practice. So much practice. Learning the skills of inclusive justice, like all learning, requires me to practice them daily. Decades of old habits and thinking patterns will not die overnight. They require work and the commitment to confront my role in the system and how I have benefited from it. This work is often unsettling, unnerving, and makes me uneasy. As a Lasallian, I can pause and rest in that messiness, remembering that I am in the holy presence of the One who loves me even in my contradictions.

My white colleagues in Lasallian education, my white friends and family members, I implore you to listen to what our students and family members of color are telling us. I implore you to believe them, to become aware and to educate yourselves on the topic of racial equity and justice. Let those with ears listen. May we incline our ears closer and Lord, have mercy on us for this loss of beautiful, vibrant, varied human life.

Lord, help ME to listen. Help ME to use my voice, my connections, and my influence to amplify your call for justice in our land.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... Pray for us.
Live Jesus in our hearts ... Forever!

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