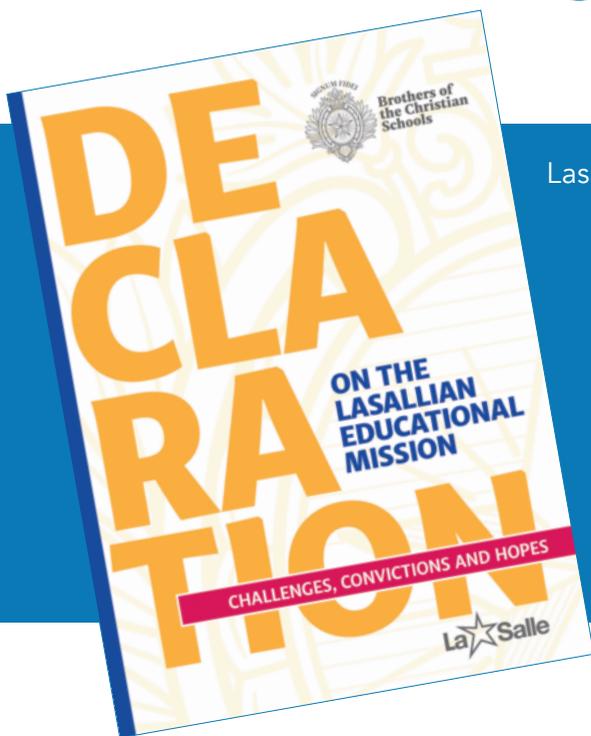


Exploring Lasallian documents.

Uncovering Lasallian research.

Sparking engagement to build a deeper understanding of mission and community.



Lasallian Essentials, a new section of *De La Salle Today*, will appear in each issue and focus on bringing Lasallian documents to life. The section will offer insight on Lasallian publications, share listings of valuable resources and explore topics of Lasallian interest. This inaugural section highlights the *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes* with the goal of offering an understanding of the document and suggestions on how to engage with it.

Do you have a suggestion for what you would like to see in this new section?  
Email your ideas to [communications@lasallian.info](mailto:communications@lasallian.info).

# How to Engage with the Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission

By Brother Robert Smith, FSC, Ph.D.



The *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes* is the most recent substantive statement on our shared Lasallian educational mission. Released by Brother Superior General Robert Schieler, FSC, and the General Council on April 30, 2020, the anniversary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle's birth, the 45th General Chapter (2014) and the 2nd International Mission Assembly (2013) called for this document, which is intended to "give us a central reference point for our educational work so that it is life-giving and creative for [those] entrusted to our care" (Page 8). We are in debt to the members of the International Council for Lasallian Association and the Educational Mission (CIAMEL) for their forbearance and diligence in bringing this important document to fruition.

## What is the Declaration?

The Declaration could well serve as a primer on the Lasallian mission, offering as it does four distinct parts that include the historical development of the Institute, those who have been and continue to be engaged in the educational mission, the fundamental theological and pedagogical principles that serve as the foundation of the mission, and a nod toward the future and

its challenges. The text is readable, engaging, informative and, at points, challenging. It speaks to those who have been engaged in the mission for many years and those new to the Lasallian family.

The Declaration is not an update of the 1967 then-seminal document *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, which was written for and by Brothers. This Declaration offers a starting point for an ongoing reflection on the Lasallian educational mission. It is important to realize that while the Declaration was developed by the work of many individuals committed to the Lasallian mission over many years, it is officially published with the authority of the Superior General. Hence, it rightly has—or ought to have—a more weighty importance Institute-wide and should be recognized as the most comprehensive and "definitive" statement of the global Lasallian mission to date.

To complement the Declaration, it would be helpful to read the *Identity Criteria for the Vitality of Lasallian Educational Ministries*, which was also called for by the 45th General Chapter, composed by CIAMEL and released by the Superior General. That document offers 27 criteria to consider in assessing Lasallian educational ministries, as well as means and methods to apply such an analysis in unique settings.

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Brother Robert Smith, FSC, Ph.D., a moral theologian, is senior vice president for university initiatives and special advisor to the president at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. A Brother and Lasallian educator for more than 40 years, he has studied the Declaration and led small group discussions on its content. Special thanks to Alisa Macksey, CIAMEL chair, for her editorial assistance.

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## Five Key Takeaways

1. An unambiguous commitment to inclusion: "...inclusive of all cultures, open to all religions, and have a message for all the people who participate in the Mission." (Pages 9, 49, 78)
2. A reminder of and a renewed commitment to those on the edges, the poor, the less privileged, those generally unrepresented groups and those who are forgotten or written off by the societies in which they (and we) live: "...the great challenge of Lasallian education is, precisely, to be accessible to the poorest." (Pages 88–90)
3. A recognition of the changing nature of the educational enterprise, the means and methods of doing the work of education, and the truly extraordinary challenges to be overcome at all levels of education: "Education should not be viewed as synonymous with school. Our Mission has found other pathways to follow through informal education, pastoral action, evangelisation in other forums and by virtual presence in the media outside the school setting." (Pages 103–109)
4. An acknowledgment and celebration of the genuine vocation of committing oneself as a Lasallian educator and understanding this as a divinely-inspired call: "Brothers and lay Lasallians see themselves as being called together and united by God, each in their own individual vocation, to respond to the needs of society." (Pages 49, 63–64)
5. A presentation of 12 statements of belief or "declarations" at the conclusion, offered in the following spirit: "We accept the past with gratitude, embrace the present with joy and look to the future full of hope." These 12 declarations provide a wonderful opportunity for reflection, discussion, debate and engagement. (Pages 117–122)

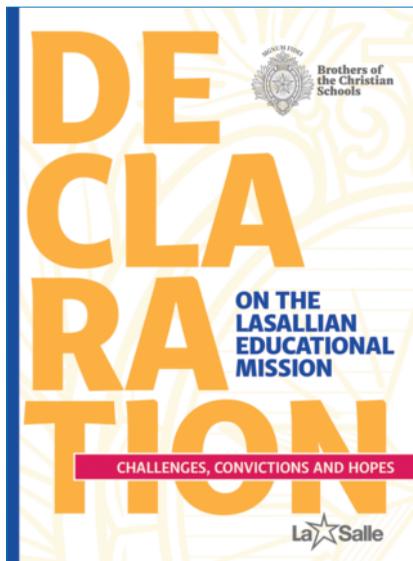
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**"...Brothers and laity feel called and gathered by God, each one with his/her personal vocation to respond to society's needs." (Page 49)**

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. As I/we read and reflect on the document and its 12 declarations, what three declarations do I/we feel are most important and why?
2. If I/we were given the opportunity to add a 13th declaration, what would it be and why should it be included in this list?
3. Given the Declaration's strong affirmation of and commitment to diversity and inclusion, what can I/we (individual, group, institution) do to embrace and reinforce this reality through your participation in the Lasallian mission?
4. As the text comes near to its end, we read: "...God has guided the Institute to find, in every century according to different circumstances and places, the means, the people, the committed groups and associates to continue this mission of a human and Christian education..." (Page 116) How might I/we restate this in my/our own words and grounded in my/our own experience of the Lasallian educational mission?



“The realities of this world urge us to take proactive and not reactive positions that put us at the forefront of educational innovation.”  
(Page 87)

## 12 Declarations

1. We firmly believe that children and young people are a call to hope and commitment.
2. We believe that in the faces of the impoverished and vulnerable we find God’s saving power.
3. We believe in the inspiring and mediating power of the educator.
4. We believe that the educational community is a core component in the building up of the person and the transmission of values.
5. We believe that our Lasallian association is a gift from God to the world and an extraordinary means to continue the legacy received from our living three-hundred-year heritage.
6. We believe that education makes possible the search for and transmission of the truth.
7. We believe that education is a fundamental, powerful and productive resource for the care of the Earth and the defense of the habitat where life can flourish and sustain itself.
8. We believe in the transforming capacity of education.
9. We believe that Lasallian education is an expression of Christian humanism.
10. We believe in the evangelizing power of the school.
11. We believe that today’s realities demand taking risks and being creative.
12. We believe that another world is possible, and that education is a fundamental force for building it.

*Read the Declaration at  
[www.Lasallian.info/Declaration](http://www.Lasallian.info/Declaration).*