

**Justice in the World and the Mission of Lasallian Education Today:
Enacting the Common Good
LACU Livestream Symposium
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Reflection

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One of the many blessings of the recent presentation and panel discussion “Justice in the World and the Mission of Lasallian Education Today: Enacting the Common Good” was the repeated reference to [Circular 412](#) - a document published in 1980 by the General Council of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Though it was previously unfamiliar to me, now I would recommend it to anyone involved in social justice work, or to any Lasallian simply in need of a reminder of the essence of why we do what we do. It made me (even more) proud to consider myself a Lasallian.

The inextricably linked themes of *service to the poor* and *Catholic spirituality* permeate the pages of Circular 412. These bedrock concepts were integrated for De La Salle, as they are integrated in this document. Our faith fuels our commitment to justice, and acts of justice give life and depth to our faith. It inspired me to reflect on how these themes are alive at the Lasallian institution with which I am associated, Saint Mary's University of MN. Undoubtedly, and as evidenced in the aforementioned circular, there are inspiring examples throughout the world wherever a Lasallian can be found. However, by necessity (and brevity) I will limit my reflection to two inspiring ways in which these themes are lived out at the university with which I am most familiar.

Theme One: Service to the Poor

A visionary part of our strategic plan is completing the feasibility study to start a guild for people within our local community in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in Minneapolis, within which our campus is located. The guild will reach people who are marginalized from education and efficiently elevate them out of poverty by providing free training in a trade and connecting them with employment partners in need of such skills. This initiative manifests the heart of the Lasallian charism (De La Salle also provided trades education) and, not surprisingly, is already inspiring zeal in those involved in the early stages of bringing this vision to life.

These institutions are not closed in on themselves, but by opening themselves to the needs of their milieu, they find the inspiration and the enthusiasm needed to renew their own educational activity. They develop a profoundly human and Christian environment whose influence spreads all around them. (Circular 412, p. 47)

Theme Two: Catholic Spirituality

Saint Mary's University's Character and Virtue Initiative promotes justice through striving to educate the university community about the cardinal virtues: prudence (wisdom), justice,

courage, and temperance (self-control). Virtue education reminds us that justice must be cultivated not only at the macro level of societal laws and institutions, but also in the character of every individual. We need *just people* to make *just laws*, but even then, no set of laws could possibly cover all of the situations in which justice is required. *Justice as virtue* encourages self-reflection and personal commitment to even small, everyday aspects of justice.

Educating the university community about the *virtue of justice* connects people with our rich Catholic intellectual tradition. St. Thomas Aquinas defined justice as giving the other person their due, ultimately in the service of giving God His due. Justice flows from our love of neighbor and love of God. Acting justly helps to form our will and helps us live more fully what it means to be human. We act justly out of an ever-present awareness that the “other” is literally our *brother or sister in Christ*. De La Salle saw his students in this light; he said, “Look upon those whom God has entrusted to you as His own children” (Meditation 133.2). The unchanging basis for our claim to justice is the God-given dignity of all people, whom we are called to love. This is profound equity, which elevates justice from basic fairness to *love*.

Faith makes it possible for the Brothers, little by little, to see in everything that happens, in every person they meet, especially the poor, the unwanted and the persecuted, a sign and an invitation of the Holy Spirit. (Circular 412, p. 119, quoting "Rules and Constitutions," p. 16)

In closing, we are blessed to have something unique to offer as Lasallian Catholics—the rationale for justice as articulated in our faith tradition and exemplified through action in Lasallian schools throughout the world. Faith was the power and the motivation behind De La Salle's justice, and is the “salt” that sets Lasallianism apart from well-meaning secular social justice efforts. It would be exciting to hear, in future talks, from courageous Lasallians willing to share how their Catholic faith informs their understanding and their pursuit of justice.

Thank you for making available this thought-provoking series of talks on justice.

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