

# Breakout Session Descriptions



## General Sessions

Target Audience of each general session:  
A = All, M = Middle School, H = High School, C = College/University

## Academic Administration (AA) Track

**Designed for principals, assistant principals, deans.** Track leaders are: Kerry Conroy, Principal, La Salle Academy, New York, NY; Melissa Livermore, Assistant Principal for Academic Affairs, Holy Family Catholic High School, Victoria, MN; and Erika Whitehead, Assistant Principal, Catalist Circle Rock, Chicago, IL

## Association for Mission (AM) Track

**Designed for those who have graduated from a significant Lasallian formation program.** All sessions of this track will be led by Heather Ruple Gilson, chair of the Institute Commission on Association, Rome, Italy.

## Campus Ministers and Student Service Coordinators (CM+) Track

**Designed for those who work in campus ministry and coordinate student service.** Track leaders are: Olivia Hart, Vice Principal for Academics, Student Support and Social Studies Instructor, La Salle High School, Union Gap, WA; Joe Lascon, Vice President of Mission and Chief of Staff, Resurrection College Prep High School, Chicago, IL; and Emily Vogel, Vice President of Mission and Ministry, De La Salle Institute, Chicago, IL

## Pre-conference Sessions

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2:00 – 4:00 P.M.

### Artificial Intelligence

A

Brother Chuck Gregor, FSC  
*Educational Technology Specialist, Lewis University, Romeoville, IL*

Joe Lascon  
*Vice President for Mission and Chief of Staff, Resurrection College Prep High School, Chicago, IL*

This pre-conference session is designed for those who want to give artificial intelligence a try in a supervised environment. Participants will receive sample lesson plans and activities that can be used immediately.

### Fostering a Culture of Vocation, the Call of Everyone

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Brother Paul Avvento, FSC  
*Director, Office of Vocation Ministry, District of Eastern North America, Eatontown, NJ*

Brother Larry Schatz, FSC  
*Director of Vocation Ministry, Midwest District, Burr Ridge, IL*

Brother David Caretti, FSC, Ed.D.  
*Director of Vocation Ministry, District of San Francisco New Orleans, Napa, CA*

Chris Swain  
*Director, Office of Lasallian Vocation Ministry, Christian Brothers Conference, Washington, DC*

All engaged in the Lasallian charism contribute to animating and instilling a culture of vocation – a shared mission to awaken “each person to discover how God desires them to love” and live that out as a “response to the needs of the world” (*Circular 475 From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations*, 2020).

This session will provide participants with time for casual conversation and shared refreshments to reflect on their personal call and to discover practical ways to invite, encourage and accompany colleagues and young people in joyfully discovering the ways in which God is calling them. Enjoy the opportunity to meet and connect with the District vocation directors and walk away ready to more fully share in bringing to life a culture of vocation within your community.



## Breakout Sessions I

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 10:45 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

### Education for Every Body: Disability in the Lasallian Classroom

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Madison Chastain  
*Writer, Communications Manager,  
Disability Theology Lecturer,  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL*

Whether it's your first year as an educator or your 50th, working with a disabled or mentally ill student inevitably brings something new and unexpected. Each person has unique abilities, needs, likes and triggers, and requires different kinds of accompaniment. From individualized education plans to major medical changes, educators are often crucial players in the lives of all kinds of young people (who have all kinds of caregivers). This breakout session will galvanize educators against the often-biased expectation that you have to be "a special kind of person" or an "expert" in order to accompany disabled young people. It will showcase just how much the Lasallian charism already encourages best practices regarding disability. Participants will look to the future of education as one that increasingly encounters disability and illnesses – both physical and mental – and brainstorm about how Lasallian institutions might respond to this growing need. The breakout session will be divided into three core competencies for engaging with disabled constituents in a spiritually responsible way: language, physical access and beliefs/messaging. All three components will emphasize the unique strength of the Lasallian charism in responding to the needs of disabled or mentally ill students: prioritizing relationships through personal accompaniment.

### Equity = Access + Supports + Success

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Matt McMerty-Brummer  
*Spanish Teacher, Benilde-St. Margaret's  
School, St. Louis Park, MN*

Stephanie Nitchals  
*Principal, Benilde-St. Margaret's School,  
St. Louis Park, MN*

The achievement gap is real. The racism of low expectations is also real. The presenters noticed a decreasing percentage of students of color in their school taking advanced coursework in honors and advanced placement, with this decline starting before the COVID-19 pandemic. Benilde-St. Margaret's School created a detailed action plan two years ago to address this decreasing percentage. In this breakout session, the presenters will highlight their action plan, how it was rolled out at their school and the positive changes seen as a result. Data gathered, both quantitative and qualitative, from all stakeholders will be presented. Benilde-St. Margaret's School is still in the process of rolling out their action plan but the recent data collected shows that they are making strides and improving. The presenters will share their next steps and how the school is dismantling a waiver system in place at the school that prohibited students from taking higher-level courses. The school's action plan is focused on the equity formula: equity = access + supports + success.

### Making Lasallian Pedagogy Relevant to the 21st Century Educational Needs

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Brother Paulos W. Mesmer, FSC, Ed.D., Psy.D.  
*Director, Christ the Teacher Institute for  
Education (CTIE), Nairobi, Kenya*

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An educational pedagogy is a product of a social culture, and it aims to respond to specific socioeconomic needs. Neither social culture nor socioeconomic needs are static; therefore, pedagogy is always evolving. Lasallian educational pedagogy was founded on the writings and educational practices of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, having a long-standing and rich tradition. Like any other educational pedagogy, Lasallian pedagogy has kept transforming itself over the past three centuries. Through significant processes of transformation, Lasallian pedagogy has remained faithful

to its philosophical foundation of faith in the presence of God, respect for all persons, inclusive community, concern for the poor and social justice, commitment to student holistic development, and commitment to quality and contextualized education. In sum, Lasallian pedagogy remains faithful to the Lasallian dictum of “Touching Hearts, Teaching Minds and Transforming Lives.” The 21st century is witnessing global trends that include the fast-changing advancement of communication technology, knowledge-based global economy and emergence of new ways of learning and teaching. These trends have an impact on Lasallian education. In this breakout session, the presenter will analyze imminent challenges and propose solutions that will help to keep the Lasallian education system relevant.

## Walking the Road as Apostolic Leaders: Exploration, Connection and Community

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AA

Kerry Conroy  
*Principal, La Salle Academy,  
New York, NY*

Erika Whitehead  
*Assistant Principal, Catalyst Circle Rock,  
Chicago, IL*

The first session of the academic administration track will allow participants an opportunity to experience an open forum focused on the needs of those in academic administration. Grounded in current educational trends, discussion groups divided by role will explore topics including curriculum, scheduling, faculty development, school culture and discipline. This session is designed to start the conversation surrounding best practices that enliven our educational communities.

## Together and by Association: Our Foundation and Future

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AM

Heather Ruple Gilson  
*Chair, Institute Commission on Association  
Rome, Italy*

This first association for mission track session will allow participants the chance to look back on major developments of Association, from the charismatic Lasallian foundation to one’s own vocational call. This session will include personal reflection, and small and large group discussion as we unpack our history and consider its implications for the Lasallian family today.

## Belonging and Beyond: Fostering Faith in Today’s Youth

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CM+

Olivia Hart  
*Vice Principal for Academics, Student  
Support and Social Studies Instructor,  
La Salle High School, Union Gap, WA*

Emily Vogel  
*Vice President of Mission and Ministry,  
De La Salle Institute, Chicago, IL*

Joe Lascon  
*Vice President of Mission and Chief of  
Staff, Resurrection College Prep High  
School, Chicago, IL*

In this first track session, participants will experience an open forum setting, grounded in the Springtide Research Institute’s recent study “Belonging: Reconnecting America’s Loneliest Generation.” Topics explored will include ministry activities (such as service, immersion, liturgies and retreats), formation and the student experience in religion and theology courses. Participants will be able to share their school campus ministry activities (previously submitted to track leaders). This session is designed to start the conversation surrounding best practices as it pertains to serving young people in this essential area of our educational communities.

## Breakout Sessions II

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2:45 – 4:15 P.M.

### Associative Groups: Supporting and Enhancing Mission

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Kate Ward-Gaus  
*Steering Committee Member,  
Philadelphia Area Lasallian Ministries,  
Philadelphia, PA*

Elissa Pensa Cerros  
*Faculty, La Salle Academy,  
Providence, RI*

Preserving the legacy and traditions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools requires Spirit-driven creativity and commitment on the part of Brothers and Lasallian Partners. Over the past 50 years, much attention has been given to how to live out the particular Lasallian tenant of association among the diverse communities within RELAN. Ministries are deeply enhanced by the communities that are formed through these various facets of association. In the early 2000s, Brothers and Lasallian Partners from the three legacy Districts of the District of Eastern North America (DENA) began meeting locally for spiritual, social, service, formation growth and networking opportunities. The intent was to build and enhance a Lasallian community beyond that of individual ministries. Attendees in this breakout session will be provided with: 1) a working definition of associative groups; 2) a brief history of two of the founding associative groups in DENA; 3) a brief review of group experiences with a focus on those that have enhanced the educational, spiritual and social service mission of ministries; 4) a small group discussion on the feasibility of developing associative groups in Districts/local areas; and 5) a large group discussion with questions from small groups.

### Integral Ecology: A New Lasallian Educational Project

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Brother Gus Sinco, FSC  
*Director, Environmental Sustainability Education  
Initiative, Lasallian Region of North America*

Integral Ecology (IE) reveals that the ecological crisis is not a collection of problems to be solved, but a symptom of a deeper human and spiritual crisis. At its core this crisis is our lost connection to the natural world and our own origins. IE education is an approach to teaching and learning that seeks to understand the interconnectedness of all of creation and provide an answer to the present human and spiritual crisis. Recognizing that our spiritual needs are just as important as our physical needs, we cannot truly heal the environment without also healing ourselves. "Integral ecology is, pedagogically, one of the best generators of educational approaches that could be characteristic of the new Lasallian educational proposal" (*Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission, 2020, p. 100*). IE education seeks to help students develop a deeper relationship with God through a better understanding of the natural world and the environmental impact of their actions. It also seeks to help students develop the skills, knowledge and sense of responsibility they need to protect God's gift and live more sustainably.

### Tradition and Transformation through the Lens of Lasallian Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

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Alexsandra Walton  
*Director for Inclusion and Belonging, Saint  
Mary's College High School, Berkeley, CA*

Carol Ann Gittens, Ph.D.  
*Dean, Kalmanovitz School of Education,  
Saint Mary's College of California,  
Moraga, CA*

One critical topic in the conversation of Lasallian tradition and transformation is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). This breakout session is developed from the more comprehensive Lasallian Institute for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging offered in the summers of 2022 and

2023 at Saint Mary's College of California. Building on Huether 2021, where the emphasis was on inclusion and belonging, the institute was launched. Over two years, 50 participants have engaged in this deep work for their school communities. This interactive breakout session is for Lasallian educators who are curious about what DEIB means, who want to begin or advance their own professional development in DEIB and who want practical strategies to bring back to their ministries. The concept of belonging has been a critical element in the tradition of Lasallian schools. How do we continue that tradition today? We are committed to linking DEIB work to our Lasallian Catholic heritage and where participants can deepen their awareness and approaches of this critical topic for our times.

## Teaching Minds and Touching Hearts, a Restorative Approach

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Amy Eckhouse  
*Director of Restorative Practices K-12,  
Catalyst Maria, Chicago, IL*

“Know your students individually and be able to understand them” - Saint John Baptist de La Salle

How does a punitive mindset versus a restorative mindset affect our relationship with scholars? All humans are hardwired to connect. Just as we need food, shelter and clothing, human beings also need strong and meaningful relationships to thrive. This session will explore restorative approaches for principals, assistant principals and deans.

## The Journey of Association: Hope, Commitment and Identity

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AM

Heather Ruple Gilson  
*Chair, Institute Commission on Association  
Rome, Italy*

Participants will consider moments of hope, challenge and opportunity around the lived experience of Association in the past 50 years. This session will be an opportunity for us to listen deeply to each other as we unpack how the Institute and Lasallian family have tried to understand the shared journey of Association and all those who are deeply committed. We will begin by considering the major developments from the 43rd General Chapter with *Circular 461: Associated for the Lasallian Mission: an Act of Hope* and beyond.

## SILENCE/PETITION: Lasallian Transformative Prayer

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CM+

Gery Short, AFSC  
*Director Emeritus of Education, District of  
San Francisco New Orleans, Napa, CA*

Brother Mark Murphy, FSC  
*Vice Chair of Operations, Lasallian  
Christian Brothers Foundation, Napa, CA*

In the context of our multi-cultural and multi-religious educational communities, participants will examine the common need for prayer that we share as adult educators in association with one another and with the students entrusted to our care. Participants will explore two major forms of Lasallian prayer meant to assist in transforming us – prayer of silence and prayer of petition. The presenters will share current practices and introduce other forms of meditation and petition.

## Breakout Sessions III

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 10:45 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

### Blessed Brother James Miller: Transformative Witness of the Lasallian Charism\*

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Brother Paul Joslin, FSC  
*De La Salle Community, La Salle  
University, Philadelphia, PA*

Chris Swain  
*Director, Office of Lasallian Vocation  
Ministry, Christian Brothers Conference,  
Washington, DC*

CM+

In every age, the Church has raised up Gospel-witnesses who inspire and touch the hearts of others. One such witness is Blessed Brother James Miller, FSC, martyred in Guatemala in 1982, who lived an ordinary life extraordinarily and embraced the Lasallian charism profoundly. In this breakout session, the presenters will explore how Lasallians can share Brother James' story with adult and student communities. Following in the footsteps of our Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Blessed Brother James modeled a life where "example makes a greater impression than words" (Meditation 202.3) by teaching students with great love, conviction and drawing on his own gifts and talents.

Through this breakout session participants will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of Brother James' story through the personal testimony of Brother Paul, who lived and ministered with Brother James, while also exploring how, exemplified in his life, the Lasallian core principles provide inroads and depth to how we can nurture one's vocation and Lasallian community in our local settings.

*\*Note: This is a combination General Session and Campus Ministers+ Track session.*

### Exploring the Twelve Virtues for Self-Growth as a Lasallian Educator

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Matt Isaia  
*Instructional Technologist, Saint Mary's  
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN*

Matthew Gerlach  
*Vice President, Office of Character, Virtue  
and Ethics, Saint Mary's University of  
Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN*

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Even before Saint John Baptist de La Salle's original list (1706) and Brother Agathon's commentary on *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* (1785), Lasallian education has been distinguished by the practice of certain virtues. For a Lasallian Catholic university like Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, such teaching virtues are as important for online instruction as they are for teaching in the physical classroom. Now that the pressure of the pandemic to act fast and "get courses online" has subsided, it is perhaps an appropriate time for faculty and academic support staff to step back and consider how the Twelve Virtues might shape online teaching and learning more fully. We are guided by the Twelve Virtues as they seek to support online instructors by sharing virtue-informed online instructor training, online course design assistance, best practices in online pedagogy and effective use of educational technology. This breakout session will offer concrete examples of how we are drawing on the Twelve Virtues and invite participants to consider meaningful applications to their own circumstances. The presenters will suggest some wider implications of this work for our efforts to promote *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* more comprehensively – among all students, faculty, staff and administrators – outside the classroom.

## Together and by Association: Student Immersion in Kenya

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Katie Abeyta  
*English Teacher and Director of Lasallian Student Life, Mullen High School, Denver, CO*

Joey Mahmood  
*Associate Athletic Director, Mullen High School, Denver, CO*

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Mullen High School's service program offers opportunities for students to immerse themselves in varied Lasallian experiences. In June 2023, 18 students and three educators traveled to Kenya on a second visit in partnership with ministries of the Lwanga District. In this way, they were able to offer their students and those in the communities visited the opportunity to "know" one another. This aligns with the charism of the De La Salle Christian Brothers and is a creative means of connecting students directly with others and their specific needs. Their students experienced traditional educational ministries in Nyeri and Marsabit and the service organizations like the Centre of Love and the NGAO Foundation. Through these associations Mullen students found commonalities with the students and children in Kenya while also recognizing their own privilege and the need for partnership with schools and organizations beyond their District to move the Lasallian mission forward. While the Lasallian world spans the globe, we have the ability to make it smaller and afford students the opportunity to see realities of other communities at a time when they are developing their own identity and transforming how they think about the future and what role they may play.

## Using Teachings from De La Salle as a Vehicle for Mentoring

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Erica Kwiatkowski-Egizio, Ph.D.  
*Associate Professor, Lewis University, Romeoville, IL*

The presenter will share how she utilizes the Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher and the letters of De La Salle as a vehicle for Lasallian mentoring. Implementation ideas will be shared with participants, with particular attention to teacher candidates. Participants in this interactive session will be able to brainstorm their own ideas for using the Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher and the letters of De La Salle as a vehicle for mentoring opportunities in their Lasallian vocations.

## "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" Insights from Isaiah 43:19

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Heather Ruple Gilson  
*Chair, Institute Commission on Association Rome, Italy*

In this session, participants will look at current needs and calls coming from the center of the Lasallian family. This session will provide insight and a chance to unpack mandates coming from current documents for the Lasallian family, including those from the 46th General Chapter and III International Mission Assembly. Structures and responses to supporting Association from around the Lasallian family will be shared as well as a chance for open discussion.



## Breakout Sessions IV

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1:00 – 2:30 P.M.

### Exploring Artificial Intelligence

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Brother Chuck Gregor, FSC  
*Educational Technology Specialist,  
Lewis University, Romeoville, IL*

Joe Lascon  
*Vice President for Mission and Chief of  
Staff, Resurrection College Prep High  
School, Chicago, IL*

This breakout session is designed for educators who have heard of artificial intelligence and want to come to an understanding of the various concepts of expert systems, machine learning, chatbots and generative AI. The focus of this session will be sharing tools that will introduce the practical use of AI ministries. Participants will receive an interactive version of the presentation that can be shared faculty and students.

### Lasallian Students' Belonging: The Data and Why It Matters

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Dr. Kari Koshiol  
*Senior Project Manager, Springtide  
Research Institute, Winona, MN*

Jaclyn Doherty  
*Research Associate, Springtide Research  
Institute, Winona, MN*

In the past year, over 12,000 Lasallian high school students from across the Region participated in a survey that measured their belonging and thriving at school. In this breakout session, experts from Springtide Research Institute will share their findings along with information and insights about how this data can inform the actions of adults as they seek to build community in the classroom and the school.

### Transforming Lasallian Educators: Being Proactive in Formation Approaches for Today's School Communities

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Frances M. Sweeney, Ph.D.  
*Vice President for Mission and Professor of  
Spanish, Saint Mary's College of California,  
Moraga, CA*

In what capacity are you a Lasallian educator? For many decades or for just a short time? In the classroom, as a coach or as an administrator? Catholic or not? This session is for all Lasallian educators to reflect, group think and take back tools for building the beloved community of Lasallian educators. As we are invited in the *Declaration on Lasallian Educational Mission (2020)* to be proactive in thinking about Lasallian education today, as well as the role of the educator, this breakout session is intended to serve as that space. Much of our attention rightly goes to the students and their experience. This breakout session instead invites us to consider how and when we do formation, for whom and by whom, and how each of us might embrace new models of invitation and engagement. The aim is to truly live that vision of educational community that works "together and by association" and make it real for each and all of us across our different contexts, experiences and settings.

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## Walking the Road as Apostolic Leaders: Challenges, Best Practices and Plans for the Future

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Kerry Conroy  
*Principal, La Salle Academy,  
New York, NY*

Erika Whitehead  
*Assistant Principal, Catalyst Circle Rock,  
Chicago, IL*

This final track session will allow participants an opportunity to reflect on their Huether experience in similar ministry-type groups while identifying key takeaways to share with their respective ministries. Participants will be invited to share resources with one another and discern next steps as a community of ministry leaders.

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## Planning for the Second Curve: Crisis... Crossroads... Opportunity... Action

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Heather Ruple Gilson  
*Chair, Institute Commission on Association  
Rome, Italy*

The final Association track session will provide participants with the chance to dream and plan together. What is next for the journey of Association in RELAN? How will ministries, Districts and the Region further foster discernment and action regarding Association? What does a strategic plan for Association invite us to? This session will allow for reflection and sharing, seeking to empower those committed Lasallian Partners to continue to dream and plan for the future.

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## Spiritual Direction: Walking the Sacred Journey Together

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Holly Hoey Germann  
*Theology Teacher, Department Chair, Spiritual  
Director, Adult Formation Coordinator,  
Totino-Grace High School, Fridley, MN*

Educators who have a deep faith positively impact the young people entrusted to their care and encourage young people to grow in their own faith. Spiritual direction, also called spiritual companionship, is a way to grow and deepen one's faith, regardless of their faith tradition or past experiences. It is a confidential, professional, sacred relationship between two people who journey together to discover how the Divine is moving in their life. Through deep listening, conversation, prayer, silence and other practices, we look at how the Sacred is leading one to uncover deeper meaning in their life, learn what God is calling them to be or do and determine what the next steps on one's journey may be. Spiritual direction can be an antidote to educators who feel "burned out." It creates space for one to truly be heard and nurtured by God. In this breakout session, participants will learn what spiritual direction is, what it's not and how, through deepening your relationship with God, you can be more present to your vocational call in education. Participants will experience a short presentation of information about spiritual direction and then several contemplative spiritual practices that could initiate a spiritual direction session.