

Brother Visitor's Letter

Dear Lasallians,

The beginning of the new school year is an appropriate opportunity to remind ourselves of the dignity of the vocation of the Lasallian educator as envisaged by St. John Baptist de la Salle. In his first meditation which he invited the Brothers to reflect on during their annual retreat, De La Salle tells them that the “ministry” to which they are called is a ministry to poor, abandoned youngsters who are “far from salvation”, youngsters who have been “confided” to their care by a loving and gracious God. Reflecting on this text in 2003, our late Superior General, John Johnston, urged Lasallians to look upon themselves, in De La Salle’s words, as *ministers, ambassadors and co-workers* of God who “wants you to *represent* Jesus Christ – to re-present – to make Jesus’ loving and saving presence a visible and effective reality in their lives. He wants you, in Jesus’ name and in his place, to touch their hearts and their minds...” There is no doubt that these meditations were written by De La Salle with the Brothers specifically in mind but it is also interesting to note that, even as early as the 1730 edition, the early Brothers saw them as being addressed, not only to the Brothers on their annual retreat but also, as that text attests, to a wider Lasallian audience of “*all persons who are engaged in the education of youth.*” Taking a similar perspective, John Johnston concluded his reflection above by inviting all Lasallians, “in total accord with your primary life commitment, to look upon yourselves as Jesus’ presence in the lives of the youth that God is confiding to your care.”

Admittedly, too, our understanding of “salvation” to which Lasallian educators are committed today is much more inclusive than the notion prevalent in De La Salle’s time. Yet one can clearly trace a common link between his time and ours through the commitment of Lasallian educators who attempt to create the milieu in which children and young people can realise their God-given dignity, helping them uncover their potential, fostering their health and wholeness, combating modern forms of “poverty” and “abandonment”, and doing all of this from within the Christian tradition. The complexity of the modern educator’s challenge was brought home to me recently when I read “The Second Family” by an American psychologist, Ron Taffel, in which he describes the immense collective power of the peer group and the pop culture, “a force so pervasive, that it threatens to, and often succeeds in, overwhelming the first family of adults at home and in school”.

As in De La Salle’s time, “God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune” by providing educators who can witness to more lasting values and who, by their gestures of grace, act as *Guardian Angels* or *Good Shepherds* to those confided to their care. This is not to deny the obvious difficulties that are inherent in the vocation of a Lasallian educator; rather it is to acknowledge that it is a grace-filled ministry in which we are invited “to work according to the grace that has been given to instruct by teaching and to exhort by encouraging those who are entrusted to our care...”



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