

The Christian Community of La Salle Palencia (Spain)

by Marta Miguel and David Ruiz

The Christian Community of La Salle, Palencia, is currently made up of 6 lay people:- a newly married couple, a single woman and three men. The ages range from 26 to 33. Four of us teach in Brothers' secondary schools, the others are occupied in various non-teaching professions. All of us, however, are actively involved in the pastoral activity of the District (of Valladolid). We also collaborate in the structures of the diocese and the local Church. Most of us have left previous employments to take up the proposed possibility of working in a Lasallian project.

Our community is associated with the Brothers via the District of Valladolid. Before undertaking the formation of this community, each of us went through a process of discovery and maturation in faith, more or less extended, within the Christian groups operating in Colegio La Salle. In those groups we learned how to share life experience, prayer and our commitment to young people, and how to make radical choices in following Christ. Having gone through those group experiences, each of us began to look for some Christian community in which we could give concrete form to our vocation. During this search we met one another and recognised the same call to journey together in community.

This sense of vocation was closely bound up with our commitment to education young people in the Faith. From the start, our work of pastoral and educational animation was linked to the two Lasallian schools of the town and the parish. We were all animators of Christian groups, some were members of the pastoral team in the school alongside the Brothers, other were part of the pastoral structures for young people in the District, in the diocese or in the local town.

From the beginning, the two poles attracting us were the call to form a community and the desire to make a commitment to young people. The two poles need each other. The fact of living in community made us present among young people through our alternative way of Christian life (in community), while the fact of being present among young people led us to question our way of living and building community.

Community life teaches us to make personal decisions by discerning with others. In the early years, everything was shared very intensely: career choices, domestic situations, pastoral commitments. All the circumstances and situations of life, as they occurred, were discerned together in order to discover the will of God for us. Thus all these things were viewed in terms of God's plan for and through us.

Our community life has its centre in Colegio La Salle, where we meet every evening for evening prayer. This is open to others, and young people from the university groups regularly take part. Every day, after prayer, we share the experiences and situations we are going through and which bother us. The discussions are usually centred on our mission as a community of educators. Four of us live and eat under the same roof. This has increased the opportunities for sharing. Personal formation is another thing that we have tried to promote for a long time now. In addition to weekly meetings focused on formation, four of us have started courses in theology. Others have taken part in the Lasallian formation courses: SIEL in Roma, CEL in Madrid. Other aspects which also give vitality to our community are: personal projects, the community project, retreats, fraternal corrections

Looking back now, it is possible to see how much we have absorbed the charisma of De La Salle, often unconsciously. By our meetings with the Brothers, our conversations with them and our shared concerns, all of which reinforced our clear sense of communion, we have made our own a number of Lasallian ways of thinking and acting: the radical identification with Jesus, the experience of the interior life, devotion to young people and to others, the community dimension. Looking back on our story, we can see that our life has been among young people and involved in their educational and pastoral animation, but in a special way by being in community. It was this that made us more conscious of the fact that our lives were no longer for ourselves but for them, and that we were not just giving up a few days or hours a week as we happened to choose but that our lives were given over totally as a result of our community living.

It was very much an experience shared with the Brothers, because they accompanied us in our community journey, and because together we tried to respond to the educational and pastoral needs of young people. In this process of sharing a mission together, the Brothers constantly offered us various opportunities to get to know the Lasallian charisma and to deepen it in us. On the one hand, there were formation sessions like the CELAS, on the other, there was the experience of a daily sharing of prayer, community projects and formation with the Brothers of the Palencia community and others of the District.

Our closeness to the Brothers community in Palencia (and in the District) gradually increased. In practice we share with them the evening prayer in common at weekends and some Eucharistic celebrations. There are many opportunities for meeting together, such as to develop our community plan, to reflect on Lasallian themes or on pastoral concerns in the school, to celebrate birthdays or go on outings together.

Thanks to such experiences, we have been able to discover fully and consciously the charisma and spirituality of De La Salle. At the same time, this gave us a base as a community in Lasallian project being developed by the Brothers of the District of Valladolid. They helped us to deepen and to find words for the experience of faith and commitment that our community was living through. Our experiences were reflected in Lasallian traits and characteristics. We formed links with the Brothers in a most natural way, because we are all sharing in the same mission, the same commitment to the educational service of the young. This led us to feel the need to be a community together with them.

Our life-plan has led us to celebrate what we call our "option for stability". This basic choice, made initially by five of us, took place towards the end of 1996. Our act of commitment was formally received by the Brother Visitor, together with the District Animation Team and with those Brothers and lay people who were close to our faith journey. During the ceremony, each member of the community gave a public and definitive "yes" to the community project, the ideal or "utopia" that we were already living. It was a "yes" to being in community for an educational mission according to the charisma of De La Salle. We wanted to make this gesture in front of others, because we wanted to give some stability to the project that God was placing in our hands. Through this gesture, moreover, we became officially associated with the District of Valladolid. Every year on Trinity Sunday, we renew our option for stability at the same ceremony in which the Brothers renew their vows.

As a result of the gesture by which we expressed our option for stability, we now share very closely with the Brothers a mission and a community way of life. That means that we see the Brothers' concerns and worries as our own, we feel that we belong in the District like any other community without losing our special non-religious character. Certainly it has made us feel tied to and part of the Lasallian charisma and all those who are living it.

We are continuing to develop ties of communion with the Brothers in the mission we fulfil together: ties of communion which are incorporated into daily life linking us with the Brothers of Palencia and of the District, through membership of various District Commission, through participation in the recent District Chapter, through the fact that a member of our community is pastoral co-ordinator in the college, another participated in the SIEL sessions and more recently helped organise the regional CELAS for young people, through the visits made by the Provincial to our community, through our continued efforts to form ourselves in the Lasallian charisma. In a word we are available to the District and we live out the mission with the Brothers, discovering together the signs of the times for the Institute.

Our way of life is telling us that to live out a vocation according to the Lasallian charisma is to live and seek to unite communion and mission. The mission shapes the life of our community. Our personal and communitarian way of life began in a particular way some time ago. None of us imagined that it was going to be the way it is now. However, we believe in the God of History who is present in the events of life and who leads us from one commitment to another. God has called each of us individually and has brought us this far. His Spirit is the primary force which unites us. It is much easier to live it than to think it. Today we are a Lasallian Christian Community which wishes to continue to incarnate the Lasallian charisma with the Brothers in step with the present time and open to the Spirit which leads all.