



Fratres in Unum

Bridging Connections Between Heaven and Earth



**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**

La★Salle



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the Christian
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Pastoral Letter to the Lasallian Family

Br. Armin A. Luistro FSC

Superior General

**Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Office of Information and Communication**

**Generalate, Rome, Italy
December 25, 2025**

Review

Br. Agustín Ranchal FSC



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BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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PASTORAL LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY

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Genesis: a single touch

Beginning an Encounter

Our host ushered our group into a preschool classroom of around three dozen kids who were happily engaged in their activity for the day. The preschoolers were all animated and cheerfully greeted me as I went from table to table. All of them, except one four-year-old boy. Sergio was self-absorbed and none of the color, music, and noise around him could shake his loneliness. In the commotion created by our intrusive presence, this four-year-old approached me ever so quietly and just wrapped his arms around my legs. I sat on one of the kids' low chairs to receive his tight embrace and look him in the eye. But Sergio buried his head on my lap and just kept saying, "Mama, Mama".

For one sacred minute, I felt deeply connected with Sergio whom I held on to my lap. Connected with myself. With all of humanity. With my God. In a flash, I realized I was entering into the realm of mystery. Not that which belongs to the category of an unsolvable puzzle, but one that unravels

deeper truths at each heightened level of engagement. I felt real—woefully human, blissfully divine.¹

“We are either brothers and sisters or everything else falls apart”.²

Pope Francis has highlighted on many occasions our universal fraternity, reminding everyone that we are “*born from the same Father*.” Not just made from the same genetic pool but brought into being by the same loving God who brings us to existence because he loves us. I exist because I am loved! Unconditionally. Infinitely. Eternally.

What a radical departure from the Cartesian principle of radical doubt, “*Cogito, ergo sum*”! The serendipitous encounter with Sergio brought me to a heightened awareness of a profound presence that called for an urgent and real response. Whatever doubts I had with my existence or abilities to make a difference in our world faded in the background in the face of an urgent situation that calls for MY immediate response. I was confronted with an expressed need from one who looked up to me for comfort. I could have pushed the reality aside and everything would have faded back into the limbo of emptiness and obscurity. Like grass that withers and fades.

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1 This story was first shared with Young Lasallians gathered at the Generalate in Rome in July 2025 for the Jubilee of Youth.

2 Pope Francis. *First International Day of Human Fraternity*. Video Message. 4 February 2021. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210204_videomessaggio-giornata-fratellanza-umana.html.

I chose to engage. A fraternal bond was forged. Two strangers are now invested with each other as brothers-in-arms. The chance meeting has turned into a grace-filled moment.

I found new meaning in this new reality. I rediscovered myself, my vocation, my God.

That moment in time was game-changing, soul-shaking. The experience of being in a loving presence—for myself and for the boy I held on to my lap—changes the way we perceive reality. We are never the same again. One who is immersed in the foolhardiness of love sees the world differently: Light is never extinguished. Problems suddenly find a solution. Nothing is impossible. Kindness becomes unlimited. Challenges only make you stronger. Joy overflows. Hope does not disappoint.

In a casual conversation with Br. Luis Gustavo Melendez FSC, theologian at the Pontifical University of Mexico, I happened to share with him that the theme of my Pastoral Letter this year is on fraternity and that I would appreciate getting his reflections on how this connects with the Trinity. He sent me an excellent article on the Trinity as model *par excellence* of fraternity. Instead of quoting voluminous excerpts from his scholarly work in this Pastoral Letter, I thought it best to keep intact his full-length article and make it available in the near future to those who may wish to delve more deeply into the topic. For now, I wish to share below a few takeaways from Br. Gustavo's article summarized into assertions that could help enrich our understanding and deepen our experience of the Blessed Trinity and how this mystery is mirrored in our Lasallian fraternity.



God is One but not a Monad. Our Lasallian consecration articulates this truth. Our formula of vows begins with a direct invocation to the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—reminding us that our lives are offered not to an impersonal force, but to a God who is communion. Theologians have long described the Trinity as a “community of love”. This means that the deepest identity of God is a relationship that occurs and is based on difference and unity, a relationship of love. The Father gives Himself entirely to the Son. The Son receives and returns that love. The Spirit is the bond of unity between them—a love so real it is itself a divine person in communion with the other two persons. This dynamic of giving, receiving, and returning is not something God does. It is what God IS. When we understand this, everything shifts. Community is no longer a strategy. It becomes a sacred imitation of God’s own life.



To Love is to Know God. St. Augustine of Hippo once wrote that the Trinity can be understood in human terms as the lover, the beloved, and the love between them. He insisted that love is not a concept, but a way of knowing. One does not come to understand God by the intellect alone. One comes to know God by loving as God loves. This speaks deeply to our Lasallian spirit. We do not build community by defining it. We build it by living it—by acts of presence, of kindness, of fidelity, and of service. We come to understand fraternity not by theorizing about it but by kneeling beside a child who is crying, or by listening patiently to a sister or brother whose views differ from our own. It is in these moments that we are closest to the mystery of God. Not because we can explain it, but because we resemble it.



Relationship as Identity. St. Thomas Aquinas deepens this understanding by teaching us that in God, relationship is not something added to essence. In God, relationship is essence.

The Father is Father because He begets the Son. The Son is Son because He receives and returns the Father's love. The Spirit proceeds from both—not as an afterthought, but as an expression of perfect unity. This means that even in our own lives, to be a “person” is not to be an isolated self. It is to be in relationship. It is to belong. This is deeply countercultural in a world that often prizes autonomy over communion or self-sufficiency over interdependence. The Trinity reminds us: we become most fully ourselves when we live for and with others.



God as Dialogue, Not Hierarchy. Joseph Ratzinger, who would later become Pope Benedict XVI, described the Trinity as a “dialogical being”. God, he said, is not substance

first and relationship second. God is relationship all the way through. He speaks of the divine persons not as roles to be assigned, but as an eternal conversation of love. The Father gives Himself in love. The Son receives and returns that love. The Spirit completes the communion. And so, God is not a chain of command, but a harmony of mutual self-giving. Imagine if our communities lived this way—not as pyramids of authority, but as circles of trust. Not with rigid roles, but with open hearts. This is the challenge and the invitation.



Communion Without Uniformity. Contemporary theologians like Walter Cardinal Kasper and Gisbert Greshake speak

of the Trinity as *communio*—a union that does not erase differences but celebrates it. In their view, the divine life is not a straight line but a circular motion, a dance. It is never static. It is always becoming, always flowing, always loving. This is a liberating vision. It means that unity is not the absence of differences. It is what happens when difference is welcomed, when it is held in love, when it becomes the space where God dwells. For us in the Lasallian Family, with our wide cultural, linguistic, and vocational diversity, this is a hopeful truth. We are not united because we are the same. We are united because we are given to one another in the name of love.



Not Just a Mystery, But a Mirror. With the hope that we could better appreciate the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in us, I wish to share with you sixteen short reflections which come from different contexts, perspectives, and moments in our Lasallian world. However diverse, the vignettes that follow are united by a common thread: each one reflects the life of the Trinity mirrored in human experience. You will meet people who chose relationship over convenience. You will hear of fidelity, presence, and forgiveness. You will see what fraternity looks like—not as theory, but as lived encounter. These are stories of fraternity lived in joy, in struggle, in quiet faithfulness.

Each vignette is a window into what it means to live as if God is communion—because God is. I invite you to look at your own story. Think of the colleague who stayed with you during a difficult season. The student who taught you humility. The Brother who made you feel seen. The

community that carried you when you could not walk alone. In those moments, you lived the Trinity. You may not have named it, but you embodied it. And in doing so, you made God's love visible. That is what the following vignettes reveal.

Fraternity is not an ideal far off in the distance, but something that is already unfolding—in our classrooms, our offices, our ministries, and our hearts. May we, as one Lasallian Family, continue the sacred work of making the love of the Triune God visible in our world—with prophetic audacity and much joy.



01.

Fever of Youth



COLETTE ALIX is currently the head of the *Fraternités Éducatives La Salle* in the District of France and Francophone Europe. She writes about how young people today embody the vitality of fraternity, reminding the Lasallian Family to rediscover compassion, creativity, and mutual transformation through their example.



Our world urgently needs fraternity. Can the Lasallian Family guide us on this path? Who is calling us, if not the young?

As educators, we exist first to respond to their needs, so that they may build a hopeful future. Youth are instinctively moved by the suffering of others, by war, by the wounds of our planet. Their cries, their questions, their games, and their prayers become a summons for us: to see the world with their eyes, to walk beside them. They are entrusted to us, yet they are also brothers and sisters to us, helping us not to grow numb.

Georges Bernanos reminds us:

“It is the fever of youth that keeps the rest of the world at the right temperature. When youth cools down, the rest of the world shivers.”

Do we choose to shiver with fear, or to keep alive the warmth of youthful faith?

Fraternity is not just an ideal—it is our heritage. It flows from *“together and by association,”* lived daily in our schools and *reaching toward the universal fraternity of Pope Francis.* To say *“Live Jesus in our hearts”* is to welcome not only Christ but every person as an image of God. Hospitality cannot exist without fraternity. If we take our Lasallian mark seriously, then our communities and our schools must be schools of fraternity.

And what a demanding program this is! Yet we have seen it alive: the joyful hospitality of the children at Baskintah school; the smiling greetings of students at Notre Dame de Furn El Chebbak—even some later lost to war; the Bordeaux youth shaping their *faith-fraternity-service* project; or the SeMIL volunteers leaving comfort behind to serve those most in need.

But perhaps fraternity begins not in what we give, but in how we allow ourselves to receive. Children welcome us first. They remind us to kneel to their height, to notice the joy of a smile returning, to listen to a boy bursting into the office with news: “I want to be baptized!”. They thank us for lessons repeated on holidays, they organize collections for Haiti, Guyana, and local food banks, they comfort

classmates in pain. Time and again, we stand in awe at the creativity and generosity of youth.

To advance in fraternity, we must allow ourselves to be transformed by those we educate—learning from them, so we can offer them even more in return.

Thus, animated by this **charism of fraternity**, entrusted forever as a gift of the Spirit, the Lasallian Family, faithful to its tradition, will remain watchful **so that the world may have life, life in abundance** (Jn 10:10).



02.

Never
Alone

Colette, in her second vignette, writes about steadfast presence and care, especially toward the weakest, revealing God's Reign in everyday acts of compassion in schools. Apart from her role in the District, she is also actively engaged in many regional and global Lasallian groups and forums.

One day, when I was a headmistress, I enrolled a student who came from another school. He struggled terribly with learning and seemed adrift, yet something in me believed we could accompany him, help him grow. Two and a half years later, when he graduated to enter high school, his mother came to see me. With tears in her eyes, she whispered words that still resonate in my heart: *“Others had also promised to take care of Sébastien, but you—you did it. Thank you”*.

Since that day, I have often asked myself: why did she say that? The other teachers were not bad people. What made her feel that with us it was different—that her son had truly been cared for, not just spoken of with promises? Each time, I return to the same conviction: is this not what fraternity is? To remain present with patience, gentleness, and trust, especially for the weakest... to stay when others walk away.

This became a refrain in our educational community: never let a child suffer alone. Whether teacher, staff, or administrator, even if we did not know the child personally, we sought to live the words of Jesus:

**“I was hungry, and you gave me food;
I was a stranger, and you
welcomed me” (Mt 25:35).**

For many in the school, this was natural. They had once been welcomed themselves. So, they gave freely, without hesitation, without waiting for recognition—simply to bring back a smile to a child’s face.

Is this not the most authentic way we, laypersons engaged in our profession, draw from the living source that has flowed for over 300 years, and which the 2015 FSC Rule summarizes in number 15: *“Brothers among themselves and with others, they make visible the reign of God”*?

Of course, fraternity is not always obvious. At times, coming to work can feel like merely repairing what is broken. And yet, it is indispensable. The way a community lives together always reflects in the students’ lives. In moments of trial or joy—when a student’s home burned down, at the birth of a child, or during a marriage—we mobilized. We found ways to help, even if it meant reorganizing the entire school. I was never surprised that students themselves offered to adjust, eager that their peers might be accompanied in love.

This is fraternity in action: often discreet, yet essential. Perhaps it is even the heart of our mission. Without it, divisions creep in, misunderstandings grow, and the school falters. Like a person who forgets who they are, a school without fraternity becomes hollow.

And so, I ask: is this not true at every level of our Lasallian world—from the most local to the most universal? Fraternity is demanding. From Cain and Abel to our present day, it calls us to honesty, trust, and the courage to disagree in order to reconcile. And yet, when the other refuses, all we can do is keep our fraternal spirit alive and entrust the silence to Christ—the one who makes us all children of God, brothers and sisters, reconciled in forgiveness.

Fraternity in schools may seem paradoxical, but for more than 300 years, Lasallians—Brothers and Partners

together—have shown it is possible. To us now belongs the responsibility to embody it everywhere: among women and men, between humanity and creation, and between humanity and God.

And then, together, we shall be able to sing:

"Then, from your hands,
a source may spring forth/
The source that invents tomorrow's earth/
The source that invents God's earth".³



- 3 "Ta nuit sera lumière de midi" by Michel Scouarnec and Jo Akepsimas: *"Alors, de tes mains, pourra naître une source, / La source qui invente la terre de demain/La source qui invente la terre de Dieu".*

03.

Only Those Who Care Truly Win



Vincenzo Rosati is a young teacher from the Lasallian District of Italy. He teaches Greek and Latin but continues to be involved with youth in complex social situations outside of formal schools. Here he writes how we can be a “brother-with-brother, Christ-with-Christ” in our courageous, self-giving encounters with the marginalized.

I am in a Roma camp on the outskirts of Naples, during the long months of Covid. Children were expected to follow lessons from a distance, but they had no internet, no devices, and no real chance. A young volunteer, aware of the heightened risk of contagion in such a place, went from house to house with a couple of tablets and a portable hotspot. With courage and tenderness, he brought learning back into their lives. This is fraternity.

I am in a prestigious school in the center of Rome, where ambition and material success seem to dictate the rhythm of life. Yet a small group of students, passionate about soccer, chose another path. They spent a week in the suburbs, where survival is the daily goal, to play *social soccer*—a game where men and women, children and adults, able-bodied and differently-abled, all played on the same team. Their motto was:

**“Vince solo chi custodisce”
 (“Only those who care truly win”).**

This too is fraternity.

I am in a boarding school where wounded children arrive—distrustful, humiliated, sometimes despising their own lives. Their pain often erupted into fights. One day, I saw a strong man with long hair ride in on a motorcycle. He gathered as many children as he could and carried them to his father, a 90-year-old doctor. With the precision of a seasoned physician and the tenderness of a parent, he treated each child: one for a sharp backache, another for stomach pain, another for a stubborn cough. And every visit ended with the same blessing: “*Prenditi cura di te, figlio mio*” (“Take care of yourself, my son”). This is fraternity.



I am in a poor, isolated village in the mountains of Mexico. A tall man knocked gently on a door that stood slightly open and called, *“Hello, may we come in to greet you?”* From inside came the reply, *“Of course—here’s what I’m preparing, and meanwhile I’ll make you a cup of coffee.”* He entered, sat on a worn sofa, and shared generously the humanity of his story, recognizing God’s hand in moments of fragility. This is fraternity.

Later, people told me, *“What a great young man you are! You gave your life for children and people in need.”* This is not what fraternity seeks. To follow Christ is not to collect compliments; it is to follow Christ’s living fragrance in every person and in every moment of encounter.

In my last four years of life spent in different Lasallian missions, I have discovered this truth: life is always given

to you by another—someone you meet who reveals Christ, and in whom you are Christ for them.

Your story does not matter;
neither does your culture
or your place of birth.
In that **moment of encounter**,
you cease to be only yourself.
**You become brother-with-brother,
sister-with-sister, Christ-with-Christ.**



04.

A Big Messy Family



Vincenzo, in his second vignette, shares how a situation of chaos and division may be transformed into a space of belonging through our shared humanity, revealing fraternity as both fragile and redemptive. He volunteered recently to serve at the *Casa Hogar de los Pequeños* in the District of Antillas-Mexico South.

Everything began during the pandemic when the world felt on the verge of collapse. On one side, doctors and nurses fought fiercely to save lives. On the other, a young man prepared his candidacy for a doctorate. And in the middle, a memory echoed. Years earlier, he had once broken his hands while working with the poorest. A question returned to him with force: *If people struggle so much in ordinary times, how can they possibly survive in an emergency?*

So, he decided to take the plunge. A tall man in a colorful shirt and sandals welcomed him at CasArcobaleno, a school in Scampia. Each morning, boys and girls of 14 and 15 came to prepare for high school. The young man was struck by their rough manners and apparent indifference. At first, he focused only on teaching lessons, convinced they live in two different worlds—his immersed in books, theirs focused on survival.

But slowly, things changed. Spending time outside the classroom—playing soccer, chatting, laughing—bridged the gap. Honest questions emerged: *“Why did you come here to Scampia? What do you want from life?”*. He asked them in turn: *“Would you like to follow a passion, try to live differently?”* Their replies were raw, yet profoundly sincere.

What mattered was not what he asked, but how he listened. **Trust began to grow where none had existed.**

That trust drew them back to class, ready to discuss literature, even the World Wars. They paid attention not because the subjects were curious, but because they believed in his presence. He stayed with them day after

day, in those tired buildings, in Italy's most stigmatized neighborhood. Soon, the nickname changed: no longer '*o chiattil*' ("rich man's son"), but '*o frاتم*'—a brother.

He, too, grew fond of them. He began to see their hidden fragility beneath hardened words. His mind and heart shifted: he realized respect does not depend on fully knowing another's story.

Life, after all, is always lived as one can, rarely as one hopes. They, too, were changed—discovering that the **world could hold not only squalor but also coral reefs of beauty, safe places that give hope.**

Fraternity did not end at CasArcobaleno. In the afternoons, the young man followed an 80-year-old volunteer to the nearby Roma camp. The road itself announced their destination: from the outskirts of the outskirts, through broken paths, into makeshift homes. There, life pulsed—children leapt into arms, parents spoke of struggles and celebrations, weddings, and illnesses. The old man moved like a father reborn: lending money to a mother, escorting a worker to the doctor, ensuring children attended after-school programs. He gave his breath, even if it were his last.

The young volunteer followed him, learning from every step. What first seemed a place of despair became a living neighborhood, fragrant with real life. He befriended a Romani teenager—also his student at *CasArcobaleno*—who loved to dance with her cousins. Her family, poor but resilient, survived however they could. She passed her exams with determination, giving him joy and pride.

By summer's end, the volunteer felt woven into this big, messy, joyful family. He shared meals, played with children, and visited homes. Even on Saturdays, he often preferred pizza with Romani youth to outings elsewhere. But then, news pierced him: the 14-year-old girl he cherished had been sold into marriage in France. That day, more than any other, he understood the grief of losing a sister.



05.

Thunder and Lightning



Heather Ruple Gilson served as Chair of the Commission on Association of the Institute and Co-ordinator of Lasallian Vocations and Association in the District of Ireland, Great Britain, and Malta (IGBM). She shares her “little family fraternity” where love perseveres through daily fidelity and shared faith.

It is July 2023. We are hosting our Lasallian Community of Southern England in our garden for a summer BBQ. There was a threat of rain, maybe a brief thunderstorm, so we moved the original time of the gathering to later in the day hoping the chance of rain would be less. We had planned a prayer service, meal, and time together. As people arrived the sun was out and we were enjoying catching up with each other outside, a rare gift in England. My husband was at the grill preparing food and we had laid out on our shared table a variety of dishes. There was laughter. My girls were running about delighting in the extra attention of the Brothers, Partners and Lasallian volunteers who form our Lasallian Community.

Then the sky darkened, the wind picked up, and we heard a crack of thunder in the distance. “It will pass”, said Emma. It did, in fact, not pass. Suddenly, the heavens opened and the rain poured. It poured fiercely. Then the hail came. Then the thunder and lightning. And here we were, 20 Lasallians huddled under the small canopy we had put out, bar a few sensible people who had run inside. The wind whipped around us as we all grabbed hold of the canopy to keep it from being swept away.

Finally, when there was a break in the rain and hail, the rest of us made our way inside. Drenched with rain; food was wet and not cooked. As the large group tried to find space in the kitchen and sitting room, towels were passed around. I realized the careful planning for the day, the preparation, the vision I had would not be lost. We regrouped and adjusted. We enjoyed a slightly soggy meal together. We prayed, not the prayer I had planned, but let my eldest lead a spontaneous prayer of gratitude to which we all said AMEN!

In that moment, gathered with my family and my Lasallian Family, I felt the deep heartbeat of my vocation within a vocation and the pulse of our little family fraternity within a fraternity.

Vocation and fraternity are not one straight path we follow. They are learning, day by day, to say “yes” to the people, the moments, and the mission entrusted to us collectively. **They are a weaving together of many threads: love, service, faith, courage.** They are the slow and patient work of letting Christ's light shine through the simple, daily acts of care and commitment.

First, I am a wife. I promised a life to someone, not just a moment, not a feeling, but a life. I have learned that love is more than emotion; it is a daily offering. It is listening when I would rather speak. It is forgiving when it would be easier to remember. It is choosing each other again and again, even when life pulls us in a thousand different directions. Is this not the core of fraternity?

Then, I am a mother. God entrusted me with two small lives, not to own them, but to accompany them. Motherhood has stretched my heart wider than I ever thought it could go. It has taught me to love without conditions. To be a steady hand, a soft place to land, a voice that reminds them who they are—beloved, unique, and capable of great good in a world which needs them immensely. Is this not the call our students and others ask of us daily?

And in all of this, I am a Lasallian. The charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who saw Christ in every child, who believed that teaching was an act of sacred service, invites my commitment to those most in need. My Lasallian identity reminds me that every relationship, whether at home or beyond, is “Holy Ground”.

My vocation as a Lasallian is not separate from my vocation as a wife and mother. It deepens it. It is the "call within a call" which Mother Teresa spoke of. To live my "vocation within a vocation" is to allow one calling to nourish the other.

It is not always easy. Some days there are storms. Some days I feel too crowded with needs and pressure. Some days, I forget that vocation is not about grand gestures; it is about small acts of fidelity. It is not about being perfect in community; it is about being present to community.

It is enough that, in my small way,
I try **to reflect Christ's presence
to others** through my vocations
lived in my fraternities.



06.

Weaving Dreams



In her second vignette, **Heather** describes how a gathering of Lasallian women becomes a sacred space of sisterhood, embodying fraternity through shared stories, dignity, and mission. She is much appreciated for her contributions in bridging formation, mission, and the global Lasallian identity.

“The circles of women around us **weave invisible nets of love that carry us** when we’re weak, and sing with us when we’re strong.”⁴



It is October 2019, months before the world would change forever, and a group of twenty or so women sit in the Formation Centre at the Motherhouse in Rome. We are gathered for an international program on Association with Partners and Brothers from across the Lasallian Family. On a whim, I decide to host a casual session for the women of the program to get to know each other and our realities of mission and vocation. We are from Argentina, France, Congo, Italy, the United States, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and other ports of call in the Lasallian Family. We are married, single, mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts. We are ministry leaders, teachers, administrative assistants, formators. We are young, middle-aged, and wisdom figures.

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4 Cf. <https://www.planetsark.com/circles-of-women/>.

We sit with cups of tea and coffee and chat informally before centering ourselves with a brief prayer. We share our names, where we are from, and our ministries. Those who can quietly translate for others. We begin to discuss our realities and experiences as women working within a congregation of men founded to teach boys. We share the joys of our vocation and the gift of relationships and fraternity with other Lasallians. We share our frustrations at feeling—and sometimes being—treated as less. We share the challenges of balancing family commitments with our deep commitment to mission. We share how vital faith is. We share stories of success and failure. We voice our worry for students—women and girls—who cannot attend school because of period poverty and the danger of travelling to and from school. Our hearts break with profound sadness for the gender-based violence that exists just beyond the gates of our schools, and occasionally pours in.

We were supposed to speak for forty-five minutes; instead, the conversation goes on for three hours, until the evening meal is ready and someone has to switch on the lights. At dinner, a few men at the program grumble that they felt excluded. Brothers, however, recognize the need for this space and encourage it.

The sisterhood forged in those few hours created **room for the Spirit to move and inspire further action.**

It is a powerful thing to feel you belong, and to take the time to encounter another with your whole heart. It is a powerful thing to feel seen, known, and loved, in order to feel empowered to share Christ's love with others. It

is what our students—and all those we serve—long for. To belong and to contribute to our mission as Lasallians, and ultimately to God’s mission, is the purpose of fraternity.

At this impromptu gathering, meant simply to let women meet, a sacred space was created—the sacred space of a sisterhood being born within fraternity. In English, the word “fraternity” is often heard as masculine. In parts of the world, fraternities are exclusive to men. In creating this space of sisterhood, we were not separating ourselves from fraternity; we were embodying it—a space where all felt valued and, despite the lived experiences of so many women and girls, safe.

When women in the Lasallian Family gather, we do not wish to exclude or detract from the commitment of men or Brothers. Rather, we recognize that the majority in the Lasallian Family have unique lived experiences and vocations that must be fostered and accompanied to best serve the mission.

As with any authentic experience or structure of Lasallian Association, our educational mission must be at the center and at the service of young people and others who need us most. Creating spaces for women to share their experience, to support each other, to nurture this sisterhood, must sharpen our awareness and deepen our compassion. It must prepare us to better accompany our students—especially the girls and women whose dreams, like ours, need room to grow.

Perhaps the Spirit was whispering that afternoon and early evening: if the Lasallian Family is truly to be a family, **we must make space at the table for every story, every voice, every sister and brother.**



07.

Hunger for Presence



Br. Jeano Endaya FSC is a young Brother from the Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD) who currently serves as the Vocation Promotion Director of the Philippine Sector and as a member of the International Lasallian Vocations Team. He describes how presence makes God's love tangible: "Here I am".

“You look so young, Brother”. It has become a familiar greeting, a common first impression. I sometimes wonder if it is genuine youthfulness they notice, or simply the perspective of those accustomed to more senior Brothers. The quiet question lingers: how do I connect and guide those I meet for the first time? On one hand, do I have enough experience to earn the trust of the young? On the other, do I have the depth to truly engage those who have walked many more years and whose commitment to the Lasallian mission has been unwavering?



I once believed this youthful appearance was a hindrance. I was mistaken. Entering my third year as a Vocation Director, I am learning that it is not about the lines on my face or the years I have lived; it is about the presence I bring, the authentic connection I forge. My call today, as a young Brother, is fundamentally a call to be present.

This “brothering”, this **fostering of genuine fraternity**, lives in the simple act of being here. Allow me to share moments when that presence felt profoundly fraternal.

Wisdom in Years: Guiding Seasoned Lasallian Partners. I was entrusted with leading a day of reflection for about thirty Lasallian Partners from Ozamiz—pillars of our institution, whose service spans twenty-three to forty-one years. What could I offer that their decades had not already taught? I centered the day on a simple phrase: “Here I am.” Samuel offers it to Eli, and then to God; De La Salle lived it in his obedience returning from Parmenie. These Partners, in their own way, had echoed it daily across decades. I wasn’t sure if it mattered—until a message arrived: “Above all else, Brother, thank you for being here”. Presence itself had spoken.

The Longing for Presence: Connecting with Young Lasallians. I was told—with a wry smile—that vocation work would make me itinerant. They were right. I found myself everywhere and nowhere: present in many places, rooted in none. A frequent question pinged my phone: “Are you here?” It could sound demanding; I now hear it as yearning. They were not merely looking for me—they were looking for a Brother. When I answered *Yes, I’m here*, conversations unspooled: stories, fears, hopes, as if no time had passed. Comfort grew because, at some point, I had been fully present.

The Fraternal Call: To Be Here. In a world that feels connected yet leaves us strangely alone, we hunger for presence—patient, attentive, unhurried. My journey as

a Brother is anchored in a continuing, heartfelt response to God’s invitation: “Here I am.” Not a single declaration, but a daily practice—young and old alike. Inspired by the presence of Jesus—who not only knew but felt, welcomed, and allowed each person to arrive as their true self—our vocation is to embody the same. Amid the digital noise, such presence becomes a tangible expression of fraternity: God’s love made near in the here and now.

Our “brothering” today is being present.
Our “brothering” today is saying to each Lasallian we meet: “Here I am.”



08.

A Thousand Gongs



Br. Armin describes an immersion experience with the indigenous Kalinga community in northern Philippines. He shares about the role of dance, music, and rituals in healing deep cultural divides.

Imagine the good that one person can do for another. Imagine the impact that one project can make for a community. Then imagine the miracle achieved when people walk side by side, united in fraternity, to transform the world.

When efforts compete with one another, one may win for a while—but both lose the greater dream. It is only when hands are joined that the dream of renewal and transformation truly takes shape.

I had a weekend trip to Kalinga Province in Northern Philippines, a region where we do not have a Lasallian presence but where a chapel (surprise, surprise) is dedicated to St. La Salle. It was a long and challenging trip—ten hours from Manila to Tabuk, then two more through bumpy roads carved along ravines so deep they could inspire even an agnostic to pray again.

The people of Kalinga have long been marked by courage and pride. Their identity was forged through survival, resistance, and at times, vengeance. When early missionaries shared the story of Jesus' passion, many instinctively wanted to avenge Him, because vengeance was the only language of justice they knew. Love and forgiveness had to be learned from the example of others.

A story from 2014 tells of a town mayor who accidentally ran over a dog while traveling on a treacherous highway. As he stopped to tend to the wounded animal, he was ambushed and critically wounded. In the hospital, his tribal elders gathered around him, ready to swear revenge. But the mayor said, "No. I do not want my children or the

children of Kalinga to live through what I endured—years of hiding from tribal wars. We will not take revenge.”

His decision planted a seed of peace, a choice for fraternity over division.

Less than a year later, a call went out: *Awong Chi Gangsa*—a thousand gongs. From 47 tribes, many still in conflict, came the invitation to gather, to play together in one rhythm. What seemed impossible happened: former rivals lifted their gongs not as trophies of war, but as instruments of harmony. As the thousand gongs resounded together, they gave birth to a new identity—One Kalinga, bound not by vengeance, but by fraternity.

What if such music could also be created with ordinary lives and acts of service? What if every project, every act of kindness, every step of faith came together in one great rhythm of hope? Could it be that fraternity is the dream with the power to transform not only communities but the whole world?

Bishop Jun Andaya of Tabuk, who convened that thousand-gong gathering, once dared to dream further: that one day the people of Kalinga would give up the jawbones of war and instead bury their dead with dignity, as one people. Then the prophecy will be fulfilled: *“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Is 2:4).*

Kalinga is known for their gongs, or *gangsa*. Played as *toppaya*—gongs struck by bare hands while seated—or as *paddung*—held by one hand and played with a padded stick while standing or dancing—their sound reverberates

across the mountains. Even a single gong has power. But when played together, the gongs create a resonance that fills the land, lifting the spirit to something greater than any one player. The *gangsá* is more than an instrument. For generations its symbolized strength and courage, often tied to the memory of tribal battles. Yet what once marked division can become the very sound of unity. One intervention competing against another diminishes the music; but many gongs, struck in harmony, create a symphony of fraternity.

Fraternity is the heartbeat of this mission. It is the sound of many hands and hearts striking together in unity. It is the choice to move beyond vengeance and division into forgiveness and collaboration. It is the call to live as brothers and sisters, children of one God, who invites humanity to love as He loves.



09.

Pedagogy of Fraternity



Dr. Marjorie Evasco-Pernia is a Filipina poet, feminist writer, literary scholar, and Professor Emeritus of Literature at De La Salle University in Manila. She shares her harvest of lessons gleaned from her journey of ever-widening and ever-deepening circles of fraternity throughout her ministry of teaching and writing.

Growing up in Bohol, the Philippines, my learning laboratory of caring relationships was the family, and this was not just the nuclear family of my parents and three brothers, but an extended one that included our paternal and maternal relatives, even my baptismal godparents and their children, who I called by the honorific term, *igsù*, or godsister or godbrother. The Bísayâ term for sibling, *igsúòn*, is not gendered. It connotes a relationship of likeness, which can extend to sameness in principles of being and upbringing. As the eldest and only female child, I was raised to try to be a good example for my brothers in diligence and industry, which are desirable traits in Boholano culture especially for a girl, as well as in loving respectfulness of our parents and grandparents.



My grandparents, parents, brothers, and American Field Service foster sister.

My younger brother, Florentino Jr., graduating from Grade Six, and I graduating from High School from the College of the Holy Spirit, Tagbilaran City, Bohol in 1969.



This loving respectfulness to elders again extended to a larger community outside my home to my teachers from Kindergarten up to senior high school with the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS). In my neighborhood on Teachers' Heights, Tamblot Street, I recognized as a child who looked up to my older playmates, that any effort they did to be good in daily tasks was something to imitate for myself. In my turn as an adolescent, I realized how my brothers, younger neighbors, and even younger pupils in my school would be happy for me whenever I was recognized for academic excellence and extra-curricular involvement as an actor in the school's annual play, as an editor of the student publication, or as an officer in the Student Catholic Action. In 2nd year college, I studied with the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) Fathers with a scholarship as the editor of the student newspaper, literary magazine, and graduates' yearbook. I was then already a young mother raising a daughter, now even more aware of my duties and responsibilities as a parent. And I raised her the way my parents raised me, with a sense of how everyone in the family and in the extended communities outside the home are connected by relationships of mutuality in acts

kindness and care, practicing Boholano values of faith, love, and fear of God, and respect for the wisdom of elders.

When I first came to De La Salle University in 1983—after my family's sojourn to Tacloban City and Dumaguete City—I went into formation as a Lasallian educator by looking at the example of my older colleagues like Dr. Isagani R. Cruz, Dr. Lourdes S. Bautista, Dr. Estrellita Gruenberg, and Dr. Emeritá Quito, and the Christian Brothers I began to get to know, like Br. Andrew Gonzalez FSC and later Br. Benildo Feliciano FSC.

They saw that I was a '*promdi*' (from the province) **willing to learn from the masters on how to teach the Lasallian way**, even if I already had a year and a half of teaching experience in Silliman University.

I was asked to take on administrative duties other than teaching, serving with the Integrated Research Center as publications editor, setting up the DLSU University Press, then becoming chair of the Literature Department as well as director of the creative writing center.

The travails of teaching and administration honed my understanding of what fraternity means, and how it is embodied in action and words as part of the Lasallian community. For me, the relationships in the university were not just borne out of the hierarchies of responsibility and office. On the ground, most especially at the classroom level, I felt that the sense of community was in the practice of fraternal relationships, where the teacher as elder taught by

example the students under her care, and where the teacher in turn looked up to the elders and leaders of the university community for good counsel, dialogue, and wisdom.



Marching feminist activists in a rally in the early 80s calling for a total ban on nuclear arms.

In the mid-80s, the Philippines was in a ferment that culminated in the first genuine People Power revolution against three decades of the Marcos dictatorship. As a student activist in the late 60s and early 70s, I grew in

my advocacy for social justice as a feminist educator.

My critique
of systems of power went into the
bone and sinews of my art practice
in writing and publishing poetry.

It also went into my initiative to teach in the College of Liberal Arts the first "Women in Literature" course framed by feminist ideas. To my delight (and surprise!), the department chair, the college dean, even the vice president for academic affairs, supported the initiative even as they must have known that the male-dominated spheres of knowledge as well as the university protocols,

then, that favored males over females would be taken to serious question.



At the DLSU Press Office as
Director from 1987-1989.

It was not lost on Br. Andrew, who was then University President that the female college students and young female faculty of the university were part of the activism and egalitarian struggle of the times. In fact, it was his positive response to the posters done by female students against sexist language in the athletic tryouts that allowed these posters space on the school's bulletin boards, after the attempt of university security to take them down. After all, De La Salle College in 1973, had shifted from admitting only male students to being a co-educational one, with female students enrolled even in the traditionally male-only fields of study like Engineering and the Sciences.

This spirit of openness and dialogue, with its emphasis on human dignity and sibling-hood made for a learning

and working atmosphere that cultivated care and concern that radiated to our personal and private lives.

My formation as a Lasallian educator ripened during my first decade as a Literature teacher who also wrote poetry as an art practice. After *Dreamweavers*, my first book, was published in 1987, I deepened my commitment to integrate writing and teaching literature, working in the vineyards of Christian education, not only in the



IYAS La Salle National Writers' Workshop hosted by the University of St. La Salle, Bacolod City, advocates for writing the environment among young writers. It is the only creative writing workshop that handles literary works by young writers writing in five Philippine languages: Hiligaynon, Akeanon, Kinaray-a, Filipino, and English.

Manila campus but also in the writing workshops with young people in communities outside the metropolis. This commitment spurred my involvement in the workshop for writing about the environment in Bacolod, now a 25-year-old institution which has been growing writers whose stewardship of the natural environment puts into practice Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* encyclical. And in 2023 in Bohol, it was a joy to be part of a workshop with six young writers writing in their first language *Binisaya*, who were learning from two master artisanal fishermen stories of how to live sustainably with the sea and their coastal marine environment. As I quietly sat at the periphery of their reciprocal learning circle, I felt deeply at peace with the realization that the Lasallian way of teaching and learning can be extended beyond the university campus and be directly in touch with the lives of those who feel that society has either forgotten them or has chosen not to pay attention to what they know, how they know, and how they live.

One of these master artisanal fishermen, 63-year-old Manoy Paquito 'Kits' Abcede, began teaching the young writers (and those of us listening with them) with a story of how, whenever he goes out to sea to fish, he first whispers to the sea a supplication of hope, entrusting to the sea's sentient generosity their community's need to also live. He told of how he gives thanks, even before putting down the nets into the waters, not only for the catch on which the community could subsist for the day, but also for the possibility that there would be little or nothing caught at all. His hope entwined with his humility touched all of us deeply, and when the young writers translated his experience and love for the sea into their poems and songs, I realized that this was a blessing to witness the



Master artisanal fishermen Paquito M. Abcede (Upper Left) and Teogenes Pelegrino (Lower Right) who agreed to teach young writers who participated in the Dagat Bohol: Kinabuhi ug Panginabuhi sa Mananagat (Dagat Bohol: The Life and Livelihood of Fishermen) creative writing workshop in Young writers of Bohol who participated in the Dagat Bohol creative writing program with the project team headed by the author, Prof. Marjorie Evasco.





effectiveness of a pedagogy that put our people's systems of suppressed knowledge back to the center of a radical curriculum that brought everyone to a consciousness of belonging: a *ka-igsuonan* with the natural environment and with each other.

A life-enhancing fraternity built on the fundamental principle that **we are all siblings on this earth**, sharing the same dignity and living with each other in dialogue and peace as **members of our human family**.

10.

Strange Encounters



Pablo Gómez is a young teacher from Argentina and facilitates formation programs for teachers in several Catholic schools in his native city of Cordoba. He was recently in Rome to attend a course for postulators, during which time he lived with the Central Community of the Brothers at the Generalate.

“I was a stranger,
and **you welcomed me**” (*Mt 25:35*)

Hospitality is a virtue as old as humanity. There have always been travelers, pilgrims, and migrants who, throughout history, found shelter in the open hands of strangers. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, welcoming the stranger is more than courtesy; it is mercy itself, a reflection of God’s compassion. In today’s inhospitable world, with refugee crises testing the solidarity of nations, finding a home in a foreign land feels like stumbling upon an oasis in the desert. By its nature, hospitality is a journey of three movements: migration, reception, and encounter—each culminating in a shared horizon between the one who arrives and the one who welcomes.

Migration. This year, I became that traveler in need of welcome. From Argentina, I journeyed to Rome to study a six-month specialization at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. I left with doubts heavier than my luggage: would my savings suffice, would I manage the language, would I feel alone? Saying goodbye to my 91-year-old grandmother broke my heart; I feared it might be our last embrace. Her absence weighed on me more than the 15,000 kilometers that stretched between us. I clung to God’s promise:

“I know the plans I have for you...
plans of hope and of future.”

Reception. That promise took flesh at the Generalate of the Brothers. I was received not as a stranger, but as kin. A Brother spent hours orienting me, sharing not just directions but stories, humor, and memories. Soon I was folded into

community life: meals, Mass, recreation, conversations that never failed to include a kind “How are your classes? Have you called your family?” These small attentions softened loneliness.

What began as hospitality soon **deepened into fraternity.**



Encounter. I began volunteering in the house library, where shelves carried 300 years of Lasallian identity—pedagogy, spirituality, catechesis, inculturated evangelization. Yet no book could equal the daily encounters:

Brothers from five continents, each different, yet bound by the **same spirit of joyful fraternity.**

Their openness made me ask: *Who are these Brothers, and why are they like this?* Slowly, I realized their witness was a prophetic sign: in a world chasing protagonism, they lived

a horizontal fraternity where no one was greater, and all were welcomed.

As I leave, I know I am not the same person who arrived half-heartedly months ago. I came searching for study; I found a family. I gained brothers. In their daily gestures, I glimpsed the Kingdom: shelter, food, care, and belonging for all. Once again, God has been faithful to His promise—giving more than I could have hoped for. I return home with a different gaze, carrying the Founder's words in my heart:

“I adore in all things God’s will for me.”



11.

Expanding Circles



Andrea Sicignano teaches at Collegio San Giuseppe–Istituto de Merode in Rome and concurrently serves as Director of the Office of Education of the Institute. He shares how his immersion with the Romani children through CasArcobaleno has enriched his lived experience of fraternity and the spirit of One La Salle.

“He who, with wisdom and gentleness, guides all things and does not usually force men to act against their inclinations, acted with great tact and at different times, so that one commitment led to another, and so on, without my realizing it when I first agreed to his requests.”

— DE LA SALLE, *Memoirs on the Beginnings*

As in the experience of the Founder, my story speaks of a series of small conversions, one following the other, which led to a greater achievement that was unimaginable at the beginning. I would like to think that, as for St. John Baptist de La Salle, an initial choice of fraternity with the teachers led to the birth of the Institute of the “Brothers” of the Christian Schools, so for our small Lasallian community of *De Merode*, an initial choice of fraternity led us to learn to discern and accept God's plan even in events that initially appear difficult, unpleasant, or even “unbearable”.

It was 2012, and together with some colleagues from my school, we had just formally expressed our “commitment” to the Lasallian Educational Mission for the first time, but our fraternity was limited to a few meetings to talk about the mission and some moments of prayer.

Our school is located in Piazza di Spagna in Rome, and the students who attend it are well-off, even if each one has his or her own inner periphery. For several years, I had been involved in the Lasallian Youth Movement and in an after-school program with students in the suburbs of Rome. But our “community” of teachers had never really “lived together” as a group.



This photo captures De Merode teachers and students, and a former student who now works at the La Salle Foundation, alongside the Brothers and Roma children during a volunteer initiative at the Brothers' *CasArcobaleno* community in Scampia.

A meeting with Br. Enrico Muller, from the community of Scampia, gave rise to a desire in us to live an experience of fraternity at *CasArcobaleno* in Scampia. The idea was for five teachers to go there, perhaps during the school's winter break, while a large number of the school community were attending a session in a popular hotel in northern Italy.

While we were organizing the trip, however, perhaps inspired by the desire for community, we thought of extending our proposal of “lived fraternity” to some students, and we did so. The response was surprising, and so we found ourselves in *CasArcobaleno*, five teachers with about fifteen students who had chosen to experience poverty, service, and fraternity with us. It may seem like a small thing, but even just washing dishes together, using sleeping bags instead of beds, sharing the discomfort and the cold, created a different atmosphere between us and

the students. When the *CasArcobaleno* students arrived, the fraternity expanded further and little by little we became one. The “circle”, the daily meeting to share and reflect on what we had experienced, became the “form” of this fraternity:

a circle that expands and is capable of **including those outside and freeing those inside.**

Since 2012, twice a year, teachers and students from *De Merode* have returned to Scampia, and each time the “magic” of fraternity is reborn: “I feel good here, I feel free because I don't have to wear masks and I can truly be myself.” Without fail, there would be someone who would be “liberated” by this experience of fraternity.



Teachers and students from De Merode gathered around the table with the Brothers of Scampia, as well as teachers and students from *CasArcobaleno*.

The circle has expanded to the Roma camp in Giugliano, which has been moved several times in recent years, and it is precisely in the Roma camp, on the outskirts of the suburbs, that we have found our heart. It is precisely in the Roma camp that we have recognized the face of Jesus in rags, where we have encountered the God who saves us from our lukewarmness.

“We do not go to the poor to save them **but to be saved**”,

Br. Robert Schieler once told us, and for us it became a reality.



This photo was taken at the Giugliano Roma settlement during a visit with De Merode students and faculty to the Brothers of Scampia community. It shows my daughter playing a 'cleanup' game with a young girl from the settlement, alongside a De Merode teacher. I brought my own family along for this visit.

In January 2025, an unbearable sadness fell on the community. A five-year-old girl from the Giugliano Roma camp, Michelle, passed away after she accidentally touched an exposed electrical cable. She was excited and prepared to make it to her first day in school the following Monday. But it was not meant to be.



In this photo, my daughter is playing with several girls from the settlement. Pictured with them is a De Merode teacher and a former student who now works at the La Salle Foundation. This took place at the Giugliano Roma settlement during a visit to the Brothers of Scampia community involving De Merode students and faculty—an occasion where I also brought my family.

We gathered with hearts full of pain and questions. A girl asked, “How can you turn such pain into hope?”. Her question gave birth to something new: the group felt that it was time for the fraternity to be born in Scampia and for us to also get to know the suburbs of our city, Rome. We organized ourselves for the service of the Romani children in Rome.

That same evening, I heard from an old friend from the Community of Sant'Egidio, Erika, who is in charge of their “Schools of Peace” in the suburbs and in the Roma camps. The following Friday, the circle had already begun to widen. Since that week, at least eight students and an increasing number of teachers, have been visiting the School of Peace in Trullo to build community with at least 25 Romani children every week. The students' parents were touched by this shared mission to the suburbs and organized themselves to buy snacks, blackboards, and markers for the school, and sometimes even to accompany the children to the suburbs. The Brothers at my school provided the minibus. This wave of unexpected and miraculous brotherhood, this circle of beauty, has spread

to another Lasallian high school, *Villa Flaminia*, which has always been in “competition” with my school. For the first time, we planned a service project together, and every Saturday morning, many students from *Villa Flaminia* travel to the suburbs to bring to life what we now call the “Michelle Project”.

It has now been almost two years since this wave of fraternity began, and it shows no sign of stopping, despite the obstacles and the opposition from some. If we had known in 2012 how things would transpire, I don't know if we would have believed it. But now we know that a small step could lead to deeper commitment, embracing more and more people, groups, movements, and schools.



This is a recent photo from the 'Michelle Project' (referencing Michelle, the young girl who sadly passed away, whose picture was included in the article I sent). The group includes De Merode students and teachers, volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio, as well as local children and children from the Roma community.



De Merode students and teachers, together with volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio and Roma children, at the Michelle Project.

Today I can say that my school for the wealthy is a “school of fraternity”, and I can say this thanks to the Brothers of *CasArcobaleno*, my colleagues, my students, the students of *CasArcobaleno*, the children and families of the Giugliano Roma camp and now those of the Candoni camp in Rome, the students and teachers of *Villa Flaminia*, the Brothers, thanks to our friends in the Community of Sant'Egidio, thanks to the District of Italy, which made the “Michelle Project” a *La Salle Foundation* project, making us “all brothers and sisters”. Remembering that everything is connected and that every small gesture of fraternity enlarges hearts and shows everyone how the world could be, it bears witness to a world that is possible.

12.

Fragile Proximity



Pablo Gómez and **Andrea Sicignano** reflect and narrate their respective immersion experience in a Lasallian school located in an area of conflict. Both schools, located in very fragile environments, are living testaments to the hope that springs eternal.

In contexts of extreme tension, Lasallian schools shine as models of inclusion, respect, and fraternity.

In today's interconnected yet conflict-ridden world, the teacher's role gains new urgency—not only as a mediator of knowledge, but as an artisan of peace. This is particularly evident in the Middle East, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians live in fragile proximity. How do we form educators who not only endure this diversity but transform it into richness—pedagogical, human, spiritual?

The international community recognizes teachers as **key builders of peaceful societies.**

Our own Institute echoed this in the 2024–2025 reflection *Our Heart in the Peripheries*, which reminds us that peace is not achieved through mere slogans but by an education that awakens, empowers, and frees. During my visits to Lasallian schools in the Middle East, I saw this lived reality: classrooms where children of different faiths learn side by side. There, the “other” is not an enemy but a classmate.



To form such teachers would require more than technical skills. It requires the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle, who saw Christ in every child. His vision makes teaching an act of humanization, a language of tenderness and presence. Lasallian educators are invited to be artisans of dialogue: listening deeply, teaching consensus, and recognizing the other not as a threat but as a gift. As Martin Buber reminds us: *“When one says You, one also says I.”*

But ideals require formation. Teachers must be trained in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, mediation, nonviolent communication, and emotional literacy. They must know how to welcome the Muslim child who prays, the Jewish child who keeps the Sabbath, the Christian who wears a cross—each with the same tenderness. And this formation itself must be diverse: male and female, believers and seekers, voices from every culture.

Being Lasallian does not lead to uniformity; it is fraternity lived in our differences.

A teacher who touches hearts, as the Founder urged, helps students discover their own dignity and the dignity of others. Each time a child is seen and loved, each time a teacher models respect across divides, another crack in our fragmented world is healed.

In Rumbek, South Sudan, fraternity is not a theory but the air we breathe. Here, scarred by war, peace is fragile, yet miracles take root in daily life. I remember in 2018 when the Brothers arrived with nothing but a desire to serve. The Loreto Sisters welcomed us with open arms,



sharing their school for our first class of 23 students. Soon after, local chiefs entrusted land to the project—not a transaction, but a sign of trust, an investment in a future of peace through education.

Today, walking through the campus is like entering a living song of reconciliation. Brothers of many nations converse with children whose very names recall rival histories. Monegro, with a spark in his eyes, once told me: *“Before La Salle, I thought the Dinka were the only people in the world. Now I cook!”* That simple phrase, “Now I cook”, spoke volumes—freedom from rigid custom, the discovery that collaboration, even in daily chores, unites.

Our school is a “laboratory of brotherhood”. Classrooms and fields intertwine: learning with cultivation, diverse languages with new friendships. One student confided that here he learned *“how to interact with others”*. Another, Isak, now dreams of becoming a doctor after seeing his people’s suffering through the eyes of compassion. Education here is not just knowledge; it is transformation of the heart.

Rumbek is more than buildings; it is a fragile yet powerful alliance of the poor and humble.

It proves that even in neglected peripheries, bridges can be built and walls broken down. It teaches us to see, as Monegro said, **“the human being before any difference”**.

In this land of fractures, the La Salle school has become oxygen—breathing hope, cultivating peace. Here, fraternity is not only taught; it is lived. And in this living space, we are closer to the possibility of a new South Sudan, one step, one child, one shared meal at a time.





13.

Flavors of
Friendship

Br. Kino Escolano FSC comes from the Lasallian District of East Asia (LEAD) and used to reside in Singapore while taking his studies at NUS. In a Facebook memorial he posted shortly after the death of a Brother, he shares how small fraternal gestures of care and kindness could leave a lasting impact transcending death. He currently serves as the Vice President for Administration at De La Salle Lipa.

Today, we lost one of the kindest and gentlest souls I've ever met—Br. Nicholas Seet FSC. They say that in the life of a Brother, your first community and first Brother Director will always hold a special place in your heart. For me, that was St. Patrick's Community in Singapore—and Br. Nick was at the heart of it. He wasn't just a director; he was a quiet guide, a steady presence, and a true Brother in every sense.

When I was adjusting to the demands of postgraduate studies and the unfamiliar rhythm of a new country, he was there—cheerful, kind-hearted, and generous with his time.



He'd drive me to and from the airport, no matter how early or late. He brought me to the doctor when I was sick. Not once did he complain. He simply showed up, as he always did, with his gentle humor and unwavering care.

He introduced me to Singaporean flavors I came to love: *Char Kway Teow*, carrot cake, *Beach Road prawn mee*, *tau sar piah* from Balestier—and his personal favorites: curry puffs, warm porridge, garlic in everything, *teh-C*, and ensaymada from Mary Grace in Manila. I still smile remembering how he taught me the difference between kopi-O and kopi-O kosong. Even in the smallest things, he was thoughtful, present, and generous.

He loved telling traditional Chinese stories—like those of the Kitchen God and the Hungry Ghosts.

These weren't just tales; they were his way of sharing culture, mystery, and meaning—of **deepening our connection to place and to each other.**



Br. Nick reminded me that fraternity is not loud or dramatic—it is found in steady presence, shared meals, morning chats over coffee, and quiet acts of love. He lived the Lasallian spirit not just through his words, but in every small gesture of care and kindness.

I will miss him deeply. And yet, I give thanks—for his life, his witness, and for the privilege of having journeyed with him, even just for a while.

Rest well, Br. Nick. Thank you for being my first director, **and for being my brother.**



14.

Beyond One's Comfort Zone



Br. Francisco Velásquez Simón FSC is a Guatemalan who belongs to the District of Central America-Panamá. He writes how he rediscovered his vocation among the poor, where fraternity becomes simplicity, joy, and renewed commitment to serve.

Photos by **The Communications Office of District of Central America-Panamá**

2025 May 9

Dear Brother, peace and joy in the Risen Christ, our only Master.

I am writing to you with fraternal respect and the joy of sharing a significant part of my vocational journey and the educational ministry that has been entrusted to me, as you requested, with hope that it may serve as a witness for other Brothers who seek to renew their commitment and fidelity to the Lasallian Mission.

My vocation was born in the context of Colegio De La Salle in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, where I received an integral formation that marked me deeply. During those years, I lived in the Casa Indígena Br. Santiago Miller, a Lasallian boarding school that offered human and Christian education and accompaniment to young Mayan boys of limited economic resources. There I discovered the fraternal and close encounter with several Brothers, whose simple life and generous dedication impacted me to the point of awakening in me the desire to follow in their footsteps as a Brother of the Christian Schools.

After my initial formation and consecration, I was sent to serve as a formator in formation houses and director in various schools in our District of Central America-Panama, urban and private contexts, serving families who could afford to pay for their children's education. Although these missions demanded dedication and professionalism, I always carried in my heart the ideal that inspired my vocation:

to serve poor children and young people, the most vulnerable, those who often have no voice or opportunities.

Over the years, and after an enriching experience in educational management, I felt the inner call to return to my roots. Brother Visitor, Br. Manuel Orozco, gave me the opportunity to have a direct experience of living in a context of poverty and marginalization, where I could accompany more closely the children and young people who, like me in my adolescence, dream of a better future through education.

Today I have the grace of living my mission at the *San Juan Bautista Catholic School* in *San Juan La Laguna*, in the midst of the Mayan Tz'utujil people and living community life in *Santa María Visitación*. Here I have rediscovered the transforming power of fraternity and the power of the Gospel lived in everyday life. Life is simple, resources are limited, but love, faith and dedication make everything possible.

This experience has helped me **to renew my vocation and to understand more deeply what it means to be a Brother** in a world that cries out for justice, solidarity, compassion and presence.

I share this testimony with humility and gratitude, in the hope that it may serve as an encouragement to other Brothers, especially the younger ones, so that they will not be afraid to go where we are most needed. Our vocation takes on full meaning when we are at the side of the little ones, when we opt for the poor, when we leave comforts to

embrace the simplicity of the Gospel and the educational style of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

I thank the Institute for the opportunities received, and for your fraternal and prophetic leadership. May St. John Baptist de La Salle and our Mother under the title of Our Lady of the Star, Queen and Mother of the Christian Schools, continue to accompany our journey.

Fraternally in Christ and in De La Salle,

Br. Francisco Velásquez Simón FSC
Santa María Visitación, Sololá, Guatemala



15.

Young Dreamers



In July 2025, **Br. Armin** addressed Young Lasallians gathered at the Generalate in Rome for the Jubilee of Youth. He reaffirms that the Institute's mission exists for the young and the poor and enjoins them to keep dreaming and risking.

“Why are you here? Why are you visiting our school?” a young Lasallian asked me recently. It sounded like an impertinent question. Only the young are capable of asking impertinent questions such as this and getting away with it, still looking innocent. It is rare for me to be quizzed in this manner. I have managed to visit 62 countries so far, with 18 sectors to go before I complete a major responsibility included in my job description. I don’t really get too many impertinent questions during our Lasallian conversations. And so, I tried to respond as best I could. The gist of my response to that young Lasallian will also give you an idea of what I truly think and feel about our International Gathering of Young Lasallians today:



**“I need to be here to see you.
To hear you. To feel you”.**

“And perhaps to offer my hand for a high five. Or a fist bump. To have the privilege of shaking your hand. To be blessed with your warm embrace. And for a bonus, it would really make my day if you will allow me to take a selfie with

you. That will be my reminder to myself—a most solemn reminder—that to serve you is the most important reason why the Institute is here—maybe it is the only real reason why this Lasallian Institute exists”.

Today and in the next few days, my prayer for you is that you will also discover why you are here. Before the mortal remains of St. John Baptist de La Salle, in this holy place, I renew my personal commitment to be a Brother to those entrusted by the Lord to me and to each of you. I make the same vow on behalf of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the global



Lasallian Family. We need to see you, hear you, feel you. There is no other reason for this Institute to exist except for you and all young people who “are far from salvation”. If we ever get distracted, if we forget and train our eyes on other goals or push you aside, you have the right to demand from us—your leaders and elders—the attention, love, and care that you so deserve.

I remember Greta Thunberg, who addressed world leaders at the UN Headquarters in New York. She spoke her mind without flinching:⁵

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5 Cf. <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>.



This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!...

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words... People are suffering. People

are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing... How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just 'business as usual'...? You are failing us.

As I welcome you to this year's International Gathering of Young Lasallians, I carry the guilt and burden of my generation and the generations before me. In so many ways, we have failed you. Societies, governments, and world leaders have failed you. What future can we offer? How dare we call you our hope for the future? We have not stopped polluting the earth with so much garbage. Thrash litters this holy city of Rome. Other respectful leaders have convinced peaceful citizens that owning a gun is the best defense and starting a war is the best offense. What kind of world are we passing on to you as our legacy?

I am thinking of Gaza, where close to 62,000 have died, many of whom are women and children. We have four nursing students from Gaza who are enrolled in Bethlehem

University and are currently attending to the needs of the infirm and injured despite the unimaginable limitations and obstacles they face. They, too, have an existential answer to the impertinent question.

There are so many other areas in our world where there are more questions than answers. The devastation and displacement in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine are described as the deadliest war in Europe since World War II. Unspeakable violence and humanitarian crises are daily stories in many parts of Sudan, Congo, Syria, Myanmar, and Yemen. Today, almost 700 million people live in extreme poverty, says the World Bank, surviving on less than 2 euros a day. *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.*

Dr. Ezzideen from Gaza posted this 5 days ago:⁶

I swear to you. Before God... what I saw today was not life... A truck passed by. It was empty. Its floor was covered in a thin layer of flour dust. Just dust. Not bags. Not bread.

And then I saw them. **Not rebels. Not criminals. Children.** They ran, ran like hunted things, toward that truck. They climbed it with hands that have never held toys. They fell to their knees as if before an altar.

And they began to scrape. One had a broken lid. Another, a piece of cardboard. But the rest, the rest used their hands. Their tongues. They licked it.

.....
6 Cf. <https://x.com/ezzingaza/status/1943758629791768682>.

Do you hear me? They licked flour dust from rusted steel. From dirt. From the back of a truck that had already driven away.

One boy was laughing. Not because he was happy, but because the body goes mad when it is starving.

Another was crying quietly, like someone who no longer believes anyone is listening.

And I stood there. With all my shame.

I shared this message to a small group of young Lasallians gathered in Parmenie this year, and it is also my plea to all of you today:

Around 2025 years ago, with just a dozen close friends, Jesus at age 30 started his ministry proclaiming the Father's grand dream for the world: no more weeping, good news





to the poor, liberty for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed.

Around 345 years ago, John Baptist, at age 28, gathered a few young men to form a community of **teachers so they may proclaim the Father's grand dream for children**, especially those who are "far from salvation". **He envisioned inclusive schools that were open to everyone, especially the poor** who had no way of overcoming the social and economic barriers of their time.

In both founding stories, the protagonists were just a handful of young dreamers hearing the same call, captivated by the same dream, united with one heart and one spirit to bring light and life and love to the whole world. Consider the power generated from their small community of young people with big dreams and even bigger hearts.

The world has always been shaped by dreamers.

Their dream took shape not in grand proclamations and extraordinary events but in the small decisive steps and struggles to live in authentic fraternity and committed service to their educational mission.

So, here I conclude by asking the same impertinent question to each of you today: *“Why are you here?”*



16.

Our Daily Bread



Jyron Raz graduated from De La Salle College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB) and currently works at De La Salle Philippines (DLSP). He speaks of fraternity not as a distant dream but as a daily commitment.

Every day I struggle to find myself reading the news about a new bad thing that happened in the world. Lines are drawn around values, beliefs, and political visions, and what once could have been starting points for dialogue now appear more like impenetrable walls. Most of the news I see revolves around the unending pursuit of power and wealth of the upper 1% of society and how the other 99% end up suffering for it.

Each day, the news carries the weight of this fragmentation into my life. Stories of conflict, natural disasters, corruption, and inequality—all quite unrelenting. My generation would often say that we're "cooked"—short of saying it's the end of the world as we know it. Every day is an emotional rollercoaster: first stage, I react with outrage, most of the time grief, I rant about it with my friends, I go to sleep and then the day resets. Admittedly, and unfortunately, over time, I feel myself getting dulled with this cycle repeating itself. Compassion, once sharp, risks turning into a kind of numbness. You know what makes it worse? Because it makes you numb, you'd barely notice this change—we're all too caught up doomscrolling on our phones. But without meaning to, I began to forget the concrete struggles of others—much less the pain of the earth itself.

I realize that this desensitization doesn't come without consequences. To protect myself, I sometimes withdraw, retreating inward, convincing myself that the world's problems are simply too immense for me to confront. The survival instinct to secure peace for myself or for those closest to me, unintentionally, makes me more suspicious, less open. And in those exact moments, I see how isolation can deepen the fractures in our society.

I'm not too hopeless though to think that that we are truly "cooked". The idea of fraternity—brotherhood and sisterhood rooted in the truth that we are all human beings in the same boat—seems to offer a counterweight. Working for the Lasallian Family offers a daily dose of fraternity that I get to keep and experience up close; it's an opportunity to trust others again.

Living fraternally, as Pope Francis reminds us, is to resist indifference and to choose encounter, even when it is easier and convenient to walk away.

What reassures me is that fraternity does not demand grand gestures. It finds its form in daily acts: when a person checks in on a classmate struggling, when co-workers celebrate each other's successes, or when young people come together to clean a polluted river. Some see these as small acts but in reality, they create a ripple effect. They disrupt the culture of isolation and remind us that the circle of care can always be widened. These things might not dismantle systemic injustices overnight, but they plant seeds of trust that can, over time, grow into something much larger.

My Lasallian upbringing has helped me see this more clearly. I just read the Lasallian Reflection 11 which says that "all is connected", a truth that reshapes how we understand both creation and community; understanding that my well-being is not separate from the dignity of others or the health of the earth and that they are bound together. Fraternity, then, is not sentimental benevolence. It is a structural principle of life itself. To harm one is to harm all, and to heal one is to begin healing all.

I don't want to ignore the debates surrounding the idea of fraternity where some argue that fraternity arises from shared vulnerability, while others warn that history shows how communities can also exclude, sometimes violently, under the guise of brotherhood. I have a deep appreciation for these views and that these tensions keep me cautious, reminding me that fraternity is never guaranteed and that it must be practiced with humility. Still, I am inclined to believe that the risk is worth taking.

Following the idea that all is indeed connected, then fraternity is not, and will never be, optional. This is why the ordinary matters so much: daily acts of fraternity rebuild the trust on which greater structures of justice and peace can stand.

Sometimes I ask myself: in a world where mistrust often feels safer, does it really cost that much to be a person for others? Easy answer is no, but I understand that sometimes it can lead to disappointment or discomfort. It might entail confronting systems that thrive on division. But it can also lead to healing. I have seen communities choose to welcome migrants, neighbors gathering around families in grief, students finding joy in projects that help the environment. In these moments, I see how trust, once broken, can be rebuilt.

For me, the call of *All is Connected* is both urgent and hopeful. It tells me that I am not meant to live in isolation, bracing against a hostile world. I am part of a community of creation, where my flourishing depends on the flourishing of others.

Fraternity, then, is not a distant dream. **It is a daily choice**—a discipline that asks me to live **as though our lives are woven together**, because in truth, they already are.



Apocalypse: a single cup

Revealing as Communion

Before the world began, there was already a circle—not of power, but of love. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit moved within one another like breath and flame, giving and receiving in an endless rhythm of communion. This divine dance is not an abstract mystery but the first revelation of fraternity itself.

To speak of fraternity, then, is not to speak of ethics or affection alone; it is to touch the heartbeat of God.

As many theologians and saints remind us, God is a relationship—a being-with and being-for. From this overflowing communion springs creation, history, and mission. To live fraternally is to echo this divine life: to enter into the giving and receiving that unites differences without dissolving it, to let our communities become small reflections of that infinite and almighty Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Lasallian fraternity, each lesson, each act of shared mission begins with life that emanates from the Trinity, the first community.

John Baptist de La Salle fell prostrate before this *infinite and adorable majesty* and sought to live the mystery with his Brothers. In his story, we may take a second look at our experience of fraternity: how the eternal communion of God sought an earthly dwelling among teachers who came to live—together and by association—for the educational service of the poor.

De La Salle's conversion was not the story of an isolated saint but of a **man drawn into a relationship—first with the abandoned children** of Reims, then with the companions who dared to live and pray with him.

Together they discovered that God's love could be written not only in creeds but in chalk, that the school could become an altar where bread is broken and hearts are kindled with hope. Their fraternity was fragile and fiery—marked by misunderstanding, poverty, but also with much joy. And so, it remains today in the Brothers' communities: not a finished portrait of perfection, but a living mirror of God's self-giving love, where difference, weakness, and shared mission become sacraments of communion.

In God's time, and with the ever-creative Spirit of God, our Lasallian fraternity begins a new moment, spreading like wildfire through diverse Lasallian vocations. What began as a few communities of Brothers has become a vast Lasallian Family, stretching across cultures and continents. Around the same table now gather Lasallian Partners, educators, families, and the young—each bringing their own light

to the common flame. The Spirit has widened the circle, teaching us that fraternity is not a possession to guard but a grace that cannot be contained. It reaches beyond our communities into the cries of creation, the faces of the excluded, the yearning of our common home. This is the widening of De La Salle's dream: that we may all become companions in God's communion, discovering in one another not strangers, but kin. Our symbol is the shared cup where divine communion, the human story, and universal fraternity meet.

In a recent trip to several communities in Latin America, I have been enamored once more by that deeply ingrained social tradition widespread in the region: the sharing of that traditional beverage, the *yerba mate*. A single cup is passed around and shared—it could be the whole day—a powerful symbol of authentic fraternal encounters.



The shared cup that goes around in a circle carries the taste of earth and fire, the scent of roots and shared breath.

In its roundness, we recognize the circle of communion

that has bound us together—Brothers, Partners, young

and old, rich and poor, women and men—**all drinking from the same vessel of grace.**

Each sip is a sacred remembrance: “Do this in memory of me”. We remember not only the One who first broke bread and poured out His life for us, but also the countless Lasallians through the centuries who have done the same—making their classrooms, their offices, their neighborhoods, a living Eucharist of fraternity.

To share and drink from the same cup is to believe that the heart of education is encounter. It is to rediscover, as the cup is passed on from one hand to another, that faith is always social, always inclusive, always poured outward. In this circle, strangers become kin, and the poor, the forgotten, the strange, find a place among friends. We learn that the Lasallian school is not a fortress but a table, where no one is excluded, and where every learner’s story enriches the flavor of our common drink.

And so, we walk—sometimes across familiar paths, sometimes across trembling spans still under construction.

To be Lasallian today is to accept the grace and risk of building the bridge as we walk on it.

In fact, we are called to become the very bridge that others may walk on to cross to the other side: between generations that no longer speak the same language, between faith and doubt, between the cries of the poor and the silence of power. Each beam we lay is an act of trust in the Architect who goes before us—Christ, the bridge between heaven and earth. Our hands may bear the splinters of this work, but they also bear the marks of the resurrection.

When we choose dialogue over division, accompaniment over abandonment, justice over indifference, we allow the

Gospel to take flesh again in history. Like Robert Quinn's⁷ image of the bridge-in-progress, the Lasallian Mission unfolds not from the safety of finished plans, but from the courage to begin—to step forward together even when the foundations are still being laid. It is fraternity-in-motion, hope under construction, love daring to cross the impossible.

And at the end of the road, where the bridge meets the land, we find a table—wide, simple, luminous. This is the table of abundance, where the poor are not guests but hosts, and where learning becomes Eucharist: the breaking of ignorance into understanding, of isolation into belonging, of despair into promise. Here, faith and love for the poor are no longer two paths but one single way of seeing. For nearly 350 years, Lasallians have prepared this table in every corner of the world—not only to teach, but to make present the God who still desires to dwell among us.

These schools, these centers of hope, are not monuments of success; they are living signs that Christ's love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think the ability to love has been lost. Around these tables, the hungry are fed, the young discover their voice, and we glimpse the Kingdom that is both promised and already begun.

In this communion, we begin to see with new eyes—that the *mate* cup, the bridge, and the table are not separate symbols, but one continuous movement of grace. The water that fills the cup flows beneath the bridge; the bridge leads us to the table; and the table sends us back to the world. *All is connected.* The fraternity we live among ourselves extends to the whole community of creation—to forests

⁷ Cf. Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

and rivers, to refugees and children, to the fragile earth that groans in hope. To drink, to walk, to share—these are gestures not only of faith, but of ecological conversion, acts of tenderness for our common home.

We are invited, then, to become “living bridges” of communion, joining heaven and earth, the human and the divine, the broken and the whole. To be Lasallian in this time is to hold the conviction that no cry is foreign, no wound is wasted, no act of love too small to restore the harmony of creation.

As we close this reflection, we do not end the journey—we only take the next step. Around the shared cup, across the unfinished bridge, at the table of abundance, we hear once more the heartbeat of Jesus’ dream: “That all may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10). Let us walk on, then, as companions on the same road—builders of bridges, bearers of cups, stewards of tables—Lasallians who believe that fraternity is not a dream of the past but the language of the present and our hope for the future. May our lives, intertwined with creation and each other, proclaim what *Lasallian Reflection 11* reminds us:

“To rediscover that all is connected is to recognize that the Gospel vision continues to be our first and principal rule.”

And so, we pass the cup again—in memory of Jesus, in hope for the world, in communion with all creation—until the dream of God becomes us.







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