

LEADERSHIP FOR A BETTER WORLD

**A Lasallian Coordinator Seminar.
Narooma, Australia, 1993.**

Miss Mary Conlan

This seminar was attended by 22 Coordinators from 15 Lasallian schools across Australia and New Zealand. Seven of the participants were women and all were lay people.

All the schools, except La Salle College in Western Australia, have an on-going presence and/or connection with the De La Salle Brothers, a factor greatly appreciated by every school represented. La Salle in W.A still receives visits from the Brothers, but feels isolated from its Lasallian origins, not only because the Brothers are no longer present in the school, but also because of its geographical location. However, it is obvious that the Lasallian heritage means a great deal to that community and this is fostered and nurtured with enthusiasm by its female lay principal and total lay staff.

The Program.

The program had a great balance between "in-put", reflection and prayer, interaction and "re-creation."

Its prime focus was the mind and heart of St. La Salle in the everyday experience of doing "The Lord's Work." In a sense the program seeks to immerse the Lasallian Coordinators more deeply into the Lasallian spirituality of faith translated into action. This Lasallian "character" is the theme that links all sessions of the seminar and it was "un-packed" in various ways:

– Through the morning and evening prayer times in which, more often than not, an extract from St. La Salle's writings became a key focus.

– The regular punctuation of the day's activities with one/some or all of the following invocations.

1. Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.
2. Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever!

3. I will continue, O my God, to perform all my actions for love of You.
4. Saint John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.

One sensed a great bond of unity, faith and purpose strengthening within the group as each day passed and with each repeating of these prayers.

– Brother Raphael presented two very detailed and most informative sessions on John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In historical-narrative format, Br. Raphael's account put us in touch with the ordinariness and sheer commitment of St. La Salle to educate the poor, come what may, and come it did!

The more one listened to the story, the more one realized that La Salle's vision of education in Christian schools was to be holistic and relevant to life. His disciples (students is not a term used by La Salle) were to be educated to be fine citizens who could work effectively when they left school. (Many had only a few short years at school.) To be a "fine citizen" implied leading the disciples/students to wholeness, to their greatest potential, to fullness of life, which is exactly the model Jesus used. "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn 10:10.)

Thus for St. La Salle and for all those educators who follow him, teaching most surely is "The Lord's work."

In no way does St. La Salle compartmentalize life into "the spiritual" and "the rest of life". All is integrated, all is "of God, with God and for God." Hence the value of teachers reminding themselves of this reality often during the day, e.g. the momentary prayers spoken of earlier. This is truly the work of "salvation", to heal, to make whole.

– Each of the fifteen schools represented gave a 15-20 minute presentation on the special qualities of their school and identified its Lasallian character.

This was the most valuable aspect of the seminar;

* It reinforced the notion of the network of the Lasallian Institute, helping us to realize just how much we all had in common, even in our diversity of school types and with such huge distances between many of the schools in the network.

* The primacy of "the poor" in its array of manifestations was evident in every presentation, poverty having many faces.

Equally apparent was the range of resources (or lack of) across the board, e.g. Boys Town and Oak Hill as compared with for example, Marrickville. This great disparity in terms of physical resources lead to much discussion and concern amongst many of the participants. It was recognized that there can be real poverty despite affluence, but creative support within the network may lead to addressing this concerning disparity. Consideration could be given for the big brother/little brother notion being applied to our schools. That is, one school "walking alongside" a poorer school and sharing some resources (camp sites, buses) or passing over some "hand-me downs" or sharing the "excess" in any creative way possible.

This brotherliness could also be reinforced by means of a school network letter, say once a term/semester. Apart from strengthening existing links, this also could assist in the sharing of resources, ideas and the Lasallian ethos of the schools.

- A session on the Spirituality of the Teacher lead by Br. Colin Griffin effectively linked into the Lasallian mentality. This was a most down-to-earth and affirming session. Working from a simple (borrowed) definition of spirituality, viz. "How do I cope with life?" Brother proceeded to work this question through with the participants.

Thus, this simple, direct question was unpacked in the following way.

How do I cope with life? that is to say:

1. What is my basic attitude to life/ (how do I most consistently view life/) and
2. How do I translate this basic attitude into lived experience? i.e., what are the patterns of behaviour that result from my basic attitude(s)?

Saint La Salle spoke in other but similar terms, FAITH and ZEAL, zeal being the expression of faith. This was central to his "way" for teachers and their disciples (students). In this way the holistic philosophy he espoused became a living reality. Another way of expressing this may be the translating of "the vision" (be it personal or collective) to lived reality.

For John Baptist de La Salle prayer was integral and never isolated from his mission. Prayer, with a specific concern for each boy he (the teacher) taught, even to the use of each one's name, is strongly encouraged by St. La Salle.

"Touchstones" for the Educator in a Lasallian School.

- * Our work is God's work;
- * Our task is to educate holistically in order to shape fine citizens;
- * Faith with Zeal form the cornerstone of La Salle's "way";
- * Primacy of "the poor" in Christian Schools;
- * Brothers and sisters walk "alongside" their disciples;
- * Jesus is "the model" for Christian schools. He is the model of wholeness and holiness. He is "the teacher" and we all are disciples;
- * Ours is the work of salvation, that is, to promote healing

and growth;

* We are to "touch the hearts" of our students, the cognitive dimension is not enough.

Conclusion.

This seminar was a consciousness-raising experience into the world of St. La Salle. It was not merely a "looking back" to a man of great vision and zeal, but a further immersing into the relevance of his ways for the "here and now."

It would be difficult to participate in this seminar and not be "touched" at some deeper level within. In true Lasallian style, the hearts of the coordinators (the disciples on this occasion) were, I believe, genuinely moved by the generous work of those who preceded us in our various schools.

Many of the practices, words, images and approaches that we all have experienced by working with the De La Salle Brothers became more fully contextualized and richer in meaning.

The richness of the story and faith behind the mottoes and devotional practices all began to "fit into place"; not only that, it became increasingly evident how much the lay teachers in these Christian schools had already claimed "this way" for their own spirituality, especially those with a long association with the Brothers.

Practical and task-related sessions on Listening, Conflict Resolution and Forces at Work also found their meaning and purpose in the Lasallian way. Frequently when presenters and participants sought to clarify a concept or approach, they would refer to something Br. Raphael had explained in telling "the story" of St. La Salle.

In every way the Lasallian Character formed the rationale behind deliberations and mutual discussions, and this in no way was contrived, but rather it was the obvious source to which we were drawn time and time again.

The way of St. La Salle is as relevant today as it was in the seventeenth century.

Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever!