

# Caring for Teachers and Students: Discipline in the Lasallian School

Presented to the Deans of Students  
District of San Francisco  
*Christian Brothers Retreat and Conference Center*  
*Mont La Salle, Napa, California*  
*December 7, 1990*  
*Edited for Publication — November, 1994*

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We will focus today on the beginnings of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It is from that starting point, I believe, that we will grasp many important cues about the origin and the meaning behind our modern term *Lasallian Education*.

To develop a complete understanding of the guidance De La Salle provided his early teachers, I will refer to a number of texts, but most of my material comes from *The Conduct of Schools*. We will approach our task from two perspectives: first, we will look at what De La Salle is saying to the early teachers about how they are to manage, organize and operate their classroom; and then we will study the process De La Salle used to develop these guidelines that he shared with the teachers. We stand to gain insight into the Lasallian school by focusing on the process De La Salle used to develop *The Conduct*. And we will begin to see ways that we too might help to guide our present-day teachers in their daily work with the students. We will also see just how timeless the guidelines are that are contained in *The Conduct of Schools*.

Before we go much further, I would like to offer the following note. You will probably recognize most of the material we discuss in our brief review of *The Conduct*. In many cases, you have already intuitively arrived at many of these conclusions yourself. De La Salle's approach, and his insights into the real lives of the children in his schools have resulted in the development of a text that remarkably mirrors our own times, and our own work as educational ministers. De La Salle, and the early Brothers' words ring true to our own experiences with today's teachers and students. This brings us back to our point about studying the process De La Salle used to establish *The Conduct of Schools*.

The preface of *The Conduct of School* neatly summarizes the process De La Salle and the early teachers used to develop this vital text:

This *Conduct* was prepared and put in order only after a great number of conferences with the oldest and most capable teachers among the Brothers of the Institute and after several years of experience.

Nothing has been added that has not been thoroughly deliberated and well tested and of which the advantages and disadvantages have not been weighed and, insofar as possible, both the good and bad consequences have not been foreseen.

*The Conduct of Schools* is not solely the work of De La Salle. Quite the contrary, *The Conduct of Schools* is De La Salle's combination of the best educational pedagogy of the 1690's, coupled with the experience of the first Brothers in the classroom. Then, "only after many conferences with the oldest and most capable teachers" they began to codify what was to become their educational handbook. It virtually grew out of the living experience of the early Lasallian teachers. This process establishes a precedent for how we should proceed when we develop disciplinary guidelines within our own schools and how we should work with our own teachers.

### ***The Conduct of Schools* from the French: *conduire*, to care:**

The word *conduct* — comes from the French *conduire*, meaning to conduct, to manage, to lead, to guide, to direct. All of these are similar to our English word: manage. But, *conduire* also means to care. This dimension of *conduire* has to do with spiritual direction — guiding somebody along the path to salvation; the sense we have in the *Meditations*. It is the pastoral sense of *conduire*, of managing, of guiding, of caring — of bringing a person forward out of care — that is the key to *The Conduct of Christian Schools*. The teacher was to do all things with the eyes of faith.

*The Conduct of Schools* combines the best in educational pedagogy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century France with this new spirituality of educational ministry. De La Salle, priest and Doctor of Philosophy, had a very keen insight into incarnational spirituality. He evidenced this by insight into the person of Jesus, found in Scripture, through prayer, meditation, and through the daily contact with each student. De La Salle's commitment to this incarnate spirituality found expression at every level of the Christian School. It permeates all of his writings, especially the meditations he prepared for the teachers' annual retreat and the meditations for Sundays and feast days. And, it is this incarnational spirituality we participate in as we begin our prayer each day — *Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God*, not, *Let us pray to God*. Notice what we are really saying, "*let us remember we are in the presence of God.*" God is with us here. This is God's place. It is in God's place that the teacher acts as God's ambassador. That spirituality is an essential filter for what that teachers are doing with, and for the students.

### **Parish Schools vs. *The Conduct of Schools*:**

*The Parish School* was one of the major pedagogical resources De La Salle drew upon for the methodology in developing *The Conduct*. It was written by Jacques De Bettencourt, a parish priest and contemporary of De La Salle. It was based on eighteen years of experience De Bettencourt had in the elementary parish classroom. (We are indebted to the work done by Brother Dominic Everett, FSC on the comparison between *The Parish School* and *The Conduct of Schools*.) By comparing these two teacher guides, we will begin to understand how De La Salle distinguished his educational system from the common parish-based schools of the late 17th century. De La Salle, who draws from the best in contemporary pedagogy, does not hesitate to make significant modifications to these pedagogies when necessary to suit the needs of the teachers and students in the newly emerging Christian Schools.

*The Parish School* was a single publication, written by an individual, and it seems to be based upon his own experiences. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* was a collaborative effort. As a part of a larger system of texts that included hymnals, reading texts, wall charts, religion texts, mathematics books, etc., it was one of many books De La Salle wrote for the Brothers, to train them, to teach them, and help them with the organization of the school, and their work with students. *The Conduct of Christian Schools* was based on shared experiences. It was a shared, collaborative effort. As such, it was written *together and by association*. De La Salle's commitment to collaborating WITH THE TEACHERS comes through quite clearly. For De La Salle, the Christian School was the result of a shared educational ministry, not as much a common ministry where everyone was doing something similar, but instead it is a ministry where every person (including the parent and the student) are dynamically linked to accomplish the aims and goals of the Christian School.

*The Parish School* was based upon logical development of the curriculum. One who develops such systems logically is locked into the perspective that they know how best to teach all kids. De La Salle, on the other hand, encouraged the Brothers to experiment, and then he authored *The Conduct*, based on what they found to be most effective. *The Conduct of Schools* promoted curriculum and learning experiences that were developed experientially.

De La Salle was one of the first people to elevate the position of the elementary teacher to a ministry within the Church; to a vocation; that these teachers were being called by God. Teaching in the Christian School was not simply a task to be relegated to persons who had no other way to make a living. This is a critical departure between what was common in 17th century France and the system of education De La Salle established. Classroom teachers were quite often persons who, having no other usable skills, turned to teaching. They were poor, untrained in social skills, had poor health and sanitary habits, and most were barely skilled in the subjects they taught nor capable in their classroom management techniques. This is not too far away from the first teachers who joined De La Salle in his new endeavor. We know De La Salle found the first teachers quite repugnant, and more than once he refers to them as being of a lower social class than his own personal valet.

*The Parish School* was based on the theories of contemporary educational pedagogy, while the Lasallian school was based on understanding the children who come to learn. Instead of projecting their needs, or ignoring them altogether, De La Salle was concerned with understanding what motivates people and especially what motivates children to learn. His work with the teachers, and his writings encouraged the teachers to understand how they could best guide their *disciples*. This psychological perspective comes through very clearly in *The Conduct*.

*The Conduct* was based on teaching a living religion, not just teaching religious principles; it was based on helping children to adapt behavior — models of living. De La Salle's schools taught life skills — rather than simply intellectual skills. As a result, the students learned living skills, which included religious practices and attitudes so that they could live as Christians in their world of late 17th and early 18th century France.

The curriculum and student body in the Lasallian school were integrated. Students were not segmented on the basis of their proficiency or course. Any given classroom could consist of students with varying levels of expertise in a given subject. As a matter of fact, quite often the more advanced students were called upon to assist the less proficient students attain mastery of a particular subject. Likewise, the subject matter itself was taught in an integrated manner; learning a language was not segmented from the learning of religion; their learning of mathematics went hand in hand with learning religion.

Often times, I think we lose sight of the importance of providing students with an integrational learning environment and course of studies. We tend to departmentalize: our math teachers teach math, religion teachers are responsible for teaching religion, and somebody else within the school is responsible for some other part of the student's life. De La Salle's system of education strongly supports the view that all learning should be integrated.

*The Parish School* was written essentially to direct teachers who were working with one hundred or so students to a classroom, while *The Conduct of Schools* was written to guide teachers who were conducting classes of 50 to 60 students. In *The Parish School*, the authority was very divided; the teacher was more like a director in the classroom. In addition to the teacher, there were a series of aides also operating in some capacity in the classroom. On the other hand, in the Lasallian school, the authority, and therefore the role of instruction, was reserved to the teacher. The teacher was ultimately responsible for guiding the entire experience. Again, I think that has some implications to us as Deans of Students. Our teachers are most immediately in contact with the students; he or she should have full authority and responsibility in the classroom to guide, model, be vigilant with, and care for the students. All the more reason for us to make sure that each of our teachers is well prepared and fully supported in their very important role as Christian ministers of education.

### **The Cast of Characters in the Lasallian School:**

In the last couple of minutes, we have examined seven distinct characteristics that distinguish the schools De La Salle developed from schools established on the "Parish School" model. And we have explained the purpose of *The Conduct* as going far beyond simply teaching classroom management techniques. In fact, as we have seen, *The Conduct* established an entirely new milieu whereby the role of the teacher takes on new meaning. Through *The Conduct*, De La Salle worked with his young teachers, trying to train them to be effective as ministers of education in the Christian School. Let's move our discussion now to the cast of characters that comprised the school community.

Since we are dealing with Lasallian schools, there is no better place to begin than with the students. Imagine, if you can, what the original students were like that the early teachers were dealing with — what are your impressions of those people? What kinds of students were these early teachers dealing with?

**Response:** Street urchins.

**Response:** They were poor.

**Response:** Many had learning disabilities.

**Response:** Uncivilized, with few social skills.

**Response:** Streetwise. They probably knew the streets pretty well.

**Response:** The only ones who were educated, as I understand it, were wealthy or wealthier.

**Br. Joseph:** That is a fairly accurate representation of the students who entered those first classrooms. Let's take the picture one step further. How would you characterize the teachers that walked

into those classrooms, as Brothers, in those early years? Can anybody take a venture as to their character, their habits, their skills? What can you tell me about those teachers that walked into the classrooms of the first Lasallian Schools?

**Response:** They weren't very well educated themselves.

**Br. Joseph:** True. Very few of them even had the education that we would equate with graduating from elementary school. As a matter of fact, probably none of them had the sophistication that our elementary school student graduates have. So, academically, they were very poorly skilled.

Many of them probably had skills in writing, but probably these skills were fairly crude. They might have had basic computational skills, but again, these skills might also be quite minimal. In many cases, the teachers that flocked to De La Salle in the beginning were people with almost no skills at all. These early teachers had to be taught how to teach and how to manage these students.

**Response:** Would you say that they were closer to understanding the lives of the students?

**Br. Joseph:** Evidently, they were much closer to the real living situation of the students. But, as we will see later, the fact that they understood the real lives of the students may not have eased the teachers anxiety about maintaining order in the classroom.

**Response:** They had the same social and personal background.... they were street-wise.

**Br. Joseph:** We know that when De La Salle brought the Brothers into his house, he was repulsed by them and their lack of even the most essential social manners and graces. He considered them lower in social class than his valet, a point that we mentioned earlier. We know, for instance, that the food that they ate was so difficult for De La Salle to digest that he, for two years, practically stopped eating. He says it took him over two years to get used to the kind of diet that these people were used to.

In light of this profile, it might not seem reasonable to have great hope for what these teachers could accomplish. But it doesn't seem to daunt De La Salle. What does he tell us of these teachers? He says, first off, *You are to become models of Christ's love to the students, models of Christ's love. The child is more likely to imitate what the child sees than what the child is taught. While I can teach you to teach, I am more concerned about who you are and the kind of person you are, because it's then that you will have a greater impact on the students.* De La Salle challenged them to *write the word of God daily upon the hearts of the students.*

Understandably, these early teachers were very human. They became easily discouraged with the lack of attention, lack of student progress, and absenteeism. And they probably sought and needed the comfort of abusive corporal punishment — the rod and the ferule. The rod, you can imagine what that is. The ferule was a piece of leather of a certain length. It had an oval head to it with a little pouch at the end to be padded and used on the student's left hand. (Never the right hand, as De La Salle and the early Brothers were concerned about the students' ability to write).

Well, the third cast of characters — Let's take a look at the parents; we've already talked a little bit about the students. The parents were not qualified to teach the students the truths of their religion. De La Salle believed it was essential for someone to teach the youngsters the truths of their faith. The parents were not capable of providing the children supervision on a daily basis, and so the kids were running the streets. Parents couldn't keep the kids from bad company; they couldn't keep the kids from a life of crime. We certainly see dysfunctional families in our own point in time, and we see what happens when kids are left to their own devices.

These are the cast of characters who are at work in *The Conduct of Schools*. It represents a workbook, a system of training and support of teachers; it is a part of a larger system. It provides an opportunity for formation, not just religious formation, but pedagogical training. It is based on the strengths of the community. It is *together and by association* that these Brothers are involved in this effort. *The Conduct* reflects the same things that De La Salle is sharing with the Brothers in their annual retreats. Through all of these experiences, De La Salle was constantly calling the teachers to understand their work with the students as a ministry, as a vocation, as the most important work that God could have chosen to call them to accomplish.

De La Salle tries to keep the Brothers constantly aware of this new perspective of teaching as a vocation, a call from God. He accomplishes it through the parallels he draws between Jesus and his own disciples. For instance, in the fourteenth meditation, he says:

Be convinced of what St. Paul says, that *you plant and water the seed, but it is God, through Jesus, who makes it grow*. That God is the one who brings your work to fulfillment. So, when you experience some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples; when there are some who do not profit from your teaching, and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God in confidence. As Jesus Christ to make the Spirit come alive in **you**...

Not in the students, but in **you**, since he has chosen you to do his work. A very personal relationship between the teacher and God exists such that the teacher understands that the teacher is doing God's work.

Jesus Christ, speaking to his apostles, said he gave an example to them that they might do as he had done. He also wanted his disciples to be with him at all the conversions he brought about so that they could see how he acted and take Jesus as the rule and model for all they would do.

The teacher is called to be a model to the student in the same way that Jesus models behavior for his own disciples.

De La Salle goes so far as to call the students, *disciples*. As a matter of fact, he uses the terms *student* and *pupil* very seldom. Instead he uses the term *disciple* in describing the relationship that exists between the teacher and the student. "*They are to follow you. They are to follow your example.*"

Earlier we mentioned that De La Salle established a spirituality of instruction. Let's take a moment to consider what this new spirituality was, and how it affected the teachers' work with the students. What do you think De La Salle said to these teachers about their work with their disciples?

**Response:** He stressed the need to be truthful and authentic with their students.

**Br. Joseph:** Their sincerity, their authenticity, that they be truthful. The teachers were not just calling the students to live as Christians; they were to model the Christian life so the students could *follow them*.

What kind of disciplinary techniques do you think De La Salle suggested to these early teachers as a means of living out this authenticity?

**Response:** I think he had a variety of disciplinary measures, depending on the student. Some students needed to be stroked a little bit at times; others needed stronger disciplinary action. Also, he told them to love their students. To build individual relationships with the students, the kind that they didn't have with their parents. He wanted the teachers to love them like a mother and discipline them like a father.

What do we mean by a new spirituality of teachers? The few comments mentioned above suggest that the teachers were called to know and love their students. The teachers were expected to bring the students to new life in the same way Jesus brought new life to the disciples and those to whom he came in contact. Their work with the students was no longer a secular endeavor, but rather a participation in God's saving action for each and every one of the students.

### **Knowing the Students:**

The *Conduct of Schools* creates an entire system where this process of knowing the student can occur. It begins at the very moment he is presented to the school for admission. The student meets with the Inspector of Schools who, during this initial interview, determines the student-candidate's skills, personal background, motivation for learning, family information, and as much other information as possible so that the student could be placed properly in school. Once the student is placed in a particular class, the teacher continues this process of information gathering and record keeping to *know the student*. The teacher was responsible for doing much more than simply keeping academic records; he was to maintain a kind of psychological profile on the student. In this psychological profile, the teacher was expected to speak about whether the student is motivated, easily distracted in school, excels in one area or excels in many areas, or has a tendency towards good or bad companions.

The extensive student profile exhibits a concern that the teacher know, and be attentive towards the student's progress, personality development, maturity, and religious development. It ensured that all teachers who came into contact with the student would be able to work with him on an individual, personal basis. One teacher's work with a student becomes a part of the *system wide* effort by all teachers who will work with that student in the future.

### **Discipline in the Christian School:**

Remember, the early teachers were well aware of the contemporary means used to maintain order in the classroom. No matter how many records teachers kept about their students, they still had times when they felt like they had lost control. It was natural for the teachers to want to maintain control of the students in their classrooms. But their solution was to use tough disciplinary techniques (including corporal punishment) to manage the classroom and control these kids.

On the other hand, De La Salle, was committed to the ideal that education and Christian living were the goals of the school... not simply compliance or silence. Towards this end, De La Salle engages the teachers in what Br. Dominic Everett calls a dynamic dialogue with the teachers. This DYNAMIC DIALOGUE between the early teachers and De La Salle is what we have reflected in the second chapter of *The Conduct of Schools*. The teachers' experiences in the classroom were the subject of De La Salle's attention. He would then masterfully remind them of their vocation — the nature of their unique ministry. Rather than allow them to bow to their base needs and frustrations (which were easily taken out on the kids...) De La Salle offered them a new vision.

We gain a sharper understanding of De La Salle's new vision of educational management by looking at the second chapter of *The Conduct of Schools*. This is the chapter in which De La Salle and the early teachers described the system that would distinguish De La Salle's schools from all others of the time.

Let's begin by reviewing the nine *means for establishing and maintaining order in the schools*. There are nine principal things that contribute to establishing and maintaining order in the schools:

- the vigilance of the teachers
- the signals
- the records or registers
- the regulation of holidays
- the rewards
- the punishments
- the appointment of several class officers and their faithfulness to fulfilling their duties
- the structure, quality, and uniformity of school buildings and suitable furniture

### **The Vigilance of the Teachers:**

Each of the three sections in this category describes the CARE the teacher is to have towards students' learning. The teacher is to:

- take care that the students do not mispronounce any words when reading
- take care that all students follow the same lesson
- take care to enforce silence in school

Silence was a means whereby the teacher most effectively established and maintained order in the school, but silence was not merely a matter of management. Through the guidance of the teacher, the students were to *understand that they must keep silent because God sees them and it is God's Holy Will and not just because the teacher is present.* (*Conduct*, p. 66)

De La Salle believed that a truly vigilant teacher would forestall any serious misbehavior. If the teacher is vigilant, then the student will develop good behaviors, and would avoid temptation. Therefore, discipline becomes a means of preventing disruption and encouraging learning. It is not far off to say that discipline in the Lasallian tradition is primarily concerned with prevention rather than punishment.

### **Signs which are Used in the Christian Schools:**

Since the teacher was to model appropriate behavior to the students, it was necessary that he speak only when absolutely necessary if he was to teach the students silence in the classroom. As De La Salle says: *Teachers will better teach the students this practice by example than by words (Conduct, p. 67)*. There were signs to use during meals, to indicate directions during lessons, signs concerning writing, signs to be used during prayers and catechism, signs used in reference to corrections.

For example, *The Conduct* is very clear about the importance of silence, most especially when the teacher is correcting a student. The teacher would use signals to get the attention of students, to call a student back to the lesson, or to correct him. If necessary, the students would be called to the front of the room in silence, and punishment was exerted in silence.

### **The Record or Register:**

There were three records kept: a record of promotion, a record of levels of lessons, and a pocket record. The guidelines on records are detailed and very exact. Teachers were instructed how to mark their pages, what information was to be collected. There were even exact instructions on what abbreviations were to be used. Since it was the responsibility of the inspector of schools to advance a student from one level to another, the records proved an invaluable indication of progress, attendance, and behavior of the student. Based on these records, it was possible to make accurate decisions about the extent of the student's progress and his ability to handle accelerated work.

### **Rewards:**

Rewards were an essential part of De La Salle's system of education. They provided teachers a means for recognizing extraordinary effort and achievement. *This is done in order to incite them to fulfill their duties with pleasure and to stimulate other students by the hope of reward to fulfill their duties. (Conduct, p. 76)* Rewards were to be given for piety, ability, and assiduity.

### **The Cause of Absences and the Means of Preventing Them:**

Students were required to attend school except for a very grave reason. When a student was absent, a visitor (a student appointed by the teacher) would go to the student's home to determine the cause of his absence. (Section 2 of *The Conduct* outlines a detailed process that a student and the parents must follow when the student returns.) The system that De La Salle established is similar in many ways to the system in use in most of our Lasallian high schools. No student is returned to class without first reporting to a teacher with the responsibility of determining the cause for the absence. In case the parents were the cause of the absence, they were to be spoken to aside from the hearing of the student. Then, before the student was admitted, the student's teacher was informed of the disposition of the student's absence.

In this area of student absence, probably a very serious problem in the schools, De La Salle's *dynamic dialogue* with the teachers comes through quite clearly:

*When a student is frequently absent, it is either through their own fault, through that of their parents, or through the fault of the teachers. In the case of the teachers, De La Salle says:*

*The fourth reason why students absent themselves is that they have little affection for their teacher. This is due to the fact that the teacher is not prepossessing and does not know how to win the*

*students. On almost every occasion, this kind of teacher resorts only to severity and punishments; consequently, the children are unwilling to come to school. The remedies for this sort of absence will be for the teachers to endeavor to render themselves very prepossessing and to acquire a polite, affable, and frank appearance. This is to be done without, however, assuming an undignified or familiar manner; let them do everything for all of their students to win them over to the Lord Jesus Christ. They should all be convinced that authority is acquired and maintained in a school more by firmness, gravity, and silence than by blows and harshness, and that the principal cause of the frequent absence is the frequency of punishment (Conduct, p. 98).*

### **The Regulation of Holidays - a School Calendar:**

De La Salle was a *systems engineer*, if we can borrow that term. He knew that for classroom order to be maintained, for the students to learn, and for the teacher to be a successful instructor, there must be a system of support. A standard school calendar provided just that support for each teacher, for the whole school, and I suspect for the other Christian Schools in cities where more than one existed. By following one calendar, there was little pressure to allow the students to leave school, and there was little reason for a student to be absent on a day school was in session.

### **The Appointment of Several Class Officers and their Faithfulness in Fulfilling their Duties:**

While the teacher was the one in the classroom that was responsible for conducting and guiding the students in their learning experience, he wanted the teacher to draw upon certain students within the classroom and to give them positions of responsibility. Coincidentally, he suggested that the student who had a tendency to be easily distracted might be the best student to take a position of responsibility, because in doing that the student would be less distracted. So, besides serving the practical needs of the classroom, the positions of class officers were a way for the teacher to recognize, reward, and give encouragement.

### **The Structure, Quality, and Uniformity of School Buildings and Suitable Furniture:**

De La Salle is very concerned that the classroom is a learning place. No students could learn in a dingy hall which lacked the proper ventilation, lighting, or necessary accommodations. The furniture also must be of a particular style and be properly placed in the room so that the teacher and students were able to go about their business readily — without distraction or discomfort.

These past five elements take up a little less than half of the second part of *The Conduct of School*. The remaining pages are taken up by De La Salle's comments on discipline. Throughout the chapters of Section 2 which deal with discipline, the reader easily recognizes the intensity of the dynamic dialogue between De La Salle and his early teachers. But remember, this is not just a dialogue between De La Salle and the disgruntled Brothers. When we began, we quoted out of the preface of *The Conduct of Schools*. *The Conduct* was a collaborative effort borne out of the insights of De La Salle and the lived classroom experiences of the teachers themselves. So much of what we find in *The Conduct* is not just De La Salle preaching to the teachers; it is the collective wisdom of the young teachers who are doing the work of their lives *together and by association* motivated by *their faith and zeal*.

### **Punishment — Within the Scope of the Lasallian School:**

We recognize that De La Salle is not just interested in punishment for punishment's sake. He looks at discipline as a part of the process of guiding and modeling Christian living for the disciples in the schools. I want to read little clips from *The Conduct of Schools* to give you a flavor for the attitudes and disciplinary practices De La Salle wants the young teachers to use in the classroom.

Before we continue, let me add the following point about corporal punishment. Remember, De La Salle was vehemently opposed to the use of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was a very common technique in the parish schools; not only corporal punishment in terms of physical punishment, but anything that might cause the student humiliation. De La Salle was opposed to both. Respect for the student was an extraordinary principle of De La Salle. The second was that at all times, and in all ways, the teacher was expected to be an example, even in disciplining a student — to be a living example of the same relationship that Jesus had for his disciples.

When a student is not paying attention in class he is called forward to a place where discipline is administered. The teacher is not to leave the teacher's teaching area and go into the classroom and attack the student. The teacher is to bring the student forward and discipline is to be done silently. Notice the dynamic that is going on. The teacher is very much in control of this process (and his own temperament), and even the process itself requires that the student begin reflecting upon his misbehavior.

It must be noted that when the ferule, or when any other punishment is given to the students for having committed some fault which caused them to neglect their duties, that they must not be told that it is for having talked or played that they are receiving the punishment.

It must be made clear to them that they are being punished for not having studied their lessons; for not having prayed in church; for not having followed the example or done the thing that they were expected to do. So, De La Salle is constantly asking the teacher — *Remind the student that punishment is being applied because they are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. They are not learning; they are not praying. They are not involved with the lesson.* For De La Salle, punishment should be used to bring the student into the lesson rather than causing the student the same *pain* that the student's inattention is causing the teacher.

I said earlier that De La Salle was opposed to corporal punishment because it is ineffective in the long run. Corporal punishment is more often a sign of the teacher losing his temper, losing his patience, and losing sight of the fact that he is an ambassador of God, that he is there, doing God's work. These are all a breakdown of what De La Salle wants the teachers to model to the students.

When a teacher uses these tactics, when they are impatient, overly harsh, physically abusive or do anything to humiliate the students, De La Salle believed that they were in fact, driving the students away from the teacher or away from the school. De La Salle is very concerned that the teacher's vocation is first and foremost to *touch the hearts of students*, and that means he wants the students to feel at home in the school. So, he sees corporal punishment or severity of punishment as a way of driving students out. To this end, he cautions the teachers: *Whatever you do in your discipline do not do something that will ultimately drive the students away from you.*

He tells the teacher, *the teacher must help the student love the school. The teacher is the guardian angel.* The teacher is not the disciplinarian; the teacher is the guardian angel.

De La Salle responds to these teachers by saying, *win the hearts of the students. Inspire students.* Can you imagine. . . talk about a dynamic dialogue. *Control, cry the teachers. Inspire them to love you,* responds De La Salle. *We need to punish these kids who disrupt our classes.* De La Salle responds: *You are guides, guardian angels, God has called you to care for your disciples.*

Clearly, there are times when young teachers want retribution. But, De La Salle's response to them is a critical insight into his caring for the teachers: *If you had been vigilant* (in other words, if you had provided a system within your classroom that kept that from happening, then you wouldn't be demanding retribution because the offense would not have been committed).

Again, what is De La Salle's response? De La Salle's response is, *You should be vigilant.* And more than concern about retribution, you should be concerned about the growth of the student. Prevention, not punishment.

You see how this dynamic dialogue is unfolding between De La Salle and the early Brothers?

**Response:** We still have that dialogue today only the teachers call it lack of support . . . in their eyes they feel as if we are not supporting them when we don't punish a student harshly.

The dynamic dialogue continues between De La Salle and the teachers. They are apparently complaining that the kids aren't coming to school. De La Salle, recognizes absence is a major problem, but instead of allowing them to punish the student, he suggests, *Let's look for the reasons for absence.* This is a perfect example of the psychological approach De La Salle brings to his work with the teachers. De La Salle asks the teachers to reflect on why the kids aren't coming to school. He suggests that the major reason kids don't come is because they don't like school. In light of this, he says to the teachers: *It is your responsibility to get the student to love school.* That's pretty harsh language for a teacher who is frustrated, out of control, wants retribution, and can't deal with the kids because they are not in the classroom.

Discipline is only a matter of management. We established earlier that the school was a place where the student learned to live a Christian life. This comes through as clearly in the section of *The Conduct* that deals with discipline as it does in any other of De La Salle's writings. For example: A beautiful example of the respect teachers were to have for the students is seen in the process whereby a student is refused promotion from one level to another.

The regular process for a student to be promoted was threefold. The Brothers would recommend promotion to the Inspector of Schools. The Inspector of Schools would test these students to determine, in fact, whether they have the competencies that the teacher says they have. And then, they would make the determination about whether they should be promoted.

All right, that's the background for what I'm going to read to you. But, when I read this, listen for the deep caring the teacher is to have for the student, and see if you can recognize the psychological approach De La Salle wants the teachers to use to understand their students. This is what De La Salle says should happen for the student who is not going to be promoted:

The teachers will take care, some time before the day upon which the promotions are to be made, to forewarn those students whom the Director or the Inspector has agreed not to promote, either for their

own good because they are too young, or for the good of the class and the lesson, in order that there be some who can support the others.

So, for whatever reason that the student is not promoted, he wants the teacher, privately, to go to the student in advance and to forewarn the student. They will do this in such a manner that these students will be content to remain in the lesson or in the level wherein they remain.

The relationship — how would you describe it? Supportive? Encouraging? Caring? The relationship is such that the teachers are helping the students want to return to school even though everything might mitigate against it.

### Reasons for Correcting the Student:

De La Salle recognizes that there are a number of reasons why a student should be punished, a number of very serious reasons. Let's take a look at the guidelines De La Salle established for the use of correcting students.

- First, it must be pure and disinterested
- Second, it must be charitable
- Third, it must be just
- Fourth, it must be suitable and proper to the fault for which it is being administered
- Fifth, it must be moderate
- Sixth, it must be peaceable; those who administer it should not be moved to anger and should be entirely self-controlled
- Seventh, it must be prudent on the part of the teacher
- Eighth, it must be voluntarily accepted on the part of the student
- Ninth, those to whom it is administered should receive it in a peaceable manner
- Tenth, it must be silent

Why does punishment occur in the Lasallian school for De La Salle? It's for guidance's sake; for learning's sake. Remember, De La Salle is concerned with helping the children grow up and take their rightful place in society. They should be well prepared by their experiences in the school to live as Christians. This necessarily means in De La Salle's eyes that vigilance, and the appropriate correction, must coincide with the larger purposes of the school.

Anyone involved in guiding students must be careful not to misguide them or deal with them too harshly. It's even necessary that those who inflict the punishment should take great care (conduct — care) that nothing appear in their demeanor that might indicate that they are angry.

Now, he does make provision for punishing a child where it might benefit the class. I don't want to use the term, *use a child to make an example*. I want to avoid that, and I think De La Salle strenuously avoids that kind of punishment. But he accepts it within the realm of vigilance — in other words, if by punishing this child, the lesson is being learned by a broader group of people. But *it must be prudent on the part of the teacher. The teacher should take great care and attention to see that nothing is done that is inappropriate or could have evil consequences.*

One of the *evil consequences* is that a student would leave the school.

**It must be voluntary and accepted on the part of the students:**

Every effort must be made to make the students consent to it. In other words, bring the students to the point where they recognize their fault. They recognize the need for them to make correction and receive this corrective effort. Okay, but what about the kid who doesn't want to receive discipline in a peaceable manner? De La Salle's response to the teachers is, *Don't punish that child until he is ready to receive his punishment willingly.*

**It must be respectful:**

This does not mean just respectful on the part of the teacher. He introduces a new element here. It must be respectful on the part of the student. This is probably one of his more difficult concepts. They should receive it with submission and respect as they would receive a chastisement with which God himself would punish them. We are in the Holy presence of God. We are doing God's work. The student receives this correction as God's correction of them. These are not easy tasks to give to a teacher who is in a classroom with sixty to seventy people who wants to maintain control. But these guidelines certainly bring the Brothers, and bring the teachers, right back to that sense of vocation — a call by God to do God's work.

For a student to accept punishment respectfully — sounds like there needs to be a lot of preparation, a lot of guidance, a lot of structure, a lot of tradition, a lot of work, a lot of trust between the teacher and the student where the student trusts the teacher's handling of their life. It's a very personal, very relational. The teacher is in touch, not only with the student, but the teacher is in touch with God who calls the teacher to do this work.

**It must be silent:**

Discipline is not a *showboat* effort according to De La Salle. It is not a public display. It is not done with great remonstrance. It is not done to make example. It's done out of view of other students, at the side of the classroom. It is to be done silently, by a look; by a signal to correct the student, to bring the student back on track; by pointing, not by speaking because then it may become a public oration.

De La Salle tells us: *Correction of students is one of the most important things to be done in the school.* Notice: his selection of the verb *correction*, not punishment. The correction of students — correction in that sense of guidance and care; they are correcting, guiding, caring for the student. Punishment is retributive. It is for an offense; it is creative. Guidance is a different approach. Correction is a different approach.

**Removal of Students from School:**

De La Salle recognized that there were reasons why a student should be removed from school (something De La Salle says should very seldom occur). He does outline a variety of reasons why a student should be expelled from school. As I am listing the reasons, notice the underlying tenor is the focus on helping the student remain in school and be successful.

Students may be, and sometimes ought to be, sent away from school. Not expelled — not *kicked out* — sent away. However, this should be done only upon the advice of the Director. No teacher himself should

remove a student. It should be only upon the advice of the Brother in charge of the school, who would be the principal today.

Those who should be sent away are the dissolute, those capable of ruining others. Sound familiar? Those who absent themselves easily and often from school. Those who are not an active part of the community to begin with. Those who absent themselves from the parochial mass or catechism on Sundays and Holy Days through the fault of their parents.

Notice, De La Salle's education is not just an education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. It is education in the living, Christian faith, and De La Salle saw that attending church and participation in the liturgical life of the Church and the Saturday religious instruction is integral to the student's faith development. So, the students were expected to participate in these activities as if they were part of the school day. If the parents would not insist on the child's attendance, then the child would be removed from school.

The parent's role in the school is essential. De La Salle realized this, but he was also very realistic; parents weren't always doing what they should to help the student grow in responsibility. So he cautions the teachers — *Never punish a student in school for something that is the fault of the parents. If the parents have not raised this child properly, and the child comes to school and is lacking in personal responsibility, don't punish the child severely. It will not make a difference in the child's life. But rather, he says, hold the parents responsible for that. Try to confer with the parents to get the parents to take that responsibility whereby they are exerting influence and discipline in the child's life.*

In this same vein, he warns the teacher — *Never let a parent come to school and demand that you punish the child for something the child has done outside of school.* Does this sound familiar? I know as a dean, I oftentimes had a parent come to school and say to me: *My son did this... my daughter did that...* Invariably, they wanted the school to punish their child rather than the parent punishing the student him or herself. De La Salle wanted the parents to discipline the child at home. He wanted the teacher to recognize that if the student has not been trained properly, it's not the student's fault, but it is in fact, the fault of the parents back home. In the case of these students, it is altogether possible that the student is removed simply because it is better to do so than to try to reform a student who, because of his home training, is unable to make the necessary changes. Unfortunately, though this is the fault of the parents, De La Salle recognized the uselessness of trying to correct such a student's faults.

The final group of students who should be removed from school are the incorrigible.

That is to say, after having been corrected a great number of times, those students who do not amend their conduct, and whose presence in school causes severe disruption, should be removed from school.

### **Inspector of Schools:**

Earlier, the comment was made that this sounds very much like what we deal with today. We focused on Chapter 2 or the second section of this document. The third section of this document deals primarily with the Inspector of Schools. The Inspector was the person responsible for being present in the school, and assuring that the students and the teachers are following this system. The inspector was responsible for monitoring the school, for placing the student, for promoting the student, for conferring with the teacher when problems occur, for providing a sounding board between the teacher and the student when there are difficulties, and the caring for the teacher. As De La Salle said to the teachers: *God cares so much that he*

*has called you to teach, to care for the students.* The Inspector of Schools helped the teacher follow the system outlined in *The Conduct*. The teacher was not alone in this effort, not alone at all. I highly recommend that you read Section 3 of *The Conduct of Schools*. It describes the ongoing system of support for that group of unskilled and fledgling religious who were to transform the world of education, first in France, then throughout the world.

**Summary:**

So, what is *The Conduct of Schools*, and what do we mean when we say *caring for teachers and students is the tradition of discipline in the Lasallian schools?*

As we now know, *The Conduct of Schools* outlines a system of running schools based on teachers' lived experience and De La Salle's perspective on education. These guide the teacher in the classroom. The teacher in the classroom is a caring person, and ambassador of Christ, a person who writes daily the *Word of God* upon the hearts of the students. The teacher models behavior — academic behavior; the teacher models Christian behavior; the teacher models adult behavior. That's what is established in the system of schools, in this *Conduct of Christian Schools*, and that's what I think is an important guideline for our work,

In summary, I would like to offer the following points: First, I think that De La Salle's contribution to education was to significantly elevate the role of teacher by providing extensive training and ongoing support to those teachers. Second, I think that the Lasallian schools should be characterized by the quality of their caring for students and the system of caring for teachers — that is what characterized the Christian Schools and should characterize our modern Lasallian schools. Finally, because of the above, I propose that as members of the Lasallian Family today, that our role, especially as we work in the areas of student discipline and teacher support, is truly one of "ADD ministration." A-D-D — that you would ADD to the ministry of education in the schools. Similar to the Inspector of Schools, we should help our teachers understand what it means to guide young people in the way of Christian living, and to help to write the *Word of God* in the students' hearts each and every time we come into contact with them.

