



The Lasallian Tradition & Philosophy of Education

The Rule of the De La Salle Brothers as published in 1705 stated:

The end of the Institute is to give a Christian education to children and it is for this purpose that the Brothers keep schools that, having the children under their guidance from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them an education which suits their needs.

This statement reflected the self-awareness of the Institute just 25 years after St John Baptist de La Salle invited the first teachers into his home. In doing so he took the definitive step in the formation of a community of laymen committed to the education of those young boys of his native city, Rheims, who were “abandoned and far from salvation” because the circumstances of their parents did not allow them to pay for teachers. De La Salle’s schools gave special consideration to the sons of artisans and the poor but were open to all who wished to come.

In 1683 the teachers, who had associated themselves as a community with others of like mind, assumed the title of “Brother” to signify their relationship with each other and their perception of their role as “older brothers” to the children whom God had confided to their care. By 1694 a first group of 12 Brothers took a foundation Vow of Association for the rest of their lives. As their community grew, De La Salle and this pioneer group developed a clearly articulated spirituality and philosophy, as well as proven methods of education which were to have an enduring influence in the history of Catholic education.

When de La Salle died in 1719 there were approximately 100 Brothers in France and one who had been dispatched to establish a foundation in Rome. In spite of its ensuing growth and the public recognition of its importance the institute, along with all other religious institutes, was suppressed during the French Revolution. Since its reconstitution in France in 1805 with Napoleon’s support, it has become international, attaining its maximum membership of 16,000 members in the 1960s when it was to be found in well over 80 different countries. Currently there are just under 6,000 Brothers in eighty-one countries, while there are over 72,000 lay partners working in Lasallian schools and institutions.

The Brothers opened their first school in Australia in 1906 at Armidale in NSW and now conduct schools or welfare works in all states, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. From an early total dependence on



Brothers to conduct these works, the schools and other works owned by the Brothers and those formerly staffed for dioceses are now almost fully staffed by lay partners to achieve what is described as the *Shared Mission* of the Institute,

.... to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it (Rule, 3, 2002).

Schools owned and operated by the Trustees of the De La Salle Brothers are Catholic schools committed to a Lasallian vision of education which is characterised by:

- an ethos which takes its inspiration from the person of Jesus Christ and the values of the Gospel as expressed in the traditions and teachings of the Catholic Church;
- a recognition of God's presence in the school and in all those associated with it;
- a curriculum which is overtly religious, emphasises excellence in all its dimensions, and is inclusive, student centred, planned, practical and contemporary, with a special concern for the poor and marginalised;
- structures and relationships which reflect the understanding that staff are as *brothers and sisters to one another*, and *older brothers and sisters to their students*, while students are as *brothers and sisters* to each other;
- a continuing effort to build a spirit of community among all those associated with the school;
- systems and structures to ensure outcomes of the highest professional standards;
- staff who demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Lasallian educational philosophy and spirituality;
- a demonstrated fidelity to the story, educational philosophy and spirituality of St John Baptist de La Salle.