

# 4. Personal life journeys

## Small accounts for a great Story

## 4.1 “Has he lost his mind?”

**Michael Gamo**, an alumnus, serves as Executive Administrator of the Provincialate Office and Bursar of the Philippine District and helps with various Lasallian formation programs. He attended the 2004 CIL program in Rome.

Being Lasallian means embodying the values of faith, zeal and communion in mission. Am I a Lasallian Partner? I am not exactly sure if I deserve the label. What I am sure of is my own personal commitment to the articulated Lasallian Mission of “providing a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor.” My own personal journey has led me to this commitment.

My first experience of La Salle in 1982 was culture shock. I was totally unaware of the culture, my handwriting was different from theirs and I was probably the poorest financially. My classmates all seemed very well off. During my first year, I remember how traumatic casual days were for me. In hindsight, I am actually very thankful for the

experience because I think it has strengthened me a lot and forced me to look beyond the externals.

I never learned about the Lasallian Mission in those early years. I really thought Lasallian education was about being the best, the most excellent you can be.

By the time I graduated from high school, I was seriously thinking of becoming a Brother, attracted by their fraternal spirit and activism. Towards the close of my first year in college, in 1987 at 17 years of age, I decided to enter the postulancy program. During my 7-month stay with them, I really learned a lot about the Brothers, prayer, and community life. But I suppose I was not really ready then. I eventually left at the end of the same year to resolve my own personal issues of intimacy, identity, self-worth.

I got to know St. Joseph’s High School (SJHS), Villamonte, Bacolod City in the summer of 1988 when I volunteered to help facilitate a summer camp there. It was a Lasallian school for the children of the working class, something I never thought existed in the Philippines. I really liked the place and found it an authentic Lasallian environment.

I finished my undergraduate degrees at De La Salle University in 1990 and went in search of something meaningful to do. I decided to volunteer as a teacher at St. Joseph’s High School because it was there where I saw the Lasallian Mission fully alive. And it was not just because many of my students were poor. It was more because of the spirit of school and the way people related to each other.

In 1994, I got married. By that time, I thought I had enough of La Salle. It was time for me to begin a real career to support my family.

I moved back to Manila to work for a social development NGO for one year. Then I plunged into a 4-year career in banking with one of the biggest banks in the country.

When I moved to banking, it was a culture shock



Photo : Torvald Lekvam

all over again. All they talked about was money. Not how to use it, but how to make more of it from money which was not theirs in the first place. It was like a regular morning prayer to the god called Mammon. I really did not feel at home.

During my four years with the bank, I had to find my own outlets for an active faith life. I started attending daily Mass and became a lay minister. I realize now that I was being prepared for something.

During this time, I was already hearing about changes in the Lasallian Family. I was curious. Br. Armin Luistro invited me to attend the First Lasallian District Synod in 1999 to represent the external sector. I participated actively in that Synod, and even helped in the drafting of the final output. After the Synod, I felt reconnected again. Then, upon the Visitor's invitation, I found myself working overnights and weekends for the Synod output. It was a clear example of being led by the nose, from one commitment to another.

Three months after the Synod, Br. Armin sprang the trap and offered me a full-time job in the Provincialate. At that time, I was doing very well in the Treasury Department of the biggest bank in the Philippines, being promoted every two years, and with generous benefits. And here was the Brother Visitor asking me to leave all that to join his operation.

I really thought I was finished with the Lasallian stuff. But here were new signs of change, of a new direction, of progress, of a movement towards greater authenticity. Here was a new way of integrating the work I do with the spirituality I was grappling with. After long discussions with Br. Armin and somewhat difficult consultations with my wife, I said yes to Br. Armin. With that yes, I actually said yes to the Lasallian calling, and yes to the God who never gave up hounding me because He loves me beyond my imagination.

I quit my job with the bank in September 1999. When the bank president heard that I was quitting to join La Salle, he reportedly asked, "Has he lost his mind?"

I first became director of the Lasallian Family Office. In my first year, I had to struggle to set up new structures for the new directions. It was a real



struggle because we were not yet clear about where we were headed or what we were going into. With persistence and after many mistakes, we were able to evolve the Lasallian Partners Council, the District Justice and Peace Commission, the Lasallian Volunteer Program and the Lasallian Animation and Formation Team.



When we started the Lasallian Partners Council, we also had no clear idea where it was headed. We were groping and experimenting with a new way of collaborating. The Volunteer program was a real challenge as well because it meant going back to the poor as Lasallian lay communities, trying to put a lay twist, even if for a short period of time, to the idea of a ministerial community or communion in mission.

My Lasallian life has been one of searching, getting frustrated, being led another way, following reluctantly, then ending up right back where I started, although along a different route. In many ways, I have come around full circle. I think I have come home.

I used to think that I made a lot of sacrifices in my struggle to become a real Lasallian. But looking back, I realize that I have gained much, much more than what I have given up. More than the sacrifices, my choices have led to more blessings. By following this path, I have been truly blessed.



By joining the postulancy, I was able to undergo Lasallian formation and I was able to develop as a person. By working in St. Joe's, I was able to clarify my values and there I met the love of my life. By quitting my job and joining the District, I was able to develop and make use of my gifts fully. I have done more traveling in the past four years than in the previous thirty years. I have made a lot of friends and I have found a job I love.

But perhaps one of the greatest blessings has been my discovery and rediscovery of Lasallian spirituality and how well it resonates with me. I find being Lasallian such a practical way of being a spiritual person. Seeing with the eyes of faith. Making no distinction between my work life and my spiritual life. Not striving to be a "superstar," but doing things "together and by association". Living not just for myself but being of service to others. Striving for excellence, not for its own sake, but to be of greater service. Not worrying about my own salvation, but focusing on how I give service to others whether in the classroom, in the office or in the exercise of my administrative functions. Or as one Brother put it, making myself holy by making others holy, which makes more sense to me than the self-serving pursuit of holiness. Focusing on relationships, person to person. Being concerned for the least, the last and the lost. These, I find very meaningful in my Lasallian life.

Many times in the past, I had tried to run away from this call to be Lasallian. But I realize now that being Lasallian and being myself are almost inseparable. Being Lasallian continues to be a daily struggle for me. And yet it is a struggle I choose to engage in because it is a part of who I am and who God calls me to be.

## 4.2 Lasallian charism and Association: A discovery

Recently I was asked what I had gained for myself by organizing Quebec 2002 and working so hard on behalf of an international movement of Young Lasallians... It was difficult for me to answer because I am not able to dissociate my Lasallian activity from my own nature. In fact, I cannot understand my life outside the context of the Lasallian Family; I AM now Lasallian, and each day a little bit more so....

Obviously all that has a story behind it....and mine began in 1990 with my entry into St.Raymond's Public Secondary School when I was 12 years old. It was then that I met Br.Richard Brochu and the Brothers' Community of St.Raymond. The constant support of the Brothers and especially of Br.Richard, his wholehearted love of the young, his tendency to give me responsibility and to have confidence in me slowly - but surely - developed my feeling of belonging to the Lasallian Family and forged my identity. To pick up the expression of La Salle, there was no turning back...

If my "birth" in the Lasallian Family took place in my native village, one could say that I had a real baptism of fire 5,000 kilometers to the south...In fact, in 1992, I took part in a continental meeting of Young Lasallians in Mexico; where, at the time, I could speak neither English nor Spanish. Handicapped therefore by my tongue, I opened my child's heart... and contact was immediately established with young Lasallians from everywhere, and through them the Lasallian spirit "spoke" to me.

Then, quite naturally, the young Lasallian of St.Raymond that I was, contributed to the birth of the Young Lasallians of French-speaking Canada, paired with the Quebec participants in Paris '97; and later, the young Lasallian of French-speaking Canada appealed to his brothers and sisters from all over the Institute to take a further step in association during Quebec 2002.

This short history brings out several aspects of my

**Yanick**, 26 years old, is in charge of matters relating to the Young Lasallians in the French-speaking District of Canada as well as being a member of the International Council of Young Lasallians.



Photo: JAW

understanding of the Lasallian charism and how I live it today. First of all, it is undeniable that the movement of Young Lasallians is for me the favoured place where I can express and live the Lasallian charism. The movement expresses itself in many ways, going from the most practical to the most general, as well as from the local to the national and even the international.

Without taking up all the aspects of the movement, I would like nevertheless to lay stress on what is for me a crucial element: communion in diversity. I have had the good fortune to participate in several meetings where young people and Brothers from many nationalities and diverse horizons came together. On each occasion, I was as much touched by the richness of the multiple and diverse gifts, initiatives and responses of the Lasallians to the needs and poverties of today's



world as by the extraordinary inter-relationships which were woven, by a fraternity which you felt could be touched, by the same spirit which accorded unity, direction and communion...

This spirit of communion is no stranger to the rich spirituality which has been nourishing Lasallians for more than 300 years. As for me, it is now ten years that Lasallian spirituality has been challenging and fascinating me. I regularly nourish myself from the writings of the Founder and of Lasallians of yesterday and today. The discovery and the deepening of Lasallian spirituality also arrives through exchanges and sharing in community. In this respect, my nearest community at present is composed of young people from Quebec, the Basque Country, Mexico, France and the

USA. We make use of all the modern means of communication and the power of prayer and of “being-one”, to form a true community of faith, fraternity and service.

These last three aspects, together with general openness, form the consistent and challenging whole for the young of today, beginning with myself. This harmonious co-existence between the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal developed by St. John Baptist de La Salle continuously leads me to a transformation, to a complete conversion... Sensitive to the cries and murmurs of the children and the young of my world, I am spurred on by the Presence of God and confidence in His holy Providence.

Nevertheless, this does not lead me along a single and solitary path, but, on the contrary, the Lasallian charism opens my eyes to the special needs of each and to the richness of all the possible talents and responses brought by my brothers and sisters. The Lasallian charism opens my heart and my hands to make my journey together and by association with my brothers and sisters for the construction of the Civilization of Love.

This makes me a happy young man, joyful and full of hope, who feels himself the trustee of a precious gift, the Lasallian charism, and co-responsible for the Lasallian Education Mission.

*Yanick Chamberlain-Richer*  
[jlcf@sympatico.ca](mailto:jlcf@sympatico.ca)

## 4.3 I have discovered a treasure

### How did your journey towards Lasallian Association begin?

Some twenty years ago I came across the Lasallian Institute at Villa Flaminia in Rome. At that time I could not have realized that that first step would respond to a call from God for me, but that is what it was. The initial motive was my and my wife's interest in providing an educational atmosphere for our son that would combine a high scholastic level with education in Christian principles which I consider to be essential for the personality development of a young person.

At that time, my knowledge of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was rather limited. But at the beginning of the school year I was asked if I would be available to be a representative for parents in the corresponding class, and then later on I was asked to participate in the school Parents' Council. I accepted both positions, and that is how it all began.

### Is there anything special that encouraged you in this process?

The regular approachability on the part of the Brothers, my natural curiosity about a world which I just entered, formation sessions in which I participated, all these have led me to get to know Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his mission. The charisma of the Founder won me over.

It has been a gradual awareness of the Lasallian mission, of the importance which it gives to the education of young people, especially the poor in order to give them the same opportunities as those who are more well-off, but above all to offer everyone the message of Christ. Little by little I came to understand that it was God's call in front of me, to add my small contribution in the proclamation of the Christian message to those in the Lasallian school.

### Your proving ground was the experience of the Lasallian Family. How have you lived it?

**Antonio Cardone** is the current Vice-President of the Lasallian Family of Italy. He served as President of that organization from 1994 until 2002. Br. **Stefano Agostino**, Auxiliary Visitor for Italy, asked him some questions about his process towards Association.

In 1990 I participated in an assembly in Rocca di Papa, Italy, as a delegate from Villa Flaminia. On that occasion I came into contact with the Lasallian world on the national level, and with the difficulties deriving from the deep renewal for the Lasallian Family that was being asked of all of us, Brothers and lay persons. There were some difficult moments and a great diversity of positions, some of which even raised doubt in myself about what we were doing, and insecurity about my own motivation.

Nevertheless, the clear intention of everyone involved, about working for the common good and for the development of the shared mission, the fact of our being together and by association, sharing both tough times and good times, helped me to grow stronger in my intentions and to accept new responsibilities which were entrusted to me later.



Photo: Johann Snyman



In this way, I contributed to the birth, growth, and development of the Italian Lasallian Family.

### **Is there any event in particular that has highlighted your journey towards Association?**

The 43rd General Chapter, in which I had the honor to participate as a lay representative of the Region of Italy. Continuing along the path marked by preceding Chapters, this is what brought up the idea of “association for the educa-

tional service of the poor” as the central axis for the development of the Lasallian Family, and has identified Associates as that which, according to their specific vocation as lay Lasallians, try to become more deeply involved in the realization of the Founder’s mission.

### **What do Lasallians represent for you, that you have found in so many years of your being committed to the Lasallian Family?**

I have discovered treasures of humility and spirituality, I have met persons who give priority to being Lasallians over everything else, dedicating all their free time and even more, to activities of the Lasallian Family and to those most in need, always smiling and available, without asking for anything, happy for being able to give. They are a concrete example of how the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is still alive and vital today, as well as that of so many persons who share the spirit and the mission of De La Salle.

I have truly learned from them what it means to be Lasallian, they have taught me that the important thing is not what you give, but how you give it and with what spirit.

## 4.4 “Where you go, I will go”

By *Jossie Burgos*  
*District of Philippine*

I consider my personal involvement as a Lasallian Partner in the mission as a journey taken one step at a time. It is a search that led from discovery to acceptance... from acceptance to commitment... from commitment to love. Many times I had been besieged by doubts and fears, but in the end, the faith to see God’s hand in every event made me believe that the Lasallian mission is a birthright and a call to live my own vocation as a Lay Partner.

**A leap of Faith.** It was exactly four years ago after attending a Lasallian formation program in Rome that I was invited to be part of the Lasallian Animation and Formation Team (LAFT) of the Philippine District. It was an exciting time for me because I knew I would be learning much from the Brothers and Lay Partners who would form the Team. The offer to live in an intentional community did not appeal much to me, considering it would mean time away from family and friends, setting aside dreams of pursuing higher studies, and challenging myself to discover my gifts and limitations within a group.

Where was God leading me this time? It was a period that paved the way to self-discovery. It was a road that was definitely less taken. It was a leap of faith when I decided to take the risk to live in community as a partner in the mission.

**An irreversible step.** In the first few months in the community with 4 Brothers and 2 other Lay Partners I discovered that I had gifts to share and brokenness I had to confront and accept. Living together with fellow community members who were also having individual and communal struggles of their own, certainly challenged my capacity to grow.

The disclosure of my life story in moments of faith-sharing and soul-baring were experiences that gifted me with pain and joy. But to be entrusted with the life stories of the other members of my

**Josefina (Jossie) Burgos** devoted four years to the Philippine District's Lasallian Animation Formation Team and last year served as Executive Director of the Lasallian Partners Office. She attended the 2004 CIL program in Rome and an earlier SIEL program.



community also made me feel both humble and significant. The ordinariness of my life became extraordinarily beautiful because I was with persons who had time to listen and affirm. And in this process, our study of and reflection on the life of the Founder became doubly meaningful as we shared and prayed our own life stories. The gift of stories, in the context of **prayer**, became the common ground that bound us and deepened our acceptance, faith, and appreciation of one another.

**“I am not a Brother!”**. Living in community, when one still had a family to go home to when schedules allowed, meant being challenged to take one’s household responsibilities seriously. Conscious that others were relying on me deepened my own sense of responsibility. Though the temp-



tation to say out loud, “*I am not a Brother...*” was present a number of times. Although each of us had different motives for doing our respective duties, I was convinced that I was called to perform even the humblest task, to carry out my community assignments and live community life because these were an integral part of our shared ministry of District animation and formation, and my own ongoing formation as a Lay Lasallian .

We journeyed into different expressions and forms of doing the animation and formation work for the Lasallian Family, and my competence as well as my limitations became important elements of participation in the ministry. Each Team member was tasked to come up with new and creative programs of formation that would best respond to the needs of the people we served.

More challenging perhaps for us Lay Partners were times when we implemented programs without the presence of a Brother and people were expecting Brothers to run the program. However the Brothers’ trust and humility to stay in the background when it was needed, facilitated the transition and re-education of our audiences about what lived shared mission was all about. I was also put to the test when I had to run a prayer workshop using my own style together with the Brother who was the author of the program. It proved to be a moment of growth for me when I discovered in the process my own love for prayer, as well as my own way of expressing the Lasallian charism.

**Wait for the others.** The membership of the community was not permanent. It changed from year to year. When new members came to join the community, the older members were challenged to exercise patience and slow down and walk according to their pace in different aspects of community life and ministry. I discovered that in community even when one was ready to move to another level of commitment, one had to be considerate of and sensitive to the other members’ pace and level of commitment.

Shared mission was never more alive than this period when I lived and worked with both Brothers and Lay Partners who had differing perspectives and views about the work, and yet were united in their common desire and commitment to be bearers of Good News in their individual and unique capacity. **Service** in the mission became the unifying value that strengthened our belief in the work entrusted to us.

**The Spirit breaths through us.** Our search for a common spirituality involved each member’s continuous and generous self-unfolding of family and personal story. That common spirit grew out of both a sense of competence as well as a felt need to grow - because the service of co-sojourners in the mission required it. And keeping that Spirit alive meant the sharing of lifegiving experiences in the context of **community**. The experience was rendered more beautiful because it was shared with a group of persons who were receptive in discovering that the Spirit indeed lived and breathed through each one of us.

In associating myself with the Brothers and much-esteemed Lay Partners, I have discovered my voice and I have given voice as well to the Lay Partners I encountered. In the end it was the inspired voice of Ruth I heard saying to Naomi (Ruth 1:16):

*“Where you go, I will go;  
Where you lodge, I will lodge;  
Your people shall be my people,  
And your God my God.”*

## 4.5 Coming Home

By Rita Maloney  
New York, LINE District

I do not know how old I was when I first heard about God, but what I do know is that once I heard, I was immediately interested in knowing more. As a child, I loved to hear Jewish Bible stories and the stories of the Gospels. As I grew older, I carried this view with me. But I was presented with another reality in church. I was reminded that the twelve Apostles were all men and that only boys could be altar servers and priests. I sat in church on one side of the rail and watched the priest and the altar servers on the other side. They, I began to believe, were closer to God than I was.

I learned not to question or challenge but to listen and not create a stir, and I stepped away from the church and looked for spiritual nourishment in other places. I studied Talmud with Jewish teachers and attended the lectures of Elie Wiesel. I read poetry by the Sufi mystic, Rumi. I studied with the Unity minister, Eric Butterworth, and I studied *A Course in Miracles*. I completed my Master's Degree in Scripture at Fordham University. But I still did not feel at home in the church.

I also felt homesick, for I had loved the church when I was young. As grateful as I was for my studies in different religions, I had no spiritual home. In the summer of 1985, I was asked if I was interested in teaching Religion at Bishop Loughlin High School. I applied and was accepted as a Religion teacher.

Some of my colleagues were Brothers, and I spoke with them about certain issues that I was struggling with regarding the church. They too were questioning many of the same things. I began to hear selections from the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle that touched me to the depth of my being. The Lasallian writings were about the spirituality of teaching and were so relevant to my work in the classroom. The words were fluid and

**Rita Maloney** is in her twentieth year of teaching religion at *Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School* (a Lasallian school) in Brooklyn, NY. Rita has completed both the *Buttimer Institute* and the *Lasallian Leadership Institute*

harmonious, practical and mystical, and my soul was stirred when I heard them. The school also had palpable spirit: caring teacher-student relationships, supportive colleagues and administration. Religion was presented in a way that considered the students' experiences. Students were listened to and challenged, not talked at.

This was the church that I loved, and I was truly grateful for the opportunity to teach Religion at Bishop Loughlin High School. I learned that La Salle told teachers that they are "ambassadors of Jesus Christ" in the classroom and that their work as teachers is truly a call from God to touch the hearts of their students. When I read La Salle's writings, I felt as though I knew him. I never cease to be amazed at the practicality and compassion of his words, both simple and profound.

I was invited to attend the Buttimer Institute to study the life, pedagogy, and spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. While I was at Buttimer, I sensed that I was coming home. I loved my



Photo: Luiz Ferreira



teachers and the participants. This truly was the church that I loved. There were no constrictions as far as questioning, challenging, and being myself with all my doubts, fears, insights, and limitations. No sooner did I complete the three-year program of Buttimer than I was invited to attend the Lasallian Leadership Institute. I shared in the Lasallian story, and I wanted to be a part of the Lasallian family.

When the studies ended, however, it was difficult. I missed being part of a prayer community with people who studied, searched, and prayed together. I wanted to be part of a Lasallian community, to live in the spirit of faith and zeal with them, and to share the Lasallian mission and the living out of the Gospels in the education of youth.

I believe that I am already committed to the work of the Lasallian mission. Yet, I have greater need for prayer, companionship, and continued study. I need to feel part of a larger community of Lasallian partners and Brothers working together. I have considered becoming an associated member simply because I love the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the Lasallian mission throughout the world. I would like to direct my talents and abilities to the work of this mission.

However, if I were associated, I think I would like to see some structure in place that would ensure ongoing prayer, study, and some sense of lived community. I don't know exactly how it would be. That is the struggle right now for many of us who would like to be associated. Will association be only lay colleagues coming together? What will our relationship be to the Brothers? Will we be equal partners in association? These are the questions I have, but I have very few answers at this time.

## 4.6 The fear of the Unknown

By Dominic Njeru  
Luanga District, Africa

Fear of the unknown and uncertainty is a common phenomenon in our lives. We fear the fact that we have no clear future in our arms, we fear the fact that while we have had the past and have the present, the future remains in oblivion. I once had such an experience of fear and uncertainty. The process of Association can sometimes become dormant because of the fear of the unknown.

My first experience with the Lasallian Brothers of the Christian schools was in 1986 when I was recruited by Brother Dominic Jordan, FSC. Initially I had worked in a Public Secondary school (not Lasallian) sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru, Kenya. After explaining the kind of programs he had in the school Brother Dominic finalized with, "Could you give it a trial?" I convinced myself that the programs were worth a trial.

I worked in this new environment with many new realities for six years. In the school, I noticed that the fashion word was "commitment." It was a new reality but I knew not that I had accepted to begin a long journey that called for a number of commitments. From the face value, I was just in search of a teaching job, which I got.

Brother Kevin Malinowski, FSC was running a Lasallian school in the northern parts of Kenya. It was a very young school and Brother Kevin was actually the Pioneer Principal. He had met me at my first Lasallian School (mentioned above), Rongai Agricultural and Technical High School. Without giving a thought I committed myself to join him in his new school. My journey to this school reveals my imperceptible involvement into the Lasallian Association. Here goes the true story:

The school is located in the middle of Kaisut and Chalbi deserts of Northern Kenya. It is over 380 Kms from Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The road was rough (so it is today), the Sun was hot (just as it is today), the road is bandits-prone and

**Dominic Njeru** is the Lasallian Mission Coordinator for Lwanga District of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) within the RELAF Region. He has been working with the De La Salle Christian Brothers for the last 19 years..

the journey was so lonely that I wondered why the hell did I decide to work in the desert. The journey was so fearful that at certain point I thought I had heard (above the rumbling of the car) the heartbeat of my son whom I was holding on my laps at the front cabin of the car. My wife who was holding my first daughter was next to the driver, Brother Kevin. I looked at her face and read only fear. I guess that my wife also looked at my face and read nothing but fear. That was like a hell's drive and seemed hopelessly endless. We reached our destination at 8:30 pm having started off from Rongai, Nakuru at 6:30 am. I worked in this new school for eight years. Nobody understood how I kept keeping on in this spectacular school but now I do.

It was not employment but the zeal and determination to see changes in the life of the students who were drawn from the nomadic and pastoralistic backgrounds. The students' determination to learn something new, the warmth of togetherness in the school and the wish of the learners to stay in school all gave meaning to my stay in such inhospitable environment. There was an inside voice telling me to stay on. That was "Vox Dei" which I believe was continuously reminding me that I was a candle holder and once my hands were up holding the light for the learners to follow, I just felt I had to keep on and on. The process of Association now and not then can be seen as a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel in my teaching job.

During the eight years stay at St. Paul's Secondary





School I found myself becoming the “Lasallian Mission Animator” in the school. Then in 1998 I attended CIL/SIEL program in Rome after which I became the “Lasallian Mission Coordinator” for the Sector of East Africa (Kenya). In May 2000 I was given the responsibility of coordinating Lasallian mission programs in Lwanga District of Africa. These are all commitments that I accepted but imperceptibly.

I now see myself as a Lasallian Partner/Associate not just because I am a member of the International Commission for Association but because I have attended and participated in several national and international workshops, seminars and assemblies on Lasallian mission. I now can bear witness to the mission of the De La Salle Brothers – *Giving Human and Christian education to the young children and especially the poor.*

### Challenges along the Journey

- Lack of preparation into the job of Animation/Coordination of the Lasallian Mission while teaching in my first Lasallian School. The animation job came without any formal formation.

- The Brothers in charge of the Lasallian schools that I taught always emphasized that the lay people were working for the Brothers and not with the Brothers. Employer - employee relationship.
- Lack of trust when Brother Administrators/Principals delegated duties to me as their deputy.
- Decisions being made in the Brothers’ house and brought down to the teachers during the pre-empted faculty meetings.
- My own misconception on the type of schools the Lasallian schools were.
- Hand-to-mouth remuneration and therefore no sound financial basis for a rainy day.
- Being a Vice-Principal for many years without any hope of promotion because a Brother had to be the Principal, was a discouraging reality.
- Overworking without considering the fact that I am not a Brother. I was ever in the office and once my spouse complained, “Why don’t you bring your bed to the office?”
- It is not easy to sell the idea of “Shared mission/Association” to the Lay Partners who have been dominated by the Brothers for many years.
- Power struggle between the young Brothers especially and the long serving Lay Partners.

Lasallian Association implies a process, which sometimes can turn tricky!

To contact:  
 Dominic Njeru  
[kithendu@yahoo.com](mailto:kithendu@yahoo.com)

# 4.7 Priest and Lasallian Associate

*Vicente San Jenaro  
District of Valencia-Palma*

His relationship with the Brothers began when the La Salle School of Palma de Mallorca, his native city, decided to accept some Gypsy children and Vicente tried to help them. Vicente began to participate in the school's pastoral ministry activities from his perspective as a priest. Later on, he was hired as a religion teacher. Since then he has been present at District meetings, youth meetings, meetings of Brothers, and Lasallian Family encounters. His presence has not been limited just to District events, but also he has participated in Lasallian meetings for the Region of ARLEP and for Europe. At these meetings, he offers his unique position as an ordained priest, a gift in service of the Lasallian Family.

Vicente was not satisfied in just giving what he had. He soon realized that the Lasallian Family had something to offer him, and he wanted to participate in its heritage. He was one of the first to participate in the Lasallian Formation Sessions (CELAS) which the Region of ARLEP began running in 1990, and we also find him attending a SIEL (International Session on Lasallian Studies) session which took place in 1998 - 1999 in the Generalate. In this way, John Baptist de La Salle has become for him also a spiritual guide who helps him to encounter the profound sense of the ministry of the Word, beyond that of simple sacramental service.

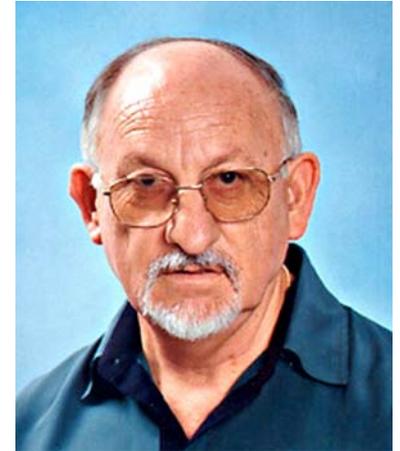
## **Vicente talks about the opportunity offered him in the field the Lasallian educational mission like this:**

"I found a privileged place to exercise the ministry of the Word, in morning reflections, on retreats with students and parents, at District, national, and international meetings with young people and Brothers, during Easter session with young people, at prayer meetings, during Bible courses with fathers and mothers, in religion classes, in leading groups in deepening their faith and in catechesis

**Vicente San Jenaro** has been a priest since 1975. And, since 2004, he is officially a Lasallian Associate from the District of Valencia-Palma (Spain), but his real association goes back 25 years.

preparing for First Communion and for Confirmation.

"Through these activities I have many opportunities for personal encounters with children, adolescents, and adults, and also the celebration of Penance is much more natural and spontaneous as is the celebration of the Eucharist and their commitment to it. I see that my priestly ministry is integrated into the life of children simply and yet profoundly, and this complemented with the efforts of the other teachers."



## **Why did you want to become an associate, including making a formal commitment?**

"I have been working side by side with the community of Brothers at the school in Palma de Mallorca for 20 years. When the first experiences in association began in my District of Valencia-Palma, I did not feel the need to make a formal commitment of association with the Institute. I already felt that I was fully associated. In our familiar way of speaking among the Brothers of the District I am known as "Brother Father Vicente," or as "Father Brother Vicente." Even in the diocese of Mallorca, to which I belong, the priests and many religious find it difficult to understand that I am a "diocesan priest" and not a priest of the Lasallian Institute, because the Institute does not have priests. Perhaps that is why I did not dare to ask for recognition as an associate, for fear that it would be badly interpreted.

"The decision to associate myself formally came in



July 2003, on the occasion of the meeting-retreat that was held in the ARLEP Region on the Vow of Association, which was led by Brother Álvaro Rodríguez, Superior General, and for which I was providing ministerial service. At the end of the retreat, the organizer of the encounter thanked me publicly for my service to the Brothers, highlighting the fact that it was not only on this occasion but anytime I was needed; and the reason for this availability, said the Brother, was that I was, in fact, an associate.

“As I listened to this acknowledgment in the presence of the Superior General, I said to myself that I no longer had any reason to delay my formalizing my association. I asked Brother Visitor about it and I made my commitment in August 2004. As I wrote in my letter of request, my process of association is based on:

- My working side by side for so many years with the Brothers of the community in Palma de Mallorca.
- My being totally dedicated to education and to the Christian education of children and young people.
- My sense that my work is within the charism of De La Salle.
- The Lasallian formation sessions in which I have participated.
- Wanting to continue living the educational ministry of children and young people, according to the true spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.”



## 4.8 The choice of living with the poorest

By Annick Martin  
France

I come from a middle-class background. My father was an architect-engineer in the Navy. I mention this because it meant we moved house many times to very different regions. What was true of one place was not true of another and this led to a lot of deep reflection.

When I was 17 we were living in Martinique and I saw a man with his back torn by the whipping inflicted on him by the owner of the sugar plantation. The latter was beside us at Mass on Sundays. At that moment I decided that I would have to decide which side I was on. My desire to become a nurse must also have been born at that moment.

I worked for two year while staying with my parents and then I went to live at Aulnay-sous-Bois (near Paris). It was the time of the shanty-towns, of the Emmaus housing estate, of the “sleep merchants” (sordid dormitories in the cellars of houses, three people to a bed. When someone was ill I would find him lying on the floor). Then I went as a volunteer worker in the depths of Chad, then to Cameroon. On my return I decided to stay with the poorest people in a poor housing estate, because it seemed to me that it was there that people lived in the most oppressive conditions. I have lived in three large poor housing-estates, the most difficult being the present one: the ‘Indes’ housing-estate in Sartrouville. Depending on the place my work involved: literacy, ACE (Catholic Action for the Child), JOC (Catholic Young Workers), catechism, neighbourhood Gospel-sharing team, ‘Relais Monde Musulman’ (inter-religious dialogue with Muslims)... This **“living with”** has not always been easy to keep up....

On my return from Africa I studied to become a head-nurse. After years working in cardiac reanimation, I have been for the past 15 years, after a university diploma in gerontology, head-nurse in a large public retirement home.

**Annick Martin** is a nurse by profession. In October 2004 she expressed her commitment as an associate with the District of France. But she has been living this commitment with the Brothers for 24 years. She now lives at Sartrouville, near Paris. Her itinerary, which she briefly tells us about here, has been linked with the poor since her youth.



I also have a diploma in theology. It was not a question of getting one more diploma but the fact that, as I said, from country to country truths are not the same and we are in a Church in which some people raise their personal interpretations to the stature of canon law.

24 years ago I made the acquaintance of a Brother (we were members of the same sector of Catholic Worker Action) and through him got to know of John Baptist de La Salle. Denis fell ill, was hospitalised in my section and I accompanied him until his death.

This was, given the circumstances, a strong relationship. It is not easy to tell someone young that there is no hope of a cure. He was an example for all those who knew him through his serenity in facing death.

Through him I had got to know St. De La Salle and



then after his death I knew other Brothers and the group FMO (Brothers in the Working World ). We were living the same realities. Our meetings, our re-evaluations of life and the retreats allowed me to keep to my commitments. This companionship made me want to get to know the spirituality of the Founder better.

My links with all the Brothers of the District (of France) have become even more important over the last year since I joined the technical commission for the retirement homes of the Brothers. In this capacity I have been to meet the old Brothers in eight of these houses. In parenthesis I might add that I was very impressed by the welcome of these Brothers, some very old, for this reality of association shared with lay people.

At a given moment I felt that Christ was calling me to live my Baptism more in the line of the Founder. God is first but John Baptist de La Salle was becoming a spiritual “key”, a spiritual Father. I wished to show my adhesion to the Lasallian collective identity by an official gesture of commitment:

- Solidarity with the ‘Brothers in the Working World’, but also with all the Brothers of the District. Several national meetings, the Chapter, the work in the retirement houses, had shown me that I was part of a larger group which was working for the same Mission.
- Solidarity with the other Lay Associates. Our commitments in life are sometimes very differ-

ent, but these differences are also a source of riches in the framework of really listening. Associates who are not chosen, who are different, but who wish to participate in the same Mission and “to grow together”.

The step of Association becomes a sign and gives another meaning to what one is living. Furthermore, accepting to signify something gives one a responsibility.

The celebration in the course of which I pronounced my commitment was a great high point. Apart from the presence of many Brothers and Associates, some of whom had come from a great distance, there was the presence of persons from my parish community in the housing estate. The people with whom I live are simple people. They consider me one of their own, while knowing well that I could live elsewhere. They have difficulty in grasping the notion of association, but by this commitment they give another dimension to my life, including the Muslims.

The educational service of the young and adults is not something I live in a school institution where children are concerned. I live with them in an environment which is sometimes quite difficult. We find ourselves with young people and adults who are completely destructured.

- The ACE and JOC offer to children and young people spaces of freedom which help them to build themselves and to act with their pals. In a recreational way they learn to draw, to make cuttings, to reflect, to play, to do things along with others... The club is their freedom space. It is also a listening place where they can talk about their lives, their problems.
- Where adults are concerned it is a case of daily accompaniment: helping them to fill-out documents, listening to their difficulties, being present for them when bad things happen (and we pile these up!)... simply sharing life.
- Old people are also the neglected ones of our modern western society. Fighting so that they can live in dignity, with their rights being respected and surrounded by human warmth... this too is being at the service of the poor.

## 4.9 Living in the Brothers' House

*Adrian Lane,  
Volunteer.  
District of Australia-New Zealand-PNG*

When I was first asked about living with the Brothers for a year while working with the mission at Balgo Hills, I thought "I don't want to live with old men for a year". Old men are boring, and old Brothers, well, that's another matter completely! Anyway, thank God I did go. The person with whom I got along best was the oldest Brother in the house. This showed me that it had nothing to do with age and all to do with personalities. I probably can't tell you Brothers anything you don't already know about living in community with Brothers but I'll try and give you an outsider's perspective of the community that I lived in.

The dedication that I saw from these people, who were willing to live in the desert for no monetary award, was truly a great example. Honestly, it can be a madhouse at times living in that place. Since it's so confined, when things go wrong, for example when someone commits suicide, all the kids are out getting 'high' on petrol sniffing. Everyone is affected, either by little sleep, or sadness. It's unlike being in Melbourne or Sydney because you can't escape out there - you're so far away, so remote, absolutely in the middle of nowhere!

But back to living in the Brothers' house. When you get into an argument with one of them - and remember that they're essentially your brothers - unlike at home with your family, you can't hit them, or swear at them, and then all will be forgotten within a few hours, even if nothing is said. It's especially hard when it's about work issues because, unlike most people who get to go home after work, with the Brothers you're going home with the workers! So there's no escaping. I'm sure you Brothers must be aware of all these things!

It's funny living in the house. Here are people living a "celibate life", and they just couldn't talk

**Adrian Lane**, having just finished his final year in secondary school, volunteered at 17 years of age to spend 2004 living in the Brothers' community at Balgo Hills and helping in the mission. His account is refreshingly down to earth and honest!

about it. Now I know they're older and, for their generation, it's a real taboo subject. But one of the major questions for today's youth, or maybe just for me, is how can these people remain celibate, and what is it like for them? Well, I never asked the question directly, because I know how awkward they felt about talking about sex. However, I found it great when one of the Brothers was able to open up and talk about paedophiles in the church and how it had affected him. But these were the sort of questions I was wondering about with regard to the Brothers. You see them at school but you don't know what their lives are like in community - and obviously all communities are different - but it's great having an understanding of what their lives are really like.

But all in all, it was the work that kept me going, the "touching hearts business", as Br. David Miller referred to it. Working with the people was probably the most amazing thing about the whole experience but, as Brothers, you probably all know how amazing it is working with people, particularly the poor.

### Note:

**Wirrimanu** or **Balgo Hills** is a remote Aboriginal community in Western Australia. It stands in a desert wilderness with a hot, dry, dusty and harsh climate.

The people of Wirrimanu are very different from the typical society in Eastern Australia and live very different lives. There are many problems in the community ranging from poor parenting, substance abuse, depression and violence.

## 4.10 Across Race and Religion

---

**Vinesh Naidu** is the Lasallian Youth Services Coordinator of Malaysia.

*Vinesh Naidu  
Malaysia*

Thirteen years receiving a holistic Lasallian education has definitely helped shape my mind and heart to become the person I am today. It has moulded in me the need to be aware of the power to make a difference to ones who need it most.

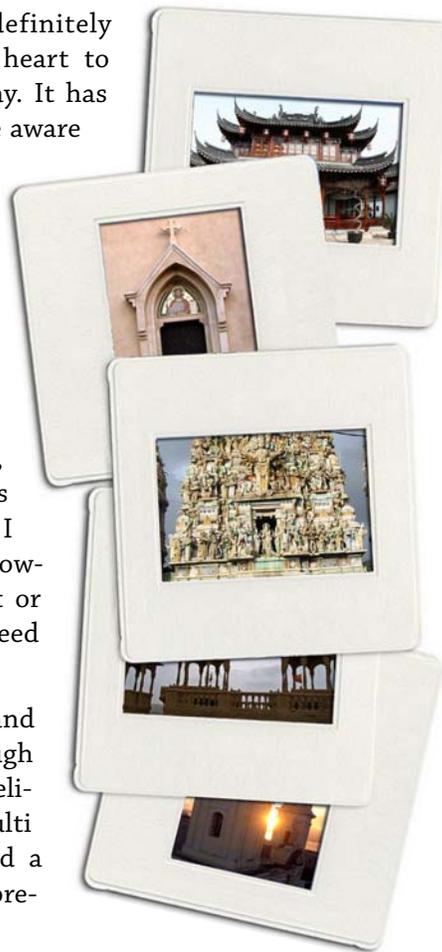
Over the years, I and others in Malaysia who have been privileged to have known De La Salle's story, have come to draw inspiration from him. In a world so absorbed in itself, De La Salle's act of selflessness was powerful enough that I think he offers a sense of empowerment to many to reach out or do something for those in need instead of just sympathising.

De La Salle's life is exemplary and his message is universal enough that it cuts across race and religion. Malaysian society is multi racial and multi religious and a Lasallian education here repre-

sents an excellent example of how different races and cultures can come together to share a common brotherhood and sisterhood that goes beyond religious and racial boundaries.

My classmates were Muslims, Christians, Buddhist and Hindus. Race, religion and creed were never something that we were conscious of or saw a need to be wary of. Our Lasallian Education regarded us equals. I am a practicing Hindu and today as I work in the mission of De La Salle as a youth coordinator. I have drawn strength from his life and I am enriched in my own personal faith life.

My outlook on the Lasallian mission is to touch, move and inspire people within my own capacity. Working with and for the lay mission gives me a wide work scope to spread the idea of spirituality as a lived reality especially in working with the last, lost and least in the society I live in. And I am convinced that the Lasallian Spirituality is more relevant to today's society than it has ever been.



# 4.11 It is on the road that the horizon is revealed

*By Jean Leloup,  
District of Belgium-South*

## Discovery is along the road

My first encounter with the Brothers took place in 1951 at the Institut Saint-Michel in Verviers. The Brothers taught me to read, write and do arithmetic. There I discovered the joys of teamwork in the service of others. Education through teaching became my ambition and I entered the training-college of the Brothers, “Jesu Placet”, in Louvain in 1961. Having become a primary school teacher, inspired by the recommendations of the Brothers, I began studying Religious Science at the Catholic University of Louvain. It was during those years that I came in contact with the catechetics team of the District, led by Br. Henri Elsen who would later become animator in charge of the Lasallian Movement.

In 1969, I started my first year of teaching at the Institut Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Wavre. I remained there until the year 2000. They were years of intense work in the catechesis commission of the district, setting up new programmes and religion courses in the years following on from Vatican 2. There was the creation of a school for the formation of ‘open-air’ animators for underprivileged children and young people (here again it was the Brothers who were the initiators). There was the foundation of my family. My wife, historian, primary school teacher and head of a school, became involved in my projects and participated as often as possible in Lasallian activities. Three girls were born of this marriage. At present they are young adults and the weekends are high points for gathering the whole family together.

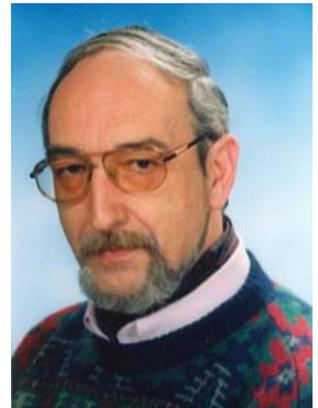
During all these years in school, along with the whole teaching body of Institut-Saint-Jean-Baptiste, I have lived a real partnership with the Brothers in charge of the establishment. This involved opening up to parents, relations with the

**Jean Leloup**, a Belgian born in 1945, married, is at present Secretary of the European Commission for Lasallian Formation.



clergy and the surrounding parishes, the creation of an informal and then a formal team for school pastoral ministry... but above all (with the gradual departure of Brothers who were getting older and older) the setting up of resourcing and formation days organised by the school at Ciney (the Centre of the District).

To conclude this first part, I would like to say that I discovered the Lasallian charism during my initial formation. Of course the vision was a little intellectual, but with the passing of the years, through experience and meetings, this concept became more concrete as it became integrated into all the actions of my daily life....



## The horizon widens

At the beginning of 2000, the Brother Visitor opened other doors for me... He invited me to assume responsibility for all the youth ministry of our elementary schools in the District: 26 schools grouped within the “Association of Lasallian

schools of Belgium- South”. This ministry was for the benefit of 650 teachers and 8,000 pupils. These 26 schools had been up till then the responsibility of a Brother. This ministry had been requested by the Directors of all the schools and it seemed normal to everyone that it should be run by a lay person. I therefore accepted this mission which is partly remunerated according to a work contract established by the Brothers’ District of Belgium-South. The main lines of the mission to be carried out were defined by common accord between the Brothers, myself, and the diocesan authorities of Belgium. Each year I submit a report of our activities to the Brother Visitor and also to the Association of Lasallian schools.

Parallel with this mission, I was entrusted with the coordination and running of the team organising the activities of the Lasallian Movement (sessions for teachers and more broadly for all the Lasallians of the District). This second mission is carried out gratuitously and demands considerable commitment including some weekends. Luckily my wife and family accept and encourage with generosity this commitment. For my part, I find it a definite fulfilment. It is in the Lasallian Movement that I discover or rediscover the Founder in his writings, as well as Lasallian spirituality and my Lasallian identity.

It was within the framework of this mission that the Brother Visitor asked me, in 2002, to participate on behalf of RELEC (Lasallian Region of Central Europe) in the work of the European Commission for Lasallian Formation (CEFL). Hesitant at first, I accepted this new commitment and it was with enthusiasm that I returned from my first meeting in Rome in 2003. Enthusiasm for several reasons:

- first of all because of the spirit and fraternity which had reigned there;
- next because this commission was made up of Brothers and Lay Lasallians;
- then because there had been a clear exchange of views between all the participants about all

that was being done at formation level in the different Regions of Europe. The sharing of joys and difficulties, when all is said and done, compels us to hope.

- finally , this international meeting under the gaze of John-Baptist de La Salle, shows dynamism and the up-to-the- moment nature of the Lasallian charism. Fidelity and creativity are not, in these meetings, vain words.

At the beginning of this year 2005, after having experienced a European colloquium on Lasallian Identity which was very rich and hopefully, fruitful, the members of the Commission asked me to take on the task of coordinator and secretary for a period of three years. This latest task, which I freely accepted, gives me the feeling of being truly associated for the Lasallian mission.

## Resourcing

All these activities are supported by indispensable periods of reflection, reading, meditations and prayers as well as a weekly meeting with the Community of the Lasallian Centre at Ciney. We have a regular sharing of meals as well as prayer. Some of these meetings are planned but there are also improvised meetings both with people in charge of establishments in the District and with Lay persons who are becoming more and more numerous in commitment to the Lasallian Mission.

In conclusion I would say that the Brothers have given me much and that today I am happy to be participating, very modestly, in the renewal and the future of the Institute in these regions. My wish is to see numerous Lasallian men and women daring to commit themselves, within the possibilities of each one, to following the Founder, the Brothers and Lay Lasallians in a creative fidelity so that the poor, the children and the young of today and tomorrow may find educators ready to accompany them on the road to success and salvation.

*Jean Leloup:*  
[jean.leloup@swing.be](mailto:jean.leloup@swing.be)

## 4.12 Never again alone

*Paul Foisy,  
French-speaking Canada*

I was in charge of pastoral youth ministry at the Séminaire Saint-François, neighbour to the Villa des Jeunes, before being approached by the Brothers. That year had been a difficult one for me, because being young and inexperienced and having a job which demanded creativity and autonomy, the challenge seemed to me enormous and I was experiencing a lot of anxiety. During the month of May I went into the chapel to pray and to ask the Lord to help me and to point me towards a place which would allow me to be myself and to fulfil myself, without having to live with all this interior tension.

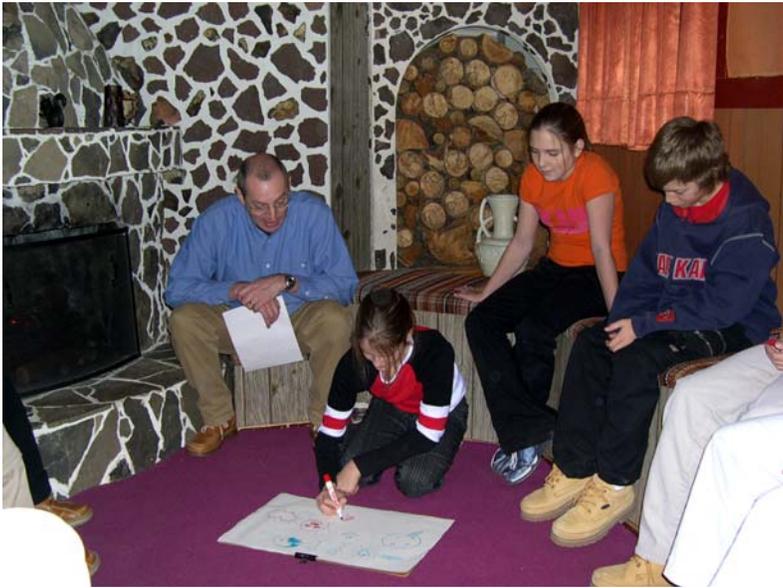
A few days later, Gilles Lapointe, who was working at the Villa des Jeunes with Brother Benoît Marcoux, approached me to ask if I would be interested in joining their youth ministry team. I took a few days to think it over and, in my discernment, it struck me that my prayer had been answered. I therefore accepted the offer which had been made to me and, at the beginning of the school year I joined the team at the Villa des Jeunes.

The work climate was very pleasant. I got on well with Gilles and Br. Benoît and I appreciated the confidence they showed in me and the support they gave me. During the first years, the question of association did not arise. We were more involved in trying to create a spirit of fraternity, solidarity and faith. The challenge which presented itself to us at the time was to propose organised activities linked with the initiation to the sacraments in the parish, with the religious teaching programmes and with pastoral activities in the schools environment. The early years were rather difficult. The groups were not very numerous. Furthermore, several of the projects that we tried to carry out never got off the ground. There were some gloomy days when I thought of resigning. But the fact of working in a team cheered me up and I appreciated the climate of fraternity which we were living.

**Paul Foisy**, a layman, is the Director of Villa des Jeunes at Saint-Augustin (Quebec)

Little by little, more numerous groups began to succeed each other and the work of youth ministry became more structured. We were listening to the needs of the youth leaders who were accompanying the groups to the extent that we had to add another lay youth leader. Our cruising speed continued to increase. Our efforts began to be concentrated more and more on the work of animation. The climate became transformed little by little, going from fraternity to a relation between Brothers and lay persons which resembled more an employer-employee relationship. Without seeking to apportion blame, let us simply say that it's not that easy to be a lay person who works in a place that is also the residence of the community. Even if each one shows a certain openness, there is nevertheless a 'stranger' in the house. And if this stranger, without realising it, encroaches on community territory, he will certainly be made aware of it. I therefore had to become aware that there were some places reserved to the community, other places where one could share and others where the 'stranger' was more at ease. With the passage of time each became camped in his habits





and in his territory. Although we respected each other, we had created between us a distance which allowed us to be in equilibrium. But we were still far from “association’.

Then, in the middle of the 90s, Br.Benoît Marcoux, just back from a General Chapter where the theme of association had begun to break through, set about forming us in Lasallian spirituality. Since Br.Benoît is sensitive and considerate, he shared this formation with us in small doses... Since he had mastered well the art of taming, this strategy proved very effective. Interest in Lasallian spirituality had already been created when, in 1996, Br.André Dubuc received the mission of gathering all the “partners’ and organising a formation session in France. First there was a week of interviews, accounts of experiences and exchanges of opinions, in Quimper in Brittany. Then there was a week-long pilgrimage “in the steps of John Baptist de La Salle”. These two weeks, lived at breakneck speed, without doubt constituted for me an important stage of initiation to Lasallian spirituality.

On our return, however, the participants, hesitant to launch themselves unreservedly into the partnership, expressed the need to do things bit by bit. At the Villa des Jeunes therefore, we set up a “Lasallian team”. Composed of Brothers and lay persons, this team gave itself as objectives to deep-

en Lasallian spirituality, to exchange ideas on the educational plan of the Villa des Jeunes and to become more aware of the lived experience of the Lasallian Family in the District. We studied together the “Meditations for the Time of Retreat” as well as Br.Jacques Goussin’s “The Mission of Human and Christian Education... The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle” and this year we have been holding exchanges of ideas, chapter by chapter, on the Lasallian education project “Never again alone”.

This team, therefore, allowed us to develop our Lasallian roots, to re-create a spirit of fraternity and to pursue our route towards association. In the year 2000, at the request of the Brother Visitor, I participated at a colloquium in Rome on the theme of association. On that occasion, I chose to make myself available to work on the development of association in the District. Since then I became a member of the Commission on the Education Mission and Association (MEL/ASS), then president of the preparatory committee for the Chapter and finally I became a member of the Commission on Association (COMAS).

I now consider myself an associate and I live in a concrete way, mainly at the Villa des Jeunes, the association between Brothers and Lay Lasallians. The climate which I find in the work is that of a family where each one shares what is best and receives in exchange, not simply a salary, but all the riches and harmony which you get from a group which is fully in tune and which takes to heart living the gospel values and making them know to the young.

For me, Association is already a reality. The steps which remain to be taken will be an official recognition that this association is alive and effective. My adventure among the Brothers for 28 years, has led me today to an association which I would never have suspected on my arrival at Villa des Jeunes. Rather like John Baptist de La Salle, “...it was from event to event that the Lord led me...” I do not quite know where that will lead me.... But I know I will be “never again alone”.

## 4.13 A Life Journey in Community

*The La Salle Community  
Palencia, Spain*

### A Tension Between Two Poles

Before beginning this community, each of us underwent a more or less long process of discernment and faith development in Christian groups that were running at Colegio La Salle. In these Christian groups we began to share life, prayer, and commitment with other young people. We encountered one another on that road and we recognized one another in the call to walk together in community.

Very united to this call was our commitment to teaching the faith to the young. We began our efforts in educational/pastoral leadership at the two Lasallian schools in the city as well as in parishes. We were all Christian group leaders, some participated in the school's pastoral ministry team, in District pastoral ministry structures, but also in Diocesan structures, such as being a member of the youth pastoral ministry delegation and the Christian coordinator for young people.

These two elements - the call to build community and the attraction of a commitment to the young - were two poles of the same tension, two poles that were both necessary. The fact of living in community encouraged us to be a presence among young people to show them an alternative Christian lifestyle, which community is. Being with young people continued to raise the question of our way of living and building community.

### A Key Element: Community Discernment

In community we learned to discern together personal decisions. In the beginning years, we shared together on a very deep level about many things, including work options, affective issues, commitments in pastoral ministry. All vital circumstances and situations were discerned in order to discover god's will for us.

That is how we established what to be a communi-

Six lay persons, among them a married couple, make up the **La Salle Christian Community** of Palencia, Spain. Their ages are now around 35 years. The life journey that they have undergone, or stated another way, the options that they have taken and which they understand only within their life journey, has led them to live their lives in the work of Lasallian education, in spite of the university training that some have had that had led them in another direction - medicine, architecture, law. It is that process we wish to focus on now, done in community, rather than on the fact of their community life. It is a process which goes back 20 years, when they were adolescents who were studying at Colegio La Salle in the same city. They recall it in this way:

ty would presuppose for a mission, always keeping our history and what we had already accomplished very much in mind. Looking at that history, it was not easy for us to discover that our lives were among young people and involved leading them in education and in pastoral ministry - but in a special way, in community.

### The Place of the Brothers in this Process

In any case, the experience has been one which has been shared with the Brothers. They have accompanied us on our community way of life and



Photo: fixe/quelle.de / JAW



together we have tried to respond to the educational and pastoral needs of young people. They have helped us to know and even to study in depth the charism of De La Salle, they have offered us formation in terms of our participating in Regional Lasallian sessions. Above all, everyday experiences in which we shared prayer, the community program, and formation with the Brothers from the community in Palencia and with other Brothers in the District have been important for us.

These experiences have allowed us to root ourselves as a community in the District's common project. We feel very deeply that we belong to the District as another community, but without losing our secular identity. We feel connected to and that we belong to the Lasallian charism and to all who live it. In a natural way, we embrace the ties with the Brothers, since we share the same mission, the

same commitment to the educational/pastoral service of the young. It is for that reason that we feel the need to be a community along with them.

### One Expression of the Option for Stability

Our life program lead us to celebrate what we call the "option for stability." Our expression was welcomed by the Brother Visitor along with those Brothers and lay persons who have been close to our faith development process. In this celebration each member of the community gave a public and definitive "yes" to the community program - to be a community for the educational mission according to the Lasallian charism. Each year on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, we renew our "option for stability" during the celebration in which the Brothers renew their vows.

Our history tells us that to live according to the Lasallian charism is to live and to seek unity between communion and mission; the mission shapes the life of our community, from the way we relate with one another, the topics that come up in dialogue, our common lifestyle, the way we pray, to our very presence in different places. Everything is determined by the needs and the experience of mission.

*To contact:*

*Ana Gassó*

[anagasso@lasalle.es](mailto:anagasso@lasalle.es)

---

# 4.14 Participation of Partners and Associates in Educational Service of the Poor

*Br. Francis Carr  
Midwest District*

I have been asked to speak today on how Partners and Associates are engaging in direct service of the poor. I would like to begin with a story:

*The man whispered, "God, speak to me" and a meadowlark sang. But, the man did not hear. So the man yelled, "God, speak to me!" And the thunder rolled across the sky. But, the man did not listen. The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you." And a star shined brightly. But the man did not notice. And the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle!" And a life was born. But the man did not know. So, the man cried out in despair, "Touch me God, and let me know you are here!" Whereupon, God reached down and touched the man, but the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.*

Brothers, we need to be attentive and to listen creatively to the presence of God in our lives in this unique time in our Institute. If we are too cautious, or too literal in how we interpret the needs of the Church and of young people in light of our consecration, we will not hear the meadowlark or the thunder or see the stars or notice the butterfly.

In preparation for this presentation, I asked the Visitors of the other Districts and the delegation in our Region for examples of involvement. There are many! So much good is happening; so many good people have accepted the invitation to be Lasallians, and once they have committed themselves, they take their call seriously.

Most of you have heard about the Lasallian Volunteers. A married couple, both former Lasallian Volunteers, offered to open their home to current Vol-

In the Intercapitular Meeting of Visitors, in May-2004, Brother **Francis Carr**, Visitor of Midwest District, presented a series of short accounts from which we extracted the following.

unteers when the Volunteers board was seeking an alternative model of community. Two years ago, as an experiment, I appointed these former volunteers Co-Directors of a Lasallian community of the Midwest District, with themselves, two current Volunteers, and another former Volunteer as members. They are serious about their commitment, about their prayer life, and their support for one another, and their two young sons have added a new dimension to the life of this community.

Two young people, neither from Lasallian universities, became Lasallian Volunteers and were assigned to serve at the San Miguel School in Camden, New Jersey. They fell in love and married. When they heard that a school would open on a Native American reservation in Montana, they pursued positions there. He, now a member of the International Youth Commission, and she, now the mother of two children, continue their work in the school as committed Lasallians, parents, and teachers.



Photo: Gregory Kazarian

Sometimes concepts originate from the dream of one person; at other times groups of men and women come together with ideas and depart with a new vision. A gathering of Brothers, Volunteers, and lay colleagues in Spring 1998 generated two new ideas that have impacted the Institute in our Region. One was the establishment of the Lasallian Partners for the Economically Poor (LPEP). The members agitate for greater awareness of the needs of the poor and help others to imagine how they can engage in making a difference in their local area. LPEP also invited leaders of the Miguel Schools to come together, and from that meeting the Lasallian Association of Miguel Schools was formed. LAMS gathers the schools to support one another personally, spiritually, professionally; they also serve as a resource for others interested in a Miguel school or one similar to it. I mentioned that former Lasallian Volunteers continue in the mission. But there are numerous other examples of women and men who served in our “traditional” middle-class schools who, after experiencing one of the regional formation programs, made the decision to leave the security of a well-established school to work more directly with the poor.

In Memphis, Tennessee, a successful administrator and coach and an outstanding English teacher felt called to re-open a small school in a deteriorating neighborhood to give the children there an education and a reason to hope! Their Brother principal was distressed to lose such good staff members, but he recognized their sincerity and endorsed their decision.

The principal of the school near Portland, Oregon, responded to a new challenge over 1000 miles from his home and asked his family to move with him to Tucson, Arizona, where he is President of a secondary school that will serve impoverished Latinos and Native Americans.

I would be negligent if I did not tell you that many of our administrators, faculty and staff at schools that have existed for 25, 70, or 150 years, while continuing to teach the middle class boys and girls of our society, are also instilling in these more fortunate young people their responsibility to the poor. Nearly all of our schools expect students to perform service, and it is the teachers who work alongside the students as they serve the economically poor in so many settings.

A graduate of Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota had embarked on a successful business career but knew he wanted more out of life, so he moved in with the Brothers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and researched the possibilities of a San Miguel School there. One year later he, a Brother and some volunteers opened a school in a rented warehouse. One of those volunteers had been a teacher at a nearby Lasallian school. When she told her lay principal that she wanted to “try” teaching at San Miguel, he approved and promised that she could return if it didn’t work out. She is now in her fifth year at San Miguel.

A teacher at a suburban Chicago school decided to move to a San Miguel School in a violent neighborhood in the city. She also moved into community with one Brother and three other Volunteers, and when I asked about that decision, she said: “I never considered working at San Miguel without living in community. It has made me a better person.” In fact, because of her Lasallian background and spirituality, she was chosen as Director of the community.

The principal of De Marillac School in a section of San Francisco that is known for drug dealing, drunkenness, and fear on the streets was comfortable at Sacred Heart-Cathedral High School but she chose to lead this new Miguel school as her way of acting on her commitment to Lasallian ideals.

One of our alumni worked in the public schools for thirty years. His dream was to start a Miguel School for children in his home town, one of the poorest and least educated in the state of Wisconsin, and last year he asked to affiliate with the Midwest District in a middle school in Racine Wisconsin.

There are many other women and men whose stories I have not reported today. Yet they also demonstrate what Brother Alvaro promoted in a statement during his visit to the District of Italy: “All members of the Lasallian community can live the Lasallian charism in their own, unique way...” What a challenge for those of us who are leaders in our Districts to be open to new ways of welcoming our Partners and Associates! These men and women surround us. They are the meadowlarks and the thunder; they are the miracles and the butterflies that teach us the ways of God. We have to listen and respond.