

LASALLIANS: HEARTS ON FIRE

OUR HEARTS
ARE BURNING
WITHIN US





INTRODUCTION



In the context of the Tercentenary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle's passage to eternal life and the *Year of Lasallian Vocations*, we would like to share the following reflection with you, which starts with an invitation to:

- *Recognize* that these 300 years of Lasallian life have been a gift from God to us.
- *Keep following* the vocation to which God has called us and helping others to discover their own call.
- *Renew* the commitment to our education and evangelization mission.

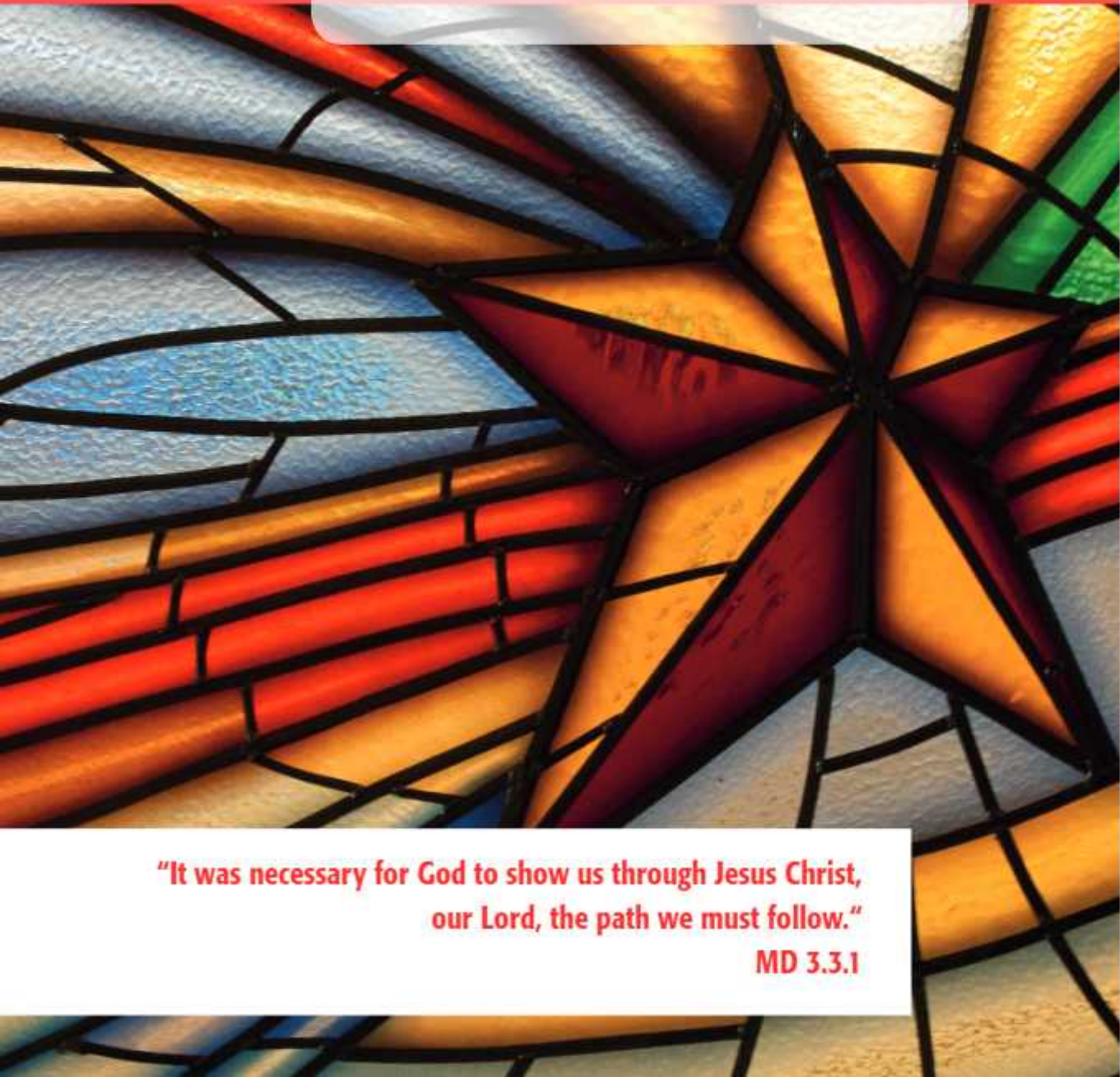
Our reflection is inspired by the well-known paschal narrative of the disciples of Emmaus, whose personal and community reading we recommend. (Lk 24:13).

To help you delve into this reflection and share it with other Lasallians worldwide in a creative way, we are including a study proposal for your community at the conclusion of this reflection.





HOMEBOUND TOWARDS EMMAUS



**“It was necessary for God to show us through Jesus Christ,
our Lord, the path we must follow.”**
MD 3.3.1

The disciples are on their way to Emmaus, which could represent any place in the world, even – why not? – your own heart.

On the WAY

They were heading home to Emmaus, back to ordinary life, to their normal occupations and certainties. They both felt confused and defeated as they left Jerusalem behind, looking crest-fallen as they walked. Jesus of Nazareth and his message had given meaning to their lives, but everything was sadly over. Returning home to their predictable lives was the best thing they could do. But something happened along the way...

Like them, we ourselves are always going from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Pilgrims like them, we experience breakthrough moments in our lives. Men and women, each of us walking at a different pace, we have different motivations in life and face our own aspirations and circumstances. But we move on *together and by association*, discovering that God walks alongside each Lasallian. What attitudes, beliefs and values underpin our Lasallian journey?

Engaging in dialogue and accepting ACCOMPANIMENT

The two disciples shared their life journey as they walked. They talked and posed important questions. Sad and desolate, their eyes were sightless. But a stranger came up alongside them. He seemed to be unaware of what had just happened in Jerusalem. *“It was Jesus, but their eyes were not able to recognize him”*¹. Jesus listened to them, dialogued and paid attention to their concerns.

Everyday life is like a pathway along which we ask questions, express doubts, find certainties, and engage in important debates regarding our faith and vocation.

Some of us allow people to question our certainties along the way; we listen to them, engage in dialogue and accept their accompaniment. Some of us move ahead with energy and a positive vision, with stamina ready to overcome difficulties, with hope trying to lead a meaningful life.

But still some of us, we must admit, are walking in darkness like the disciples of Emmaus at the beginning of their journey. We wander around as if we were in a labyrinth, without knowing in what direction to go, unable to find the way out. We live moments of confusion, fear, doubt and emptiness, as if the embers that kept our hearts burning had died down. We feel unprotected, abandoned and hardly find answers to the questions arising in our hearts. The answers we did have are no longer useful, as Mario Benedetti says: *“When we thought we had all the answers, suddenly all the questions changed”*².

¹ Pope Francis. General audience: May 24, 2017.

² Quoted by González-Geraldo, José Luis. *Educación, desarrollo y cohesión social*. Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, 2015, p. 321.



The journey seems endless when we feel sad, discouraged and lonely, but it becomes lighter when someone comes along with us. Those who have followed the Way of Saint James (Camino de Santiago), or other pilgrimage routes, know this very well.

We do not walk alone! Jesus is beside us, although sometimes we do not recognize his presence. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we need him to open our eyes. Our Founder wrote: *"The road you must follow through this life being so dangerous, you need a guide to walk safely"*. (MD 164, 2.1)

Those who live next to us can help us discover Jesus at our side. We are called to accompany one another in our communities without sparing means or resources. If we want to grow, we must walk along with someone, moving on together as we share our lives.

Effective *mutual accompaniment* has some implications:

- ▶ Willingness to study together and work as a team, before deciding how far we are willing to go.
- ▶ Discovering each person's uniqueness: offering empathy and trust; avoiding prejudice and invasiveness; accepting diversity with respect; admiring the treasure hidden in everyone; learning to listen and pay attention to others; and being ready to let relationships change us.
- ▶ Spending time together and implementing the right group dynamics.



RECOGNIZING Him along the way

The disciples of Emmaus did not know that Christ had risen. But little by little, the words of the traveler made their hearts burn within them, and hence they invited him to stay overnight. Jesus accepted the invitation and broke bread with them. Gathered around the table, when they finally recognized him, he disappeared, leaving behind the broken bread and the sweetness of his words. By taking the road to Emmaus, every person and each Lasallian will discover that God is always walking at their side.

We know that Jesus is risen, but sometimes He is hard to find and recognize. We need to shout: *Stay always with us, oh Lord! Help us to discover you even when we are in pain! Help us recognize you and welcome you with hope!*

We know that God wants to be our companion on the way of life. Our Founder reminded us that *"Jesus Christ, who is in your midst, will give himself to you, and he will communicate his Spirit to you"*. (MD 30.3.2)

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AS LASALLIANS



*"It is not enough to sail securely;
you must reach the harbor".*

MF 164.3.1

We have come to the Lasallian family through different paths. Let us take some quiet time to recall our memories. The Spanish word for 'remember' is 'recordar', which etymologically means 'bring back to the heart'. Let us recall the highlights of our journey so far.

Different experiences intermingle in our personal Lasallian story. Some are joyful and positive, a source of light in our lives; others are painful and perhaps have left us wounded. We need to move on, heal the wounds and evangelize our hearts. There are several requirements to do this:

- ▶ Connecting with the Source of Life and sharing the treasure we live, both personally and in community.
- ▶ Nourishing our charismatic, missionary and apostolic vitality; preventing 'spiritual anorexia'; avoiding contaminated relationships; keeping a sparkle in our eyes and a flame in our hearts.
- ▶ Overcoming the institutional rigidities that strangle us and prevent life from flowing as we share in communion with others.
- ▶ Living our vocation with joy, willing to carry the Good News to all nations.
- ▶ Actively and creatively celebrating the *Year of Lasallian Vocations* in 2019.

CELEBRATING 300 years of life

John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers lived with **"one heart, one commitment, one life"** and thus made these 300 years of salvation history possible. Are we willing to live like them?

One HEART

De La Salle and his first companions made the birth of our Lasallian family possible. They let God touch their hearts, which started beating in unison with the hearts of poor children and young people. God touched the depths of their being and enabled them to walk along with others to set their hearts on fire. They became the source of a new charism for the Church and the world.

Ours, like any charism, *"is a grace, a gift (...), which is given to someone not because he is better than others or because he deserves it: it is a gift that God gives him, because with his freely given love he can place him in service to the entire community, for the good of all"*³. We have freely received a charism as a gift for those whom God has entrusted to us, and who are at the center of our mission: our students, especially the poorest among them. This is what our Founder says: *"Act in such a way through your zeal that you give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you"* (MD 201.2).

³ Pope Francis. General audience: October 1, 2014.

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It is not an abstract love made of intangible feelings, but a concrete commitment expressed in words, gestures, attitudes and actions: welcoming our students, paying attention to each of them, appreciating their efforts, encouraging and supporting their growth process, questioning their blind spots in a timely manner and properly correcting their mistakes. These concrete expressions of our Lasallian zeal shape our distinctive pedagogy.

As Lasallian educators, we should not be afraid of winning over and moving the hearts of our students; on the contrary, we must earn their trust and affection. It is a matter of creating a positive educator-student relationship, since it leads, together with our personal witness, to a more effective learning process.

By using the right pedagogy, we can achieve the great goals of Lasallian education, among which leading our students to God stands out in a special way. Yes, even in these times when so many people turn their back on the mystery of God, our Founder's recommendation is still valid: "*Do you take advantage of their affection for you to lead them to God? (MD 101.3.2) You must consider the obligation you have to win their hearts to be a princi-*

pal means to lead them to live in a Christian manner" (MF 115.3.2).

Moving people's hearts is both a gift and an art. As a gift, we receive it from God and, therefore, we must constantly ask for it. As an art, it must be studied and developed. Whatever we cultivate with dedication and grit eventually grows, ripens and bears fruit.

The pedagogy of the heart has a prophetic and a mystical dimension: educators take care of the students in a concrete way, while they remain open to the love God reveals both through them and the students and they seek to awaken a filial love for God in everyone, themselves included. Through the pedagogy of the heart, we accompany the students in their growth process, and we help them learn and develop new skills and attitudes, new personal and social values. By doing so, we create a better future for society.

Today each member of the Lasallian Family must be open to the deep touch of God, and heed the call to become, together and by association, "*the heart, the memory, and the guarantor of the Lasallian charisma*" R 157. We can only be Lasallians at heart if "*our heart is burning within us*". (1k 24:32).





One commitment

His answer to God gradually led him to lead a life of full commitment to others: *"One commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning"*. (MSO 6)

The spirit of our Founder – the Church's declared patron saint of educators – lives in us today. It is our duty to guarantee its relevance by meeting the real needs of children, young people and adults nowadays. Are we doing this? How and when?

We do it when we fully live our vocation as educators and express our Lasallian commitment in concrete ways:

- ▶ In community, striving for an integral education and a culture of vocations that can enlighten people in their search for truth and allow them to lead a meaningful life.
- ▶ Together and by association, with clear attitudes of selflessness, respect for diversity and dialogue; aiming at justice, peace and the integrity of creation; in active solidarity with the poor of the world; and caring for the future of our planet.

We could enrich the present reflection by indicating more concrete ways of living our Lasallian commitment.

One life

A committed heart is only possible when we feel that our life is fulfilled, when we learn to overcome the contradictions and inconsistencies we experience along the way, when we learn to rest in God's hands.

Our Founder lived for God, with God and in God. His life was centered on what really matters: *"For this present life, you must not be concerned about anything except to make God reign in your heart by his grace and by the fullness of his love"*. (MD 67.1.1) More than ever, his life questions us nowadays when many people live so far away from God.

According to Lasallian Spirituality, we must constantly sail if we want to reach the harbor. During our journey, experience tells us that we feel fulfilled when we respond to God's call, which is always new. This is our safe harbor that to reach we must ask: What is God asking from us in this moment of our life?

Our vocation is dynamic; it constantly grows and develops. Giving a vocational sense to our life – no matter what our concrete option may be – fills us with enthusiasm, optimism and joy. It enables us to share with others whatever we find valuable along the way.

ONE COMMITMENT

IV.

RETURNING TO JERUSALEM TO "DO GOOD"



*"Their hearts were filled
with ardor for doing good".*
MD 30.3.1

After a unique on-the-road experience, enlightened by the breaking of the bread, the disciples of Emmaus set out immediately and returned to Jerusalem. The experience was so powerful that they were able to reconnect with the community and witness to what they had seen with their eyes and touched with their hands.

The world still needs to discover God's love, which is closer to us than ourselves, and becomes evident when we walk together with others. There is much truth in this statement: *"Man can set about organizing terrestrial realities without God, but closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man"*⁴.

Our world needs people who can witness to the tenderness of God. To do this, we must overcome the regrets and disappointments that assail us along the way to develop internal harmony and a purposeful life. Prejudice, fear and in-the-box thinking must be discarded before deciding how far we are willing to go when we go back to our own Jerusalem, where God has mysteriously sent us to bring about life. The energy to do this comes from within. We know that if an egg is broken from the outside, life ends; if it breaks from the inside, by the impulse of its inner energy, life begins.

How can we develop this inner energy?

▶ *On a personal level.* Not being stubborn people, to begin with! We need an intense experience of dwelling in

God's presence. Then our Lasallian life will be full of faith, fraternity and service, and we will stay updated regarding our educational mission. We must constantly move from despair to hope and achieve the highest level of inner freedom possible.

▶ *On a group level.* Experiencing fraternity and building it together. Being supportive of our students and our fellow travelers along the Lasallian way. Working to make people as happy as possible. Respecting their personal process and pace and helping them to move forward. Building relationships that are full of compassion, kindness and dialogue. Being agents of change who seek the common good. And helping others to discover their own vocation.

God keeps calling us, caring for us in mysterious ways, and expecting from us a sincere and transformative commitment that can set our hearts ablaze.

Is it not true that we need to rekindle the fire of faith and rediscover God in our lives? Rainer Maria Rilke's piece of advice could be useful here and perhaps inspire our prayer:

*"The work of the eyes is done.
Go now and do the heart-work"*⁵.

⁴ *Populorum Progressio* 42

⁵ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Turning-point: Miscellaneous Poems*. Anvil Press Poetry, London, 2003.

V.

SUGGESTED COMMUNITY DISCUSSION



We invite you to discuss the present reflection in each group and/or educational community by using the *Design for Change Method*:

1. Feel:

- Regarding what you have read and reflected:
- What do you feel? What concerns you? What worries you personally and regarding your community?
- Sort the information and try to understand it better.
- Summarize the information and choose both a personal and a community challenge.

2. Imagine:

- Brainstorm regarding these challenges.
- Choose the best and more useful ideas.
- Propose a feasible solution.
- Design a concrete proposal for change.
- Draft an action plan.

3. Do:

- Set up the plan: action lines, resources, strategies, schedule, tasks, responsibilities and so forth.
- Implement the plan: put it into practice, bring the project to life personally and in your community.

4. Share:

- Share your change project at different levels: local, zone, Sector, District and Institute.
- Inspire other people by sharing how you chose and addressed the challenge, and how you implemented the project.
- Celebrate in your own setting what you have accomplished – school, educational community, etc.
- Send us a summary of your project to inspire all Lasallians and communities worldwide: comunicazione@lasalle.org. We invite you to be creative.



To know more about the initiatives which are responding to "LASALLIANS: HEARTS ON FIRE" see www.lasalle.org and our social networks. Share your experiences. Send information on your activities to: comunicazione@lasalle.org



LASALLIAN REFLECTION

PREVIOUS ISSUE

2015 - 2016

1. "A Gospel Adventure"

2016 - 2017

2. "One Call, Many Voices"

2017 - 2018

3. "Lasallians without limits"

NEXT ISSUE

2019 - 2020

5. Great Things are Possible



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- Pages 1, 6, 8 and 16 @Shutterstock
- Pages 2, 4, 10, 13, 14, 18 and 20 lasalle.org

Logo: "Lasallian hearts on fire"

The RELAN Communications Team (Lasallian Region of North America) in Washington, made this logo for all Lasallians.

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