Sharing in the Lasallian Mission

If you’ve browsed through our catalog or visited our website, you’ve probably encountered the term Lasallian. You may know that it refers to the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and the patron saint of teachers, John Baptist de La Salle. He was committed to providing a human and Christian education to young people, especially those who were poor.

- A 17th century man, he taught some ideas about education that sound surprisingly modern today:
  - Children should be taught in their own language, not in the Latin used in the pedagogy of the day.
  - Touching hearts is as important as enlightening minds.
  - The kind and attentive relationship a teacher builds with a student is the very thing that makes learning possible-- and that makes faith grow.
  - Teaching is a Christian ministry; teachers are ambassadors of Christ

Those Lasallian principles guide our work at Saint Mary’s Press, and can offer guidance for teachers everywhere by posing these challenges:

- Do we use the kind of language and active teaching techniques that engage young people in their own learning?
- Do we inspire the hearts of youth? Do we challenge their intellects?
- Are we the caring and attentive mentors that our students need?
- Do we regard our work as a ministry, and approach it with faith and zeal?

Wisdom from our patron saint

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and patron saint of teachers, pioneered many of the teaching techniques that we at Saint Mary’s Press continue to support today, including the practice of tailoring instruction (and discipline!) to the very different needs of individual students.

De La Salle’s instructions on how to teach the daily catechism lesson are especially interesting. Catechists will find these 17th century teaching tips effective today:

- Don’t talk as if preaching to the students.
- Ask questions and “subquestions,” as simply as possible.
- Speak only on the subject and guard against departing from it.
- Include ideas for practical application in each lesson.
- If class is especially long, tell an engaging yet pertinent story.
- Do not teach anything that you haven’t learned from a competent authority.

Which of these points could be most helpful to your work as a catechist?

Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God

At Lasallian gatherings, and in Christian Brothers’ Schools, the opening prayer is always the same: Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God. Like others engaged in Lasallian ministries, I find this little phrase to be rich in meaning, each and every word providing nourishment for my personal and communal spiritual life. It also informs my work as an editor and reviewer at Saint Mary’s Press, because it tells me a great deal about teaching and ministering to young people:
When we address youth, we can invite them to walk with us; there is no need to bombard them with a multitude of “shoulds.”

Young people, like adults, may forget that they live in God’s presence; by continually calling them back to this awareness, we teach them to see for themselves.

Young people stand in the presence of God not as an “I” but as a “we;” it is through relationships and conversations with peers-- and with us-- that they most often become aware of how God is working in their lives.

We don’t need to lead our youth to God; they are already in God’s presence. Our job is to open their hearts and minds to what God has already offered.

This little phrase also teaches me that the culture of the young is no more alien to the presence of God than are the young themselves. Youth culture is infused with God’s presence, as is the entire world. Can we help our young people to discern God’s presence in their own hearts, in their interactions and daily activities, and in the world-- and culture-- in which they live?

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What we do together

Saint John Baptist de La Salle didn’t just train teachers, he gathered them into a lay community later known as the Brothers of the Christians Schools. Today, his educational mission continues through the efforts of the Brothers, with the support of thousands of Lasallian partners in 80 countries. The principle of association is basic to a Lasallian worldview, and it is a guiding principle of our work at Saint Mary’s Press:

- Our work is wholly collaborative: behind every book there’s a cross-functional project team and wide input is sought on decisions.
- We learn from our partners in the classroom and parish, inviting teacher and student input on our resources.
- We encourage teachers to partner with students in the learning process, following the Lasallian model of teacher as older brother or sister.
- We promote a vision of the Catholic school and parish as communities of learning, where every adult and every young person is called to contribute to the work of sharing the Gospel.

What aspects of your teaching ministry are done in association with others? Could you collaborate even more effectively with students? Parents? Administrators? Parish or school staff?