

**The Educational Climate and Mission in the District of San Francisco
Presentation to the District Assembly on Mission**

Saint Mary's College of California
July 29, 2002

Gery Short
Director, Office of Education
District of San Francisco

Introduction

As Brother David stated last night, the mission is well established. It is clear. We are not here to define or redefine the mission. Our challenge this week is to determine a direction and answer the question: How are we to be faithful and authentic to this mission in light of our circumstances in the District today?

To help us to determine this direction and answer this question I have organized my presentation to focus on:

- **Strengths** What is in place that we should build upon?
- **Challenges** Both internal and external challenges that we need to keep in front of us.
- **Recommendations for the Assembly**

You have in front of you a summary of these three areas and copies of charts and graphs I will be presenting. My goal is to provide an overview and surface certain critical issues facing the educational climate and mission of the District from my perspective in the Office of Education.

I will mention, but not review in detail some of the activities of the Office of Education over the last four years. We have compiled a fairly thorough documentation of our efforts in the "Response to the Action Plan" that you have received and which outlines how we have responded to both the recent General Chapter directives and the Action Plan. Additionally, we have summarized the activities of the Office since 1999 on the last page of the handout you have in front of you.

If there is something that you feel deserves more attention or clarification, there will be a bit of time following this presentation and I or other members from the Office will be available throughout the week for any follow-up conversation. I really encourage those who want to follow up on something to do just that.

Strengths

What is in place that we should build upon?

1. Lasallian Mission, History, and Community

We are blessed with a rich and relevant history and tradition. A pedagogy and spirituality, which is as relevant today for education, the Church and society as ever.

We have relationships and real connections with students, Brothers and our Lasallian partners, nationally and internationally. It seems as people become involved and learn about the mission they become more and more attracted and committed to it.

Friday, I received an e-mail from Emily Vogel who just returned from Sri Lanka. Emily worked as a Lasallian Volunteer at the LEO Center in Oakland and we invited her to be part of the recent summer immersion program to Sri Lanka.

Emily writes, "I continue to be overwhelmed by the work of the De La Salle Christian Brothers (all over the world) and how they began impacting me when I was a freshman in high school. Who would have ever thought that a weekly 6:45am meeting in high school would have taken me to California, Baltimore, Sri Lanka and many other inner-city service experiences in between. Just talking to Lasallians in Sri Lanka and Bangkok and meeting the students was an inspiring testimony to how the Lasallian spirit has traveled and unites us".

This richness is a blessing and has given us an opportunity to serve the Church by being a model to other congregations and other diocesan systems and structures. For example, since January, I have been contacted by representatives from six different religious congregations to learn what we are doing in the District to engage educators in the mission.

2. Brothers

Several years ago, in the face of declining numbers in the congregation, the Brothers could easily have adopted a fortress mentality, but they did not. In the spirit of faith and with a deep commitment to the mission and work of this Institute, the Brothers openly welcomed colleagues, seeing the sharing of the mission as a "grace", a gift of the Spirit.

The Brothers internationally, and especially in this District have opened their arms:

- Invested in formation programs for the laity;
- Invited lay people into leadership positions at the District and local levels;
- Welcomed their colleagues into their prayer and community;
- Set up new structures to give partners greater responsibility such as this Assembly;
- Brothers have walked with us, have encouraged, listened and have come to rely on their partners;
- And served as leaders and mentors by expressing the mission in example and words.

As a result, a natural partnership, a sharing of the responsibility of the mission, has evolved. Today, for example, in this Assembly, we are witnessing this partnership at work.

3. Renewed Commitment to Service of the Poor through Education

Responding to the call from the International Institute and the District Chapter, we have experienced in this District a renewed commitment to Service of the Poor through education:

- Six new apostolates have been founded to serve the poor over the last 4 years: La Salle High School in Yakima, Saint Joseph School, Sunnyside Washington; De Marillac Middle School, San Francisco; De La Salle North Catholic, Portland; Rancho de los Hermanos and the Latino Adult Institute in Napa
- The schools have made a clear commitment to making themselves accessible; to enroll students from families below the federal poverty level through the “5%” program and other significant efforts; and by establishing remedial and compensatory programs for these students
- Service programs, service learning, and immersion programs have become part of the District culture.

We have experienced a growing commitment and consciousness to make service of the poor a priority across the District.

4. Formation Activities

We can say with confidence that our formation activities for Brothers and partners are second to none in the Institute. The District has invested in people through a wide variety of programs with clear purposes and has responded to clearly expressed needs.

5. Strength of the Local Works

As a District, we are operating today from a relative position of strength. For the most part, every school or work is at capacity and demand for most is extraordinary.

Recently, we have experienced unprecedented building projects and capital campaigns of almost a quarter of a billion dollars. This is a testament to work and strength of these school communities, educators, parents and students, and the incredible jobs the presidents and development staffs are doing.

6. Strength of Leadership

We are experiencing a crisis of leadership in Catholic education. Since 1999, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles has had to recruit 159 principals for the 256 elementary and secondary schools; an average of 40 per year.

However, this District has been blessed with extraordinary local leaders who are:

- Committed to the mission
- Prayerful
- Professional
- Care deeply about their students and fellow educators, and

An effective District Leadership and staff:

- Who listen
- Who are tireless
- Who are willing to act and risk, if necessary, and
- Who are attentive to the direction offered by the District Chapter, Action Plan and General Chapter

7. **Renewed Sense of Lasallian Identity and Culture across the District Among Laity**

Somewhere over the last 4 years, as a result of the years of formation activities, development of new structures, and the Convocations, we hit a “critical mass” where more and more people are clearly identifying with the mission. Listening to people today, it is commonplace to hear the expressions – “our Founder, our District, our mission, our commitment to serve the poor.”

This renewed sense of identity is evidenced by:

A. Hiring for mission

Administrators looking for individuals who see their work as a vocation, which is having a snowball effect. We see former Lasallian volunteers like Amy Bell at Christian Brothers, Carrie Kinsilla at De Marillac, Marilyn Paquette, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, and Bill Bosselli at SMCHS and former Jesuit Volunteers, and many others that I have not mentioned, looking and finding a place in the District’s apostolates. These are people who clearly see their work as a vocation.

In spite of the teacher shortage we are attracting a pool of quality educators.

B. Schools have become open to sharing personnel, something the Brothers have done for many years and continue to do. Individuals have stepped up in response to a need:

- Catherine Karrels from Sacred Heart Cathedral to De Marillac Middle School as principal;
- Matt Powell from La Salle Milwaukie to De La Salle North Catholic High School;
- Rudy Schulze from De La Salle High School to Christian Brothers High School.

And they have been supported in remarkable ways by their sending communities. People from La Salle High School, Milwaukie, helped develop the curriculum for De La Salle North Catholic and helped to paint the school. When Catherine needed a place to house the school for the first semester, Sacred Heart Cathedral found a classroom and opened the campus to the De Marillac Middle School students. When these people took these new positions other competent individuals committed to the mission have stepped forward. We have people in place who are trained to step in where there is a change.

C. Collaborative Relationships: *a sense of association*

From the beginning of the Institute, the Brothers have had a history of collaborating with one another. A strength of the District, with all the personnel changes we have experienced, is that this practice continues today.

Here are just a few examples:

- The first line administrators of the secondary schools meet together 3 times/year.
- A Lasallian Youth Summer Assembly is now being held annually.
- The recent support of Saint Mary's College to the others works of the District and international Institute, in particular the incredible job Carole Swain has done to engineer these efforts.
- Exchange and interaction between such programs as LEO and Saint Mary's College High School and Saint Mary's College.
- Immersions and connections with India, Sri Lanka, Tijuana, Africa.
- To the roles individuals have taken on for this Assembly.

We are clearly associated for the mission across the District.

8. **Finally, this District has demonstrated important leadership in the Region and International Institute with:**

- Financial and personnel support to areas in Asia: especially the Philippines, Vietnam, India, and Pakistan;
- Bethlehem University;
- Romania;
- Lwanga District in Africa.

Also, as chairs or leaders on Regional Committees and Boards and as leaders in the collaborative design of the Lasallian Leadership Institute, Huether workshops, formation programs for Brothers and partners, including the National Novitiate at Mont La Salle in Napa.

We should do this, we have been blessed with resources – we have an obligation to share our resources with others.

It's no accident that we are one of the first, if not the first District in the International Institute to respond to General Chapter Proposition – to set

up an Assembly, a new structure that brings Brothers and partners together to formulate direction for the mission of the District. We are reaping the benefits of years of formation and partnership of Brothers and colleagues – all of this work has brought us to be ready to do the work of this Assembly.

Over the last four years we have created a culture of greater association and commitment to the mission District-wide. We have come to a point where more and more people are asking the questions: How are we to be authentic; to be faithful to this mission?

Today I believe we have reached a point of healthy intolerance where we challenge each other: e.g. why is the school not more accessible to the poor? How do we help educate our fellow teachers to what it means to truly be a Lasallian educator?

Why? Because we have come to a greater focus on the mission: what needs to be done for young people; how do we best advance the mission of a Christian and human education, especially for the poor?

Challenges

1. Money/ Finances:

The most common challenge mentioned in the discussion forum on the Internet for this Assembly, and most often mentioned by the Secondary School Administrators Association over the past 4 years, and the College for many more years, is money. How to address the increasing cost of education and serve the poor and working class?

A. Balancing

- Providing just salaries and benefits for teachers and staff;
- Proper facilities and equipment for our students;
- Making the schools accessible to the poor;
- Making tuition affordable for middle income families; and
- Balancing the budget.

A challenge we must face is what some have called the “hour glass effect” squeezing middle class families out of the schools due to the increases in tuition and efforts to serve the poor.

B. The second financial challenge is assuring the financial viability of those existing and new works that serve the poor almost exclusively.

2. The Needs of the Poor Continue to Challenge Us

a. Economic Poverty:

A study by the National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, states that in June 2001, 17%, or approximately 12 million children under 18 years old in the United States, live below the federal poverty level, (\$13,290/family of 3). One third of all African-Americans and nearly a third, or 30%, of all Latino children under 18 live below the federal poverty level.

The study reports that almost 25% of children in California live in families below the poverty level and in L.A. County the number is over 30%.

b. High School Graduation Rates

Another study sponsored by the Black Alliance for Education reports that:

- Just below 75% of all students enrolled graduated from high school in the U.S. in 1998;
- Over three-fourths of Anglos: 78%; but
- Just over 50% of African Americans and Latinos in the United States are graduating from high school. (African American: 56% and Latino: 54%).

We can clearly see the great need for us – for this Institute – a community of educators dedicated to serving the poor and working class.

c. Hispanic/Latino Influence

If we are to respond to the needs of Catholic Youth on the West Coast, our schools should be increasingly Hispanic/Latino.

According to a research study for Instituto Fe y Vida, a publication arm of Spanish catechetical materials for Saint Mary's Press (Chart 1), in the United States, 42% of all Catholics under the age of 30 are Hispanic; there has been a 10% increase from 1990-2000.

Chart 2: This bar graph portrays Catholics in the United States by age and ethnicity, 0-9, 10-19, 20-29, and so on. The yellow bar refers to the Hispanic Catholics. Note the concentration of Hispanics at the younger end of the chart.

The blue bar refers to Anglos and the green bar to “Others” – African-Americans, Asian Catholics, etc. Note that the number of Hispanics under 9 years of age in the entire United States is almost equal to the number of Anglos.

The California Catholic Conference reports that the growing majority of Catholics under 30 in California are Hispanic, and that within 10 years or sooner, it is estimated that Latinos will represent more than 75% of all Catholics under 30 in California.

In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Diocese of Yakima, where two-thirds of all Catholics are Hispanic, these numbers for Catholics under 30 are already at 75% and are rising rapidly.

Here is what a recent report for Fe y Vida says about education and the Hispanic community: “The national level of high school graduation rates for Hispanics in public education fluctuates between 50%-60%; the graduation rate among Hispanics attending Catholic high schools is over 90%.” We know that most of our graduates will obtain a university degree.

Are we prepared to respond to the needs of Catholic Latino youth and their families? To recruit and communicate with parents in Spanish? How many bilingual and bicultural teachers, administrators, and board members are in our schools to help us learn the needs of the Hispanic community? To provide role models for students?

We need to continue to create a culture of accessibility in our schools for all of our students, especially for the young Latino students.

We know what we need to do. How do we do it is the challenge?

As for the capital campaigns that 10 years ago seemed impossible to even consider let alone achieve, we know that to respond to these challenges may take some time, a strong commitment and a lot of hard work.

3. Influence of Public Education

As at the time of the foundation of the Institute, the present educational system is not serving the poor.

A. Response to Poverty

The public schools and many diocesan school systems have abandoned the inner cities or, where they are present, do not seem to be able to serve the poor.

For example, in the L.A. Unified School District, 52%, or over half of those enrolled, drop out before they graduate from high school. North Portland is served by two public high schools, Jefferson and Roosevelt High Schools, with drop out rates at around 45%; Matt Powell told me recently that the number is closer to 55% for Latino and African American students. These numbers are one of the primary reasons so many encouraged us to open De La Salle North Catholic.

B. Teacher Salaries, Credential Programs

Our schools are also impacted by the increasing salaries for teachers. Recently, it was reported that the average salary for public school teachers in California is over \$52,000, a \$10,000 increase over the last five years; not to mention the increasing cost of living, especially in places like the Bay Area.

We are also being impacted by the changing, more rigorous and sometime cumbersome teacher credential program requirements.

4. **Teacher / Leadership Shortages**

We continue to be challenged by the general teacher and administrative shortage across the country, especially in the critical areas of religious studies and campus ministry. For many administrators, finding qualified religious studies instructors is the biggest staffing challenge they face.

The District has initiated a number of activities to meet these challenges including:

- The Religious Studies Institute with Saint Mary's College;
- The Religious Studies Assessments of the Secondary Schools; and
- Sponsoring an exhibit booth at the L.A. Religious Ed. Congress to promote the Brothers and Lasallian education.

With regard to general leadership:

- The 73 participants from our District in the Lasallian Leadership Institute over the first two three-year cycles is the largest District group in the Region.
- We have been providing academic scholarships for those studying for an advanced degree in educational leadership; and
- Saint Mary's College has instituted the Lasallian Educator Fellows Program, a free credential program in exchange for three years of service in a District school.

5. Hunger for Faith and Community among Students Today

In the midst of the increasing secularization of our culture, students today seem more hungry than ever for meaning and spirituality, for faith and community.

It has been observed by educators across the District that with the proper support and direction, and by providing a real experience of community and prayer, by providing opportunities to meet the poor face to face and in our curricula and really consider this experience, and by promoting a life of integrity and vocation, our students are graduating and becoming the kind of caring, responsible people of whom we can be proud. They are blossoming under our care.

6. Formation in the Lasallian Mission

Another challenge is the need to continue to form educators, board members, coaches, support staff, and administrators who are well grounded in the mission, who will more fully internalize the mission, and who will live it out effectively.

7. Brothers and Lay Association

Brother Thomas pointed out the demographic situation of the Brothers in the District; we know it mirrors what is happening internationally and in religious orders around the world.

Animating Influence of Brothers

A recent survey conducted by the international Commission on Association of which I am part, noted that the primary formative influence

on the laity in the US/Toronto Region is a relationship with a Brother or a Brothers' community. With fewer and fewer Brothers and Brothers' communities, we need to find new and creative ways for the Brothers to exercise this animating influence.

How can we all support the wonderful work and efforts of the vocation coordinators and encourage young people and others to consider a calling as a Brother?

New Structures

“Working together and by association” is an integral element of the Brothers and Lasallian mission. In light of the changing make up of the Lasallian educational community, there has been much conversation internationally and in this region about what any new structure of “association” with Brothers and partners should look like. Our challenge is to identify new structures of association that reflect the new reality.

We do not have to look far to see new, energizing structures of association – such as the new Network of San Miguel Schools, District Leadership Team, Boards of Trustees, this Assembly. But, we must be careful to avoid fitting new reality into old structures such as asking lay partners or associates to take vows, that could, in the end, be divisive.

As daunting as these challenges may appear all at once, we are capable and have already begun to address them. With the same kind of faith as De La Salle – we know that God wants us to do this work and is bringing us along step by step. We are at a point where we can say they are daunting, but doable. Our faith says God is calling us to do this work and God wouldn't call us if it were impossible.

Recommendations

1. Leadership – Succession Plan

For the most part, we know that to be successful any organization or school needs strong and inspired leaders. In fact, without strong leaders, the best efforts of everyone are diminished, at best limited. Any school or work will only be as strong as the local leadership, both governance and administration.

- We need to continue our efforts to develop present and potential leaders;
- Invest in “growing our own” through training and formation, both Brothers and partners; and

- Effective recruitment when necessary.

2. **Development of a Plan**

The present Action Plan has set a direction, has served us well – much momentum is in place. We need to pursue and adjust this plan rather than invent a new one. We recognize what should continue, be added, and changed. For example, I have been asked will the 5% and remedial programs continue? My response has been, “It is up to the Assembly and the Chapter’s affirmation.”

3. **Culture of Growth**

There are those who say we need to be doing more, opening up new works, making the schools even more accessible, playing a larger role in helping out internationally; others who want to stop taking on anything new for a while in order to stabilize existing works.

The reality is we can do both, if we act prudently. For example, some schools’ recent successful capital campaigns are being complemented by efforts by the same schools to make themselves more accessible to the poor; i.e., efforts that are not mutually exclusive.

I believe we must continue to see beyond our local situations to the larger needs of the District and the International Institute. We need to keep our eyes open to uncover *new creative models and opportunities*.

For example:

- The Corporate Internship Program at DLSNC didn’t exist six years ago;
- The San Miguel Schools and Network are relatively recent phenomena;
- Joint ventures with other congregations such as the Daughters of Charity provide great promise.

There are new types of schools/structures/partnerships that we know we have not identified. We need to continue to be:

- Innovative;
- Strategic;
- Be attentive to where the Spirit is moving us; and
- Be willing to act when the time is right.

4. **Formation**

We need to continue to invest in people, educators, students, collegians, continue to develop effective programs as we have been doing; we must listen to people at local levels to identify needs and directions and respect commitments, especially to our communities, personal and family lives in the design of these formation activities.

5. **Increased Attention to Formation for Justice**

The recent General Chapter recommended that increased attention be given in formation programs for justice, a critical analysis of society, and insertion into the world of the poor. In writing up our response to the Action Plan and General Chapter directives, we, in the Office of Education recognized that we need to do more in this area:

- We need to do more to integrate justice and this critical analysis of our economic and political reality into our formation programs and into our curricula for students, including finding effective ways to introduce the social teachings of the Church.
- We need to develop opportunities and encourage all those involved in this mission to meet people in situations of poverty, learn the world of the poor on the West Coast and internationally personally. Most of us know the powerful conversions we can have when we allow ourselves to be touched by the world of the poor.

6. **Assembly**

My final recommendation is a call to Authenticity for us during this assembly:

That we keep the mission in front of us.

That we listen for the Holy Spirit – we know that the Spirit speaks in the prophet and in the quietest person.

That, in Faith, we trust that it is the Holy Spirit who will guide our discernment and actions.

We need to listen to the answer to the question: “Lord, what is it that you would want us to do?”

In our Zeal, that we bring our best human efforts to this challenge before us this week.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the members of the Office of Education: Greg Kopra, Robert Jordan, and Jackie Berlogar, for your great work, your support and your commitment to be available and to serve so generously the members of this District and beyond over these past few years.

I want to thank Brothers and partners for your support of us in the Office of Education. So many of you throughout the District have stepped up to offer assistance when we have called for help.

We deeply appreciate you working with us and your enthusiasm for this mission.

Thank you very much.