

De La Salle Christian Brothers
District of San Francisco
DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ON MISSION
Saint Mary's College of California
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS
by
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Theme: ***Mission:
Whom We Serve
and
How We Serve***

I brought my baby, Matthew, to this conference and your reactions to him have brought to life the metaphor we so often use in describing our district and the works of Christian Brothers throughout the world... the Lasallian family. Matthew has been greeted with lots oeing and smiles from this group; people seem genuinely interested in seeing what makes him laugh, knowing how he is sleeping, wondering if he is healthy. Watching your reaction to Matthew and the joy that he brings to the conference, I am reminded of the image Vicar General Brother Bill Mann used when he addressed the Lasallian Association of Miguel Schools (or LAMS) at a conference several years ago. Bill spoke about the LAMS schools as the babies in the Lasallian family... full of new life and hope, these young schools are bringing new energy, a new source of pride to the entire

family. Bill talked about how the older, more established members of the family gain energy from watching this new life and look upon it as a blessing.

Today's theme of Educational Mission: "Who we serve and how we serve" gives us the opportunity to extend this metaphor to talk about our District arm of the Lasallian family and some of what has happened in our family's mission over the past four years. Every school or apostolate plays a particular, unique and vital role in the district family. What place does your community hold at the district family table? What unique role does your school play in the mission of "providing a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor?"

I guess in the scope of our family, De Marillac Academy is the little sister with special needs—or should I say, the little sister who hangs out in the wrong part of town. If you've taken a walk or a drive through the Tenderloin neighborhood, you know that it is best known for the poverty, sex industry, drug trafficking, and homeless population that are prevalent there. The children who we serve are the marginalized—kids living in severe poverty, many of whom sleep on the floor at night or share a bed with at least one other family member. They have anywhere from three to eight people living in studio or one bedroom apartment. Most come home to a place where none of the adults speak English. Most have minimal access to healthy, fresh food every day. Most rely on free medical clinics for health care and most have no dental care whatsoever. Many of our students come from loving homes, but others have been the victims of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional distress. In the five years that we have operated, we have said quick goodbyes to several families as the family withdrew from school because they were moving because of domestic violence, inability to pay rent, or immigration issues; we've put several children in the hospital for severe depression; we've stood by children as they were taken away from their parents and taken into the custody of the state.

What I've just described evokes a tragic image, but if you walked through the doors of De Marillac, you would not see something tragic. You would see polite, respectful, well-groomed students, actively engaged in the learning process. You would see teachers passionate about their students, working tirelessly to serve each child. You would see a clean, orderly school building where student work is displayed on every board. You would see hope in the potential of every child. You would see a Lasallian school. And it is a good Lasallian school, with proven success evidenced by rising test scores and the success of our graduates as they move through high school.

Walking through De Marillac is just one of the many encouraging signs of the direction of mission since our last assembly. In 2002, De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland and De Marillac in San Francisco were only one year old, La Salle High School in Yakima was only four. San Miguel High School in Tucson had not yet opened. The past four years, these programs have blossomed through the early stages of life. I am sure that the other new schools have, like De Marillac, taken their fair share of spills along the way. But, like a child in infancy, these programs have grown rapidly, taken in information like a sponge, and transformed themselves dramatically year by year. The newer programs have allowed us to greatly expand the number of poor families that we serve and to design programs that specifically meet the needs of the community.

Over the past four years one of the positive signs of our mission has been partnerships between the newer schools and other district works. Speaking from the De Marillac experience, every school in the district has reached out to support us in various ways: student fundraisers to help our development efforts, academic resources, professional development support, consistent volunteers who tutor our students. While I could say something about each of the institutions in the district and how they have been in partnership, I want to focus on three: De La Salle High School in Concord, Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory in San Francisco, and Saint Mary's College of California in Moraga.

With service learning as a priority in all of our schools, De La Salle in Concord has made De Marillac part of their service program. Every month, a group of sophomore boys stop by De Marillac while completing a day of service in the Tenderloin. There is also a group of high school boys that come every week to tutor students after school. During Lent, the De La Salle boys include De Marillac as one of the organizations that receives proceeds from their Change War. The student council has also raised money for our program through several dances they sponsored and the football team has raised money through several lift-a-thons. Additionally, several De La Salle faculty members have made presentations during various professional development meetings at De Marillac.

Sacred Heart Cathedral Prep (SHCP) has been vital to De Marillac since our beginning. There are far too many examples to list them, but some of our connections include service learning programs between the two schools, shared liturgies, and both student volunteers and faculty volunteers. SHCP also provides almost full scholarship aid so that all of our rising 7th and 8th graders can attend the high school for a five week summer program.

For the past four years, the two schools have been in the process of developing what I think will be THE model partnership for Catholic elementary or middle schools to work with high schools in the service of the poor. Twenty five of the forty four students who have graduated from De Marillac have gone on to enroll at SHCP. Through the generosity of the Daughters of Charity Foundation, these students are receiving 95% of their tuition through scholarship. Additionally, the team at SHCP has designed a specific program to meet the needs of these students. What SHCP is finding is that some of their low-income students do not require special programming and can jump right in to the mainstream of their community. However, there are inevitably some students who require more inclusive, wrap-around services. Their PIRO scholar program provides training for teachers, translation of documents for parents, access to support for

uniforms, books, summer school and registration fees; personal and academic counselors, a free lunch program, bus passes, tutorial services, and funds available for activities such as dances and athletic games. The students are being observed carefully and as new needs arise, they are addressed or monitored appropriately. I know that every school in our district has implemented the 5% program and I think we should be very proud of that. But I do not know if every school has really examined the services provided to those students once they arrive. I point to Sacred Heart Cathedral's model as one to be studied—it is not yet perfect, but it is a great beginning.

A major goal articulated four years ago was to create connections between Saint Mary's College of California (SMC) and the schools of the district. I cannot speak to what is happening with other schools, but I want to acknowledge that this has been a positive sign of mission for De Marillac. Brother Ron and the administration of SMC have taken an active interest in what we are doing and have reached out to partner in various ways. Of course in addition to overseeing the Lasallian Fellow Program which all of our schools benefit from in finding well-prepared Lasallian teachers, Carole Swain serves as the Chair of our Board. Additionally, every year we have had at least one Bonner Leader working as a student intern on our campus and several students who work with us during Jan term. And happily, several of these SMC students have returned to De Marillac as employees at a later date. Our students are invited to participate in events on campus annually, exposing them to the idea of college and planting the seed that someday they may become SMC students themselves. Having just had a member of my own family graduate from Saint Mary's College, I pray that in the future, De Marillac graduates will have access to an opportunity similar to what my niece Nikki experienced here.

Nikki's story is a great illustration of the mission at work at the college. Raised by a single mother in a very low-income home, Nikki is a bi-racial African American and Caucasian child who grew up in the South suburbs of Chicago. Coming to

Saint Mary's College was a huge cultural leap for her. Through the combination of the intimate campus, caring advisors, and excellent professors, along with her experiences as a manager for the men's basketball program, Junior year in Rome, volunteering at De Marillac, and Jan term at Resurrection school and living in a Brothers community in Harlem, Nikki experienced the Lasallian charism in a wonderful way. Her time at SMC completely transformed who she is and set her on a different path. I can only hope that six years from now, when the first graduates from De Marillac are preparing to finish college, I will be telling similar stories about the De Marillac kids who stayed in the Lasallian family straight through from middle school into high school and through college.

What are the emerging needs and challenges regarding the mission? We have already heard Brother Stanislaus Campbell mention the challenge our family faces in how we will prepare for leadership in future generations. With the number of Brothers diminishing and shared mission a priority, we need to continue to create structures for formation and training. We also need to talk openly about the time demands of such leadership roles and the challenge we face of trying to maintain balanced healthy lives and families, while also being excellent educational leaders, spiritual leaders, organizational leaders, and fundraisers. I am especially aware of this issue in light of the birth of little Matthew. The leadership roles in our district are very demanding and I think we are incredibly blessed to have the strong team we do running our schools and apostolates. I have watched my lay colleagues do this balancing act for years, and frankly, I am in awe of how they are managing. I think the future of our mission is in part dependent on continuing to explore this issue as part of our discussion of leadership.

A second challenge that I see in our family is in regard to designing programs that will adequately meet the needs of all children we accept. What struck me in my preparation for this Assembly is how tremendously diverse our student bodies are—and the better we get at advocating for and admitting students who are low-

income, the more complicated our campuses become. I think we sometimes have romantic notions of service to the poor. Recognizing our call in response to the gospel teachings, it is our desire to help children break the cycle of poverty. We have every good intention in setting goals for expanding the number of poor families that we serve, but the truth is, working with these students can be VERY difficult. And some of our schools are better equipped to handle this particular profile of learner than others. One of the great lessons I have learned in working with families with different economic and cultural profiles is that solutions that work in stable communities, often do not work in communities where families are simply surviving.

We also need to recognize that our successes with some of our low income students may be measured differently than our successes with students who are not living in poverty. In an age where transparency and accountability are the expectation, this can create challenges for a school. We are all striving to show test scores and college acceptance statistics that demonstrate our program's success. While high academic achievement is always the goal for all of our students, if we are committed to serving low-income families sometimes we have to take a risk by accepting a child who may or may not ever realize some of those goals. At De Marillac, we articulate the goal that all of our students consider themselves to be college-bound. Yet the reality of our experience is that not every child will follow that path. And then we have to make very hard decisions about what to do when a child is underperforming. We also have to recognize the fact that sometimes a student's success will be sabotaged by something completely outside the scope of our school's control—for example, the need to stop attending school in order to care for younger siblings or to earn money for food or rent. How will we prepare to be of support to students in those situations? There is a learning curve that comes with changing the school profile to include more low-income families. We need to recognize that as one of the major changes we face.

How do I envision the future of mission? The gospel calls us to continue to challenge ourselves with the question of “How are we serving the poor?” In my opinion, one of the central concepts of moving forward with mission is this concept I already spoke of regarding partnership. Thoughtful partnerships can result in huge benefits for both organizations in regard to meeting real needs and living out mission. And when I point to the need for partnering it is not just within our branch of the family, but reaching out to other, more distant relatives as well. De Marillac exists as a partnership between the Christian Brothers and the Daughters of Charity. Our partnership with California Pacific Medical Center is also a key component to our success—providing both an extensive counseling and health and wellness program. The Lasallian Association of Miguel Schools network recently merged with the Nativity network, therefore growing from a network of sixteen Christian Brothers Schools to a network of sixty faith-based schools run by a variety of religious orders. These schools all serve very low income families with an educational model similar to the one used at De Marillac. The new network exists in order to provide professional development and possibly future sources of funding for our collective body of schools. De La Salle North Catholic and San Miguel Tucson are part of the fiscally and educationally innovative Cristo Rey Network, through which they receive programmatic support, professional development and opportunities for funding. In dialogue today and this week, I hope to hear people not only thinking about their own institutions, but always thinking about the connections, the family. How can we partner with each other and with other organizations in order to strengthen the individual efforts? Our isolated stories are rich, but our collective story is much richer. Our individual faculties are talented, but imagine the creative strength, the intelligence, the power of mission, when we are all counted together. I especially think we need to recognize that in order for newer institutions to be sustainable over time, they need the support of the more established works. If we consider new projects in the future, we must consider how the existing programs are able to help initiate and stabilize these projects.

Finally, as if no one ever thought of this one, if our mission is to continue on the path we have set, we need to discuss alternative models for funding. Funding our educational programs is expensive. Especially if we are committed to direct service of the poor, we need to recognize not only that these students need tuition assistance, they also need resource programs that will increase our overall operating costs. We need to make the pie bigger, and I believe it will take more creative solutions than those we currently use. Our district is well positioned because of the wisdom of the people that came before us. The Christian Brothers' winery operation was a brilliant source of income for us. San Miguel Tucson and De La Salle North Catholic are great inspirations for us in this regard. What else can other district schools do now in order to build new sources of earned income? What synergy is there in our collective story of mission that will open up new doors to funding?

I'll conclude my remarks by telling you about Perla—a great example of our family's mission over the past four years. Perla entered De Marillac as a sixth grader in 2002, just a few weeks after our last Mission Assembly. When I first met Perla, she and her older sister, Johana, were living with their mother in a room behind a garage out near city college. I went to their home to interview Johana for a position in our sixth grade class and I remember the family telling me Johana was the brains of the family; Perla was the one interested in sports, not school. The girls were being raised by a single mom who doesn't speak any English and makes a living cleaning houses. Both Perla and Johana have a lot of responsibility at home helping to care for their little sister, who at that time was less than a year old. When Perla entered the sixth grade, she could barely write a sentence. In addition to her language arts class, a dedicated volunteer, Mrs. Chu, was given the task of helping Perla with her basic writing skills, including spelling. It was during that year that Perla learned to spell. She proved to be a determined student, always completing her work, always giving her best. When she graduated from De Marillac, she was honored with the St. Louise De Marillac Award because she represented the hard work, determination, and good

citizenship that we expect of our students. She is currently a sophomore at Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory, and is doing well there both academically and socially. Perla's story is the story of our Lasallian family and our Lasallian mission gone right! I look forward to continuing working with you to give other deserving students a similar chance.

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