

De La Salle Christian Brothers
District of San Francisco
DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ON MISSION
Saint Mary's College of California
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KEYNOTE PANEL ADDRESS
by
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Theme:
Association

I'd like to begin by offering the Assembly some common definitions and characteristics of association. To do this, I have borrowed a great deal of work already done by Gery Short for his presentation on association at the US/Toronto Regional Assembly last November in Salt Lake City.

Much has been written and discussed about association –it is a hot topic for the District, Region and the worldwide Institute. An encouraging sign is that there does appear to be a growing convergence of definitions for association that have emerged since the 2000 General Chapter in Rome. There are 4 points these definitions have in common.

1. The first is a **common vision or unifying spirit**: a vision inspired by the story of De La Salle, the Lasallian story, the Lasallian charism, a spirit which recognizes the presence of God.
2. The second common point of thinking about association is “**association with**” that is partnership with others and the notion of belonging, communion and solidarity. Relationships are essential to association.
3. The third common characteristic of association is **commitment, a personal expression of one’s vocation, an expression of one’s faith and spirituality**. One sees the association as a significant response to his or her baptismal call and, as the Founder did, tries to see all things through the eyes of faith.
4. The fourth and most important characteristic is that association must be **apostolic; it is mission-oriented and focused on the educational service of the poor**. The mission is the reason for the association.

Brother Antonio Botana, who has published widely on the topic of Association, gives us the image of a solar system to visualize the expressions of Association in the Lasallian world today. At the center of the solar system is “The Lasallian Mission”, which is the purpose of our association. Around this center are different expressions of association or ways that association is lived out. Specifically in the District of San Francisco, I can list at least ten different expressions of association for mission: The Brothers as a whole; the various communities of Brothers; the shared communities of Brothers and lay people; the traditional schools and works; the new works; the Secondary Schools Administrators Association; the Lasallian Volunteers; the La Salle Sisters of Vietnam; the Lasallian Association of San Miguel Schools; and the individual Associates of our District. These expressions animate the characteristics I have previously

described: they share a unifying vision, a partnership and solidarity with others, personal commitment or sense of vocation, and apostolic, mission-oriented work.

I think it is important to see the solar system as something whose essential structure is solid and firm but has parts that are fluid and in relationship to one another. The Lasallian Mission is absolutely the center and the heart of the system, the sun if you will. It is from the sun that we draw our strength and our direction. The circulating planets are many and of different sizes. What holds us together, the gravitational forces so to speak, is the Lasallian charism –to see and to respond, faith and zeal. What unites us in our association for mission is our common Lasallian reference –something that is beyond simply our job in a school or work and beyond our individual role.

The expressions of this association come in several life-giving and encouraging forms. One form in the District is, of course, **the vowed religious**: which includes the De La Salle Christian Brothers and La Salle Sisters of Vietnam.

A second form of association includes those whose **communities are residential** and include vowed and non-vowed members. Sometimes referred to as “shared Communities” these are communities of vowed Brothers living with lay men and women. One example in our District is De La Salle House in Berkeley which has two lay women Lasallians, two vowed Brothers, and now, a postulant. There are also several communities in the District where vowed Brothers are living with Lasallian volunteers. These include the San Francisco community which serves Sacred Heart Cathedral Prep as well as De Marillac Academy, the Lasallian Educational Opportunities Center community in Oakland, De La Salle North Catholic High School community in Portland and the La Salle High School community in Yakima.

A third form of association, found in other Districts but not yet in our own to my knowledge, are **non-residential groups** which may include Brothers and lay

men and women who devote regular, consistent time for prayer, reflection, formation and service. In other Districts examples of this include: Signum Fidei, whose members do take vows; there are also non-vowed groups in the Minnesota Twin Cities as well as a Rhode Island Lasallian Association Group.

A fourth form of association, where I find myself, is “**individual associates**”. Like the other groups, individual associates meet the emerging definition of association: they share a common vision and solidarity with others, a deeply held personal vocation, and a commitment to the mission. But there is no residential feature and no vows. The association is expressed in commitment to mission, relationships, vocation; solidarity and vision are expressed in the context of mission/work.

I offer you a glimpse of my personal experience to elaborate on this expression of individual association.

I have been married for thirteen years. We have three sons ages 6, 4 and 1, and we are expecting Boy Number Four in early November. I have taken marriage vows and right now my family is my primary commitment. Because the needs of my young children have become so significant and have to take priority, I recently made the very difficult decision to leave my employment at Christian Brothers High School at the end of the past school year. However, I will continue to identify myself in the context of this Lasallian mission; it has become a fundamental part of the expression of my vocation. Catherine and Michael Carotta in their recent book, *Sustaining the Spirit*, write that, “vocational callings are found in three key areas of our lives; work, relationships and faith.” They explain that these three vocational calls are often intertwined, sometimes all work together and sometimes are in tension with one another. Their explanations have helped me to understand better my own vocational struggle in responding to my call to work and family through the eyes of faith. I am becoming more comfortable with the idea of being Lasallian while devoting the majority of my

time to my immediate family relationships while asking for God's grace every step of the way.

Still, I hope my Lasallian and professional experience will speak for itself. I was employed for 12 years doing various teaching and administrative jobs at CBHS. I was a member of the first Lasallian Leadership Institute cohort. I participated on District level committees in 1998 and 1999. I served as a member of the preparatory committee for the first District Mission Assembly in 2002 as well as the preparatory committee for this current Assembly. Following the First Mission Assembly, I was elected by the delegates to be a member of the first District Mission Council established in response to the General Chapter and charged with advising the Visitor on issues of mission in the District. Last year, I began a three-year term as a member of the Justin-Siena High School Board of Trustees. I will also continue as a member of the Mission Council, and I will continue to consider myself an individual associate. As for my call to return to professional Lasallian employment, I trust in God's providence and will prayerfully consider needs in the District as they may arise. I will see where my Lasallian vocation calls me to serve.

As an individual associate, I feel I know the vision and I certainly feel strongly connected with other Lasallian educators. This is an expression of my vocation and I am completely committed to this educational mission and especially to serve the poor. I know there are many individual associates, like me who share similar commitments and life experiences, who are not necessarily part of a group, and who feel very much associated for the Lasallian mission.

More Encouraging Signs . . .and Some Challenges

In our District today, there are so many encouraging signs of genuine association for mission. I have spoken about significant developments in residential communities of both vowed and lay people. I believe there is also a tremendous

growing appreciation for one's vocation, in the fullest sense of the word. Many of us have always generally appreciated the vocation of our vowed religious, and I believe with the newly invigorated vocation program in the District which Kevin has just described, our appreciation of these vows has grown even deeper. Likewise, there is a new respect for and appreciation of the vocation of the laity. Clearly at this point in history, our Lasallian mission and work need the laity to survive and thrive. Lay men and women are filling every role available in our schools and works throughout the District and Region. The invitation to live one's lay Lasallian vocation is constant.

Very simply, we are not able to successfully live this Lasallian vocation without a strong bond of Association for mission. We know that Association has been a hallmark of the Lasallian mission since its origin with De La Salle and the founding Brothers. And, just as many of the expressions of the mission have changed in over 300 years, the expression of Association has also changed. Clearly, Association looks different in the 21st Century, and we must to continue to read the signs of the times through the eyes of faith.

I 'd like to spend just one more minute on the characteristic of "Association with" and the essential element of relationships and solidarity with one another and the larger Lasallian organization. I previously mentioned Catherine and Michael Carotta's explanation of vocational callings in the three key areas of work, relationships and faith. The Carottas go on to explain that, "responding to the call of relationships takes place within a constant state of vulnerability and grace." They say that, "the call of relationships is not restricted to committing just to another person. It can also be a call to commit to a relationship with a movement, an organization, or a school of thought. Responding to the call of relationships by relating to a group or movement can indeed bring us a richer experience of life and at the same time call us into life-giving dynamics of self-sacrifice and commitment to the well-being of others." I know these rich

experiences and life-giving dynamics are alive throughout our District. **Our challenge is to continue to embrace the 21st-century call of Association and relationships that does indeed place us in a state of both vulnerability and grace.**

A personal challenge that I would like to leave with each of us is the question, **“What does Association for Mission ask of me?”** In order for our association to flourish and for it to strengthen and further the Lasallian mission, we must each contribute our gifts and talents to their fullest. We must challenge ourselves to look beyond our daily role and consider ourselves part of the larger SF District which is part of the larger US/Toronto Region and part of the worldwide Lasallian institute. We must consider one another, lay or religious, with a completely open mind and through the eyes of faith. I challenge you to ask yourself how you personally can share your Lasallian vocation with colleagues who are new to our mission or who don't yet seem to understand their own importance to the mission. I challenge each of you to consider your specific gifts and talents and to see how they can best serve our District and our Region. Perhaps you may be called to serve in another capacity at another work site. Will you be open to prayerfully considering the possibilities? Many in this room have done just that and have found tremendous fulfillment in sharing their talents to see our work grow and to see more lives touched by all that our District has to offer young people today.

A structural challenge that I also would like to leave with all of us, is the question, **“How can our Lasallian workplaces become more family friendly in light of the growing numbers and essential involvement of the laity?”** Our 21st-century Association asks a great deal of spouses and children who also support the mission. Are there adjustments we can make at each work site and at the District level to better acknowledge and accommodate the needs of families, especially working mothers, who contribute so significantly to the Lasallian

mission? We need to think creatively and simply be bold enough to give some new ideas a try.

Indeed, Association has many rewards and challenges and asks us to stretch and walk together in a state of vulnerability and grace.

Cecilia Powers

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