

Brother Visitor's Letter

By Brother David Brennan, FSC



A TIME OF LEARNING AND CHALLENGE

This is my last "Visitor's Letter" to the readers of *Signs of Faith*, as my second term as Visitor of the District of San Francisco is drawing to a close. It has been a privilege for me to serve as Visitor for the past eight years and to work with many of you to identify our mission, implement our vision, focus our resources, and face the challenges of the times.

A principal challenge we identified early on was the need to develop long-range strategic plans that emphasize the gifts and charism of our Institute. Together we have risen to that challenge. Our District Convocations in 1998 and 1999, and the District Assembly on Mission in 2002, have given us Brothers and Partners insight into our mission and have resulted in visionary goals and concrete plans for action to achieve them. In schools throughout the District, local action plans have been formulated, and serious campaigns have been undertaken to fund upgrades in facilities and increases in scholarship aid. The contributions of Trustees, Presidents, and Principals have been numerous, and the continued commitment of teachers, staff, parents, alumni, and all donors and supporters has been indispensable.

Though the cost of providing first-rate, college preparatory, Catholic and Lasallian education is always rising, the demand for — indeed, the yearning for — this education is also on the rise. Together we have reached out to communities where educational opportunities are lacking, using innovative means to make education accessible in neighborhoods where it is badly needed. The roster of such educational programs established in recent years includes Latino Adult Institute in Napa, La Salle High School in Yakima, De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland, De Marillac Middle School in San Francisco, and San Miguel Catholic High School in Tucson, Arizona, set to open in 2004. To support and secure these programs, we have worked hard to develop the local partnerships — with other religious congregations, with Catholic universities and colleges, with community groups, and with civic and business leaders — that are crucial to success.

A Visitor's role is as much pastoral as administrative, and it has been a pleasure for me to get to know personally so many people involved in Lasallian education, and to experience firsthand your care and concern for me and for the Brothers. The enthusiastic response to new opportunities for Partners to become knowledgeable about the principles of Lasallian education and the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle has been gratifying, and wholehearted participation in such programs as the Lasallian Leadership Institute, the Buttimer Institute, and the Religious Studies Institute has helped us all to become more deeply informed about the mission we share.

Much has been accomplished in the past few years: Contacts among Lasallian institutions in the District have been multiplied; links between this District and Lasallian works in other lands have been increased; the role of Partners in setting the direction of our educational mission has been strengthened; and our commitment to the poor has been deepened by such means as the 5% Plan for tuition assistance. Of course, great challenges lie ahead. Among our chief challenges for the immediate future are increasing our commitment to the education of the poor, and increasing the number of young men who will discover the satisfactions of a vocation as a Christian Brother.

What I wrote in the first issue of this magazine remains true: "This is a time of learning and challenge for us. We need to have the same courage and boldness that John Baptist de La Salle had when he said YES to that insistent voice of the spirit within him to do something radically different about the way poor young people were educated or, even worse, were abandoned without any formal education at all."

I think that the collaborative work of recent years has led us into a new and promising era, an era of mutual trust between Brothers and Partners, a trust based on our shared commitment to the Lasallian mission. Guided by the District's Action Plan and by the Propositions and Reports from our 2002 District Assembly on Mission, we face the future together with the energy and excitement that only a shared vision can supply.

This issue of *Signs of Faith* examines the crucial work that trustees do for our schools, interviews several graduating seniors, gives brief news of our Lasallian family, provides a look at the senior vocations discernment retreat, and continues the chronicle of our District's history as we mark the 135th year since our founding. Through all these stories, and through all 135 of years of our history, there runs a theme — a theme of serving youth by bringing to them the transformative opportunities provided by Catholic, Lasallian education.

The young, the poor, the world, and the Church will continue to need the saving power of Lasallian education. Thanks to our ability to work together, the District of San Francisco, with God's help, will continue to provide it.

Brother David Brennan