

Faithful to a

Sacred Trust

How our Boards of Trustees guide, lead, and govern.

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ONE SIGN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO DISTRICT'S DETERMINATION TO ADAPT ITS EDUCATIONAL MISSION TO A CHANGING WORLD HAS BEEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOARDS OF TRUSTEES AT DISTRICT SCHOOLS. THESE TRUSTEES HAVE COME TO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN SUSTAINING AND EXTENDING THE LASALLIAN COMMITMENT TO EDUCATING THE YOUNG, ESPECIALLY THE POOR, AND THEY SEE THEIR TASK — IN THE WORDS OF ONE OF THEM — AS "A SACRED TRUST."

The sense of shared mission among trustees is a phenomenon that Brother James Joost, FSC, has seen himself in those with whom he works. Brother James serves on the boards of two District high schools, La Salle High School in Pasadena, and La Salle High School in Yakima, Washington.

"The trustees understand," Brother James explains, "that we're not just there to run a really good school or even to only help students understand that religion is important. The deeper understanding behind the work is that the event of a

school, or the process of undertaking a school, brings everybody involved in touch with a sense of salvation, wholeness, health, and vitality."

This unique partnership is not simply the result of recruiting as trustees those with the 'ears to hear and eyes to see,' although that is part of this unusual story. Instead, it is the product of the De La Salle Christian Brothers' conscious intention to extend their educational mission in new and revitalized ways and the desire of lay people to share in the Lasallian endeavor.



"THIS CONCENTRATION ON THE MISSION THAT THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HAVE, AND CARRY OUT, AND LIVE OUT, IS SOMETHING I HAVE NOT SEEN IN ANY OTHER GROUP THAT I'VE WORKED WITH. THAT'S WHAT DREW ME TO THEM AND WHAT KEEPS ME WITH THEM. I THINK IT'S VERY FORWARD-LOOKING TO INCLUDE LAY PEOPLE, ALTHOUGH IT HAS TO BE LAY PEOPLE WITH A SENSE OF WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT AND WHO ARE WILLING TO LEARN."

Barbara Brown, Cathedral High School trustee

"I'M VERY ATTRACTED TO THE MISSION OF ENABLING PEOPLE WHO OTHERWISE WOULDN'T HAVE A CHANCE TO HAVE ACCESS TO A QUALITY COLLEGE-PREPARATORY EDUCATION. I'VE NOT HAD MUCH CONTACT WITH THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS PRIOR TO THIS, AND IT'S A VERY RICH EXPERIENCE I NEVER EXPECTED TO HAVE. THEY DO AN INCREDIBLE JOB OF ORIENTING NEW BOARD MEMBERS. "

Dan Steffey, De La Salle North Catholic High School trustee

"I GREW UP IN THIS COMMUNITY. I WAS A POOR YOUNG MAN GROWING UP HERE, AND I SEE THE VALUE OF THIS INSTITUTION IN THIS AREA: MOST OF THE FAMILIES ARE AT THE LOWER END OF THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE, AND WE HAVE A GROWING POPULATION. ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE BOARD IS A MEMBER OF THE TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION, WHICH LIVES ON A NEARBY RESERVATION. STUDENTS FROM THAT RESERVATION COULD ATTEND SAN MIGUEL."

Miguel Palacios, San Miguel Catholic High School trustee

Above: Trustees at De La Salle High School, Concord, hear from faculty, students, and parents at their March 2005 meeting.

Increasing Local Leadership

In 1994, the schools of the District were incorporated separately, the better to share responsibility for their operation and nurture, and to increase the level of local engagement in school life. Each school corporation is guided by a board of trustees which provides leadership to the institution by taking the responsibility of representing the spiritual and educational tradition of the Christian Brothers. In other words, the board exercises leadership on behalf of the Brothers, continually guiding the school toward the goals of a Lasallian education.

To enable trustees to fulfill their goals, the governing system known as the Policy Governance Model has been adopted. Central to this model is the recognition by trustees that their primary responsibility is the mission and goals of the school. Day-to-day operations, on the other hand, are the responsibility of the school's president and staff, not of trustees.

A school's board of trustees writes that school's mission policy statement, which states in specific terms the goals and desired outcomes of the Lasallian education provided by that school in its unique situation. Each board of trustees has a single employee – the school's president, who is the chief

executive officer of the school corporation. The board hires, monitors, and evaluates the president, but board members avoid becoming involved as individuals in matters affecting the operation of the schools. Though a president may request that a trustee become involved in strategic planning or advise in other areas in which he or she has expertise, such as development, finance, or facilities maintenance, these functions are subordinate to a trustee's role of focusing on the mission and goals of the school.

"The nature of policy governance," says Richard Sprague, the District's former Director of Lasallian School Boards, "is to focus on developing mission policies: What results? For whom? And at what costs? That's the hallmark of policy governance."

Training and Orientation

This model of board function is also modified in unique ways in order to prepare trustees to carry out an educational enterprise that is specifically Lasallian. A rigorous training process has been devised to educate board members about their responsibilities and about the history and purpose of Lasallian education. A crucial element in the training process is an extensive orientation session



held at Mont La Salle in Napa. Prospective trustees are required to attend the orientation, which begins with prayer and reflection, and includes instruction in the policy governance model and its application in the school setting.

Trustees are given an introduction to the philosophy and goals of Lasallian education, an overview of the De La Salle Institute, its structure and its guiding documents, and an understanding of the history of the Christian Brothers and John Baptist de La Salle.

The impact of the training and orientation program is profound, and trustees appreciate its effects. Miguel Palacios, who is a trustee at San Miguel Catholic High School in Tucson, Arizona, is also president of the Desert Vista campus of Pima Community College. He says, “I’ve been through orientations with national boards, and I’ve not been on one that goes through the consistency and follow-up that I experienced here. I could see transferring some of those features to training for other boards that I’m part of.” The formation of trustees is ongoing, in order to deepen the trustees’ understanding of Lasallian educational principles.

Board meetings at the schools emphasize not only the importance of ongoing formation but also of information, so that trustees keep in touch with

vital aspects of contemporary education and of the life of the school.

Sharing and Communication

“We sometimes have representatives of the school community – a student, a teacher, or parent – talk to us about what’s going on at the school,” says Barbara Brown, chair of the board of trustees at Cathedral High School in Los Angeles. “It may be a very positive report or it may be someone saying, ‘We don’t have enough computers.’ It helps us to keep in touch, otherwise there can be a danger of a real chasm between the board, which meets six times a year, and the school, which is in session 180 days a year.”

The chairs of the boards from throughout the District also gather, as the Association of Board Chairs, in regular meetings at Mont La Salle, to share their experiences and to discuss the progress of their schools in advancing their mission. “At the final meeting of the year, the CEOs also attend,” says Sprague, “so that the presidents and board chairs are all together in one room, and the incoming board chairs are there as well. Part of the reason is to pass the torch, and part of it is to have the chance to talk about similar problems.”

Although trustees from all schools experience





the same training and orientation, the model they use to govern encourages flexibility when it comes to responding to the particular realities of each school campus and each local environment. In Tucson, for example, where San Miguel Catholic High School is preparing to open in August 2004, “The board is focused almost entirely on the establishing and developing phase of the high school,” says Miguel Palacios. “Facility development, selection of school president and principal, identification of potential donors. The school will sit on about nine acres that are part of St. Monica’s parish, and the trustees are engaged in meeting with parish groups, neighborhood associations, and other community groups, in order to build supportive links.”

San Miguel Catholic High School also has a

Native American trustee, Eileen Preston, a member of the Tohono O’odham Nation, whose people are mostly Catholic. The school’s site is only a few miles from the homes of many of its projected students.

Reflecting Local Needs

Preston’s and Palacio’s service as trustees is an indication of how these boards are designed to reflect the communities that the schools will serve. Each group of trustees is deeply engaged in and knowledgeable about its unique local setting.

Jacob Jundt, chair of the board at La Salle High School in Yakima, says, “We live in a community that is economically challenged. What that means is that we’re educating children who can’t afford to pay the going rate, and we have to make the school go. So we have some board members helping the president try to deal with that. The other challenge is facilities. We’re trying to get our campus built and raise the funds to do that. We have a few people developing a strategy to do that. So, the president has asked us to take a hands-on approach to help him in some of these specific areas.”



The ability to respond to local conditions is essential. That occurs sometimes by identifying the obstacles to fulfilling the mission, and asking trustees to raise funds or to recruit prospective trustees. But those responsibilities are always carried out within a larger institutional context.

“New board members often think, ‘We’re here to help raise money,’” says Ted Tsukahara, who teaches business at Saint Mary’s College and is chair of the board at Saint Mary’s College High School in Berkeley. “Of course they’ll help to raise money, but the question we ask them as board members is ‘Why?’ Mission is always the test: Is what we are doing faithful to the mission? Will it advance the mission?”

Joseph Feltz, who is chair of the board at La Salle High School in Milwaukie, Oregon, and works in audit management for a Northwest utility company, believes that the key to the success of the Lasallian boards is that they continually raise questions about how results match with goals.

“For a corporation and its board, the bottom line is income for the corporation. The bottom line



working for a Lasallian school board is really the value of the students we send out the door and who leave our school with life skills and core competencies. You don’t measure that in terms of dollars and cents,” says Feltz.

The Lasallian Vision

In the eyes of some who are associated with the Lasallian schools, the use of the Policy Governance

Model may be more than just an extremely efficient way of guiding a school. The board of trustees may be a means for institutionalizing another innovation in Lasallian education: the successful transmission of both vision and





mission from the Christian Brothers to their lay partners that results in a truly shared partnership. Yet, says Tsukahara, for this experiment to be successful, the sharing of vision must be deep: “We, as boards, need to know more about what it’s like to be a Brother in order to be able to run a Brothers’ school,” he explained, “and that means we have to be willing to understand the role of prayer in our lives, and do the reflection on the gospel to guide our actions.”

To Brother Michael Meister, FSC, who is a trustee at Cathedral High School, Lasallian spirituality is, indeed, the key to the entire project. “The governance model could be effective as a corporate model that works well in any organization,” he says. “However, what’s different here is that you are dealing with an organization that is first and foremost built upon a vision that grows out of an active and engaged relationship with God. Without that spiritual element, the structure probably isn’t going to last.”

Brother James Joost says, “I find that that’s

what I’m called to be on the board, a spiritual witness, not just in terms of the practice of religion, but a spiritual witness from a consecrated point of view. We Brothers commit our lives to the endeavor of education and salvation of students. So, the lay trustees begin to understand this by being involved in the enterprise with us.”

For Tsukahara, it is this mining of the rich vein of Lasallian spirituality that is at the core of the work of the boards of trustees. “We need to understand the commitment behind the life of vows and how to keep that commitment alive,” he says.

“That’s the magic to the process.”

Thanks to the Trustees of De La Salle High School (Concord), La Salle High School (Pasadena), La Salle High School (Yakima), and Saint Mary’s College High School (Berkeley), for letting us photograph them as they worked. ■





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Jake Jundt, La Salle High School (Yakima) trustee

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Ted Tsukahara, Saint Mary's College High School trustee

"IT'S REALLY A PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO FEEL LIKE I'M MAKING MY SMALL CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOOL. IT'S A JOY FOR ME TO BE A PART OF THE WORK THEY'VE DONE. WHEN I WAS ASKED TO BE ON THE BOARD, ONE OF MY FIRST THOUGHTS WAS, 'WOW, I HAD BETTER GET SERIOUS ABOUT GETTING A PRAYER LIFE. THIS IS A WONDERFUL GIFT THAT GOD IS EXTENDING TO YOU, TO FOCUS YOURSELF AND YOUR ATTENTION ON THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.'"

Rita Spillane, Christian Brothers High School trustee

Above: trustees and colleagues in front of chapel at La Salle High School, Yakima



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