

# St. John Baptist de La Salle

F A I T H   ★   C O M M U N I T Y   ★   S E R V I C E



## Who was John Baptist de La Salle?

He was a French priest in the 17th century who came from a well-to-do family and was on the fast-track of a priestly career when he became involved with a group of men who were teaching poor children in parish charity schools. Within about five years he became completely devoted to the education of these children and to the training of these men, forming them into a dedicated, competent, committed, and holy group of educators whose whole lives were dedicated to the ministry of teaching, to the students entrusted to their care, to each other, and through all of these ... to God.

## Did he want to get involved in education?

No, he got involved without meaning to do so. Much later in his life, De La Salle said that if he had known what his charitable help with those first schoolmasters would have led to, he would have dropped the whole thing immediately. But, he says, God “who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.”

## What happened once he did get involved?

Once involved, he gave away his wealth and became fully associated with the Brothers and with education. In the process, he wrote a school handbook that became a standard for Catholic education throughout Europe, a set of meditations for teachers, textbooks for students in the areas of reading, politeness, religious education, and many other works. By the end of his life in 1719 there were some 23 houses of Brothers teaching throughout France and a large body of educational writings. The educational movement that he began continues to be shaped by his life, his writings, and his inspirational presence.

## Are there Brothers who become priests?

Early on, De La Salle and the Brothers decided that they would best serve their mission by concentrating entirely on the ministry of teaching. The only priest in the order was him. Today, the Brothers remain the largest group of lay religious men in the Church devoted exclusively to education.

Those who are called to priestly ministry, along with teaching, will find very good religious orders that do so. The Brothers bring the Gospel to the educational world with singleness of devotion and purpose, solely through teaching ministry.

## Some quotations from the writings of De La Salle

- “Be satisfied with what you can do, since this satisfies God, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that, provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God’s grace than you imagine.”
- “Most Christians regard decorum and civility only as human qualities, and do not realize that these virtues can relate us to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves.”
- “Generosity is the motive power of all noble actions, and perhaps the germ of all virtues.”
- “The twelve virtues of the good teacher are gravity, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, reserve, meekness, zeal, vigilance, piety, and generosity.”
- “You too can perform miracles by touching the hearts of the children confided to your care.”

## The Patron of Teachers in the Catholic Church

John Baptist de La Salle was canonized as a saint on May 15, 1900, and his statue stands in the middle of nave of St. Peter’s in Rome (right side, top level). Exactly fifty years later, in 1950, Pope Pius XII declared him to be the “Special Patron of All Teachers of Youth” in the Catholic Church. Today, throughout the Lasallian world, May 15th is the day when his legacy, his heritage, and his charism are celebrated.

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# The Lasallian Educational Network



**St. John Baptist de La Salle (1651 – 1719)** began an educational heritage of more than 300 years that ranges from store-front schools to great universities in over 80 countries. He is the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (known as the De La Salle Christian Brothers in the United States) and is the inspiration for some 77,000 educators in Lasallian institutions around the world. His writings continue to shape what teachers teach, how teachers teach, and why teachers teach. He is the Patron Saint of All Teachers of Youth in the Catholic Church. [www.lasalle.org](http://www.lasalle.org)

**The Vocation of the Brothers** is a religious commitment to “association for the service of the poor through education.” Brothers are men who dedicate their lives to God in the ministry of education. They are serious about prayer, live a life in common, and are devoted to the lives of young people, especially the poor. The De La Salle Christian Brothers are the largest group of lay religious men in the Catholic Church who are dedicated exclusively to education.

[www.brothersvocation.org](http://www.brothersvocation.org)

**Lasallian Education around the world** includes both formal institutions (64 colleges/universities, 900 primary/secondary schools, etc.) and innovative programs that reach out to those in need (30 vans in France to teach Gypsy children, a youth-crisis phone line in Australia that receives 30,000 calls a week, Catalyst Charter schools in Chicago, etc.). In non-Christian countries, Lasallian schools quietly witness to God’s Presence in all our lives and present Christ’s example in action. We are present in 84 countries around the world. [www.lasalle.org](http://www.lasalle.org)

**Lasallian educational spirituality** arose from the experience of De La Salle and the early Brothers, developed through 300 years of expansion among many cultures, and forms the core of today’s Lasallian schools and agencies. It is a spirituality that has the school as its setting, the teacher as its focus, and the salvific potential of education as its inspiration. Elements include faith in the presence of God, quality education, concern for the poor and social justice, life through Jesus Christ, and a respect for all persons within an inclusive community. [www.lasallenetwork.org](http://www.lasallenetwork.org)

**Lasallian Volunteers** are dedicated, well-trained men and women who provide one or more years of service to schools and agencies of the Brothers whose mission is to serve the poor. Acting out of faith, rooted in the gospel, and sharing community with the Brothers and other Lasallians, the Volunteers empower the poor by personalized service primary through education. Lasallian Volunteers change the world for the better and discover themselves transformed in the process. [www.lasallianvolunteers.org](http://www.lasallianvolunteers.org)

**Lasallian Institutions in the United States** comprise a wide spectrum of institutions and agencies. These include 7 Colleges / Universities, 54 High Schools, 13 Middle Schools, 17 “San Miguel” Schools, 3 Cristo Rey High Schools, and 5 elementary schools. There are also many programs that address special educational needs, such as court-adjudicated youth, after school care, and residential supervision. New schools and educational outreach efforts continue to be established every year. [www.cbconf.org](http://www.cbconf.org)

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“People are hungry, especially the young.  
They are hungry for God and you  
are here to satisfy that hunger.  
Be faithful to the great gift that God made  
you to be teachers, educators, light,  
His light in the world among young people.  
The future of the world depends on what you do.”



Mother Teresa  
(Talk to the De La Salle Christian Brothers)

The Brothers have “demonstrated permanency  
by providing for over three centuries an  
astonishing array of activities from the most basic  
literacy learning to the most complicated  
technological learning for both children and adults . .  
. so that they can be fully integrated  
into community and society.”



United Nations  
(UNESCO Noma Prize)

“Union in a community is a precious gem,  
which is why Our Lord so often  
recommended it to his apostles before he died.  
If we lose this, we lose everything.  
Preserve it with care, therefore, if you want  
your community to survive.”

*De La Salle*

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