



DE LA SALLE

★ 1719 - 2019 ★

ONE HEART.  
ONE COMMITMENT.  
ONE LIFE.

**Message to the Brothers**  
**on the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**of the Death of**  
**St. John Baptist de La Salle**

*(Transcript)*

**7 April 2019**



Brother Robert Schieler, FSC

Brother Superior

**Dr. McGuinness:**

I'm Maggie McGuinness, professor of religion and theology and former Vice-President for Mission at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Today, I'm talking with Brother Robert Schieler as he reflects on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the year of Lasallian Vocations. Brother Robert, 2019 marks the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Founder. And it is also the year of Lasallian Vocations. Could you say something about what this year means for you and for the Institute?

**Brother Robert:**

Sure, and thank you for the invitation, Maggie, to be with you today. For me, I would say first, Brothers with our vocation, realize that we receive within that vocation, throughout our life successive calls from God on responding to new and emerging needs. So this year is an opportunity for the Brothers to reflect on, "What am I being called to today". Secondly, I would say that it's an opportunity to acknowledge, to appreciate, to support all Lasallian vocations, the many, many thousands of women and men who are living their own vocation through the Lasallian charism. And third, I would urge the Brothers to consciously, creatively, consistently to invite young people into our communities to experience our life as Brothers, certainly young men to consider the life of a Brother. So that's in a nutshell what it means for me this year.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

Do you get any inspiration from de La Salle's time about what this might all mean for us too.

**Brother Robert:**

Sure. Certainly. First of all, I would say we are not celebrating a memory. What we're trying to do this year and throughout the years is to have the same courage that de La Salle had and the first Brothers at their time to set out on new paths. What are we being called to today? What are the new needs? What is the context we're living in? Because it's very different from the context of de La Salle's time. So the inspiration is let us have the same courage that de La Salle and the first Brothers had to meet the needs of the time.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

The Global Lasallian theme for 2019 is "Were not our Hearts Burning", based on the story of Emmaus. What does this theme mean to you and the global Lasallian family, especially during this very, significant anniversary year.

**Brother Robert:**

Okay, well last year, in my pastoral letter to the Brothers I spoke about that parable and what it means to us. So let me just add at this time, and this is based on a recent reading of the spiritual writer, Anthony Gittens. It's an opportunity again to reinterpret our own life story, our own life journey. Where have we been, where have I been as a Brother? Where am I today at the present moment, and where will I be? How do I continue? How do we as Brothers continue to be open to what God is asking of us and how are we ready to re-

**Dr. McGuinness:**

Brother Robert, you've spent a good deal of time visiting various ministries throughout the Lasallian world since you became Superior General, can you share some thoughts with us about the Brothers and mission today?

**Brother Robert:**

Certainly. The mission today is expanding and that's for at least two reasons. We often reflect on the diminishing number of Brothers and the aging of Brothers, but in reality the mission is expanding. We are reaching more young people, children today than at any time in our history and I think that's because the Brothers continue to be witnesses to the consecration and the mission of what they've given their life to and we are blessed with 90,000 lay women and men also inspired by the charism. So the mission is expanding. It's expanding in many different ways. Non-formal education, university education, innovative initiatives in secondary schools and primary schools throughout the world.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

Can you maybe offer us a couple of examples of some new missions and where you see the mission expanding.

**Brother Robert:**

Well, very recently, the past year we opened a school in South Sudan, the newest country on the planet engaged in civil war. More recently we went to Samoa, our Brothers in Australia and Lasallian partners in Australia opened a school in Samoa and we're on the verge of opening a new mission in Ghana. So those are the three new countries where we have not been. And they are good examples of how the mission is expanding in areas of the world where there's need.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

And where do you see the role of Associates in all of this?

**Brother Robert:**

Absolutely critical. In 1965, there were 16,000 Brothers. That's the largest number ever. We were teaching 700,000 students around the world. Today we're 3,600 Brothers and we're teaching 1 million students around the world. The mission is expanding because many lay women and men of every religion, of every ethnicity, of every culture are inspired by the charism and are responding to it in our schools and institutions and centers around the world.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

In your writings and presentations, you often highlight the Brothers' community life and their life of prayer. Could you say something about those two themes that often appear in your work?

**Brother Robert:**

Well, as the Brothers know, there are three constitutive elements to our vocation: mission, consecration, community. We're doing very well with mission. We can do better in the other two areas, so that's why I'm always focusing on community life because if there's going to be any positive response to real needs today, it's not what Rome tells us to do. It's what we've decided to do in community. So as a community, we need to be in dialogue with each other. We need to be a real community. We're not called to the common life. We're called to community and that means we trust one another and we're willing to share our faith and our experiences of God with one another. And when we do that, we're going to respond in new and creative ways to young people today.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

The number of Brothers today, as you mentioned a few minutes ago, are not what they were in the last century, but yet young men continue to be called to the Institute and to the consecrated life. Can you tell us something about these young Brothers and what they're doing?

**Brother Robert:**

Well, for me, they're very courageous because it's not common any longer for young women, young men, to enter religious life, yet they're open to it. Young people in general, as you know, across the globe, have lost faith in civil and religious institutions. They don't believe in those institutions any longer, but they do believe in people

who live an authentic life and who live a committed life, and I think we Brothers have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with these young people because they're mystified. Why would you live your life this way? Why would you live your life this way for 20, 30, 40, 50 years? So that's why I say it's important for our communities to witness a prayer life, to witness community that is open in dialogue and welcoming to young people.

**Dr. McGuinness:**

So as we come to the end of our conversation, what final thoughts would you like to share?

**Brother Robert:**

Well, going back to the idea of community, Brothers: The Gospel is our fundamental reference point. We know that and we're challenged to live the three constitutive elements of our vocation: community, mission and consecration. And we need to live them in an integrated manner. In my own life, whatever assignment I've had, whatever ministry I've been engaged in, I've asked myself, are these three elements integrated in me as a person and when they were, everything was fine, but when they were not, what was I going to do about it? So I simply ask the Brothers during this very important year to ask yourself that question, where you're presently are, do you feel you're living in an integrated manner these three elements? Because we need to integrate the gospel message in our life every day and we need to continue to say yes to God's will for us each day. And when we do that, the needs of those who have to live their life with dignity, the need to protect the rights of children will respond to that. We will go to the poor with a heart of a poor man. And I think as we live authentically, that vocation, God's going, take care of the rest just as he did at the time of St. La Salle. So Brothers, pray but move your feet. Thank you for all that you have done. Thank you for what you're accomplishing. Thank you for the lives you touch. Keep praying, keep moving those feet.

Live Jesus in our hearts forever!

Thank you.



# Message to the Brothers on the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of Saint John Baptist de La Salle

7 April 2019

## Questions for reflection

Identify some occasions when you were aware of calls from God. Would you characterize the calls as “successive”; that is, one following upon the other? Do you see a pattern of calls/response in your life?

Describe your responses to God’s calls that have led you be who you are today?

How can you more consciously, creatively and consistently invite young men to become Brothers?  
Can you suggest a new strategy for your community to invite young men to become Brothers?

Identify one contemporary educational need to which we as ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ should respond.

Describe the concrete and practical practices that you employ daily to insure that you are attentive to God’s successive calls.  
Describe a new way for your community to be continually attentive to God’s successive calls.

The Lasallian mission is thriving! What about your community – is it pulsating with zeal for the Reign of God?  
Zeal for the Reign of God flows from baptism. Life in the Spirit is not age dependent. Can you share with your community new ways to express zeal for the Reign of God and to be a more credible and attractive witness to the Gospel?

“Keep praying! Keep moving those feet!”

  
Brother Robert Schieler, FSC  
Brother Superior