

Reflect on the Life of Being a Lasallian Educator

By
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Currently, my vision of myself as a Lasallian educator is being an older sister to the students I serve. And that came from working here at Saint Mary's College and witnessing the interactions of Brothers, faculty and staff with others, and also from the Buttimer experience that working here at Saint Mary's has allowed me to participate in.

I came to Saint Mary's College in August 2002 from Korea. In Korea, we do not have Lasallian schools. I knew that in Japan two "Lasallian" schools are in operation, but I didn't know what that meant because as of 2002 the Christian Brothers hadn't come to Korea yet. So, when I looked at the big statue in front of the Chapel on the August 2002 day that I arrived at Saint Mary's, it was the very first time I encountered the name, "De La Salle." As a student first, and as a staff member later, I have become acquainted with De La Salle and our Lasallian mission. I have read about it, talked about it, studied it and experienced it. And I thought I understood it. But it was not until I participated in the Buttimer 1 program during the summer of 2012 that I finally "got" it — that is — I finally had De La Salle and his mission enter my heart as well as my head.

In our very first Buttimer 1 class, our presenter, Brother Jeffrey, used the words "Saint De La Salle," but challenged us to see the "Human" De La Salle before the "Saint" De La Salle. What is the difference, I asked myself. Is it possible to separate them? What is the point of separating them? As I struggled to answer these questions for myself the process of De La Salle entering my heart as well as my head began.

De La Salle was a visionary leader. His value of "gratuity," doing something for nothing, was something that struck me deeply. God has already provided me, and us, with more than what we need. We need to touch hearts in return. And as I thought about that, I realized that that is what the Brothers I have met here at Saint Mary's have done for me. Ten years ago, I was an international student who barely spoke English and knew nothing about American culture. When I look back, I could have been easily lost. On the contrary, I felt comfortable and cared for. And Saint Mary's became my home away from home very soon. I remember I once said "I don't feel like I came to America. I feel like I just came to Saint Mary's." How did it happen? Wherever I went, I ran into Brothers. I asked Brother Ronald where I could find 5:15 p.m. Mass because he went to the International Student Retreat. Brother Dominic welcomed me with the biggest and sweetest smile when I met him at the APASA meeting. Brother Camillus always told me "Remember that you are a daughter of God." Brother Brendan saw my potential and hired me because he wanted to reach out to our diversity students like me. Brother John invited me to a Christmas party when I had no Christmas party to go to. There are also faculty and staff members who showed me what it means to be a Lasallian educator. I still remember the late Dr. Dennis' last Jan Term class that I happened to be invited to. He took all the students to his home and cooked for them. Hope Rolland, another staff member, volunteered to be my conversation partner because she was surprised by my poor English when I met her at the San Francisco symphony. After that, she helped me as my editor throughout my graduate study. From my graduate school application to my Master's thesis, she proofread every single page of my writings. Until the day she retired, she edited my thesis paper. These people and others have helped me greatly and touched my heart, expecting nothing in return. I am so grateful to have a chance to work with them, "together and by association," in support of the Lasallian mission to provide for the well-being of our students in this world, and in God's eyes. I am doing my best

to treat my students in the same way I was treated by our Brothers, faculty and staff here at Saint Mary's.

Next, Brother Jeffrey showed us a video of Sung Bong Choi, the homeless 22-year-old Korean high school student who sang beautifully on a Korean television show, Korea's Got Talent. I remembered learning about Choi when my American friends sent me his videos as soon as they appeared on YouTube. In one of his videos Choi stated, "If I do well, I can bring the honor to my school." When I saw that, it broke my heart, and I thought to myself, "I wish we had a Lasallian school in Korea for the boys like him." So many memories of young people less fortunate than myself came to me during my very first day of Buttimer class. The process of De La Salle entering my heart as well as my head was continuing.

Brother Jeffrey continually challenged us and encouraged us to challenge ourselves, and what we think and believe, throughout the entire program. He left me with this image of Lasallian educators: Teachers who challenge students with compassion.

The process of De La Salle entering my heart as well as my head took place during my Buttimer reading as well. One thing I learned from that reading that struck me deeply was De La Salle's directive that Lasallian educators need to be brothers and sisters to each other before we can be older brothers and sisters to the students we serve. I realized I have been missing the first part. I can say that I have been working hard on the second part. I started to work here in 2005 as a Career Counselor and the Diversity Coordinator at the Career Center. I work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and go to Mass at 5:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday (I even met my husband there at 5:15 p.m. Mass), unless the Career Center has evening events. Every single day, I pray for all the students I saw that day, hoping that I was good enough. And I pray "Dear Lord, if I was not good enough, please fill the rest with your love and grace. They will be fine." Last summer, I realized I cannot be an effective older sister to SMC students without first being a sister to my colleagues (and challenging them with compassion and letting them challenge me with compassion). That will help us build the necessary community among ourselves. I came back to school last Fall semester, more motivated and inspired than ever before, to help build a community among us.

At the same time, as I learned more about De La Salle, I was amazed by his thoughtfulness and effectiveness in practical matters. For example, when he organized class schedules he put religious classes at the end of the day as a way of promoting evangelism of family and selling the school. This kind of thinking seems to me to come only from prayers. De La Salle never forgot about our mission as Christians, while at the same time he was thinking about all the other aspects of education. I have always wondered how I can better live my faith in my everyday life. Working at Saint Mary's has helped me to find specific ways to live a Christian life.

The most amazing thing I learned about De La Salle from my Buttimer reading was how much he suffered to do his work. The pain he endured physically, emotionally and spiritually, from the Church, his family, and even other Brothers, defies words. That he gave up his wealth and canonry (which was all I really knew about him before), was not even a small part of the suffering he had to endure. I wish it had not taken me 10 years, until my participation in Buttimer 1, to learn this, and to meet the human De La Salle.

It was after the very hectic (yet great) first week of Buttimer 1 that I decided to finish reading our text book, *The Work Is Yours*, over the weekend. During that reading I learned that after De La Salle met Nyel

in 1679 and helped him open the first school, that his life was filled with pain and enemies. And the closer De La Salle got to the end of his life, the worse things got for him. On Saturday night, June 30, 2012, as I reached the point of the book where De La Salle's "Dark night of soul" is described, I found myself praying, "Oh, God, please just take him. So, he doesn't have to suffer any more." Two days before De La Salle died, his enemies revoked his faculties. When I read about De La Salle dying on the morning of Good Friday, I found myself crying.

Why did he have to suffer as much as he did? Is it that hard to do God's work? Was it worth it really? Why do people (even other church members) sometimes persecute those who do God's work? Obviously, De La Salle was not treated in the way he deserved. I could not help but let my heart be troubled, until I realized that Jesus was not treated in the way he deserved either.

I was born and raised in Catholic family. When I was young, I understood Jesus' life from the perspective of the resurrection. After three days, he was supposed to be risen from the death. In my mind, nothing was a big deal to our Lord, Jesus, including his death. But as I got older, and realized that without the horrible suffering and death of Jesus there could be no resurrection, I started to see the human Jesus. When I transformed the story of my Lord's salvation this way (upside down), I started to love him. Through my Buttimer experience, De La Salle's life has overlapped with Jesus' life in my mind. When I finished *The Work Is Yours* at 3:00 a.m. on Sunday, July 1, 2012, I couldn't be satisfied with the ending of the book – the picture of the 41st General Chapter with Pope John Paul II, and the story of the Institute of Brothers, as De La Salle's legacy. How can I make the ending of the book more positive? Soon I realized that De La Salle's story didn't end where our text book ended. It continues at the desk where I sit, reading and crying; it continues with others who, like me, have had him enter their hearts as well as their heads and who realize that "Lord, the work is yours," so finally "the work is ours." I, and my fellow 28 Buttimer 1 classmates, have accepted the God's work that De La Salle began 300 years ago, as our own work as well.

My final thoughts came from the memory of my first meeting with the statue of De La Salle in 2002 and my first day of Buttimer class, 10 years later, in 2012. I do not know why Brothers who went to north-east Asia just stopped in Japan. My country, Korea, is right there across the small East Sea. And there are still boys like Sung Bong Choi in Korea. Maybe none of Korean bishops invited Brothers to build Lasallian schools. I still do not know why God brought me here to Saint Mary's College, all the way from Korea, but I believe God has plans for everybody. In my lifetime, if I happen to encounter the possibility to help open a Lasallian school in Korea, I will take it as the God's work for me. And I will do my best, each and every moment, to remember the ending of the book, *The Work is Yours*.

Personally, I am a Career Counselor and was interested in De La Salle's vocational changes. He became a canon before his age of 16. His life was all set. Interestingly enough, he changed his "career" and became a founder of a non-profit organization – Christian Brother's School. What happened to him? In addition to that, working here at Saint Mary's produced one question in my mind. De La Salle built schools to help poor boys on the street. But Saint Mary's is a very expensive school. What happened to De La Salle's mission? After 10 years of my experience here, I can say we still serve students who are financially poor. We also strive to serve those who are spiritually poor. And I saw some students who are good financially and spiritually. As a Career Counselor, I have witnessed that those students chose to serve when they graduated. What happened to De La Salle in the past is still happening right here on our campus in the present tense.

De La Salle lived 300 years ago and he still challenges us today; our attempts to meet those challenges are his legacy too.