

Understanding the Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts Traditions

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On August 15, 2012, Brother Ron's last annual staff day, he shared with the staff that the upcoming sesquicentennial year is an occasion not only to celebrate, but to reflect on the meaning of the College's traditions and mission. Brother Ron's memorable presidential reflections prompted me to reflect how my work and activities here at Saint Mary's College of California since December 2009 have supported the traditions and mission of College. My first step is to take a closer look at the College's three-prong (Catholic, Lasallian, and liberal arts) traditions, and how these traditions are integral parts of the College's mission. I believe that it is only through the perpetual effort of understanding the College's educational philosophies and mission that my future plans and goals in the College can be properly guided and actualized throughout my spiritual journey and professional growth.

How is the Catholic tradition an integral part of the College's mission?

The College's Catholic tradition emphasizes the fostering of the dignity, integrity, and morality of the human person from Christian theological perspectives. The Catholic tradition manifests the divine goodness, extends the love of humankind towards one another, and embraces individuals coming from all religious and spiritual backgrounds. The longevity of the Catholic tradition is extended through a pedagogy that strives to integrate both intellectual and spiritual journeys in the quest for truth. While the mission of the College is built on the steadfast principles of Catholic values, the College cultivates a learning environment that promotes engaging and stimulating discourses in seeking the unity of faith and reason. Even though we are not all Catholics, we all benefit from the Catholic tradition. The bond of community is strengthened in the presence of God through the immersion of diverse spiritual and religious experiences that celebrate the sacramental lives of the learned individuals who are committed to reach out and touch the hearts and souls of the others.

How is the Lasallian tradition an integral part of the College's mission?

The College's Lasallian tradition is defined by its five core principles: faith in the presence of God; quality education; concern for the poor and social justice; respect for all persons; and inclusive community. As an extension of the Catholic mission and the teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the Lasallian tradition is dedicated to inspire lives through educating the poor and transforming individuals to become practitioners of social justice for the society and common good.

The Lasallian principles foster a safe and an inclusive community among the Faculty, staff, and students. Mutual understanding and respect for all persons is preserved through sensitivity and inclusion of the cultural, social, and economic diversities in the campus community. Immersed in a service oriented environment where Lasallian teachings and practices are established as the core foundations, individuals equipped with the will to learn are being prepared to become the future Lasallian educators and leaders of the community. Through the education we receive, we develop leadership qualities and a sense of social responsibility within us, and contribute in whatever small ways to right social, ethical and environmental injustice. As we are learning ways to help the disadvantaged and underprivileged coming from varied social, cultural, economic backgrounds, we become aware of regional and global concerns and more determined to change the world.

How is the liberal arts tradition an integral part of the College's mission?

Like the Catholic and Lasallian traditions, the philosophy of the liberal arts tradition is centered on the cultivation of the moral virtues within oneself and the student-centered community. In the process of becoming a learned scholar and reflective thinker, one nurtures the passion for lifelong learning and to acquire knowledge and wisdom, as well as the intellectual skills to apply that knowledge into practical learning experience.

The mission of a liberal arts college is to educate individuals to become spiritual, compassionate and responsible leaders. At the heart of the liberal arts tradition lays the core foundation of the Collegiate Seminar. Drawing from the Great Books from various ages and cultures, the liberal arts curriculum integrates branches of knowledge from arts, sciences, education, and business to inspire and lead learners to live a balanced and enriching spiritual and humanistic life.

The core curriculum is a practical adaptation of the liberal arts tradition. Combining theory and practice, the learning goals in the three categories—habits of mind, pathways to knowledge, and engaging the world, are the essential ingredients needed to foster scholarship and leadership qualities in our students, to prepare them to become the reflective thinkers, responsible citizens, and democratic leaders of the 21st century.

In what ways can I support the College's Catholic, Lasallian, and liberal arts tradition?

It is important to remember that the weight of the College's mission is supported by the three-prong traditions. It seems logical to start my examination with the Catholic tradition, proceed to the Lasallian tradition, and complete the cycle with the liberal arts tradition. The College's Website provided many resources that helped me explore the three traditions. I came across three sources that have inspired and guided my will to put the traditions into practice.

"Love and knowledge: the Heart of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition" by Dale Lauderville is an essay about the challenges of the Catholic intellectual tradition in shaping the changing trends of society and higher education today. Father Lauderville observed that Catholic thinkers are entrusted with the mission to use love and knowledge as driving forces to reconcile the tension between faith and reason. In a Catholic higher education environment sustained by the three aspects of love (agape, eros, and philia), the pursuit of knowledge and the shared concern for the common good are conveyed through dialogue and communication. Students as embodied thinkers are guided to explore the metaphysical mysteries of human existence as well as the dynamic social relations of being in the world through critical or methodical inquiry.

Sharing the Lasallian Mission: six orientation/Lasallian formation seminars for faculty, staff, students, parents is a series of oral interviews with the Saint Mary's College Professors of the Year 1992-2004. Saint Mary's College provides a passionate and diverse environment for the lifelong learners coming from various religious traditions. The campus is a safe zone for interfaith dialogues, intellectual partnership, and every other form of engagement within the grounds of peace, tolerance, and mutual respect. In this student-centered learning community, faculty, staff, and students work collectively towards promoting the Lasallian pedagogy of social justice and fostering responsible leaders who are committed to make a difference in the world.

Brother Mel's memoir, *Years of Yearning*, enables me to gain insights into an important time in Saint Mary's history. I was struck by how much of the College's strengths and challenges were shaped by the mission to defend its liberal arts tradition. The 60s was the best and worst of times. During his 28 years

of reign, Brother Mel not only successfully contended with the external climates affecting the College's stability, he managed to reconcile the various voices within the College regarding administrative matters. Under his leadership, the 4-1-4 calendar was implemented. Women were admitted for the first time to Saint Mary's College. Despite the financial challenges, Brother Mel raised funds for new facilities and residence halls. New programs were introduced. As the President of College, Brother Mel demonstrated tremendous wisdom and courage as he overcame the never-ending challenges by leading the College through several WASC accreditation visits. His everlasting legacy will continue to be reflected in the College's mission and its spiritual transformation in the years to come.

The campus offers many opportunities for staff to participate in activities that support the Catholic, Lasallian, and liberal arts traditions. Among the events sponsored by Office of Mission, Mission and Ministry Center, CILSA, Intercultural Center, and Human Resources, my favorites are the annual De La Salle week, the Soup and Substance meetings, and the professional development workshops. For the library staff, the 2012 De La Salle week was particularly exciting due to our participation in the post-it project. The library invited the community to contribute their thoughts and reflections on "What 'Together and by Association' means to us" on a post-it board that constituted a colorful image of a Lasallian five point star. Meeting the Brothers and attending the Soup and Substance special presentation were the highlights for me. It was eye-opening to meet with the Brothers who dedicated themselves to teaching disadvantaged youth and to listen to their stories and first-hand experiences at the St. Mary's Boys' School in Nyeri, Kenya.

The annual staff in-service day is an important themed event that marks the beginning of the new academic year with anticipations of continuing and new directions as indicated in the State of the College Address given in the previous year. The staff day is also an occasion for the staff to remember their role as Lasallian educators. I always appreciate the community time we share at the staff appreciation luncheons. The special short films presentations on Catholic involvement in social and environmental issues always leave the staff something to reflect on. As always, I look forward to the Soup and Substance gatherings and sharing my thoughts on the new readings of the year.

The Campus of Difference workshop was the first order of business on my list within six months of my arrival at Saint Mary's as a new staff. It was my first encounter of getting to know the cultural and social climate of the College. I was so impressed with the training that I continued to participate in several follow-up workshops sponsored by GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), Intercultural Center, Human Resources, CCIE (College Committee of Inclusive Excellence), and Staff Council, such as, the safe-zone workshops, and a series of staff workshops on cultural diversity, communication skills, and leadership development. The participants who attended these workshops with genuine openness and friendship bonded with one another. After we left the workshops, our positive learning experiences enable us to appreciate the fact that we as a group of dedicated individuals love working in the College together.

Gaelebration events were prepared campus-wide to kick off the Year of the Gael. In the spirit of celebrating the College's sesquicentennial year in 2013, the library was proud to host a current faculty scholarship exhibit (along with their citations and bibliographies) that showcased faculty's distinguished publications and artistic accomplishments. Out of the many spectacular events throughout the Year of the Gael, the great(est) conversations symposia series are definitely not to be missed. As part of the audience, I am confident to state that the crowd never ceases to be in awe of these scholars who share their passion in the Catholic intellectual tradition, Lasallian education, and the liberal arts commitment in promoting the common good. It is indeed a great honor for me to be part of the Saint Mary's College history during this special year. Happy 150th Birthday Saint Mary's and many more to come!

Resources

Anderson, FSC, Mel. (2011). *Years of yearning: Memoir of Brother Mel Anderson, FSC, President 1969-1997*. Moraga, Calif.: Brother Mel Anderson, FSC.

Lauderville, OSB, Dale. (2009). *Love and knowledge: The Heart of the Catholic intellectual tradition*. Retrieved November 1, 2012 from http://www1.csbsju.edu/catholicidentity/values/love_know.htm

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