

# **Spirit of Community: Convocation Remarks**

**Lasallian Heritage Days 2024**

**Saint Mary's College of California**

**24 April 2024**

**Brother William Mann, FSC**

## **1. Introduction**

**What a delight it is to be back on this campus! Over the past 40 years, I have spent so much time here visiting with the Brothers, teaching for more than two decades in the summer Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies, and serving for three terms on the Board of Trustees. So many happy and blessed memories.**

**I truly appreciate the focus you've chosen for Lasallian Heritage Days 2024 – spirit of community – and feel honored to be part of this week's celebrations. In these times, both around the country and on the world stage and in the face of the upheaval and challenges being experienced by so many of our institutions of higher education, the decision of Saint Mary's College to continue to dig deep into your \_\_\_\_\_ and to hold onto your heritage with both hands and a full heart encourages me and encourages, I have no doubt, all those who know and love this venerable institution.**

**“The cornerstone that sustains the construction of [the Lasallian educational] mission has been and always will be the .” As the recently published states: “To be Lasallian, by definition, is and to commit oneself within that same community to a common task.”<sup>i</sup>**

## **2. Three Remarks about Community**

**Community is the context in which Lasallians believe “an unknown, lovely power” at the heart of all being [which some of us call God], invites us into its own loveliness.”<sup>ii</sup> Faith in this presence is at its heart what Lasallian spirituality is, and life in community is one of the principal ways<sup>iii</sup> in which this spirituality is manifested. With this backdrop, I have three observations to share.**

**Grounded in our Lasallian tradition, ours is fundamentally “an educational path travelled in community.”<sup>iv</sup> Together and by association, we educate, we strengthen our members, we care for the weak, and we nurture their spirit.<sup>v</sup>**

**My favorite quotation about what it means to live in a community comes, from the , in a â ; ; rom the**

**Whoever thought that working in and belonging to a community [or, for that matter, working on a committee] was always going to be easy hasn't lived in community long enough. Using an expression coined a number of years ago by historian and social critic Christopher Lasch in referring to family life, community life – as much as we'd like it to be so –**



positively than the present, and often enough we can be overly dramatic in our dealings and negotiations with one another in the here and now. Guided by the Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts habits of charity, civility, and collegiality, let's be united in "helping to turn dramatic times into a lyrical song: a promise of hope."<sup>xiii</sup> Let's show the next generation – in a spirit of Lasallian community – what a loving and lovely world can look like.

### 3. Conclusion

Three practices have, over the centuries, helped the members of the community of the Lasallian educational network live our identity authentically and keep moving forward successfully in solidarity.<sup>xiv</sup> The first has been the practice of presence, a commitment to remain personally – and not just physically or metaphorically – present both to the transcendent and to those around us. The second has been the practice of fraternity (of being siblings all), an attitude that embraces our shared humanity even when the externals of appearance and behavior make that difficult. The third has been the practice of interiority, a habit of quiet and deep listening to the heart – which Augustine calls "the place where I am whoever I am"<sup>xv</sup> – that allows for self-discovery and promotes awareness of a benevolent "higher power" and a sense of purpose and inter-connectivity. This practice of interiority "liberates us from undue ties, worries, and superficial concerns. It ... enables us to devote our energies to what is essential."<sup>xvi</sup>

My sincere hope is that Saint Mary's College continues to embrace and celebrate the "spirit of community" and that Lasallian identity continues, in this time of "great upheaval,"<sup>xvii</sup> to provide the foundation of a differentiating

**character that demonstrates your distinctiveness, value, and relevance today. “Be convinced,” as John Baptist de La Salle told us, “that provided you are willing, [this inclusive community of yours and all its members] can do more with the help of God’s grace than you imagine.”<sup>xviii</sup>**

**Thank you most sincerely for the honor you’ve shown me today, and may God bless Saint Mary’s College!**

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<sup>i</sup> *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions, and Hopes* by Brothers of the Christian Schools (Rome, 2020), #3.2.

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from wording of Philip Endean SJ in “Christian Spirituality in a Rapidly Changing World” by Cliff Knighten in *Crux: Taking the Catholic Pulse* (April 2, 2017).

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 2015), #63 to #77.

<sup>iv</sup> “Guiding Our Ministries So the Next Generation Will Know God” by Carlos Gómez-Restrepo FSC (DENA Spring Trustee Representatives Conference, 2024).

<sup>v</sup> *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission*, #3.2.

<sup>vi</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community* by Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (Vatican City, 1994). #39.

<sup>vii</sup> *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* by Christopher Lasch (Basic Books, 1979).

<sup>viii</sup> *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and translated by John W. Doberstein (Harper & Row, 1954), pages 7, 20, and 39.

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would be much better conversationalists, so that their company would be sought out by others, rather than being regarded as a simpleton or a bore, and they would also be better prepared to relish solitude, whether they chose it or it was imposed on them.”

<sup>x</sup> *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Richard Arnandez FSC and edited by Augustine Loes FSC and Francis Huether FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994), #91.2.

<sup>xi</sup> *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #65.1

<sup>xii</sup> “For a Revolutionary Dramaturgy” by Victor Hugo (Paris, 1827), as quoted by Carlos Gómez-Restrepo FSC (DENA Spring Trustee Representatives Conference, 2024).

<sup>xiii</sup> Carlos Gómez-Restrepo FSC (DENA Spring Trustee Representatives Conference, 2024).

<sup>xiv</sup> Cf. “Nurturing Lasallian Spirituality Today: A Journey from Affectionately Grateful Former Students to Lasallian Associates” by William Mann FSC in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 10, no. 2 (2020), pages 25-32.

<sup>xv</sup> “My heart is the place where I am whoever I am,” *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, 10,3,4.

<sup>xvi</sup> “Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage” by Michel Sauvage FSC in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), page 277.

<sup>xvii</sup> Cf. *The Great Upheaval: Higher Education’s Past, Present, and Uncertain Future* by Arthur Levine and Scott Van Pelt (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2021).

<sup>xviii</sup> “Reflections regarding the Use of Time” in *Collection of Various Short Treatises* by John Baptist de La Salle, translated by William J. Battersby FSC and edited by Daniel Burke FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993), page 80.