The Lasallian Education Movement Alive in the World

By Raymond Ricci, '67

THROUGHOUT THE history of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, the Institute has passed through critical thresholds when its future was in doubt. At each of those moments, the Brothers have forthrightly addressed the needs of the world through a remarkable process of renewal. Understandably, they have won a hard-earned reputation for adaptability, a characteristic they have now ingrained in their lay colleagues.

Today, the faith and compassion that St. La Salle exhibited in his life have not only lived beyond his lifetime but also beyond the borders of his imagination. Collectively, the geographic scope and range of Lasallian activities show imagination and resilience, qualities so necessary to produce new life. Lasallian ministries continue to find new ways to focus on those most in need of their work. The Lasallian educational movement is flourishing in the world.

Such a brief glimpse cannot possibly show the extraordinary range of the Lasallian network. There are traditional schools operating at all academic levels, more than 800 elementary, middle, and secondary schools, a host of child-care agencies, and 64 colleges and universities. Here is a sampling of the creativity that Br. Alvaro has called for:

• In the Philippines, the De La Salle Health Scarlets Institute houses the College of Medicine plus other health-related colleges. De La Salle University Medical Center is a principal teaching hospital.

• Technical training centers for adults in Madagascar, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Eritrea, and elsewhere.

• Centers for street children in Rwanda, Kenya, Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand, and elsewhere.

• Teach-in and the creation of novel teaching methods and materials in Panama, Guatemala, Kenya, Rwanda, Peru, France, Spain, and elsewhere.

• Lay formation programs in Italy, France, Argentina, Colombia, Belgium, the United States, Egypt, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

• Teachers and the development of literacy programs in Panama, Guatemala, France, Sri Lanka, Australia, Switzerland, and elsewhere.

• Lay formation programs in Italy, France, Argentina, Colombia, Belgium, the United States, Egypt, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

• In Mexico, Universidad La Salle has 14 campuses with programs in business, education, architecture, engineering, medicine, and law.

• Universities in Spain, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the United States, Indonesia, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Palestine, and elsewhere.

• Spirituality centers in Ireland, Great Britain, Spain, Canada, France, Sri Lanka, Australia, Switzerland, and elsewhere.

• In the United States, 20 new Lasallian schools have opened since 1988, most San Miguel type schools, independent schools for at-risk children who have significant social, economic, and academic needs. The San Miguel model was envisioned first by Brother Lawrence Goyette, F.S.C., who opened a middle school in Providence, R.I., in 1993. There are now 17 elementary and middle schools using the San Miguel model, providing an extended school day and school year to impoverished children in some of America’s poorest places.

All of these are examples of new institutional life being born across the world. In the words of one observer, “If it doesn’t exist, (the Brothers) will invent it.” These programs are the product of thousands of Brothers and laypeople joined in their commitment to the Lasallian mission. This same sense of purpose is a continuing force for La Salle University.

Political observer Alexis De Tocqueville wrote that when Americans face a problem, they pass a law. In today’s world, in terms of the social mission of the Church, laws won’t do. Lasallians work to achieve a level of social intimacy derived from a shared view of what students need, should know, and can do. On this campus, Brothers and lay people have for many years connected with each other for the sake of the mission. Today, they do that in ways that I would have never dreamed of when I began my life here. These twin concepts—the act of associating together for mission and the process of lay formation—are the keys to preserving the University’s sense of itself and will be addressed in the final two installments of this series, which will appear in the following two issues of La Salle Magazine.

Brother Michael J. McGinniss, F.S.C., Ph.D., ’70, on issues related to the University’s mission. He has been a member of the University’s administration for more than 40 years, including 17 years as Vice President for Enrollment Services. Ricci has participated in the three-year Lasallian Leadership Institute and serves on the Mission Council of the Baltimore District of the Christian Brothers and on the Mission and Ministry Committee of a new, united southern diocese of the Christian Brothers. He is also on the board of La Salle Academy, a San Miguel school in North Philadelphia. He was honored with La Salle’s Distinguished Lasallian Educator Award in 2004.