

Principles of Effective Lasallian Formation¹

Gregory T. Kopra, EdD, AFSC²

1. Introduction

For many years, even decades, Lasallian mission formation has been named a priority (or of primary importance) by the Brothers and Lasallian educators from the International Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the North America Region (RELAN) and its Districts.³ But what is Lasallian mission formation? On what principles, values, or commitments is it based? Put another way, what principles, values, and commitments should drive our Lasallian formation efforts? In this paper, I would like to share some "core principles" of Lasallian formation for mission, some culled from an Institute document and others culled from my own experience as a formator. We Lasallians have talked about many of these principles throughout our conversations over the past few years,⁴ but I think we could all benefit from a focused presentation on them.

Wisdom from MEL Bulletin 51

The first of several principles I will share comes from *Formation for the Lasallian Mission*, an informational bulletin published in 2014 by the Center of the Institute in Rome. Often referred to as *MEL Bulletin 51*,⁵ this paperback is one of a series of some sixty publications on Lasallian themes that began in 2002 and continues to this day. The bulletins are all available as downloadable pdf. documents so that any interested person can access them freely. This particular MEL Bulletin took seven years to write. It was the culmination of a long consultation process involving many Lasallians worldwide, including members of at least three international councils.

Early in the Bulletin, we find a list and discussion of "principles of formation."⁶ It is a good list worth reflecting on. But before we go there, let's remind ourselves of just what Lasallian formation *is*.

What Is Lasallian Formation?

One of the most important sections in the entirety of *MEL Bulletin 51*, in my opinion, is Section 3: "Formation for Mission."⁷ Here we find a succinct series of statements that help us understand what our task involves as formators, as people involved in leading formation activities. These statements deserve a good deal of our attention so that they can more and more fully guide our

local Lasallian mission formation efforts. Local formation teams might consider reviewing these statements annually and by asking themselves, “How are we doing in relation to these statements? What could we do better? What could we do more of? Is there anything we need to do less of?”

Formation for Lasallian mission is the process of interiorizing the constitutive elements of Lasallian identity. It involves the accompaniment of persons and it helps them fundamentally in their human and spiritual growth and maturation in order to respond to their vocation and to the needs of the mission. (3.1)

Formation for mission involves the development of the professional competence that each person needs in order to carry out the mission. From the very beginning up to today, attention to “those who have been entrusted to us” and care that “the school run(s) well” guarantee the continuation of quality, person-centered, educational initiatives, which is achieved only through the appropriate professional preparation of each person involved in the mission. (3.2)

The mission is shared and is carried out “together and by association.” In order to do this, formation sees to it that persons acquire an in-depth spirit that unites them and is manifested in one’s personal ability to work together. (3.3)

Formation “touches the heart” of each person. At different times in their formative journey, each person is challenged to integrate within themselves the various contents and processes of formation. The process of personal integration is ongoing and leads to transformation and change. (3.4)

Some important words and phrases to keep in mind from these statements found in this Bulletin would be: *interiorizing, accompaniment, human and spiritual growth and maturation, professional competence, together and by association, and personal integration*. As previously noted, these statements are well worth discussing by the local formation team as we consider formation opportunities for our colleagues from year-to-year and as we answer these questions: (a) what do the Lasallian educators in our school need in order to be the most effective Lasallian educators possible; (b) what do individuals need in order to continue to grow in their identity as Lasallian educators; and (c) what does our community of educators need collectively to nurture its identity as a “Lasallian” community?

2. Ten Principles of Formation

Let’s now turn our attention to *MEL Bulletin 51*’s ten “principles of formation.” The commentary on each principle comes both from *the Bulletin* and from my own experience.

2.1 Formation Is for Mission

We believe that the Lasallian “approach” to education works! We believe in its power to transform persons personally and collectively. We believe that, done well, Lasallian education provides access to opportunities that will benefit our students for their entire lives. We also

believe that Lasallian education exists especially to serve young people in great need and to provide access to a human and Christian education that is transformative.

When people come to work in one of our Lasallian ministries, we owe it to them to introduce them to how we Lasallians approach education. We want to empower them to participate actively and personally in the mission and to contribute to the accomplishment of our educational ministry through their actions. This sharing of information related to “how we do things around here” (our school “culture”⁸) is the beginning of what, for some, becomes a lifetime of formation in Lasallian mission.⁹

Ongoing formation for those who have been laboring in Lasallian ministries for some years builds on the initial formation received as a new employee. As experience dialogues with the essentials of the Lasallian story and vision,¹⁰ new insights emerge, subtle nuances become clearer, and Lasallian educators sharpen their knowledge, understanding, and integration of the Lasallian charism.¹¹ Sometimes this means circling back to the basics of Lasallian mission, but this time from the vantage point of a number of years of experience in the school. At other times, this involves learning and internalizing new information, facets of the Lasallian charism that have yet to be explored. This may be the time to consider inviting a colleague to participate in a District or Regional formation activity or program, always with our foundational purpose in mind: to better provide a human and Christian education for those entrusted to our care, especially those most in need.

Formation, to make sense and to be effective, must be applied to our educational work. We must always look for opportunities to share examples of how each formative theme works in the day-to-day educational experience. When someone asks, “What does this have to do with my teaching/counseling/coaching/groundskeeping/etc.?” we can say, “Let’s talk about that!”

2.2 Formation Is Transformative

Formation begins with information.¹² Who are we? How did we come into being? What are we trying to accomplish? How do we approach education? Orientation is the first, very important, irreplaceable step on the formative journey. Let’s never dismiss it as “just information.” One cannot make one’s own what has not first been broken open for, and by, us.

In time, we take in this information and wonder: So, if this is “how we do things around here,” what does this have to do with me? How can I participate in this mission? How do I need to adapt my approach to education to “fit” with this approach? What would it look like in practice if I applied these cultural pieces to my particular work? I may need more information and a patient, wise ear from a trusted colleague to answer these questions. These are formative questions.

Over time, and with lots of trial and error, each person begins to figure it out for themselves. “Here is how *I* contribute! Here are some of the gifts *I* bring to this ministry. This is how *I* do it. *I* feel like *I* belong.” This feeling has the potential to be transformative. “This is how *they* do it” becomes “This is how *we* do it.”¹³

More and more, each Lasallian educator integrates the core elements of Lasallian mission (concern for the those in poverty, remembering we are always in God's presence, quality education, respect for all persons, and inclusive community) into their lives and their work. More and more, their work takes on greater meaning and purpose. It becomes more "ministry" than "job." Thoughtful accompaniment of new Lasallian educators can go a long way in assisting them in the process of integration.

All of these levels are critical to good formation. Whether every person ultimately finds themselves fully "captured" by the Lasallian charism isn't really the point. However, all educators need to know what we believe about schooling, about young people, and about educating, and all need to "translate" it so that their own practice can be informed by it and guided by it. Effective initial and ongoing formation goes a long way to assure this. And for those who *are* "captured" by the Lasallian charism, we need to respond by providing them with more and deeper opportunities for Lasallian mission formation.

2.3 Formation Promotes Association for Mission

Formation, when experienced with fellow educators, nurtures and strengthens relationships. At the local level, we begin to get to know our fellow teachers and staff members better. We begin to learn their stories, and they begin to learn ours. We discover kindred spirits; we learn of others to whom we can go with particular challenges or questions; we inspire, encourage, and energize each other.

Formation, when experienced with educators from other Lasallian ministries, nurtures and strengthens a wider circle of relationships. We realize that we are part of a bigger family—a District community, a Regional community, even an international community.¹⁴ We begin to build relationships with Lasallians from other schools and contact them to discuss our ministry.

The word for this, from our Lasallian story, is *association*.¹⁵ We say that we accomplish this great work of Lasallian education "together and by association." We accomplish this work united with Lasallians in our local community as well as with Lasallians around our District, Region, and international network.

2.4 Formation Responds to Local and Global Needs

Formation reminds us of our responsibility to those "directly" entrusted to our care: our students. This requires us to learn about the lives of our students and their families so that we can better understand what life is like on a daily basis for them. This is very helpful as we discern, individually and collectively, how best we can assist in educating our students toward the fullness of their lives. Getting to know the lives of our students is formative work.

Part of our obligation to our students involves engaging them in good works for people in need in their local communities and around the world. Community service projects, service-learning activities, twinning projects, and other activities can raise the awareness of our students to the realities of our world and to *their* role in the world.¹⁶ When we join and accompany them in

participating in these activities, we, too, are formed, becoming more aware of the realities of our world and of our role in the world.

2.5 Formation Starts with the Individual

Everyone comes to our ministries with a story—with a lifetime of stories.¹⁷ Each person comes to us with their own level of experience in education and in life. Formation begins by building relationships with folks new to our ministries, getting to know them, their stories, their gifts, their questions, and their needs and letting them come to know us. Formation begins by getting to know people and building from there.

As previously discussed, the starting point is a common formation to Lasallian education for new employees. Following this, it's important to accompany each person on their own individual journey, addressing questions and special needs that arise along the way.¹⁸ In time, each person gets to be known well enough that we can begin to tailor formative invitations to each individual person, depending on who they are and where they are at. Some folks will thrive with a Buttimer Institute experience.¹⁹ But not everyone will. Some folks will thrive with an LSJI experience.²⁰ But not everyone will. Some folks are really intrigued by De La Salle's life journey and want to know a lot more. Others are just fine with the broad strokes they receive at a Lasallian mission orientation.²¹ Some folks would love to lead a small group discussion at the next formation activity in their school. Others prefer to simply be part of the group.

How do we know which formation is best for whom? By getting to know them! Whatever formation program is provided, I suggest that it is important to operate from a few important assumptions.

First, no one comes to us as a blank slate. Each person brings experience, background—in a word, a story—with them to our schools. As noted above, it is important to do what we can to get to know a bit of each person's story to better discern ways to help them find their place in our educational community.

Second, good will must always be assumed. In other words, we must assume that each person is doing what they can to respond to the expectations of the Lasallian mission. When they struggle, it's not that they are resistant; rather, they just need some assistance or even just someone willing to walk with them and “see” them as they find their way into the community.

2.6 Formation Is Integrative

Formation involves learning and doing. Formation involves reflection and action. Formation involves the head, the heart, the soul, and the hands. Formation is intellectual. Formation is emotional. Formation involves our whole selves.

Integrating is a very personal task. We lay the foundation, we extend the invitation, we provide the time, the space, and a few good questions. We do so in as engaging and appealing a manner as possible. Then it is up to the individual to take what has been offered and begin to apply it to themselves and their own work in a way that makes sense to them and in a way that utilizes their

own particular gifts, talents, and “areas” (math, science, basketball, counseling, finance, attendance, etc.).²²

2.7 Formation Takes Place in Community

It is one thing to read a book on one’s own; it is totally another to read it with others and discuss it along the way. It is one thing to watch an inspirational video about a Brother; it is totally another to view it with others and talk about it with one another. It is true that we enrich ourselves through our own private study and prayer—and that is so important—but we know that as educators such study can be amplified and deepened when engaged in as part of a supportive educational community. Formation happens best when it takes place within a community of Lasallian educators.²³

2.8 Formation Develops a Particular Spirituality

Our Lasallian spirituality is rooted in our realization that we are, always and everywhere, in the holy presence of God.²⁴ Our spirituality is an educational spirituality. It is lived out, and it is applied, in an educational setting.

John Baptist de La Salle, a committed Catholic priest, responded enthusiastically and creatively to God’s call to serve through education. It is no surprise that our spirituality is a Christian spirituality in the Catholic faith tradition. Yet, Lasallian spirituality welcomes those from other faith traditions—or from no faith tradition—and invites them to find connections between the Lasallian Catholic spirituality that drives the school and their own faith traditions or their own human values. Remember. When really understood, all Gospel values are, in fact, human values.

2.9 Formation Presents the Founding Charismatic Event as a Source of Inspiration and Discernment

Our founding story and vision drives us. We know this because we have, in all probability, been introduced to this story and vision at least once, likely many times. It is a story and vision with many layers and with stories within the story, with beliefs and values and guiding principles that have coalesced over time as we, and many others, have lived our way into this tradition.²⁵

Lasallian documents today speak of the importance of *creative fidelity* to our founding story, of being faithful to the original inspiration in a way that is responsive to the needs and realities of our time. This requires an ever-deeper knowledge and understanding of the founding story, an ever-deeper knowledge and understanding of our contemporary situation, and a dialogue between the two.

Some “translation” is almost always required.²⁶ Assisting our colleagues in better knowing, understanding, and applying the elements of our Lasallian story and vision to today’s realities and needs is some of the most important formation work we can do.²⁷ And as we do this, we need to remain focused on the essential elements of “Lasallian” education, rooted in the Gospel and in our founding story, in a way that makes sense and can be readily applied to our educational ministry with one another and with students in the twenty-first century.

2.10 Formation Is Lifelong

Formation never ends. We can and should assure that all people hired to serve in our Lasallian ministries receive a thorough and engaging orientation to Lasallian mission. But that's not the end. We need to revisit our foundational principles, practices, beliefs, and values. We need to let experience dialogue with the story; we need to spiral back to the foundational aspects of Lasallian identity in creative ways so that our colleagues have the opportunity to integrate them more deeply into their lives and practice.²⁸

This is not just the responsibility of Lasallian formators. It is not just the responsibility of the formation team at the local level. It is the responsibility of each of us, our teams, our District, our Region, and our International Lasallian Family. Together, we form ourselves and one another, deepening our roots in Lasallian tradition and strengthening our commitment to our Lasallian vocation and extending our reach to touch the hearts and minds of young people everywhere! It never ends.

3. Advice for Lasallian Formators

While reflecting on the preceding ten principles of formation, I began to wonder: “What if I were to write my own *MEL Bulletin 51*? What would my principles look like?” To be honest, I like the list of formation principles as presented and discussed in *MEL Bulletin 51*. I like them a lot. But once I finished putting my own words to those ten principles, something nagged at me. Something was missing. The more I sat with this nagging, empty feeling, a thought began to take shape. I began a list of some ideas or “advice” about Lasallian formation from my own lived experience and perspective as a Lasallian formator. On the next few pages, you will find what I came up with as “advice” I want to share with other Lasallian formators. I do so in the hope that others find these additional ideas helpful in their own formative journey as well as in their efforts in forming others in the Lasallian charism.

3.1 Start with the Low-Hanging Fruit

When building a local formation plan, we must admit that we cannot do everything at once. We build a plan, a program, one step at a time. Culture takes time to build. As it is said, Rome was not built in a day and the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Have you ever wondered why we have so many different ways to express how important it is to take things slowly? Perhaps because that is often how programs grow best, and this is something about which we need to be reminded often!

Beginning with necessary tasks—such as assuring that a kind of “mission orientation” for new teachers and staff is provided on an annual basis—makes great sense. This is a real need every year and deserves our best attention.²⁹ More experienced Lasallians can assist in these orientations; and the ongoing involvement of Lasallian formators with these orientations is an opportunity for us to come to know our newest Lasallian educators.

Lasallian formators can build on this mission orientation in a variety of ways: (a) checking in with new employees on a regular basis; (b) revisiting core elements of the Lasallian story and vision periodically with new folks (especially in the first year); and (c) assisting new employees as they endeavor to apply core Lasallian principles to their daily work.³⁰ I encourage all Lasallian formators to attend to this task. If you do not have the time for anything else, make time for our newest Lasallians.

But what about our more experienced teachers, staff, and administrators? My advice is to pay attention to people who are particularly intrigued or drawn to the Lasallian story, folks who find natural connections between the story and their own lives, beliefs, and values. Engage them! Invite them to be a small group leader at faculty/staff retreats. Invite them to speak to the entire faculty/staff during formation sessions. Invite them to be part of a reading and discussion group on a current Institute document. Invite them to join the local formation team! Talk with school leaders about inviting these folks to participate in District or Regional formation activities (workshops, Johnston Institute,³¹ Buttimer Institute, LSJI, Discerning Leaders,³² etc.).

3.2 Little by Little, Step by Step

Let's continue on this theme of taking things slowly. We do not have to do everything at once. Breaking topics up into bite-sized chunks works not only in the classroom with students, but also works well with adult formation. For multi-faceted topics (such as the five core principles, the twelve virtues of a good educator, or our founding story), it might be a good idea to provide an initial overview of all elements of the topic to provide the "big picture" related to the topic. After that, it may make good sense to circle back to each element of the topic in separate sessions. This will allow formators to go into greater depth on a topic and allow significant time for participant reflection, writing, discussion, and asking questions. Some examples may help here.

First, regarding our founding story, get to know the story well enough that you can begin to see different aspects of it that can become smaller, more focused formation activities. For example, formators might create a session focused on the "educational community" that emerged and resulted in the first teachers with De La Salle choosing to call themselves "Brothers." This could lead to a rich discussion about the current educational community at the teacher's ministry. Another session might be created on the theme of "vocational journey," focusing on De La Salle's experience of "one commitment leading to another." This could lead to further consideration on one's own vocational journey as it continues to unfold. A third session could be created that focuses on the women who played important roles in the founding story. This could lead to a rich discussion about the important roles played by women in our own lives and in the lives of our own educational communities. These are just a few possibilities. Many others abound. Be creative!

Second, regarding our Lasallian core principles,³³ they are five; but they are also one reality, a "constellation" of core values. Provide an overview of them all so that everyone has a common introduction to them. Later, address them one at a time. Again, such a focus allows time for focused input and focused conversation. As previously stated, always be on the lookout for opportunities to build concrete connections between the ideals contained in the core principles

and the day-to-day experience of educators and students. Always seek to apply the ideals to the lived experience of our colleagues.

Third, regarding the twelve virtues of a good educator,³⁴ after providing some background on them as a whole, address the virtues one at a time at monthly faculty/staff meetings. Such an approach allows time for focused input and focused conversation on each virtue. These virtues have an uncanny ability to stimulate storytelling, as colleagues are invited to reflect on their own experience of each virtue. Make it inspiring, and make it real!

3.3 Utilize the Wisdom Already Present in Your Community

Most likely, there are colleagues in the school community who are well-formed Lasallians. Do we Lasallian formators know who in our educational community is a Buttimer Institute graduate? A Johnston Institute graduate? An LLI graduate?³⁵ An LSJI participant? We should look for ways to tap into their knowledge and insights in ways that are doable for them and helpful for the entire educational community. For example, well-formed colleagues could be invited to serve as discussion group leaders for monthly “virtues” sessions where faculty and staff are divided into mixed discussion groups.

Every educational community is a rich mix of experience. Some educators are in their first year of professional work in a school; others are in their thirtieth year as a Lasallian educator; others fall somewhere in between the two. When planning formation activities, mix discussion groups up so that each group contains people from across the spectrum of experience. Sometimes, having people sit with their coworkers by department or office makes sense. But many other times, it helps to have a group seeded with some veteran educators and some less experienced educators. Other times, mixing up groups is a great way to help folks to get to know each other as they converse with teachers, staff, and administrators with whom they would not normally have a conversation.

Each educational community also has some very well-formed students. Think of those students who have some experience of Lasallian formation through their participation in student programs.³⁶ Which students can be immediately identified as “on fire” with the Lasallian charism? Might it be helpful for our colleagues to hear students reflect on their experience of Lasallian mission? Might students be invited to reflect on their experience of one of our Lasallian core principles? Once again, possibilities abound.

3.4 Patience Is a Must

By all means, be patient. Each Lasallian formator is asked to engage in a process of growing a program of Lasallian mission formation locally. This process takes time and is built slowly. If formators think about any number of strong programs at their own school and do some digging to learn about how each program began, they’ll understandably see that most programs began small and grew incrementally, year after year. Be patient. Not everything is going to work perfectly the first time through, despite our best efforts. Be patient with the other members of the local formation team. People need time and experience to grow more confident in their role as members of the local formation team.

Also, be patient with school leaders. In my many years leading this initiative on the District level, it is clear to me that school leaders fully support and recognize the need for enhanced Lasallian formation locally. However, they are juggling many different priorities at the same time, and they have varying levels of experience with formation activities. Keep them in the loop. I will have more to say on the importance of your relationship with school leaders later. For now, let the voice of my mother echo in your head as it continues to do in my own: “Patience is a virtue.”

3.5 Persistence Is Also a Must

While patience is indeed a virtue, it must be paired with the virtue of persistence. Be persistent with yourself. Try to do some reading or study related to the Lasallian charism each week. Participate in District or Regional formation opportunities as your schedule allows. The Covid pandemic has taught us how to gather virtually for stimulating conversations on Lasallian topics. See if you can find time to participate in a few of these virtual conversations as they come up.

Be persistent with your team. Keep encouraging them, affirming incremental progress, walking with them as they grow in their confidence and competence in Lasallian formation. Be sure to schedule regular meetings and include community-building activities as part of the dynamic. The better teams know one another, the better they will work together as a team. Debrief after formation activities, affirming what went well, trouble-shooting those things that could use improvement.

Be persistent with school leaders. Keep affirming them for their support of local Lasallian formation and for their support of you as a Lasallian formator. Keep talking with them about your experience of leading formation on the local level. Keep advocating for time, space, and funds for mission formation. More on this relationship below.

Be persistent with the invitations you extend. People often say “no” for good reasons. Perhaps it’s not the right time in one’s life for something as intensive as the Brother John Johnston Institute. So invite them to something less time-consuming (for example, a Huether Conference).³⁷ Do they perhaps need more information about a program you are recommending for them? If this is the case, then provide them with more information. Would it help if they heard from someone who has already done what you are inviting them to do? If so, then invite a graduate from a formation program to talk with the person you are inviting to participate.

Be persistent with your messaging. Be creative! As has been said many times in the past few years, there are lots of ways to keep mission in front of folks. Daily quotes in the morning announcements, core principles posters on bulletin boards, discussion of a Lasallian theme in a school president’s monthly newsletter to parents, half-day or full-day retreats at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Lots of possibilities exist for keeping the Lasallian charism on people’s minds and in their hearts. Don’t be afraid to try something new.

3.6 Engage Leaders in Regular Conversation about the Work of Formation

Administrators have invited you to take on this task of local Lasallian formation; but do not make the mistake of assuming that, because a person is a school leader, they are an expert on Lasallian mission formation. Also, do not presume that they are mind-readers capable of always being aware of all that formators are doing with regard to Lasallian mission formation. Keep administrators informed of the things you are doing. Keep them informed of the challenges you are facing. Keep them informed of the ideas that are emerging. Keep them informed about your needs and the needs of the school community and how they can help address those needs (such as special schedules, calendaring, budgeting, and invitations to District and Regional formation programs).

Be open. Listen as much, if not more than, you speak. What challenges are vexing your school principal with regard to local formation? Are there budgetary considerations that need discussion? Does the thought of building a special schedule to allow time for regular mission formation seem totally impossible? Listen, listen, listen. The more you get to know one another, the better you will be able to work together as you grow your local formation program. Strategic priorities begin to emerge with regular conversation. Consider scheduling a regular check-in time. Once a month? Thirty minutes? Sixty minutes?

3.7 Build Trust

Formation programs by their very nature can be intimidating to some people in a school community. The word “formation” might imply “faith” to some folks, and perhaps they keep their faith close to their vest and would rather keep that to themselves. The word “formation” to others might imply “indoctrination.” This can definitely be intimidating, raising questions like, “What are they trying to turn me into?” “Will I have to change how I teach my class?” “Do I have a choice in how I interpret some of the core principles?” You will have to be clear with your colleagues about what the formation activities are about. Start small and deliver on what you promise. Be responsive to questions, observations, suggestions. Early successes lead to the establishment of momentum, setting the stage for more and deeper formation. Get to know your colleagues. This will help you target invitations that are appropriate and effective.

3.8 Presume Everybody Brings Something to the Table and Engage That Something

The first rule of adult education is this: Everyone brings experience and a story to the table. Engage that experience! Create opportunities for folks to tell their stories. This is how community is built and how connections are made. Social gatherings can be very helpful places for some initial sharing to take place. Hearing the stories of others is also very helpful to you as a formator, as you then have the opportunity to help individuals “connect the dots” between their own stories and the larger Lasallian story and vision. Care must be taken not to be too intrusive with the questions asked of colleagues. The goal is to create time and space to allow folks to casually visit with one another and gradually form relationships with others in the school community and with the Lasallian charism.

Always be on the lookout for opportunities to connect elements of Lasallian mission with the very concrete, practical things educators do on a daily basis that make them effective educators. This can be transformative, especially for someone who has, for whatever reason, an aversion to “Lasallian formation.” I recall meeting a veteran classroom teacher at a formation event many years ago who explained to me that, for a long time, he had no appetite for or desire to participate in “Lasallian formation” because he was just fine the way he was and did not want to be “indoctrinated.” However, he was willing to be a “team player” and participate in a nominal way in the formation provided at his school. As he reflected about his approach to teaching, about his relationship with students, about what he thought was most important in his teaching work, and about why he was a teacher, his self-understanding grew. As he learned about the Lasallian story and vision, he began to see connections between Lasallian core values and his own core values. Over time, it became clear to him that what he was doing was, in fact, “Lasallian.” Here is how he expressed it to me: “When I was a young teacher, I would tell people that I teach social studies. Now I tell them that I teach students. To me, that is the core of Lasallian education!”

Here is another way to approach this piece of advice. As you are breaking open certain elements of Lasallian mission, look for exemplars in the community, educators who so naturally and so effectively live that cultural marker. For example, say you are leading a formation session on the virtue of generosity. At some point, ask your colleagues to reflect quietly, to themselves, for a moment: “Who is the most generous person in our school community? Think of an example of her/his generosity that you have either witnessed or heard about.” After a minute or two, ask people to get in groups of four to tell stories about the “icons of generosity” in their school community. Then, call everyone back together and open the floor for stories. This is a powerful community-building activity, and it is a wonderful shot in the arm for those icons!

3.9 Take Care of Yourself

Please, please, please practice self-care. This could take many forms. Engage in ongoing formation for yourself (Buttimer Institute? Johnston Institute? Discerning Leaders Program? LSJI? Huether Conference?). Keep inviting others to participate in this important formation work. Don’t go it alone. Make it easy for others to say “yes” to the invitations they receive by asking them to do something that you know they’d be great at; tThen you’ll be more likely to hear someone say, “Sure, I can do that!” Pray! Feed your relationship with God through regular prayer. Stay in touch with others involved with mission formation. Take advantage of every opportunity to gather, whether it be virtually or in person. Don’t hesitate to reach out to a colleague or to one of the folks who work at District level. Look for opportunities to share the formation activities you create with others, perhaps even at a breakout session at a Huether Conference or at a District workshop. Such experiences can be powerful formation experiences for you.

3.10 Enjoy the Ride

So those are the nine ideas or pieces of advice that I came up with from my own experience when I was preparing these remarks; but then someone with whom I was sharing my plans strongly suggested that I add one more piece of advice to make it an even ten. After all, *MEL*

Bulletin 51 had ten principles. Why shouldn't I also have ten pieces of advice to share? And so here, by way of conclusion, is a final (tenth) piece of advice I offer to all who are Lasallian formators: *Enjoy the ride!*

4. Conclusion

De La Salle once chided a Brother for “having a face that looked like a prison door.”³⁸ The work we do can be exhausting. It requires a lot of us, often on top of many other responsibilities at work and at home. However, remind yourself periodically how fortunate you are to be part of this beautiful mission. Somehow, somehow, you found your way into the Lasallian Family; and you have become so enamored with it that you are now, as a Lasallian formator, sharing its story, its values, its challenges, and its beauty with others. Let that excitement show in your face. Enjoy telling the story! Enjoy opportunities to break open this charism for others. After all, Lasallian mission is meant to be celebrated and shared.

And, by all means, do not miss the opportunity on a regular basis, perhaps even daily, to thank God for drawing you into this work imperceptibly, little by little and step by step, in such a way that one commitment has led you to another³⁹ until you found yourself leading for mission. Imagine that!

¹ This paper was originally prepared with a specific audience in mind: Lasallian Partners and Brothers of the District of San Francisco New Orleans involved in local Lasallian mission formation efforts.

² Gregory Kopra has until recently served as director of formation for mission in the District of San Francisco New Orleans of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He earned his doctorate in education from the University of San Francisco and is a long-time presenter at the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies.

³ In RELAN, there are currently four Districts: Eastern North America (DENA), Francophone Canada, Midwest, and San Francisco New Orleans (SFNO).

⁴ The reference here is to a number of gatherings in the District of the San Francisco New Orleans; but by extension, the remarks go out to so many in the Lasallian educational network concerned with the matter of Lasallian formation for mission. A conversational tone has deliberately been kept throughout the paper.

⁵ *MEL Bulletin 51: Formation for the Lasallian Mission: A Common Frame of Reference* (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2014), www.lasalle.org.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pages 9-14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 3, sections 3.1 to 3.4.

⁸ In *Will to Manage: Corporate Success through Programmatic Management* (McGraw-Hill, 1966), Marvin Bower described culture as “the way we do things around here.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 9, section 5.1.1.

¹⁰ Cf. *The Lasallian Mission of Human & Christian Education: A Shared Mission* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997) and *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2020).

¹¹ Cf. *The Lasallian Charism*, by the International Council for Lasallian Studies, translated by Aidan Patrick Marron, FSC (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2006).

¹² Ibid., page 10, section 5.2.1.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., page 10, section 5.3.2.

¹⁵ Cf. *Bulletin 250: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2005).

¹⁶ Ibid., page 11, sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2.

¹⁷ Ibid., page 11, section 5.5.1.

¹⁸ Ibid., page 11, section 5.5.3.

¹⁹ The Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies is an intensive three-year Lasallian education and formation program of the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN) that studies the life, work, and spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Lasallian educational mission. Through an examination of the writings of De La Salle and an analysis of some modern authors, participants develop a deeper understanding of the Lasallian heritage and its influence on contemporary education and spirituality.

²⁰ The Lasallian Social Justice Institute (LSJI) is a week-long formation program of RELAN based on the Gospel and our Lasallian vocation to the promotion of social justice and service to the poor.

²¹ While mission orientation programs vary around the Districts of RELAN, the office of education of the District of San Francisco New Orleans (SFNO) offers a pre-service program called the Lasallian Mission Orientation Program that provides a half-day orientation for new personnel at each school in the District. The orientation includes an introduction to the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and to the foundational Lasallian educational principles and terminology, as well as an orientation to SFNO, RELAN, and the international Institute.

²² Cf. *Bulletin 250: Associated for the Lasallian Educational*, pages 12-13.

²³ Ibid., page 12, sections 5.7.1 and 5.7.2.

²⁴ Ibid., page 13, section 5.8.3.

²⁵ Ibid., page 14, section 5.9.1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ To assist formators to do this well, the District of San Francisco New Orleans has developed resources like the “Lasallian Core Principles Retreat Facilitator’s Guide” and the “Twelve Virtues of a Good Educator Facilitator’s Guide.”

²⁸ *Bulletin 250: Associated for the Lasallian Educational*, page 14, sections 5.10.1 and 5.10.2.

²⁹ This initial formation is so important that my own District’s office of education provides the first step in the process by providing a common orientation to Lasallian mission on a school’s campus each year, facilitated by the District’s director of formation for mission.

³⁰ This can be a very helpful step in the process of integration of Lasallian themes. One way to accomplish this is by leading a mid-year retreat focused on the Lasallian core principles for your new employees.

³¹ The Brother John Johnson Institute of Contemporary Lasallian Practice (JJI) is a two-year formation program of RELAN that focuses on deepening participants’ understanding of Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s story and vision, Lasallian pedagogy, and the Lasallian promotion of

justice and Lasallian spirituality while utilizing contemporary texts to inform and influence current and future Lasallian practice.

³² The Discerning Leaders Program is a formation program of the District of San Francisco New Orleans (SFNO) that aims to help selected educators from across the District to discern their talent, interest, and aptitude to serve as a principal or president for one of the secondary schools of the District.

³³ Cf. Gregory Kopra, “Reflections on Five Core Principles That Help Guide Lasallian Education,” *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 11, no. 2 (2020): 15-27.

³⁴ Cf. Agathon Gonlieu, FSC, *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, translated by Gerard Rummery, FSC (Washington, DC: Chrisitan Brothers Conference, 2008).

³⁵ The Lasallian Leadership Institute (LLI) was a formation program of RELAN that preceded and has been replaced by the Brother John Johnson Institute of Contemporary Lasallian Practice (JJI).

³⁶ What about students who have just experienced a Lasallian Youth Assembly or a vocation retreat?

³⁷ The Huether Lasallian Conference is an annual gathering of educators in RELAN. Location and theme change each year with a focus on relevant and innovative educational issues. All faculty and staff of Lasallian ministries are welcome to attend. Through a thoughtful blend of keynote addresses, panel presentations, breakout sessions, and prayer services, scholars from within and outside the Lasallian tradition are invited to present on matters pertaining to each year’s theme.

³⁸ Cf. “Letter 96,” in *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, translated by Colman Molloy, FSC (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988), page 215.

³⁹ Cf. Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Book 1, edited by Luke Salm, FSC, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000), page 80.