

Transformative Collaboration toward a Raised Awareness of Lasallian Research

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Introduction

From September 21 to 23, 2018, more than 70 researchers representing 17 universities, two high schools, and five organizations from nine countries around the world gathered in Minneapolis at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota to share their research with more than 120 participants at the International Symposium on Lasallian Research. Keynote addresses were delivered by Brother Louis DeThomasis,⁴ Carmelita Quebengco,⁵ and Brother Cristhian Diaz⁶; and these were followed by a number of large and small breakout sessions, some of which will be referenced here.

Keynote Presentations

On "From Chaos to Ethical Clarity: The Quest for Lasallian Higher Education in Today's Global Society"

Brother Louis DeThomasis began the symposium with his inspiring talk titled, "From Chaos to Ethical Clarity: The Quest for Lasallian Higher Education in Today's Global Society" in which he challenged participants to respond to the changing often chaotic times. Brother Louis' talk encouraged all to reflect upon the actions and potential power we all hold, recognizing the world has recently undergone rapid transformation. He issued a call for the community, as Lasallians, to be at the center of these paradigm-changing times, meeting people wherever they might be. His core reflections segued to the identification of five suggestions to break open directions for Lasallian research, including to:

1. Foster and nurture ethical principles and applications that can be universally acceptable in a diverse and pluralistic world.
2. Embrace a commitment to seek a prophetic role that responds to the new wave of power humans possess in a transformed understanding of what our God-given domain and power of Creation are in today's world.
3. Explore, search and discover new ethical economic principles that demonstrate that business profits when people and the environment profit.
4. To conceive, shape, generate and design a new human synthesis that responds to today's world and leads us toward a creative interpretation of Christianity by becoming "Creators," "Enablers," and "Networkers" of strategies and actions acceptable in today's diverse and pluralistic world of competing values.

5. Create specialized Lasallian institutes to raise global awareness of Lasallian research, seeking grants from interested foundations and make our research applicable and replicable for other entities to apply to real-life problems and situations.

After Brother Louis' thought-provoking initiation of ideas, subsequent keynote speakers expanded on his ideas and conference-goers had plentiful opportunities to engage with Lasallian counterparts from around the world.

On “Conversation on Cross Institutional Research Partnerships in IALU”

The second day of the symposium started with a talk by *Carmelita Quebengco*. The presentation first provided some metrics highlighting the global presence of Lasallian schools and a summary of the International Association of Lasallian Universities' (IALU) mission and goals. Next, some initiatives for IALU's research were discussed. One such initiative is to expand the scope of research from the current topics of food, nutrition and health, sustainability and the environment, and education and learning innovations to any topic provided it responds to Lasallian Challenges posted in Institute *Circular 470*. Another proposed initiative is making the research base more accessible, possibly through starting an e-book or an IALU magazine. Challenges such as making the proposed publication competitive amongst specialized research journals were pointed out. The engagement of students in the research was also stressed. At the end of the talk, Dr. Quebengco held a discussion with the audience about possible ways to encourage research in IALU and collaborations between IALU universities.

On “Making Peace Possible: Grassroots Peacebuilding Leaders”

Sunday's keynote speaker was *Brother Cristhian Diaz* from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota delivering his talk “Making peace possible: grassroots peacebuilding leaders” related to his doctorate thesis. After a brief introduction to Columbia, Brother Cristhian described current challenges associated with the longest armed conflict in the western hemisphere. As part of his doctorate study, Brother Cristhian investigated the role of grassroots leaders in the peace process by conducting 15 interviews with peace leaders. It was determined that these grassroots leaders influence the peace process in three areas: generating the social, political and formative conditions for peace and freedom; inspiring a sense of hope, belonging, and identity among their community members; taking actions from bringing about the personal, social, and political transformation. Brother Cristhian also discussed the role of Lasallians in the peace process at both individual and organizational levels.

The technical portion of the symposium was concluded by seven round table discussion on the following topics which had emerged in the three-day symposium: how is “Lasallianism” lived and manifested, developing the capacity to support the mission, inclusive education in all contexts, creating a Lasallian digital repository, Lasallian retreats for women, creating organizational structures for collaboration, and supporting coffee growers. In these sessions, participants collaborated to reflect and build on their symposium experiences and take back to their home universities and organizations.

Large Breakout Sessions

On “Lasallian Research in our Tercentenary Year”

*Brother Diego Muñoz*⁷ continued the discussion of research focusing on the state of Lasallian studies, which includes life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the first Brothers, and the history of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Brother Diego stressed the importance of such work, which is vital to understanding the impact of the John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers on education in the western world. Brother Diego also discussed ideas for the future of Lasallian research and proposed three initiatives. First is the creation of an inter-university structure or organization to enhance networking in this research field. Second is the creation of an agenda and a joint itinerary to enhance efficient collaboration between institutions. Lastly, Brother Diego proposed the creation of a platform to publish research results in the field.

On “Global Women’s Symposium: New Wine into Old Wineskins?”

*Maryann Donohue-Lynch*⁸ and *Alisa Macksey*⁹ shared information on the Global Women’s Symposium and women in the Lasallian community. They shared that though women represent the majority of those engaged in Lasallian mission (57%), overall women are underrepresented at various levels of the organization, and often less visible in leadership positions. Ms. Donohue-Lynch and Ms. Macksey highlighted some of the ongoing gender disparities in the field, addressing recommendations to move toward gender parity. For example, Global Women’s Symposiums have been increasingly important, supportive gatherings of those committed to ensuring inclusivity, a collective Lasallian voice, and gender parity at all levels. At the most recent symposium, held in New Zealand in 2017, symposium resolutions focused on the establishment of a truly representative International Lasallian Women’s Council which would engage and collaborate with regional groups while communicating experiences with the full and inclusive Lasallian community – involving both women and men, global and regional connections, young and older Lasallians, addressing short and long-term needs, virtually and traditional to inform, engage and include all Lasallians.

Small Breakout Sessions

Throughout the afternoon, attendees had opportunities to attend several concurrent sessions in four research themes: innovation in education, health care, environment and sustainability, and food and nutrition, led by presenters from across the Lasallian networks. Fifty-three presenters shared insights on 27 different education-related presentations. Fifteen presenters held 13 sessions related to environment and sustainability, while four presented in three different sessions related to food nutrition, health and health care, as well as a panel with two presentations on Lasallian workplace spirituality. An ongoing theme in many of the presentations was sharing collaborative research practices and spreading some of the positive Lasallian work happening around the world.

On Research Theme: “Environment and Sustainability”

Specifically, in the environment and sustainability sessions, the talks ranged from technical presentations to showcasing programs associated with sustainability and the environment.

In a technical group presentation, *Froylán Albarrán Tamayo*¹⁰ and his student, *Edna Lopez Quinones*, delivered a talk on an experimental study of agricultural sustainability and animal welfare. In their study, animals’ stress levels were quantified by measuring cortisol levels in the hairs of farm cows. The study focused on correlating the stress levels cows experience with various weather factors such as temperature, humidity, wind speed, and temperature fluctuations.

An environmental research specialist, *Monika Vadali*,¹¹ presented a project, started in December 2017, involving an experimental study measuring the air pollutants locally in the Minnesota urban area. Dr. Vadali described the conventional weather monitoring stations as expensive and sophisticated compounds. The cost of each station and some regulatory requirements limit their ability to collect local information on air pollution with fine geographic resolution. Therefore, cheaper sensors were acquired by the agency, allowing more installations around the city to measure pollutants locally. Currently there are six stations in the field around the Twin Cities area and 18 more locations have been approved.

*Yelda Balkir*¹² presented her experimental study on converting solid waste to energy. Her work focused on using the concepts of Green Chemistry to produce biodiesel from various oils, including camelina oil, algae oil, and even oil from used coffee grounds. Dr. Balkir explained that conventionally in the process of creating diesel, a highly-toxic catalyst is used. To produce biodiesel in an environmentally-friendly process, her research group eliminated the highly toxic catalyst and used non-toxic sources such as seashells and eggshells to the same effect.

A comprehensive conservation effort was presented by *Romeo G. Teruel*.¹³ He delivered a talk on the conservation and management enhancement of Irrawaddy dolphin habitats. These animals have a red list status in the International Union for Conservation of Nature. To protect them, Dr. Teruel described efforts which include the establishment and expansion of marine protection areas, creating a managing board, and formulating a management plan. Presently, one marine protection area has been approved and the expansion of current areas has been proposed.

The technical presentations in the environment and sustainability session were also accompanied by showcasing organizations that educate society and implement environmentally friendly initiatives. *Nathalie Cruz Mora*,¹⁴ talked about Eco-Lasalle, a group that developed by combining ecology with Lasallian philosophy. Eco-Lasalle educates students on various sustainability topics including biodiversity, water, energy, and plastics recycling through a series of workshops.

Bienvenido C. Eusebio,¹⁵ described Life, a parent program which was developed in 1999. Life started various organizations which include: Watershed Management, One Million Trees and Beyond, Lasallian Earth Day, La Salle Botanical Garden, Lasallian Eco-Camp, Safe and Green Schools, and Project Carbon Neutral. Bienvenido summarized the accomplishments of each program. For example, members from One Million Trees and Beyond planted 1,392,637 trees in

the Philippines as of 2017 and the La Salle Botanical Garden secured land for development into a botanical garden.

On Research Theme: “Innovation in Education”

In the innovation in education strand, a wide variety of examples of collaborative innovations at Lasallian universities from around the world were showcased.

A “super session” included four panels whose projects synthesized into a strong representation of the innovations in Lasallian education service learning. *Dennis Clark*¹⁶ shared information on the intersection of positive leader development and service learning. In a session titled, “The Lasallian Mission in Action: Faculty Immersion Experience on the USA-Mexico Border” led by *Myrna Santiago* and *Michael Barram*,¹⁷ presenters shared their experiences with faculty immersion programs introduced to move toward transforming the culture of the college. Specifically, they shared information on a faculty trip to the San Diego-Tijuana border as a way to better understand contemporary migration issues. *Heidimarie Rambo* and *Nick van Santen*¹⁸ expanded on the experience through reflecting on “Developing Mission-Driven Immersion Experiences for Adult Learners,” sharing logistics of the trip and experience, and reflecting on lessons learned including the need for developing trust through immersion. *Erica Kwiatkowski*¹⁹ shared information on the influence of service learning on the formation of prospective teacher’s Lasallian identity.

Shawna Bu Shell, *Mohab El-Hakim*, and *Mary Michel*²⁰ co-presented on “The Colombian Connection: Exploring Academic Innovative Collaborative Opportunities between Lasallian Colleges.” They shared experiences of a Lasallian faculty educational trip to Universidad La Salle in Bogotá, Colombia, reflecting on collaborative experiences within the Lasallian community. Each presenter shared examples of the unique projects they were involved with through the experience, including international course collaboration, international exchanges, and highway and pavement engineering.

Conclusion

Throughout the three-day period, inspiring new ideas were shared, visions created, and relationships established. One ongoing theme that emerged from the seventh annual International Symposium on Lasallian Research was the analogy first introduced in Brother Louis’ keynote presentation, the burning candlelight under a bushel basket. Though there may be a brightly burning candle of the Lasallian community, if a bushel basket is placed over it, the candlelight is not spread beyond the confines of the basket. This analogy was referred back to by many presenters throughout the three days, often in reference to sharing the great work that is being done in the Lasallian community and spreading access to those outside of this community as well. All are encouraged to continue to engage in and share research that contributes to furthering the Lasallian research field. Everyone is invited to join the next International Symposium on Lasallian Research, which will be held in September 2019 at the campus of Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Endnotes

1. Notes from the seventh annual International Symposium on Lasallian Research, co-sponsored by the Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and the Office for Lasallian Education of the Region of Lasallian North America.
2. Oleg Goushcha is an Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Manhattan College in New York. He received his master's degree from University of California, Irvine in Aerospace Engineering and a PhD from The City College of New York. His teaching is teaching subjects related to and conducting research in the field of experimental fluid mechanics.
3. Shannon Tanghe is the Program Director of the Master of Arts in ESL (English as a Second Language) department at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Shannon spent sixteen years teaching in South Korea before joining Saint Mary's in 2016. She received a PhD from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
4. Brother Louis DeThomasis, FSC, PhD, of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, USA.
5. Carmelita Quebengco, AFSC, PhD, of De La Salle University of Manila, Philippines.
6. Brother Cristhian Diaz, FSC, EdD, of La Salle University of Bogotá, Colombia.
7. Brother Diego Muñoz, FSC, PhD, of Casa Generalizia of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome, Italy.
8. Maryann Donohue-Lynch, MA, of the District of Eastern North America, USA.
9. Alisa Macksey, MA, of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, USA.
10. Froylán Albarrán Tamayo, DVM, PhD, from Universidad De La Salle in Bajío, Mexico.
11. Monika Vadali, PhD, from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, USA.
12. Yelda Balkir, PhD, from Manhattan College in New York, USA.
13. Romeo G. Teruel, PhD, from the University of Saint La Salle in Bacolod City, Philippines.
14. Nathalie Cruz Mora, MA, from Universidad La Salle in San José, Costa Rica.

15. Bienvenido C. Eusebio, AFSC, PhD, from De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines.

16. Dr. Dennis Clark, PhD, from Christian Brothers University in Tennessee, USA.

17. Myrna Santiago, PhD, and Michael Barram, PhD, from Saint Mary's College of California, USA.

18. Heidimarie Rambo, PhD, and Nick van Santen, EdD, from Saint Mary's University of California, USA.

19. Erica Kwiatkowski, PhD, from Lewis University in Illinois, USA.

20. Shawna Bu Shell, EdD, Mohab El-Hakim, PhD, and Mary Michel, PhD, from Manhattan College in New York, USA.