

Brother Gus and Service of the Poor

Brother Philip Rofrano, FSC¹

The Early Years

On June 24, 1928, a fourteen year-old boy left his home in Detroit, Michigan, to begin a journey that would last for almost eighty-five years. Robert Anthony Loes entered St. Joseph's Normal Institute, also called the junior novitiate, in Pocantico Hills, New York. Little did young Robert realize that his journey would take him to become a formator of young Christian Brothers, a religious superior, a scholar, and most importantly for the purpose of this paper, to become a crusader and advocate for poor and marginalized youth. After completing his junior year at St. Joseph's, Robert entered the novitiate and took the habit of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and was given the name Brother Augustine Benedict. Brother Gus, as he later came to be known, described himself as a docile young man who was strongly inclined to obey his parents, and later to do what the Brothers expected of him. He described himself as a "scroup" (meaning very scrupulous and docile in following the Rule of the Brothers) throughout his year in the novitiate and subsequent three years in college at the Brothers' scholasticate.²

Brother Gus began his teaching career at Christian Brothers' Academy, Albany, New York in 1934. In two undated letters from his mother Mary, she gives the following advice: "Don't be satisfied just to teach, but be ambitious to get the most you have. You can be a 'salesman Brother' and work up to be the president of your firm. Don't be content to let George do it..." and regarding academic accomplishment, "Your marks don't count, it is your contact and guidance of the future generation that will repay the Brothers for their interest in you."³ Brother Gus later recalled a conversation he had with his mother who told him, regarding the time he left home, "Your father and I knew that you did not know what you were doing, but we did not know that God was calling you." Brother Gus went on to say that in all of his work, his most meaningful experience was counseling his young charges on the presence of God. He believed this flowed from the faith of his parents united to the faith of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁴

Following three years of teaching high school in Albany and New York City, Brother Gus was assigned to St. Joseph's Normal Institute, the junior novitiate or juniorate, which had relocated to Barrytown, New York, as teacher, then sub-director, and finally as director. It was during his time in Barrytown that Brother Gus stumbled on what he described as one of the greatest blessings of his life, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* by Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He saw the *Meditations* as a fresh introduction to the Founder, and corrected his image of him as a rigorous, even severe person whose spirituality was focused on one's relationship with God, but with no apostolic mission. He felt the *Meditations* revealed the founder as a person motivated by "the love of poor children, and the value of the work of a teacher." Since the English translation of the *Meditations* was published in 1884 and was out of print, Brother Gus set out to translate the *Meditations* from the original French publication. Before he was able to complete

the task, Brother Clair Stanislaus Battersby, an English Brother, published his translation in 1953. Brother Gus was able to work on an updated translation published by Christian Brothers Conference in 1994. He served at the juniorate until 1950, but spent 1946-47 at the second novitiate, a program conducted in Rome at the Brothers' Generalate.⁵

Lincoln Hall

Brother Gus found that the second novitiate, like his first one, emphasized the seventeenth-century French School of Spirituality, which focused on “annihilation of self,” or self-denial and mortification with no emphasis on the mission of the Institute. In this spirit, Brother Gus requested an assignment to St. Patrick's Orphanage in Halifax, Nova Scotia, not because of a concern for poor orphans, but in the spirit of self-denial, he requested the assignment because it was the “Siberia” of the New York District and nobody wanted to go there. Brother Victor Lally, the Visitor (Provincial) assigned Brother Gus to Lincoln Hall in Lincolndale, New York instead. Brother Gus later described his assignment to “the Hall” as a special blessing where he was able to work with poor youngsters who were assigned to the residential school by the Family or Juvenile Courts for delinquent or unmanageable behavior. He recalls that he was especially blessed in having his classmate, Brother Steve O'Hara, as the Director and described this experience and Brother Steve as his “third novitiate” when he learned the real mission of the Brothers and that service to the poor was what Saint John Baptist de La Salle had in mind when he established the Institute. Brother Gus spent a total of 13 years at Lincoln Hall, with the exception of 1954-55, which was spent in Washington, DC studying for a degree in clinical psychology at the Catholic University of America. He was appointed executive director of Lincoln Hall in 1956 and remained in that position until 1963. Brother Gus boasted that he knew all 200 students at the Hall by name, and that he chaired their intake conferences and the regular case conferences where the progress of each individual youth was discussed with him and the staff that worked with him. He also developed a deeper understanding of and an appreciation for the *Meditations*, which he used in weekly conferences with the Brothers. Brother Gus later commented that he learned more at Lincoln Hall, along with the importance of serving the poor he also recognized how a gifted group of men, the Brothers, applied their talent and energy in working with the young men entrusted to their care. He also appreciated the value of the lay partners who not only worked directly in the program, but also the wealthy men and women who contributed to the support of this special work.⁶

District Service

In 1963, Brother Leo Kirby, Visitor of the New York District, and Brother Joseph Finnegan, Visitor of the Long Island-New England District, appointed Brother Gus to be the director general of De La Salle College in Washington, DC, the joint scholasticate for the two Districts. There were over one hundred Brothers living there, including scholastics and faculty members doing graduate studies. Brother Gus had overall responsibility for the organization of the house, as well as serving as liaison with the two Districts and with the Catholic University of America, which the scholastics attended. In addition, he served as community director for two of the classes of scholastics. Brother Gus was director general during a time of transition both within the Catholic Church, a result of the Second Vatican Council, and in American society with the

Civil Rights Movement. Brother Gus and a number of scholastics attended the 1963 "March on Washington" when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I have a dream" speech.⁷

The Second Vatican Council required Religious Orders and Congregations return to their original charism in their apostolic activity, which for the Brothers of the Christian Schools is service to the poor through education. A General Chapter of the Brothers was held in Rome in 1966 and 1967 to enact legislation to synchronize the Institute with the requirements and teachings of the Second Vatican Council. During the first session of the chapter, Brother Leo Kirby was elected as an assistant superior general, and Brother Gus was appointed the Visitor of New York, and therefore an ex-officio delegate to the General Chapter. Brother Gus felt that it was his responsibility, given his experience at Lincoln Hall and the scholasticate, that due emphasis be given to service of the poor, as well as the concept of subsidiarity and personal responsibility in the lives of the Brothers.⁸ In preparation for his attendance at the General Chapter, Brother Gus wrote a position paper on service to the poor in early July 1967, as a response to another paper entitled the "Finality of the Institute." The paper was initially accepted by a meeting of the United States Visitors in Memphis later that month and by the Commission II of the General Chapter at their meeting a few days later in Montreal. The paper was sent to all of the New York District communities in August of that year. The paper addressed the following three areas:

- 1) Schools in poor parishes (where the majority are racial minorities): It is desirable to have a community of Brothers teaching in a poor parish school in every city where there is a tuition school.
- 2) The establishment of residential schools for youth without homes or in need of placement away from home.
- 3) Missionary schools in developing countries.

Additional recommendations included private government-funded schools for slum children whom public schools are finding it hard to educate due to a lack of competent or motivated personnel, and afterschool programs for teens to keep them off the streets.⁹ Brother Gus was disappointed that his plans to establish a government-funded school for poor children never materialized. He attempted a joint effort by contacting other religious congregations that sponsor schools, but was unable to develop a partnership. Another effort that went nowhere in developing programs for the poor was the formation of a committee of Brothers and lay educators from both the public and private sectors. Future Cardinal Theodore McCarrick was a member of this committee while he was working at the Archdiocese of New York. Brother Gus, probably unfairly, blames the failure of these initiatives on his own lack of leadership skill. As his second term as Visitor drew to a close in 1972, Brother Gus had several job offers. He was invited to do missionary work in Pakistan by the Visitor of that country, to be on the staff of the Sangre de Cristo Renewal Center in New Mexico, to be on the staff of the International Lasallian Center (CIL) in Rome, and to be executive director of La Salle School in Albany, New York. He stated that he only gave serious thought to the latter, and after consulting with the Superior General, Brother Charles Henry Buttimer, he went to Albany where he spent the next nine years serving poor and troubled at-risk boys in a residential school.¹⁰

The La Salle School Years

Brother Gus assumed the reins of La Salle School in what would prove to be a very challenging time for child welfare, juvenile justice, and La Salle School, as well as the other residential programs for children and youth in the state of New York. The first crisis began 150 miles south of La Salle School in the form of the 1975 New York City fiscal crisis. Governor Hugh Carey, who took office in January 1975, approved a state bailout for New York City, which came close to bankruptcy in spring 1975, and established the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) under the chairmanship of Felix Rohatyn. MAC was charged with restructuring city debt and overseeing its financial operations. However, as confidence in New York City's financial viability eroded, bonds issued by MAC lost value and the city came close to default on its debt again. It was widely believed at the time that a default by the city, whose bonds were sold throughout the world, would bring down at least 100 banks, and the state of New York would follow shortly into default. The city made plans to keep essential services running such as the police, the fire department, and hospitals while being unable to pay for other services such as education and social services. After an all-night negotiation on October 16, 1975, MAC Chairman Felix Rohatyn was able to convince Albert Shanker, president of the powerful United Federation of Teachers labor union, to invest \$150 million in city bonds from the teachers' pension fund. This gave the city, and by extension the state, a few more weeks of solvency.¹¹

The city requested a bailout from the Federal government, but on October 29th President Gerald Ford said he would veto any legislation to bailout New York City. This led the New York Daily News to print its famous headline of October 30th, "Ford to City: Drop Dead." Ford reversed himself a few weeks later and the Federal government provided the needed bailout. It is widely believed that Ford lost New York's 41 electoral votes and therefore the Presidency a year later due to that Daily News headline.

Although La Salle School did not contract with New York City to provide residential services to youth, the financial health of the state of New York and the many upstate counties that had contracts with La Salle also suffered. Per diem rates were frozen for several years, which made cost of living adjustments for staff impossible. This was compounded by the loss of the number of Brothers available to staff programs like La Salle, putting even more financial pressure on religious institutions dependent on government funding.

A second external challenge came once again from New York City in the form of a class action lawsuit "Wilder vs. Sugarman" instituted in June 1973, and not finally settled until 1999. The lawsuit alleged that religious child welfare organizations using public money effectively discriminated against Black Protestant youth and children. The vast majority of agencies operated under Catholic or Jewish auspices, and by accepting primarily children of their own faith, they effectively left Black children who are mostly Protestant without services. Seventy-seven agencies and their executive directors were named as defendants, as well as six city and state officials including their respective commissioners. Although La Salle School was not a defendant in the lawsuit, changes in the social service laws of the state affected all agencies with increased oversight and regulation during the ensuing years.¹²

A third challenge came from within the field of social work and child welfare itself. Research showed that children and youth were more effectively served in the least restrictive environment. If possible, children should be left with their family and services should be provided to the child and family in the home. If a child or youth had to be removed for safety reasons, community-based foster homes or group homes were thought to be preferable to institutional programs. Even though La Salle School was located in a residential neighborhood, it was still considered an institutional program under the state definition. La Salle School was not located on a rural, walled-in campus, but all services including board and care, education, and mental health were provided on campus. Institutional programs could continue to operate if they became residential treatment centers and provided services to youngsters with the most severe mental health and behavioral challenges. These changes were codified in the New York State Child Welfare Reform Act of 1979.

Brother Gus believed there was still a need for programs such as La Salle School. He did not believe there could be a “one size fits all” approach to child welfare and juvenile justice programs, but that there should be a spectrum of services in order to meet the individual needs of youth and their families. Brother Gus testified before a temporary commission on child welfare in Albany, New York, on February 6, 1975, meticulously describing a typology of behavioral and mental health traits of adolescents and the intensity of services they require. He described the vast array of services provided by La Salle School beginning with the institutional program that consisted of one hundred youth living in five units. The youngsters were ages twelve through eighteen and were referred by county social service districts or Family Courts as dependent, neglected, delinquent, or persons in need of supervision. He described the middle and high school programs on campus as well as the team of psychiatrists, psychologists, and clinical social workers who provided mental health services to the youth in care. In addition, La Salle had three group homes, a day treatment program, a supervised independent living program for older youth, and he mentioned a plan to develop a specialized foster care program for a small percentage of La Salle’s clients.

Brother Gus made it clear to the commission that the trend toward placing youth in group homes or foster homes was not the total answer for all adolescents in need of placement. He told them there was no doubt that the best place for a youngster was at home with family or with relatives. He argued that the least restrictive placement that could meet a youth’s needs was desirable but, some have needs sufficiently severe enough that a higher level of care is indicated. He said that time and time again a youngster who needs a higher level of care is placed in a lower level of care, and the result is more harm than good. He described “very sick adolescents” who need care in a mental hospital or specialized residential facility where they would receive intensive services from mental health clinicians. He went on to say that between the psychiatric hospital and those who can be served in foster homes or group homes, there is a group of adolescents who need an institutional program such as La Salle. He defended the use of the word “institution,” a term he admitted had recently fallen out of favor.

Brother Gus admitted to the commission there are disadvantages to institutional care, namely that residents do not get totally individualized attention from adults and they live in relatively large groups of peers. However, an advantage to institutional care is the structure provides greater control than can be achieved in a group home. Although La Salle was an open setting in the

middle of a city, there were geographical and architectural characteristics that also provided for a separation from the neighborhood. The size of the population also allowed for an on-campus school. He felt this controlled access to the community was beneficial for youngsters that lack the self-control to benefit from free access to the community. He went on to say that as the adolescent develops increased self-control, he could therapeutically transition to a less structured environment as he prepares to return home. One type of youth who requires this structured setting would be one who is prone to run away and get into “mischief” in the community. He goes on to describe additional advantages of an institutional setting for the commission, beyond the previously mentioned controlled and gradually increased access to the community. A second advantage is by virtue of the large number of residents, the environment provides neutrality and a moratorium from the demands of intimate and primary relationships. For those youth who have trouble forming trusting relationships with peers or adults, this setting allows them to step back and form more or less tentative relationships as their confidence grows. Brother Gus testified “practically all of the adolescents in need of placement outside of their own homes have had traumatic experiences over many years in the area of relationships.” Brother Gus gave this testimony thirty years before the idea of “trauma-informed care” became practically universal in child welfare, and research that described the role of adverse childhood experiences on brain development! Brother Gus concluded his testimony with an optimistic prognosis for youth who are placed in the appropriate level of care and receive appropriate services to address their individual needs.¹³

Brother Gus was invited to make a presentation at a convocation assembled by the New York State Council of Voluntary Child-Caring Agencies (NYSCOVCCA), a statewide coalition of agencies, on April 26, 1977 at La Salle School, with recommendations on improving services to court-related (adjudicated) youth. Once again, as with his testimony on child welfare two years earlier, he questioned the wisdom of placing these youth in community-based programs because of their evident lack of self-control, which caused them to be adjudicated in the first place. He believed those adjudicated youth who did do well in a community-based group home probably either did not really need placement in the first place, or should not have come under court disposition at all. Although he believed these youth needed a certain amount of restriction, he felt the quality relationships with staff were crucial so the youth would understand and cooperate with the restrictive environment, begin to grow personally, and develop the responsibility and self-control that would permit return to their communities. On the other hand, too much restriction could be as counter-productive as too little restriction when working with delinquent youth. He named a number of upstate agencies that worked effectively with these youth, as these agencies had representatives attending the convocation. He also emphasized the role that day treatment could play in the lives of these young people and also named agencies such as La Salle that provided this service. There was a need for increased government funding, not only for residential care, but also for day treatment and aftercare. It was also very important that all parties who played a role in the lives of these youth maintain continuous communication, including probation officers, government social workers, agency workers, and the youth and his family. He deemed it especially important that communication with the education programs, either private or public, be maintained. He said there was a good deal of communication with the schools but that much more could be done through properly staffed and knowledgeable pupil personnel and guidance departments in both elementary and secondary schools. He recommended each agency continuously review its admission policies and services to be able to

change in order to meet the changing needs of youth referred. Because a wide range of programs is needed, there must be a high level of communication in all of the component parts of the system.¹⁴

Brother Gus was well respected among his peers in the New York State child-welfare community, particularly among the upstate executives, and was frequently invited to address assemblies of executives and board members. He was asked to share his ideas on the role of an executive director on the growth of a child-care agency. He told the assembly that the executive must have a temperament that is open to innovation and change. The executive must be involved in the daily life of the program, and know his staff and children personally. He must be personally aware of youngsters who are unsuccessful and have to leave the program for various reasons. He must be aware of the reasons the agency's intervention was not successful and innovate and change accordingly to meet the needs of these challenging children. He must also be aware of the referrals that his agency rejects and explore what changes in programs or services would make these referrals acceptable. The executive must also be immersed in the community served by the agency to be able to advocate on behalf of the agency and maintain positive relationships with the power structure of the community, to be able to gain their support for innovation and change. The executive must also be a stimulus to staff to gain their support for innovation and change, as well as be open to initiatives and ideas for change that come from staff.¹⁵

Two months later, Brother Gus was asked to address the annual spring conference for the upstate agencies on serving children and families in a time of fiscal austerity and crisis. He defined the dilemma the state and voluntary agencies were facing as the choice between providing inadequate service or spending more money in a time of fiscal austerity. He described how the state and the agencies were able to cut unnecessary fat during the rate freeze, which he saw as a positive step. He also praised and called for an increase in voluntarism based on a commitment to the values of the voluntary sector, namely a profound respect for human dignity, especially for the poor, and a respect for their rights to a full life, liberty, and the free pursuit of happiness. Brother Gus emphasized the need to put more effort into fundraising through grants and charity, and also expressed an appreciation for the patience of agency staff that had to work with frozen salaries and decreased benefits. The choice between providing inadequate services or spending more money is a choice between two alternatives that only appear to be equal. Inadequate service to those in need is an absolute evil, whereas spending more money in a time of fiscal austerity is a relative evil. He called for the wealthy, both individuals and corporations, to pay higher taxes for the good of those being left behind (a familiar cause in the early Twenty-first Century). He called upon the agencies to speak to the state with a united voice to discontinue the freeze on the rates that fund operations.¹⁶

He was elected treasurer and later chairman of NYSCOVCCA, the state coalition of child caring agencies. He testified before the National Commission for Children in Need of Parents in Philadelphia in January 1978. This testimony included the role of preventive services in reducing the number of placements outside the home. He emphasized the important role of day treatment programs, but because of inadequate funding and lack of legislation, there was a shortage of such programs. He also described an early detection and remedial network, which at the time and to the present, existed only on a very limited scale. He described this type of program as a close

linkage between clinical social workers and school systems. A complete and full-time clinical service unit would be established in every school. Teachers' observations of a child's behavior and progress would serve as a form of "detection network" which would result in an assessment of the child and family by the clinical staff, who would then recommend what services to the child and family would help strengthen that family. He saw these clinical units as existing in both elementary and secondary schools. Besides lack of funding for these programs, Brother Gus felt that "constricted thinking" was a barrier to starting these programs. By "constricted thinking" he was referring to the attitude that a school is not a social service agency that schools are for academics, and also to professional territoriality and legal definitions.¹⁷

Brother Gus completed his tenure at La Salle School in 1981 to become the director of senior Brothers in Lincroft, New Jersey. However, he was invited back to address the "state of child-welfare" to board members from four upstate New York agencies in 1982. He reiterated his conviction that one size does not fit all and services must evolve to meet the changing needs of young people. He lamented the decrease in funding and rigid governmental oversight that resulted from the fiscal crisis of the 1970's, but he observed that there was recent improvement in both of those areas. He concluded

The future belongs to boards that are knowledgeable, that continue to create comprehensive services, which raise new funds continually for the creation and operation of new programs, and that exercise political influence as concerned taxpayers on behalf of voluntary agencies for the child of their community.¹⁸

Brother Gus' concerns for the spiritual development of youngsters while he was at La Salle are summarized in his comments published in *The Evangelist*. On understanding Jesus and spirituality:

I spent a lot of time with kids who are almost hostile to this understanding. At least they're very much unready to understand. Their stomachs aren't empty, but often their hearts are, and their heads are cluttered. Filling their hearts, clearing their heads, that's the best way to help them understand what I want to teach them. These are my children.¹⁹

Brother Gus: The Lasallian Scholar

While still at La Salle School in 1980, Brother Gus read a letter from the Superior General in which the latter referred to a doctoral dissertation by Brother Othmar Würth, FSC at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. The dissertation was written in French, with the English translation being "The Pedagogy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle: A Contribution to the History of the Education of the Handicapped." Brother Othmar used sources such as Saint La Salle's *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* and Canon Blain's biography of Saint La Salle, as well as materials from archives in Rouen, France, and at the Brothers' Generalate in Rome. Brother Omar described the specialized educational work of the Brothers at St. Yon in Rouen, which was the center of the Brothers' Institute during much of the Eighteenth Century until the French Revolution. Brother Othmar describes the maladjusted child and the programs that addressed their needs at St. Yon. Besides a traditional school program, St. Yon housed a working farm, a Brothers' retirement community, a novitiate, as well as detention programs for juvenile and adult

offenders. Brother Gus felt it was important to translate this dissertation into English for an American audience, especially because of the increased focus on working with children and adolescents with learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and problems of drug use and delinquency. His original intent was to spend six months translating the work but the team at Lasallian Publications decided, with Brother Othmar's permission, to adapt the dissertation into a book entitled *John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education: A Study of St. Yon*. The book was published in 1988 with Brother Omar credited as author and Brother Gus as translator.²⁰

In 1983, Brother Gus coordinated the poverty committee for the New York District. The committee, consisting of eight brothers, met in March 1983 in order to formulate a proposal for revising chapter eight of the 1966–67 version of the Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which addresses the vow of service to the poor through education. Brother Gus and the committee believed the New York District had a special reason for proposing this revision beyond updating the text, namely that this topic tended to polarize the discussion at the New York District Chapters for several years, and the intention of the revision would be to unite rather than divide. Brother Gus and his committee believed the General Chapter of 1966–67 and the Commission on the Rule intended to include the Institute's two special vows, that of stability and service of the poor through education under the vows of poverty and obedience. However, the Second Vatican Council issued the document *Perfectae Caritatis*, which placed emphasis on the value of the individual charism of each religious congregation only three months before the close of the Council. This led the Brothers capitulants of the 1966–67 General Chapter to appreciate the value of the two special vows, but by that time the revision of the Rule was in its final draft and the vow of service of the poor through education was not given the attention it was due. The members of the poverty committee also believed the underlying theology of service to the poor developed considerably since 1967.

The poverty committee described the vow to service of the poor through education as the specific characteristic of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the rationale of which is that "All persons... have an inviolable dignity and are worthy of inalienable love and care, especially those who are most in need." The committee goes on to state that the Brothers were founded for the distinct purpose of conducting schools for children who could not afford tuition. Over time, in response to the need for children to receive a Christian education, the Church authorized the Institute to conduct an increasing number of tuition-charging schools. The committee goes on to say that providing education to those who cannot pay tuition still is the preferred service of the Institute. The Brothers therefore, show a special concern for those who lack material goods, personal talent or human affection, regardless of social class. "The Brothers who conduct schools for those who can pay tuition serve the poor through education by giving the students a Christian understanding of social justice, inspiring them by word and example to promote justice in the world as a constituent dimension of the Gospel." The proposal goes on to boldly recommend that every Brother, community, and the District regularly assess the current ministries to see where the number of Brothers could be reduced in order to develop new educational programs for the poor. Brother Gus will recapitulate this theme in his 1990 letter to the New York District Chapter, and it will also be expressed in the annual pastoral letter of Superior General Brother John Johnston in 1992. The goal would be for the majority of Brothers to be directly involved in educational service with the poor at home or abroad.²¹

During the ensuing years, Brother Gus made many presentations to the Brothers at the novitiate in Skaneateles, New York, the participants of the spiritual renewal center at Sangre de Cristo, New Mexico, and he collaborated with his friend and former student, Brother Luke Salm, at the Buttimer Institute, Session I, for several summers in Moraga, California. Brother's handwritten notes and outlines, with plenty of annotations and updates, are available at the DENA archives at Manhattan College, New York.

Brother Gus addressed the characteristics of Lasallian schools at the first Baltimore District Lasallian Education Workshop held in Adamstown, Maryland, in 1988. While speaking of the relationships of the teacher and student, and particularly the at-risk student, Brother Gus writes:

This affective bond between the teacher and the student, motivated by being a minister of God, has been historically the hallmark of the Lasallian School. It has been proven especially in the concern for the less fortunate student, the less gifted, the least attractive, those who are poor in any one of several ways. It is when the teachers have the ability to reach out and become truly helpful to these students that the Lasallian School can be recognized as authentic.... "Lasallian teachers take the time and effort to know their students individually and to treat them as unique individuals, relating to them beyond the exigencies of the subject matter and the strictly academic demands of knowledge, performance and exam results. They seek to touch the heart, that is, the whole person of the student."²²

Brother Gus wrote an article entitled "Thirty Years of Evolution in the Service of the Poor," in *Lasallianum*; an Institute periodical published in three languages and distributed worldwide. The Brother delegates of the 1967 session of the General Chapter adopted a position paper emphasizing the service of the poor. Brother Gus describes their position as "revolutionary" for the time. He again asserted that the 1967 and 1977 Rule of the Brothers gave service of the poor short shrift. He applauds the evolution of the Rule in 1986 where the vow was changed to "conduct together and by association schools for the service of the poor," as well as additional discourse on this principle.

Although the Districts and Regions of the Institute were required to develop a plan for service of the poor, it was the initiative of individuals or small groups of Brothers and colleagues that developed new programs or intensified and upgraded existing programs for service of the poor during the thirty years following the 1966-67 General Chapter. Brother Gus went on to highlight a gathering of thirty-seven Brothers and twenty-one colleagues who were providing direct service to the poor and who represented twenty schools and agencies nation-wide. The initiative for this meeting came from one individual Brother and not from any District or Region. The participants discussed Lasallian spirituality and its preferential option for the poor, as well as plans for future collaboration between the programs.²³

Brother Gus composed a two-page memorandum to the New York District Chapter in January 1990. He requested to either be permitted to address the delegates, or at the very least, to have his memo read publicly. He was a member of the District formation committee at the time, and was concerned with the sharp decrease in the number of vocations to the Brothers during the prior twenty years. He had high praise for the Brothers who served on the formation teams

during those years and described their work as “intelligent and heroic.” But he said trying to improve these programs is “pretty much like rearranging the clubs in my golf bag in order to lower my handicap.” He agreed that we were attracting fine men and women to work in our Lasallian schools who would largely be replacing the Brothers over the next twenty years. He wrote that the Brothers run excellent middle class largely college preparatory schools, but that particular type of work was not attracting vocations. He boldly predicted that young men would be attracted to the Institute if we returned to the characteristics of our founding charism, namely explicit religious education (catechesis) and direct service of the poor, which he believed the Brothers had all but abandoned. He attributed three reasons for this, namely we have not meditated deeply enough on the Gospel, we have not been sensitive to young people’s hunger for the faith and the “dire needs of the poor at our doorsteps and in our overseas apostolates.”²⁴

During the last two decades of his life, Brother Gus worked on translating or editing a number of works either written by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, or his followers on the Lasallian mission and the preferential option for the poor. He gave many talks and lectures on this, his favorite topic. He was well ahead of his time in emphasizing that programs in child-welfare need to be individualized to the needs of the youth in care, the central role of the relationship between the youth and the direct care worker in bringing about growth, and bringing the youth closer to “salvation.” He acknowledged that the youth who need residential treatment were the victims of trauma, and he called for research and program development for delinquent girls. Brother Gus left us on May 1, 2013 at the age of 99. Coincidentally, there was a collaborative meeting of six child-welfare and juvenile justice agencies of the District of Eastern North America, the Lasallian Association of Family and Youth Services (LAYFS), that same day.

Conclusion

Brother Augustine Benedict Loes spent a lifetime of service as a De La Salle Christian Brother. According to his writings, his most cherished work was educational service of the poor, and informing other professionals of the importance of this work. He left behind many unpublished papers, which are preserved in sixteen file boxes in the archives at Manhattan College. He also translated and edited a number of published texts regarding the founding principles of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. During the eulogy for Brother Gus, Brother Colman Coogan reflected on his first meeting with Brother Gus at Lincoln Hall in 1963, and his compassionate treatment of both youth and staff. Brother Colman concluded his eulogy with the following words:

May I suggest that Brother Augustine’s life might best be summed up by the concluding paragraph of the Introduction to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* that speaks of celebration paraphrased as: Celebration of life lived in openness to the Mystery of God; . . . celebration of gratitude for the goodness of God; . . . of the confidence of the minister in God’s fidelity; . . . celebration of hope as the origin of his commitment; . . . and, the celebration of my own ‘story’ as a Paschal way of life.’ May these words stand as a lasting tribute and commentary on the life of Brother Augustine Loes.

Endnotes

1. Brother Philip Rofrano, FSC, is a retired founding Executive Director of Martin de Porres Group Homes (1974). He is also a licensed clinical social worker in the state of New York.
2. Loes, Augustine, "The History of My Spiritual Life" (2003), 1-2. *MCA-AL B1 F2.
3. Loes, Mary, Undated Letter *MCA-AL B1 F1.
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