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Strategic Planning for Lasallian Research: A Report on the 2012 RELAN Research Symposium

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With the aim of promoting Lasallian research initiatives by scholars in the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN), Saint Mary's University of Minnesota's Institute for Lasallian Studies and RELAN cosponsored a symposium in late October 2012. The three-day event held at the Twin Cities campus of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota (SMU), October 28-30, brought together educators and administrators from Lasallian educational institutions in the United States and representatives from RELAN's central office and several of RELAN's district offices, as well as two Lasallian leaders from outside of RELAN.

Purpose of the Symposium

The symposium, facilitated by Dr. Roxanne Eubank, Director of the Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's, gathered Lasallians interested in research for several interrelated purposes:

1. To dialogue about the key characteristics or areas that comprise Lasallian research today
2. To look beyond the study of the origins, traditions, and heritage of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which have been the main areas of Lasallian research to date
3. To discover the possibilities for Lasallian research in the twenty-first century in RELAN and identify topic areas for such research
4. To develop a community of scholars in RELAN committed to supporting, conducting, and publishing Lasallian research

The purposes of the RELAN symposium are aligned with the Institute's effort to encourage a renewed emphasis on contemporary Lasallian research. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, Superior General, has been persistent in his invitations to those in Lasallian higher education to conduct research in areas important to the Lasallian educational mission today.

The authorship team for this report is comprised of three participants in the 2012 RELAN Research Symposium: Maura Thompson Hagarty is the managing editor of Anselm Academic, the college division of Saint Mary's Press, Winona, MN; Susan R. Hines is the director of faculty development and associate professor in the Doctor of Education in Leadership program at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota; and Br. Frederick Mueller is the coordinator of faculty/staff professional development and Lasallian formation at La Salle Academy, Providence, RI.

Also, the Institute's 1993, 2000, and 2007 general chapters and the five international colloquia – on family, globalization, the megalopolis, technology, and evangelization – sponsored by the Institute between 1993 and 2000 have manifested the renewal and broadening of Lasallian research beyond the Institute's origins to include studies of topics important for the continuation of the Lasallian educational mission.

Symposium Presentations and Participants

The symposium program included a welcome by Brother William Mann, president of SMU; two keynote presentations, by Brother Robert Schieler, RELAN General Councilor, and Mary Catherine Fox, PhD, professor of interdisciplinary studies at SMU; six research presentations by faculty members and administrators from Lasallian universities; and several periods for participant dialogue about research priorities and future planning.

In his welcoming remarks, Brother William provided an overview of the work of SMU in Minneapolis and Winona, on four satellite campuses, and at some international sites. He spotlighted numerous graduates of the university whose work has significantly furthered the Lasallian mission in the world. Brother William emphasized that the group assembled had the opportunity to articulate an agenda that will invite and inspire others to participate in research, to share the story of the Lasallian mission, and to contribute to the story's next iteration.

The symposium's forty-three participants included the following:

- Thirty-one educators and administrators from four Lasallian colleges or universities and one Lasallian high school. The educators' fields of study include business, education, history, human development, leadership, psychology, religious education, social studies, theatre and dance, and theology. The administrators' areas of leadership include academic support for student-athletes, directing of academic programs, faculty development, Lasallian mission, library science, and residence life. The participants included one university president and three university deans.
- Three leaders from RELAN's central office and four from RELAN district offices

Keynote: The Call from the Institute for Lasallian Research

In the symposium's first keynote, Brother Robert Schieler reviewed the research areas recommended by the 2006 International Mission Assembly and the 44th General Chapter in 2007 and summarized the Institute's view of the nine topics most in need of research.

- Association
- Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue
- Evangelization and catechetics
- Immigration
- Lasallian pedagogy
- Multi-cultural education
- New forms of poverty

- New information and communication technologies
- Rights of the child

Brother Robert noted that these topics reflect the Institute's sense of international needs and raised the question of identifying regional research needs, the concern of the symposium. He referred to a report on challenges facing the region prepared by RELAN's delegates to the 2013 International Mission Assembly and noted several challenges that may benefit from research:

- Ensuring the financial viability, sustainability, and accessibility of Lasallian schools and agencies
- Measuring the effectiveness of Lasallian ministries
- Assessing the effect of technology on the culture and sense of community in Lasallian schools, agencies, and universities
- Fostering Lasallian identity in teacher formation
- Evaluating the effectiveness of Lasallian catechetical programs

Brother Robert elaborated on the final point and posed some questions: Is there a Lasallian approach to catechesis? Is one necessary? What is happening in the religious curriculum of Lasallian schools? What can we learn about our students and religious education programs from the findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion reported in *Soul Searching*¹ and *Souls in Transition*²?

Brother Robert concluded his presentation by emphasizing that the future of the Lasallian mission depends on ongoing review of what Lasallians do and why, strengthening what is good, and continuing to be innovative and creative in the development of projects and programs. High quality research on contemporary Lasallian education will make a necessary and important contribution to this process. Without these efforts, the Lasallian mission in RELAN is in danger of fading away with the decline in the number of Brothers. A commitment to research and initiatives like the symposium, Brother Robert noted, will help to equip Lasallians to carry the vision and mission of John Baptist de La Salle into the future.

Keynote: Capturing Our Time for Theirs: Considerations for the Context of Our Future

In the symposium's second keynote, Dr. Mary Catherine Fox challenged participants to set research plans for themselves and for RELAN by considering the research areas identified by the Institute in conjunction with those areas that attract and inspire them: "We need to apply our fine minds to both what the Institute is calling for in research and to what is calling within each of us as individuals committed to [the Lasallian] mission."

Dr. Fox noted the dearth of Brothers engaged in research today, especially in English, and the explosion over the past 25 years in the number of Lasallian partners – those contributing to the Lasallian mission who are not Brothers. She underlined the need for RELAN partners to commit to Lasallian research and to see the past and present work of partners – thinly represented in research to date – as topics for research. She urged raising the stature of Lasallian scholarship to that of other academic disciplines and strengthening ties among Lasallian scholars and universities in the United States so that collaborative research initiatives become commonplace.

Dr. Fox proposed a number of specific lines of research for participants' consideration. To begin, she explored two lines proposed by Brother Diego Muñoz, Secretary for Lasallian Resources and Research: faith-culture dialogue and historical research. Research in such areas, she emphasized, must be grounded in a clear understanding that Lasallians serve both the materially poor and those suffering from the new poverties including the excluded, the spiritually poor, migrants, those with AIDS, those living at the margins of society, addicts, and those who struggle to find meaning in their lives. Research related to these two lines must also consider the nature of Lasallian spirituality and how well Lasallian ministries transmit faith, foster spirituality, and deepen people's understanding of the transcendent.

Dr. Fox proposed a number of additional research topics for participants' consideration: Lasallian pedagogy; the role of technology in Lasallian education; qualitative and quantitative studies that increase understanding of the multi-faith and multi-cultural nature of Lasallian communities and ministries; contemporary Lasallians' stories, especially the aspects that cohere with De La Salle's story; women in the Lasallian world; Lasallian formation programs; structures for mission and association; governing boards and the experiences of partners who serve as board members; succession planning; Lasallian movements (eg., Lasallian Volunteers, Young Lasallians); Lasallian art and music; and fundraising.

Dr. Fox concluded by encouraging participants to discern what aspects of research they are called to and recalled the following instruction John Baptist de La Salle wrote in a letter to a brother, "Follow the inspirations that come to you from God."

Research Presentations

The symposium continued with breakout sessions featuring recent Lasallian research by six scholars:

- Rose Beal, Ph.D., assistant professor of theology, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, presented "A Lesson from the Lasallian Christian Brothers for Lay Theologians Today."³
- Brother John Crawford, Ph.D., assistant professor of religion, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA, presented "Lasallian Charism, Lasallian Higher Education in the United States Today, and the Increasing Presence of Women in Lasallian Higher Education."⁴
- Susan Hines, Ed.D., director of faculty development and associate professor of leadership, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, presented "Evaluating Lasallian Faculty Development: Looking to our Past to Improve our Future."⁵
- Brother John Kane, Ed.D., director of academic support for student-athletes, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA, presented "The Experience of Association for Mission of Teachers Who Completed the Lasallian Leadership Institute."⁶

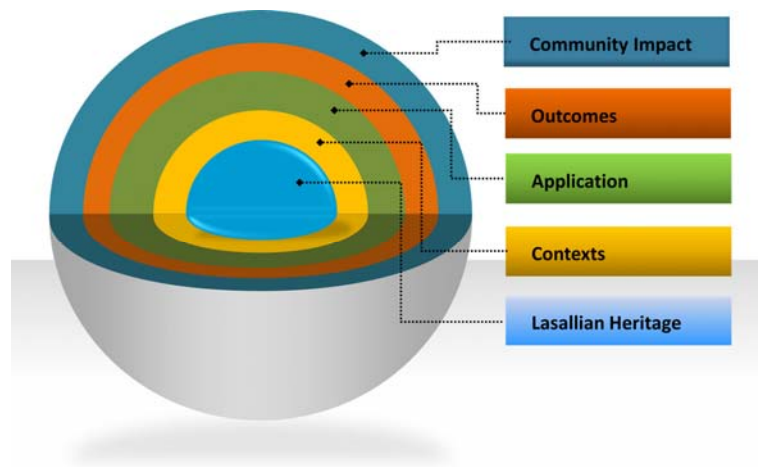
- Roger Peckover, Ph.D., director of assessment and CELT, Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, presented “Connecting Lasallian Principles of Practice to Educational Research in the San Miguel Schools.”⁷
- Kurt Schackmuth, Ph.D., associate vice president for mission, Lewis University, Romeoville, IL, presented “An Exploration of the Experience of First-Generation College Students in Lasallian Higher Education.”⁸

What is Lasallian Research?

The dialogue portion of the symposium began with an invitation to participants from Dr. Eubank to work in small groups to discuss the question, what is Lasallian research? Rich discussions of the nature of Lasallian research and its methodologies and scope ensued. The discussions reflected the idea that Lasallian research should move beyond the beginnings of the Institute and investigate contemporary topics that impact Lasallian institutions and those they serve. The participants also embraced the idea that scholars from a multiplicity of disciplines should contribute their expertise to the investigation of research topics. The group agreed that creating a definition of Lasallian research will require additional reflection and discussion. Dr. Eubank concluded this portion of the symposium by emphasizing the need to be clear about what Lasallian research is. To that end, symposium leaders proposed a future on-going dialogue among Lasallian researchers to develop at least a tentative answer to the question.

After the symposium, leaders created a graphic model aimed at summarizing some central insights that emerged during the group discussions and providing a tool that can be used as the basis for further discussion about the nature of Lasallian research. This layered spherical model points to both the complexity and the comprehensiveness of Lasallian research:

Figure 1: An Emerging Model of Lasallian Research



Core. The core of the model is the Lasallian heritage, i.e. the Lasallian story and the Lasallian mission. Examples of core research topics include the following: the vow of gratuity, gratuitous

schools, and the St. Yon Boarding School; the role of women in De La Salle's early Christian schools.

Layer 1. The first layer, "Contexts," refers to the settings and institutions in which the Lasallian heritage has been and continues to be lived out. Examples of layer-one research topics include the following: creating the next generation of Lasallian formators in the United States; studying programs that address new forms of poverty such as Lasallian programs for court-adjudicated youth.

Layer 2. The second layer, "Application," refers to how the Lasallian heritage is lived out in new contexts. Examples of layer-two topics include the following: the application of the twelve virtues of a good teacher to online learning; the application of the rules of decorum and civility to the use of technology and social media.

Layer 3. The third layer, "Outcomes," refers to the results of the application of the Lasallian heritage. Examples of layer-three topics include the following: assessing the outcomes of Lasallian formation programs; determining the effect of Lasallian service-learning and mission trips on participants' attitudes about justice and those who are poor.

Layer 4. The fourth layer, "Community Impact," refers to the influence of the Lasallian heritage beyond Lasallian settings and institutions. Examples of layer-four topics include the following: the impact of Saint Mary's Press on religious education in the United States; the impact of San Miguel schools on urban communities.

At each layer, researchers can explore topics through a variety of academic disciplines and from a number of perspectives including local, regional, national, and international perspectives.

Priority Areas for Research

The symposium participants spent many hours discussing priority areas for research in RELAN and, in the process, a central overarching question emerged: How do Lasallians create structures and situations that allow, encourage, and support research? The symposium leaders deemed this question critical but outside the purview of the assembled group and steered the participants' attention toward identifying topics for research.⁹

The participants identified numerous research questions and worked together to prioritize the topics. The symposium leaders then studied the array of topics and grouped similar ones together. This process yielded the following eight priority areas for research:

- New forms of poverty
- The relationship between those involved in the Lasallian mission and the Catholic Church
- Issues of the young
- Assessment of outcomes of Lasallian education
- Technology and pedagogy
- Adult formation, education, and teacher training

- The sustainability of the Lasallian mission
- Women

Dr. Eubank then invited the participants to select one of the eight areas and to work with others to identify research threads, to determine how each individual might contribute to the research, and to prepare a brief report on how the group might work together to conduct, support, and publish research in the selected area. The following questions, culled from the reports, reflect the directions envisioned by symposium participants for research in each area.

New Forms of Poverty

1. What are the new (and old) forms of poverty, and what do we need to know about them or how should we think differently about them?
2. How can the economic poor be actively involved in defining their needs and solutions?
3. What structures can be created and implemented for the purpose of eradicating poverty?

Lasallian—Catholic Relationships

1. Can one be a Lasallian educator without being Catholic?
2. How does the Lasallian charism help or hinder the presentation of the Christian message in Lasallian educational institutions?
3. What is unique about Lasallian Catholic educational institutions in the United States?
4. In what ways are individual Lasallian schools linked with local churches?

Issues of the Young

1. What is the impact of participation in Lasallian youth assemblies on young people?
2. What is the impact of the Lasallian Volunteers program on the future development of youth and their involvement in the Lasallian world?
3. What is the relationship between the faith of young people and their social and political views?
4. How do young people view themselves as believers, including how they perceive and relate to the terms Catholic, Christian, and Lasallian?
5. What is the role of partners in promoting a culture of vocations among the young?

Assessment of Outcomes of Lasallian Education

1. What is the impact of formation programs on individuals and their institutions?
2. What is the impact of graduates of Lasallian teacher preparation programs on their students?
3. Are the Lasallian assessment processes in each of the districts transformative?

Technology and Pedagogy

1. Does technology create relational poverty?
2. How can we use technology to enhance the Lasallian charism?
3. What is the relationship of technology and organizational structures and policy?
4. How do instructors embody the twelve virtues of a good teacher in an online learning environment?

5. What is the impact of the adoption of iPad use in Lasallian schools?
6. How is technology shaping the way we think?
7. Across disciplines, how are we intentional about Lasallian pedagogy?

Adult Formation/Education/Teacher Training

1. How are we creating the next generation of Lasallian formators?
2. How might collaboration among Lasallians involved in higher education be enhanced?
3. How is graduate education seen as a genuine response to the Lasallian mission?
4. How do we convey the Lasallian mission in graduate education with so many programs being part-time and professional in nature?

The Sustainability of the Lasallian Mission

1. Are Lasallian ministries doing succession planning, and if so, how?
2. What are the best practices for ensuring the sustainability of Lasallian mission?
3. What would happen if the Lasallian mission was not sustained?

Women

1. What is the current demographic information on women in Lasallian ministries?
2. How have women's roles evolved in Lasallian ministries?

Many of the symposium participants committed to taking responsibility for specific action steps in relation to the lines of research.

The 2013 Lasallian Research Symposium

At the close of the symposium, Dr. Eubank announced that RELAN and Saint Mary's University will host a Lasallian research symposium again in 2013 to help ensure that the research initiatives maintain momentum. The 2013 symposium will be held October 27-29 in Minneapolis.

Notes

1. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
2. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
3. Dr. Beal's paper is available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.
4. See John M. Crawford, "Women in the Lasallian World," *De La Salle Today* 7, no. 2, available at <http://lasallian.info/doc/DLST%20summer%202011.pdf>. Also, Brother John's

PowerPoint presentation slides are available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.

5. See Susan R. Hines, "Evaluating Faculty Development: Looking to the Past to Improve the Future," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 3, no. 3, available at <http://axis.smumn.edu/indes.php/axis/article/view/52/96>. Also, Dr. Hines's PowerPoint presentation slides are available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.

6. Brother John's PowerPoint presentation slides are available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.

7. Dr. Peckover's paper is available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.

8. Dr. Schackmuth's PowerPoint presentation slides are available at www.lasallianresearch.weebly.com/presentations.html#.

9. The symposium leaders decided to refer the question of creating structures that support Lasallian research to the Lasallian Association of College and University Presidents (LACUP) and the Christian Brothers Conference.