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## **Exploring the Intersections: Racial Justice, our Lasallian Heritage, and the Catholic Tradition**

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From January 31 to February 2, 2018, twenty-one representatives<sup>5</sup> from the six North American institutions<sup>6</sup> of the Lasallian Association of Colleges and Universities (LACU) of the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN) met outside of Baltimore, MD. The majority of these attendees work closely with students, either as faculty or as student-engagement administrators. We<sup>7</sup> explored the intersections of our Lasallian<sup>8</sup> heritage with the challenging racial justice issues on our campuses, ranging from hiring and personnel practices to curricular and course syllabi concerns to fostering student engagement with racial justice. Racial justice issues are not a new phenomenon, but recent events in the United States – including the increasing boldness with which some people express their opposition to racial justice – are impacting our campuses at unprecedented levels in recent U.S. history. This intensive three-day colloquy was seminar oriented, with small groups meeting together to explicate or tackle specific problems. This paper serves to document the experience of being at the colloquy, to share what we learned, what we created, and how we hope to shape Lasallian responses to racial justice moving forward. First, we will set the stage for the 2018 colloquy by reviewing the first Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice.<sup>9</sup> Second, we will briefly describe the colloquy experience, pulling out themes that should drive and inspire future work. Third, we will conclude with some of the major outcomes of our meetings: 1) a working draft of the Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice, which applies Lasallian values to racial justice issues and 2) a call for the creation of Lasallian Affiliates for Racial Justice collective that, together and by association, would connect racial justice actions across campuses.

### **History: The First Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice**

In January 2017, seventeen individuals representing all seven RELAN colleges and universities met at the San Alfonso Retreat House, Long Branch, NJ for the first Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice. We were invited to share resources and set a course of support for ourselves, our colleagues, and – with typical Lasallian focus – our students. This first Colloquy on Racial Justice produced a working draft of a Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice (see Table 1), penned initially by Maureen O'Connell (La Salle University-LSU), Jordan Pascoe (Manhattan College-MC), Jeff Sable (Christian Brothers University-CBU), and Jack McClure (Saint Mary's University of Minnesota-SMUMN), and endorsed by the Colloquy attendees in general. Over the next year, the draft received refinements and revisions, and it laid the opening framework for the second Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice.

## **The Second Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice**

Our first evening of the January 2018 colloquy fostered a sense of openness and community. The colloquy opened with a welcome by the Faculty Planning Team: Mehnaz Afridi (MC), Chip Gallagher (LSU), Jeff Trask (Lewis University-LU), and LACU Mission Officers Brother Ernest Miller, FSC (LSU), and Brother Jack Curran, FSC (MC). We adopted a community agreement to stay engaged, speak our truth, experience discomfort, expect and accept non-closure, and to practice confidentiality.<sup>10</sup> After each member shared personal goals in attending the colloquy, we adjourned the first day. These opening activities set the stage for members to authentically share and be supportive during the colloquy.

A review of the previous year's meeting opened the second day of the colloquy. Jeff Sable summarized the experience and outcomes of the first colloquy. During the 2017 colloquy, Fr. Bryan Massingale, Professor of Theology at Fordham University, pointed us toward resources in our own Lasallian tradition that might animate our commitments to educating for racial justice. Over the course of the 2107 Colloquy, these resources were translated into the draft of the Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice (see Table 1), which was shared by Maureen O'Connell. To continue this work, the 2018 participants broke into groups to review that document for resonances and lacunae, and then identified action steps that might be taken in each of the five commitments to build inclusive communities and educate for racial justice throughout the Lasallian network. These additions were then incorporated into the original draft of a "Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice."

The next four sessions illustrated the use of different perspectives and tools to engage students, faculty members, and administrators in actively creating inclusive communities, ensuring respect for all persons, enhancing concern for the poor and social justice, cultivating faith in the presence of God among us, and providing quality education. Chip Gallagher demonstrated a teaching exercise leveraging perceptions of racial / ethnic / religious groups to facilitate conversations about the forces that shape inequality. Mehnaz Afridi led participants Maeve Adams (MC), Karin McClelland (Saint Mary's College - SMC), and Teresa Taylor (SMUMN) in furthering the theme of integrating racial justice and religious racialization in the Lasallian context. Speakers discussed specific examples of inclusion of others in reading texts, pedagogy, administrative initiatives, and interfaith encounters. Jeff Trask, Laura Roy (LSU), Sara Shuman (LSU), and Daisy Sherry (LU) shared personal and professional stories surrounding the realities of race, immigration, and the alt-right on campus. Small groups discussed concrete actions to effect institutional transformation on their respective campuses. The last session of day two, facilitated by Chip Gallagher, Frances Sweeney (SMC), Erin Mae Clark (SMUMN), and Erica Davila (LU), directly engaged colloquy members with difficult conversations around issues of justice. In general, viewing racial justice through the lens of our Lasallian values indicated the need to engage and transform our institutions as a whole – professors, students, and administrators – in the service of racial justice.

The third and last day of the colloquy pulled together ideas generated in earlier sessions that intersected across a variety of subjects: race, class, gender, religion, institutional identity, institutional administration, pedagogy, and professional development. Adam Koehler (MC) and Cory Major (CBU), along with participants Gloria Sosa (SMC), Danielle Young (MC), and Kristin Callahan (LU), instructed colloquy participants to generate action items for faculty to take back to their home institutions. The final session, facilitated by Mehnaz Afridi, Chip Gallagher, Maureen O’Connell, Jeff Sable, and Jeff Trask, specifically looped back to the Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice (see Table 1), and further developed it by proposing an additional fourth column, entitled “Now What? Recommendations for Contemplation and Action,” as one means to maintain the momentum generated by the colloquy going forward.

### **Lessons Learned: Outcomes of the Second Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice**

Though brief, this three-day colloquy called several important things to attention. First, our Lasallian mission compels us to directly engage with racial justice. We cannot sit idly by, but must instead lead by example in creating change on individual and institutional levels. To share the beginning of this conversation, we integrated new themes and actionable steps into the Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice (see Table 1). This table provides recommendations for contemplation and action (column 4: “Now What?”) that emanate from resources of our Lasallian heritage (column 3: “How?”) to address societal realities of racial injustice that have been exacerbated post 11/9, the day after the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, (column 2: “So What?”) in light of our Lasallian Core Principles (column 1: “What?”). These recommendations reflect an active commitment to integrate racial justice issues into our pedagogy and life at the college. We want this document to be developing, not stagnant, and to inspire contemplation, revision, and action.

Second, in order to accomplish this important, mission-driven work, we could not operate alone. Thus, we wrote a call to embody “together and by association” by creating a Lasallian Affiliates for Racial Justice Collective that would connect racial justice actions across the LACU campuses of RELAN. This call included a working draft of a mission statement for the collective, next-step actions, and support requests. We envision that Campus Affiliates would act as campus liaisons, organizing working groups on their respective campuses, establishing connections with already-occurring racial justice initiatives, and coordinating actions both within and across campuses. These working groups will be flexibly responsive to the needs of the individual campuses. They will also pursue recognition of racial justice as mission-related work in issues surrounding hiring, tenure and promotion, and classroom support – as well as, in co-curricular student life programming and service learning activities. Affiliates would also facilitate the conversation by keeping the work visible. We further identified ways to keep this work visible within the Lasallian community and beyond through publication (this White Paper being the first step) and presentation. Finally, we discussed preliminary plans for the Colloquy next year, to keep this work moving forward, including, for instance:

- having the Colloquy meet annually, maintaining a focus on racial justice;
- welcoming the involvement of additional colleagues by having the participants from the 2017 and 2018 Colloquies inviting colleagues so as to have new voices and perspectives while at the same time building on the wisdom of the previous Colloquies;
- ensuring the involvement of faculty, as well as staff and administrators, who “together and by association” will implement and put into motion these ideas through course syllabi, student services, new student and employee orientations, as well as faculty and staff development.

**Table 1.** Mission Mandated Lasallian Vision for Racial Justice. This is a dynamic draft of the vision, initiated by attendees of the first Lasallian Colloquy on Racial Justice, held January 10-12, 2017, and rooted in the Lasallian Core Principles<sup>7</sup>. Various revisions, including the recommendations for contemplation and action, were proposed by attendees of the second Colloquy on Racial Justice, held January 31-February 2, 2018. This is not intended to be a final and definitive document, but rather a starting point and an ongoing challenge for the Lasallian community.

<b>WHAT?</b> <b>Lasallian</b> <b>Core</b> <b>Principle</b>	<b>SO WHAT?</b> <b>Translation in post</b> <b>11/9</b>	<b>HOW?</b> <b>Resources from our</b> <b>Heritage</b>	<b>NOW WHAT?</b> <b>Recommendations for Contemplation and Action</b>
<p><b>Concern for the poor and social justice</b></p>	<p>Social justice addresses the root causes of injustice. In the U.S., racism fuels economic inequality and poverty is racialized.</p> <p>Social justice, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is answering the call of the prophets to stand in the gaps created by racism and embody a vision of relationship.</p> <p>Our institutions are perpetuating inequality and are often not aware of/in denial about it).</p>	<p>“Concern for the poor” needs to be couched in language of “The Heroic Vow of 1691”<sup>8</sup>, which defines association and union as taking risks to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable.</p> <p>Social justice in the context of racism uses a systems analysis lens to consider root causes of racial inequality and resists individualizing or pathologizing understandings of and responses to racial inequity. “Our mission must not be reduced to mere assistance but rather go to the roots of poverty in order to find structural solutions and educate to justice.”<sup>9</sup></p>	<p>Be aware that our institutions are working from a deficit model when it comes to our students of color, which in turn gives rise to an austerity mentality when it comes to distributing institutional resources.</p> <p>Be aware of the way in which the very language of “concern for the poor” is objectifying.</p> <p>Build classes into our curricula that address issues of racism over the life course of all of our students.</p>
<p><b>Faith in the presence of God</b></p>	<p>Racism renders faith a private experience, rather than something that animates our concern with and commitment to—in relationship with others—the common good.</p> <p>Racism has made an idol of the Christian God, rendering</p>	<p>Incarnation: All are created in the image of God, a God in the Christian tradition who is best known in the multiplicity of the Trinity.</p> <p>Circular 461: The theme of God in the Lasallian heritage is welcoming people of all faiths and recognizing non-Catholics as</p>	<p>Design and support opportunities for multi-faith prayer and action on campus and in our communities.</p> <p>Create ways of sharing our activities among the institutions, particularly within the FSC community.</p> <p>Exhibit diverse religious symbols to capture the presence of God in different traditions – or the multicultural expression of presence of God.</p>

<p><b>Respect for all persons</b></p>	<p>that God as exclusively white, male, and Christian</p>	<p>a valued part of the Lasallian community.<sup>10</sup></p> <p>God is present in midst of suffering and <u>dreaming</u>.</p>	<p>Commission public art—such as a mural, for example—that could exist on all Lasallian campuses.</p> <p>Cultivate notions of belonging by inviting those of other traditions to explain to us what it means for them to be in the presence of God or their understanding of what it means to be Lasallian. This could “flip the script” and invite a deeper, unfolding, and shared understanding of our heritage.</p> <p>Have people trained in and committed to religious pluralism on our campus ministry staffs.</p> <p>Assist faculty in figuring out how to create spaces for remembering the holy presence of God in an inclusive way in our classrooms.</p>
	<p>Racism, in its many forms (personal, cultural, institutional, etc.) denies the full humanity of people, perceiving them through a narrow lens of stereotypes and prejudices.</p> <p>Racism stunts the ability to achieve full flourishing and the integral development of persons and peoples.</p> <p>Racism denies respect for persons in a variety of systems, including our Lasallian education system.</p> <p>Inequality is both intentionally and unintentionally conveyed and perpetuated by language.</p> <p>Structural inequality based on gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity persists. These realities of a person’s identity are deeply connected – often</p>	<p>“The anthropological view of human nature that motivates Lasallians recognizes and dignifies every human being as being unique, unrepeatable, and educable. Discrimination based on gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation has no place in the Lasallian educational mission. As social beings, humans are capable of establishing meaningful relationships. As spiritual beings, they are open to transcendent reality and the search for life’s meaning. This holistic view of human nature includes intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.”<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Human persons cannot be reduced to or defined by artificial and arbitrary categories of race and ethnicity.</p> <p>We live our heritage when we respect persons by honoring,</p>	<p>Recognize that the dynamics and conditions of racism intersect with other expressions of human identity, particularly gender.</p> <p>Help students and colleagues avoid a reductionist approach to our shared heritage by understanding it in light of their <i>lived</i> experience and not in arbitrary and static categories.</p> <p>Embrace the reality that acknowledging these lived experiences of our shared heritage are ways of helping each other—particularly our students—transform their realities and build bridges to each other and of building community/connection/association.</p> <p>Help our students and faculty to be proud of being Lasallian in this regard.</p>

	<p>inextricably so – and efforts to address them need to be rooted in this understanding.<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>engaging, and celebrating difference.</p>	
<p><b>Inclusive community</b></p>	<p>Racism fragments, fractures, divides, and isolates people with otherwise common concerns and common dreams.</p> <p>In the name of political correctness, neutrality, assimilation, and public order, racism maintains communities that exclude/deny the experiences of many of its members.</p>	<p>Language on “solidarity” from the 45<sup>th</sup> general chapter.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Inclusive communities are certainly open to all, and cannot be neutral. They affirm the dignity of their most vulnerable members and cultivate generosity in contexts of discomfort.</p>	<p>Be aware that the work we are doing here has to be more than reactionary, since for many among us the reality we’re attempting to address predates 11/9/2017.</p> <p>Move beyond alienation, but still provoke discomfort, disruption, conflict, and exploration by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultivating practices of dissent with civility</li> <li>• uncovering our own assumptions and our own personal biases</li> <li>• creating spaces where we can be vulnerable with each other</li> <li>• breaking silences</li> </ul> <p>If we want our students to be status quo breakers, then we too need to become vulnerable enough to be status quo breakers ourselves.</p>
<p><b>Quality education</b></p>	<p>Racism precludes opportunities for students to encounter ideas and people who are different.</p> <p>Systemic racism creates barriers to education, particularly for communities of color, and to multicultural education for all teachers and learners.</p>	<p>We draw on the twelve virtues of Lasallian<sup>14</sup> teaching to meet students where they are, to help them recognize their positionality in the morass of racism, and to accompany them in growth needed to find their own purpose.</p> <p>Just as the first Brothers “discovered God’s call in the faces of the urban poor children and young people excluded from advancement in society”<sup>15</sup>, Lasallian education is committed to challenging the norms of “meritocracy” built into contemporary social systems, particularly education.</p> <p>We encourage both dialogue and engagement with difference as a lived experience in our</p>	<p>Be clear about who are our people? Our people are our students, faculty, staff, and administrators across our Lasallian network.</p> <p>Ensure classrooms that promote quality education need to be dedicated as “safe” or even “sanctified” zones (being attentive to potential exclusivity with that language).</p> <p>Have resources available for all of our educators: books, courses, etc.</p> <p>Continue to build up the Lasallian Affiliates for Racial Justice Collective so that we can exchange ideas and resources.</p> <p>Encourage a growth mindset among ourselves, since the work of undoing racism is ongoing.</p> <p>Use our geographical/physical spaces as places for uncovering the full history of who we are and to learn from that history.</p> <p>Conduct institutional audits of where we are in terms of our:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mission statements</li> <li>• demographic representation in all areas/divisions</li> <li>• curriculum and learning outcomes</li> <li>• symbols on campus</li> </ul>

		<p>classrooms and campuses as pathways to truth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenure and promotion processes (to see how innovation is or is not valued, and how maintaining the status quo is or is not valued)</li> </ul> <p>Pay attention to data: The national data are out there and we need to connect it to the data we are or could be collecting.</p> <p>More explicitly incorporate our core values and Lasallian heritage into our courses and assist other faculty in making that happen.</p> <p>Decenter whiteness by moving from being allies (colonial missionaries) to accomplices (liberation workers).</p> <p>Look at tenure and promotion processes: How do we (and how <i>should</i> we) acknowledge those who are doing this work and hold those who are not accountable.</p> <p>Create spaces for people of color.</p>
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## Endnotes

1. This paper documents the second Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice held January 31-February 2, 2018. Through contemplating and applying Lasallian values, colloquy participants explored challenges and solutions to racial justice issues on Lasallian college campuses. Seminar-style sessions promoted breadth and depth of discussion, developed important themes for carrying out racial justice work in a Lasallian context and participants also actively created tools to facilitate this work.

2. Danielle M. Young, PhD, assistant professor in psychology at Manhattan College, earned her PhD in personality and social psychology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her current research focuses on the process and impact of social categorization, with a focus on stigmatized groups.

3. Jeffrey J. Sable, PhD, is an associate professor in the department of behavioral sciences at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. He received his doctorate in psychology from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2003 with an emphasis in cognition and neuroscience and an interdisciplinary graduate minor in college teaching.

4. Jack Curran, FSC, PhD, is vice president for Mission at Manhattan College in Riverdale, NY. He previously served in senior administrative roles at two other Lasallian higher education institutions, Bethlehem University and Saint Mary's College of California. He completed his bachelor's degree at Manhattan College, entered the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1979, and went on to earn his master's and doctorate in social work from the State University of New York at Albany.

5. Participants of the 2018 Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy on Racial Justice:

- Maeve Adams, PhD, assistant professor of English, Manhattan College: [maeve.adams@manhattan.edu](mailto:maeve.adams@manhattan.edu)
- Mehnaz Afridi, PhD, associate professor of Religious Studies and director of the Holocaust, Genocide, Interfaith Education Center, Manhattan College: [mehnaz.afridi@manhattan.edu](mailto:mehnaz.afridi@manhattan.edu)
- Erin Mae Clark, PhD, assistant professor of English, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota: [eclark@smumn.edu](mailto:eclark@smumn.edu)
- Kristin Callahan, MFA, assistant professor of Art and Design, Lewis University: [callahkr@lewisu.edu](mailto:callahkr@lewisu.edu)
- Brother Jack Curran, FSC, PhD, vice president for Mission, Manhattan College: [jack.curran@manhattan.edu](mailto:jack.curran@manhattan.edu)
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- Sara Shuman, PhD, MPH, assistant professor of Public Health, La Salle University: sshumans@gmail.com
- Gloria Sosa, PhD, chief diversity officer, associate professor and program director, College Student Services Specialization, Counseling Department, Saint Mary's College of California: gas6@stmarys-ca.edu
- Frances Sweeney, PhD, professor and chair of World Languages and Culture and the faculty chair of the Core Curriculum, Saint Mary's College of California: fsweeney@stmarys-ca.edu
- Teresa Taylor, EdD, Culturally Responsive Teaching instructor and program director, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota: ttaylor@smumn.edu
- Jeffrey T. Trask, PhD, assistant professor of Healthcare Management, Lewis University: traskje@lewisu.edu
- Danielle Young, PhD, assistant professor of Psychology, Manhattan College: dyoung01@manhattan.edu

6. Christian Brothers University, Memphis, TN (CBU); La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA (LSU); Lewis University, Romeoville, IL (LU); Manhattan College, Riverdale, NY (MC); Saint Mary's College of California (SMC), and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Winona, MN (SMUMN).

7. By engaging with this text in the first person plural, we want to encourage us, the readers, to consider the challenges described in this paper as belonging to us all.

8. We want to note the inclusive religious and spiritual nature of the Lasallian heritage, reflected both in the attendees and the tenor of our conversation, "Let it be stated clearly and unambiguously that calling oneself Lasallian is not relegated only to those of the Christian faith. Many faith-filled people professing other creeds participate daily in the Lasallian educational Mission. They are a valued part of this community. In turn the goal, in those places where

Lasallians minister in a multi-religious context, needs to be the deepening of faith in each student. It is our hope that students of all religions would graduate from our Lasallian schools professing their beliefs more faithfully and be committed to the construction of a better world.” *Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of HOPE*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Circular 461, 2010, General Council, Rome, Italy: [[http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/circulares/461\\_circ\\_en.pdf](http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/circulares/461_circ_en.pdf)], page 36.

9. There actually have been four Lasallian Higher Education Colloquies since June 2015. The first took place in June 2015 at the Loyola Retreat Center in Morristown, NJ, and included 14 participants from La Salle University and Manhattan College. The theme was “Deepening our understanding of how we bring to life the Lasallian heritage.” It was facilitated by Maggie McGuinness, PhD, and Brother Jack Curran, FSC, with Brother Gerard Rummery, FSC, as the keynote presenter. The theme of the second Colloquy was “Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy: Together and by Association.” It was facilitated by Brother Ernest Miller, FSC, and Brother Jack Curran, FSC. Eighteen participants from La Salle University and Manhattan College convened in January 2016 at the San Alfonso Retreat House in Long Branch, NJ. Thus, the first and second Lasallian Higher Education Colloquies on Racial Justice (January 2017 and January 2018) are the third and fourth Lasallian Higher Education Colloquies.

10. Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2006).

11. Lasallian Core Principles [<https://www.lasallian.info/lasallian-family/5-core-principles/>].

12. On 21 November 1961, John Baptist de La Salle, Nicholas Vuyart, and Gabriel Drolin professed the “The Heroic Vow” of unity and commitment to the “society,” even if it required great poverty. [text: <https://www.delasalle.org.au/blog/the-heroic-vow/>].

13. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, “New Wine in New Wineskins,” in *Report of the International Assembly: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission* (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools Generalate, 2006), pages 41-44.

14. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Circular 461*, page 36.

15. The Ford Foundation: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/challenging-inequality/gender-racial-and-ethnic-justice/>.

16. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Circular 461*, page 3 (section 3.3).

17. Solidarity is mentioned numerous times in the *The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: This Work of God is also our Work*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Circular 469, November 30, 2014; General Council, Rome, Italy: [[http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Circ469\\_Actas45CG\\_eng.pdf](http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Circ469_Actas45CG_eng.pdf), 24], pages 17, 21, 29, 41, 44, 50-51, 57, 59-60.

18. The twelve virtues of Lasallian teaching were originally published in John Baptist de La Salle's, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* (trans. F. de La Fontaninerie and Richard Arnandez), (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1706/1996), and expanded in Brother Agathon's, *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1785/2000).

19. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Circular 461*, page 28 (section 2.5.2).