
Preserving the Precious Gem of Lasallian Workplace Belonging

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Introduction

John Baptist de La Salle made a strong statement to the early educators, also dubbed "brothers," who were struggling in community. In *Meditation* 91.2, De La Salle writes to the early teachers regarding their communal rumblings with each other that "unity within community is a precious gem" that must be preserved if the community would continue to exist.³ The earliest followers of the Lasallian mission struggled with finding their basic needs met within the community. There were disagreements and members breaking away from the group due to lack of food, money, and adequate classroom conditions. Through the challenges, De La Salle stayed faithful to the mission, which he grew to love. Educating the poor was not immediately attractive to the founder given the comfortable lifestyle and privileged position he was promised as a canon of Rheims. Somehow De La Salle found deep meaning in the mission of educating the young, especially the poor, and gently invited those who followed to be committed to community, which would sustain the mission for more than 300 years.

Belonging to the Lasallian charism may be difficult and members may find it challenging, especially with the contemporary culture that sometimes promotes a message of the necessity of financial wealth necessary to achieve happiness. The first Lasallian educators, like those of today, faced issues of belonging within a community that values inclusivity while living in a society that glorifies exclusivity. The question of belonging at work and how the Lasallian mission fosters a sense of belonging is of great importance.

The Lasallian community is an organization that advocates for unity in community. The third Lasallian Reflection, entitled *Lasallians without Limits: Creation of Sustainable Communities*, bravely identifies challenging realities of our time that involve belonging in community, including migration, global diversity, family structure, gender bias, generational struggles, and religious unaffiliation.⁴ According to the Lasallian Institute, the core values of what it means to be Lasallian is one of inclusion, or a "new beauty" of belonging that transforms communities.⁵

This article will present literature on belonging at work, the Lasallian paradigm, and will offer some discussion on how the precious gem of Lasallian belonging can be preserved. Instilling inclusive programs and policies begins with the adult Lasallian educators, who are responsible for modeling Lasallian core values to each other and those who are entrusted to their care. Belonging at work, a construct that exists in the larger context of workplace spirituality, is deeply personal and communal.⁶ Belonging can also be seen as a longing to be in community. In the present American climate of building walls that divide, the world can learn healthy inclusive practices from Lasallians, who are called to be a community of unity.

Workplace Belonging

Belonging at work is an aspect of spirituality of the workplace that is also intertwined with the ways in which an individual can find work and the workplace meaningful. In other words, belonging is a mechanism to find meaningfulness of work. Lambert and others, in their longitudinal study demonstrate a correlation between the sense of belonging and possessing meaning in life to the extent that a “sense of belonging caused an increase in meaning, even relative to other aspects of positive social interactions.”⁷ In their study, they were able to infer that individuals who feel a sense of belonging are better able to verbally express their perceived meaning in life than those who do not.

Contemporary American society tends to be individualistic and yet neuropsychology tells us that there is hope for people to become more connected.⁸ The human person desires to be connected, which has been tested through cranial imaging. When we are not connected with others, our bodies feel it in an ill manner.⁹ The good news for our individualistic society is that our brains are able to change; they are neuroplastic.¹⁰ The need to belong is rooted in the human desire to form relationships and fit in.

Belonging as a construct is very complex because it is so personal and individual.¹¹ Belonging lies in the affective domain because it involves emotion and process; it is a feeling, a sense, and set of practices. Walton and colleagues conducted four experiments and conclude that there are two main types of belonging.¹² Social belonging, the first type, refers to shared experiences surrounded by social norms, feedback, and validation. These are the formal ways of belonging, like being invited to a wedding, getting employed, and sharing similar social experiences as another. Mere belonging, the second type, refers to moments of belonging that happen by chance and tend to be trivial and surprising. The findings of these four experiments show that even “a mere sense of connectedness can cause significant changes in self, personal interests, and motivation.”¹³ A mere sense of belonging enhances achievement and motivation because “relatedness is a key human need that shapes motivation.”¹⁴ Even small trivial cues, like a shared birthday with another, help to motivate people to pursue their interests.

Jack McClure and James Brown interviewed twelve employees and asked them what their experience of belonging at work was like. In their phenomenological study, six elements of belonging at work emerged:

- Being invited and learning to be a part of a workplace;
- Connecting with colleagues and wanting to be included results in fun at work, shared values, trust, ritual, and a feeling of being a part of a family;
- Doing work and being recognized;
- Natural selection at work, competing and being excluded (participants described this atmosphere as animalistic);

- Being needed and finding oneself describing work as a vocation and one's passion; and
- Reflecting on time, work and people passing.¹⁵

The only negative response to belonging at work is the feeling of competition and being excluded. However, this is an essential element in understanding belonging and the need to belong. Ryan McVeigh describes belonging as a duality between inclusion and exclusion, belonging and non-belonging. In order to understand belonging, non-belonging must also be analyzed.¹⁶

Dennis Ross, in an analysis of Martin Buber's I-Thou model of human interaction, emphasizes the I-Thou relationship as the first step to workplace spirituality.¹⁷ In Buber's model, there are two types of relationships: the I-It and the I-Thou. The former refers to everyday interactions that are cold and impersonal in nature. These interactions focus on calculated and sometimes competitive means of accomplishing a task, like getting money out of an ATM, delivering mail, or receiving immediate medical attention. These interactions use people to get a job done, but can be good when it does the good by providing necessary services. The I-Thou connection involves an absence of concern for time, space, and cause; it is simple, mutualistic; it happens between two people; it involves imagining the reality of compassion and empathy; it preserves individual integrity. When authentic human and caring exchange happens, the Eternal Thou is encountered. When the I finds the Thou, the workplace enters the spiritual dimension. The challenge is recognizing the I-Thou experience at work, in the everyday human exchange. True belonging happens in the workplace when this dynamic occurs.¹⁸

Organizations that focus on building healthy bonds rooted in a validation of an individual's life experience and worldview increases social capital and aids in creating more resources and opportunities, especially for those who are marginalized. When social capital is high, organizational involvement increases.¹⁹ People stay at their jobs because of the relationships formed at work. However, belongingness involves a sense of vulnerability needed to form deep human connections.²⁰ Becoming aware of the profound dynamic of human connection can also enhance the viability of fostering workplace belonging.

Benefits of Fostering Workplace Belonging

Promoting elements of workplace belonging has its benefits, which include employees feeling a sense of meaningfulness, well-being, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and creativity.²¹ Organizations that facilitate a deep sense of belonging and use effective interventions to increase inclusivity will see that employees view their job as more than a career, but rather as a calling.²² Storycorps, an organization that sets up space and time for individuals to audio record their stories, collected personal testimonies about work into a book entitled *Callings*.²³ The collection categorized callings into five main themes: dreamers, generations, healers, philosophers, and groundbreakers. Most, if not all of the stories, omitted the element of financial income and stressed how work was more of a calling than a job or a career. Karakas claims that authentic contemporary work has meaning beyond the nine to five mentality and "it is even becoming the cradle of meaning in modern knowledge society."²⁴

Bandsuch and Cavanagh record the benefits of fostering workplace belonging centering around loyalty and commitment, which results in greater retention rates.²⁵ In addition, promoting inclusivity in an organization increases virtue and ethical development and ultimately offers the employee a road to self-actualization. When workplace belonging is endorsed, employees report that work is enjoyable because these organizations help employees identify skills and personality traits that parallel their work.²⁶ This work is uniquely done through team building exercises.

One of the major benefits of fostering workplace belonging is an increase of employee well-being and workplace satisfaction. Promoting a healthy sense of belonging increases employee morale by expanding commitment and productivity, and decreasing stress, burnout, and workaholism.²⁷ For example, an organization fosters wellbeing by providing spaces at work for prayer, yoga, and spiritually balanced programs. Essentially, workplace inclusivity combats the idealistic notion of being defined by one's work--being is more important than doing, and an individual is more than one's work.

Fostering workplace belonging also combats fear within the organization. A healthy organization is a place that reduces fear through encouraging trust, develops a sense of belongingness, promotes creativity, and displays clearly a vision and ethics that values trust, respect, honesty, commitment courage, and support.²⁸ People are more able to reach their goals when they are engaged physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. An organization that promotes a healthy sense of belonging will most likely have a less stressful organization.²⁹ When the organization and the employee share similar values and purpose, work satisfaction can best be achieved.³⁰ Employees and leaders play a vital role in fostering workplace belonging. The best outcomes are produced when all individuals in the organization are pleasant, cordial, communicate openly in a work environment that does not just focus on the narrow concerns of self, but attends to a greater purpose, the spirituality of the individual and the organization.³¹

The Shadows of Workplace Belonging: Isolation, Manipulation, and Abuse of Power

The benefits of advancing healthy elements of workplace belonging is abundant in the literature, but more light needs to be shed on what happens when isolation and manipulation occurs in the name of inclusivity. Just as inclusiveness is about promoting meaningfulness and belongingness, the opposite happens when mechanisms to do so are misused in the form of abuse of power. Two main ethical cautions or “shadows” of workplace spirituality are discussed and a parallel of opposites will be highlighted. The opposite of meaningfulness is manipulation and the opposite of belongingness is isolation. These two negative outcomes arise when the promotion of workplace belonging is misused.

Social rejection and isolation emerges in organizations when a false sense of belonging is fostered. In a study on the dualities of belonging and non-belonging, McVeigh discusses the biopolitical nature and implications of belonging. The study is most concerned with belonging and religion, and defines religion as “simply the process by which individuals group together.”³² A group is religious if “it consists of people who share a set of norms, practices, and symbols . . . religion is the foundation of all belonging because the religious impulse is the introduction, maintenance, and ritual production of every moral collectivity.”³³ Isolation manifests itself as an

experience opposite of belonging, and may occur in tightly knit organizations, like religious affiliations.

The second ethical consideration to ponder when assessing the promotion of workplace belonging is the possibility of manipulation of individuals into creating a false sense of self or superficiality, and using inclusive workplace practices as a means to merely making money.³⁴ Workplace spirituality, when misunderstood as divisiveness, discrimination, and superficiality, can lead to illegal discrimination, criminal violence, job dissatisfaction, decreased loyalty, increased turnover, lower productivity, poor performance, and discontent.³⁵ This unhealthy dynamic happens when workplace belonging is not rooted in positive psychological behaviors and when there is an inappropriate management of workplace beliefs, rituals, and community.

Two realities exist within belonging: utilitarian (egocentric, self-interest) and communal (society-based on shared norms, rituals, and symbols).³⁶ These opposites exist in each other creating a belonging paradox. McVeigh sees belonging as biopolitical in nature and uses vaccine injections into the body as an analogy. Biopolitics refers to the interplay between human ethics and biology. A body invites a vaccine into itself as a foreigner in order to be healthier than its current state or to prevent future disease. The chemical “does not simply use a small disruption to prevent a critical disaster but instead reconceptualizes the harmful qualities of an invading virus into a positively progressive force . . . the will to power is the tendency of an organism to strive to continued betterment and growth.”³⁷ In other words, an honest reflection on belonging faces the reality that inclusion can only happen by excluding.

Religions, according to McVeigh, are “simply the process by which individuals group together” and “consists of people who share a set of norms, practices, and symbols.”³⁸ McVeigh boldly asserts that “belonging thus rests on the fragile boundary between violence that both unites and disbands, both brings together and tears apart. Belonging is in that sense dependent on the violent processes and practices of exclusion.”³⁹ Oddly and ironically, the marginalized are sacrificed in ultraconservative and fundamentalist religious practices because they often belong out of fear of violent attacks or death perpetrated against them if they do not adopt orthodox views. Those individuals who live on the margins of a society, a religion, or an organization are seen as belonging and not-belonging at the same time. In this case, violence toward the outsider keeps the group strong and the “inability to distinguish sacred violence from its profane counterpart cataclysmically results in the inability to distinguish between victim and victor, citizen and foreigner, insider and outsider.”⁴⁰

Like McVeigh, Sarah Wright identifies dualities within belonging: nature and culture, emotion and reason, human and non-human, and living and nonliving.⁴¹ Belonging is also understood under the context of non-belonging because belonging is “imbued with powerful (but contested) sexist, racist and exclusionary logics at the same time as it is used to generate inclusive ways of being in the world.”⁴²

Power is also associated with belonging because categories of gender, class, and race influence decisions made regarding who belongs. Belonging is an epistemological and ontological question that results in surprising answers of ambiguity, exclusion, reductionism, openness, hope, and empathy.⁴³ Empathy as an emotion is rarely studied because of the shame that is attached to non-

belonging. Social exclusion is first experienced as a feeling of shame.⁴⁴ As noted earlier, the universe forms two realities: utilitarian and communal. The former refers to the human desire to be egocentric and self-absorbed, and the latter refers to a society-based reality that shares norms, rituals, and symbols. Belongingness can only happen, according to McVeigh's biopolitical perspective, through exclusion.⁴⁵ Belonging and non-belonging exist within each other as a paradox. Vital to the study of workplace belonging is the awareness of the possible isolation that may result because of forced membership, as in the case of those who are marginalized and those who experience belonging and non-belonging at the same time.

Second, workplace inclusivity, if not open to the individual expression of one's spirituality, could result in inequalities. Scholars in the field, according to Margaret Stout and Leslie Tower, should be aware of the terminology used in research so that one group is not excluded at the expense of another.⁴⁶ These authors propose two unhealthy approaches to workplace spirituality: the Institutional Individual Perspective and the Atomistic Individualistic Perspective, both of which fosters the use of bureaucratic and manipulative language in order to create blind obedience to the organizations. This type of manipulation eventually results in workaholism, burnout, and a duty-oriented workplace.⁴⁷

Third, the misuse of workplace belonging could also lead to proselytism and indoctrination which may push employees away from their authentic self and toward a feeling of isolation.⁴⁸ In the promotion of workplace belonging, it is important to examine which beliefs are being promoted and which ones are being omitted.⁴⁹

Lastly, rejection, especially when it is experienced by someone who shares similar values as another, may result in a lack of self-esteem and anxiety as studied by Gailliot and Baumeister (2007):

Rejection is most detrimental to self-esteem when it comes from someone who supports one's worldview. In contrast, rejection by someone espousing a different worldview is apparently much less threatening . . . learning that someone agrees with your worldview increases the importance and power of that person's evaluation of you, and so rejection by that person has a bigger impact". . . social anxiety is almost by definition marked by vulnerability to social rejection, and so it seems reasonable that social rejection would have had the biggest impact among anxious people . . . social rejection hurts the most by those with similar views and that social anxiety reflects fear regarding the possibility of being rejected by like-minded others.⁵⁰

Rejection and social isolation are possible factors in the fostering of workplace belonging. Leaders and members of organizations should be aware of the implications of these possible harmful effects.⁵¹ When organizations become compulsive in forcing (often unintentionally) spiritual practices, employees often feel alienated, the opposite of what should be happening in an inclusive workplace.⁵²

Another dark side of workplace spirituality occurs when it is fostered as a management fad that forces employees to reach a bottom line. According to Gordon Dehler and Ann Welsh, work should only be one way of expressing one's spirit, which provides meaning and purpose so that

“the opportunity to transcend the physical and cognitive demands into the world of emotional connection: doing inspired work. And when the purposes and values of the organization are congruent with the purposes and values of individuals, alignment provides for internalization of belief systems.”⁵³ Managers need to be aware of the “shadows” of workplace belonging in order for true positive outcomes to grow out of the organization.⁵⁴ What can be seen as strengths may also be experienced as weaknesses if organizational leadership does not stay aware of the potential dangerous outcomes of workplace belonging. Four “shadows” of workplace belonging exist:

- seduction, which amounts to discrimination as seen through proselytization and exclusion;
- evangelization, which occurs when one specific religious practice attempts to control others through hyperreligiosity and the use of workplace spirituality to control;
- manipulation, which is used to enhance performance and the bottom line through forcing a feel-good sense of belonging; and
- subjugation, which occurs when employees feel that the organization is above all else in one’s life.⁵⁵

It is vital to recognize possible harmful effects when promoting workplace belonging. The negative outcome of wrongfully promoting workplace belonging through manipulation results in the lack of meaningfulness and purpose, and the negative outcome of harmfully implementing workplace belonging via isolation is the absence of belongingness, isolation, and rejection. In order to preserve the precious gem of Lasallian belonging, a look at the Lasallian charism is important.

The Lasallian Tradition

The Lasallian charism began in the late seventeenth century with a movement started by John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), a Roman Catholic priest born in Rheims, France.⁵⁶ La Salle, with the prodding of some of his contemporaries, started a community of men who provided an education for poor street boys dating from 1680. This revolutionary idea emerged during a significant time when only the rich had access to education. La Salle recruited mostly untrained men to join a teaching community, later to be called the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which was dedicated to the shared mission of educating the young, especially the poor.⁵⁷

La Salle was a revolutionary of his time bravely crossing social and cultural boundaries. He challenged the status quo of what it meant to be a priest, a teacher, a religious person, and a son.⁵⁸ As the eldest son, he was expected to pass on the family name, but instead he became a priest. As a priest and a member of the cathedral, he was expected to work into Church leadership, but instead he chartered a group of men dedicated to the teaching of the poor, something unacceptable in his time. As a religious man, he intentionally began a religious order that was non-clerical, when most religious orders with power were clerical. As a leader of the order, he left the rich clerical lifestyle to live in community with the teaching brothers.

La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is a well-known spiritual author. He was a pious Roman Catholic priest who loved the solitary life and frequently quoted scripture.⁵⁹ Given the context in which he lived, La Salle's spirituality was influenced by the Catholic Reformation, the rediscovery of scripture, the rediscovery of hermit and desert spirituality, and other saints like Saint Francis de Sales, whom he often quoted.⁶⁰

La Salle's spirituality was a lived and practical one centered on authentic work to the poor. This work was done within a community who made their first vow of association in 1684. The men who were associated together as teachers called themselves "brothers." Association became a leadership tool to keep the order sustainable after the founder's death, and was a particular way of belonging. At the first General Chapter meeting, twelve brothers vowed, not to the traditional poverty, chastity, and obedience, but "to keep together and by association gratuitous schools."⁶¹ This ministry, based in a common mission, was from the beginning, a ministry not of hierarchy but of equality and specific belonging. According to Crawford (2011), "The first Lasallian principle respects education as a ministry of equals who serve as elder siblings to the young entrusted to their care. La Salle's texts and their lived contexts highlight 'brotherhood/sisterhood' among an educational ministry of equals."⁶² The founder took association and belonging for mission so seriously, that he left the cathedral to live a simple life with the brothers.

Today, this Lasallian mission has spread to more than 80 countries in the world consisting of five regions and 34 districts. The four districts in the Region of North America serve more than 100,000 people through 102 schools and ministries including seven colleges and universities, 53 high schools, 19 middle schools, three elementary schools, retreat centers, summer camps, and 25 other youth facilities and treatment programs for young people with special and behavior needs.⁶³ The diverse and active ministry of Lasallian communities around the world add to the unique character that is Lasallian belonging.

What is Lasallian?

The term *Lasallian* refers to the spirit and work evolved over the 300-year period since the time of La Salle. The way in which the work continues and the people who do the work together is Lasallian. Fred Mueller includes the following as the basic building blocks of Lasallian education:

- Concern for the young as unique persons with real needs;
- Preferential option for the poor;
- Communion with the Church;
- Social conscience and advocacy of social change with an emphasis on the rights of the child;
- Inspiration of the Gospel;
- Spirit of faith and zeal;
- Formation of a community of faith;
- Programs of excellence; and

- An educational plan linking evangelization and sound human development and emphasizing catechesis and pastoral work in multiple contexts open to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.⁶⁴

Lasallian Spirituality

Lasallian spirituality is rooted in the 300-year tradition and has developed over time and consists of the spirit of community (together and by association), the spirit of faith and zeal, and a practical spirituality.⁶⁵ The Lasallian mission and the Lasallian spirituality make up Lasallian identity.⁶⁶ The notion of Lasallian spirituality is individual and varies from person to person. Van Grieken notes that “It is the dynamic integration of foundational documents, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices that shapes a spirituality,” and specific to the Lasallian charism are Lasallian pedagogy and the Christian faith.⁶⁷ Kurt Langthaler identifies three pillars of Lasallian spirituality: faith, zeal for the mission, and community lived as a siblinghood.⁶⁸ Essentially, the non-negotiables at the heart of the Lasallian mission are the spirit of faith and zeal.⁶⁹ According to *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, the first spirit or charism of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is faith and the second is the “ardent zeal for instruction of children.”⁷⁰ Following and integrated within the Lasallian charism is an authentic spirit of community, or association, which should always be present and preserved.⁷¹ A renewed sense of inclusive belonging for association has emerged in contemporary Lasallian identity and is an intentional aspect of Lasallian spirituality and work.⁷²

Since Lasallian spirituality is a practical one, it helps to offer some sustaining metaphors of this intentional lived spirituality. Rummery offers four images of Lasallian spirituality: (a) you are called by God to your work; (b) you are co-workers with God; (c) you work for the poor; and (d) all is done through the movement of the Holy Spirit.⁷³ It is also important to point out that being a part of the Lasallian mission is voluntary. Van Grieken suggests that there are certain Lasallian commitments, five of which fall into the arena of faith. They are centered in and nurtured by the life of faith; trusting providence in discerning God’s will; work done with creativity and fortitude; through the agency of the holy spirit; and incarnating Christian paradigms and dynamics.⁷⁴ In addition, faith-filled Lasallian educators are seen as ambassadors, ministers, good shepherds, and guardian angels.⁷⁵ At the heart of Lasallian spirituality is faith.

The second main dimension of Lasallian spirituality is zeal. The Lasallian educator connects their work with *salvation*, which is defined in its truest sense as becoming most fully human and functions as a path to wholeness.⁷⁶ Five of Van Grieken’s Lasallian commitments fall into the zeal category. Lasallian educators teach with a practical orientation; devoted to accessible and comprehensive education; committed to the poor; working in association; and express a lay vocation.⁷⁷ A zeal-filled educator is like a good architect because education happens through good planning while special attention is given to accommodating needs.⁷⁸

Faith and *zeal*, the hallmarks of a Lasallian education and spirituality, are lived through a committed community. The community of Lasallians is faithful to the founder, and to the rich history and heritage that has formed within the 300-year rich and abundant history.⁷⁹ An integration of Lasallian life is rooted in mission and community, with a special emphasis on

communal belonging.⁸⁰ Association is never an end to itself; it is always for the education of the poor, done in the context of a community.⁸¹

Lasallian Identity

The Brothers now share in this association and mission with those who are not vowed, also known as Lasallian partners.⁸² This association gives security and strength to the mission and community, especially with the declining number of vowed brothers.⁸³ The Brothers of the Christian Schools were one of the first Roman Catholic religious orders to equally share their mission with those who are not vowed as Brothers. The Brothers of the Christian Schools in their rule of 1987 committed themselves to a *shared mission* with all of the educators who work in a Lasallian school.⁸⁴ Calligan, a vowed Brother of the Christian Schools, boldly states:

I see a new age for our Lasallian Family as we learn to broaden John Baptist's insights to encompass men and women across the world of many continents and religious persuasions to grab a hold this common heritage: a provident God at work in the fabric of reality.⁸⁵

Contemporary Lasallian spirituality and identity encompasses a broad sense of belonging, embracing walks of life far beyond specific religious and cultural traditions. In fact, Botana, calls the contemporary Lasallian identity as a *collective* characteristic shared by all those who choose to be Lasallian.⁸⁶

A Lasallian educator is referred to anyone, whether in or out of a classroom, who works in a Lasallian ministry. Mouton sums up the Lasallian spirituality and mission in a practical way by offering eight beatitudes of a Lasallian educator:

- Blessed are you who are called to teach, for you walk in the footsteps of the master;
- Blessed are you who sow peace and harmony in the staff room, yours will be the joy of The Lord;
- Blessed are you who plant seeds of hope in youthful hearts, for they yearn for the coming of my kingdom;
- Blessed are you when you share your faith with others, for your name is written in my heart;
- Blessed are you who anguish now because your students are difficult, for one day they will thank you for your loving concern;
- Blessed are you when efficiency gives way to compassion for the deeper secret of education is yours;
- Blessed are you when you reach out to me in your students, for you will surely find me and rejoice;

- Blessed are you who lead young people in the paths of justice and peace, for you will shine like stars for all eternity.⁸⁷

A star has become the image of the Lasallian charism and work done by Lasallians across the globe. The Region of North America articulates, as the focal point of its contemporary mission, five-core principles of a Lasallian education. They are faith in the presence of God, quality education, concern for the poor and social justice, respect for all persons, and inclusive community.⁸⁸ The Lasallian mission is alive and continues to thrive through those who commit to association for mission. Lasallian research, according to Mueller, should

[B]e initiated: (a) to gather data on the kind of personal traits, experiences, etc. of individuals and the kind of institutional environments that foster the growth of being ‘associated together for mission,’ and (b) to determine the degree to which students, parents/families, Board members, and alumni/ae are and can be a part of being "associated together for mission."⁸⁹

In 2010, the Brothers of the Christian Schools published *Circular 461* entitled *Associated for Mission...an act of hope*.⁹⁰ This document focused on the fundamental elements of the Lasallian charism; specifically, association and the ways in which association can be fostered. As a call to identify the lived and practical aspects as articulated in *Circular 461*, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, under the direction of Brother Diego Muñoz, FSC, conducted research through a survey and testimonies of 350 Lasallians throughout the world. A list of quotes and reflections were organized into themes and eventually published and distributed worldwide as *Bulletin 254*.⁹¹ Themes in *Bulletin 254* include, but are not limited to, identity, belonging, association as vocation, and challenges to association. For example, one person’s testimony on belonging is that “Life in community, the sense of belonging, and working as a team, are all things inherent in the duties and the mission of the Lasallian teacher.”⁹² Another person’s words on association articulate a sense of community: “Living in association means sharing in a thousand ways the daily building up of a consciousness centered in social justice...We do this together with people we know; people rooted in this issue and who chose it before we did.”⁹³ Belonging to a community that shares common values is important in the Lasallian workplace, as articulated by this one Lasallian: “The role that Lasallian association plays in my personal life is one that is central to my core values as a person, husband, father, and grandfather...My personal and professional lives are really strongly intertwined...This connection transcends work and professional practices and imbeds itself, hopefully, within my personal interactions.”⁹⁴ The Lasallian charism, as stated in these statements, connects closely with elements of workplace belonging.

Discussion and Considerations

With the growing interest of individuals’ desire to experience a healthy sense of belonging within the organizations in which they work, workplace belonging has become an emerging construct in organizational literature. Within the last few decades, individuals desire the workplace to be an environment that gives meaning to the worker; offers a genuine place of belonging; and is a place where the employee and the employer share common values. The benefits of fostering effective workplace belonging within the organization include employees feeling a sense of meaningfulness, belongingness, well-being, satisfaction, organizational

commitment, and creativity. Some shadows or warnings to unhealthily promoting workplace belonging may result in isolation, manipulation, and an abuse of power.

Lasallian ministries have an opportunity to creative possibilities for engaging all Lasallian educators, especially those new to the community, through formal and informal ways of sharing founding stories and ways in which individual members share core values. Likewise, Lasallian leaders can keep the gem of unity in community preserved by hiring for mission, and promoting healthy inclusive practices that keep manipulation, isolation, and abuse of power away from what it means to be Lasallian. On the same token, the shared responsibility of fostering workplace belonging is in the hands of all Lasallian educators, and should be a vital part of every aspect of the Lasallian ministry, whether athletic, academic, or, social. The way in which adult Lasallian ministers respond to this call to foster appropriate belonging trickles to other stakeholders. This is the way the belonging gem continues to remain polished. In addition, Lasallian ministries may evaluative which assessment mechanisms are in place as a way to evaluate authentic belonging. A key question leaders should ask is “If someone does not feel a sense of belonging, what procedures are in place for someone to feel comfortable enough to share these concerns with others?” Lips-Wiersma and others offer five overarching questions when assessing an organization’s shadow when promoting an inclusive workplace:

- Who is being left out?
- How does this practice effect all stakeholders?
- Are multiple spiritual perspectives honored?
- Does this practice promote idealism or cynicism? and
- Who is benefiting or being harmed by this practice?⁹⁵

The Lasallian work context stresses the importance of faith and zeal along with community and commitment to a common mission. One way of preserving a strong and healthy sense of belonging is to share with others within the community common values and stories. Speaker and author, Charles Vogl, in *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging*, promotes the practice of sharing founding stories in order to strengthen a community.⁹⁶ Returning to La Salle’s story of belonging in the first years of founding the Institute helps to solidify the Lasallian mission. These opportunities happen largely within regional programs like the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and in many of the district programs provided for Lasallian educators.

Lasallian ministries have a unique opportunity to keep the gem of Lasallian unity in community shining through creative community practices. These practices, when done authentically and with mission in mind, can serve as a model for other organizations, and be a shining star in an often dark and divided world.

Endnotes

1. This article explores relevant literature on workplace belonging, a construct connected to workplace spirituality, the benefits of fostering belonging, and possible shadows of promoting workplace belonging. Lasallian tradition lends itself to discussion on ways in which ministries

can preserve a culture of inclusiveness for those who work in a Lasallian setting. Some initial recommendations for practice are presented.

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3. De La Salle, *Meditations*, Lasallian Publications (1994): 386.

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