

“You’re Fired!”

When One Door Closes. . . .

Nancy E. Baker–Crellin

I arrived at La Salle School (Albany, NY) sixteen years ago. I knew I had “come home.” For me, that is where association begins: the inner sense of being exactly where you were born to be. Being associated with the Christian Brothers isn’t a job; it’s a calling.

The month before I arrived at La Salle, I would never have told anyone that I was being called to be there. I didn’t pursue the job. I didn’t even go looking for it. My arrival at La Salle School and my association with the Brothers and laypeople came as the result of a series of events that I would never have chosen—events that were part of God’s plan for my life.

Association is not only our connection with one another but our bond, our synergy, and our driving force with the children and families we serve. Association means that together we can “do it better” than we could ever do it alone.

Once, a while back, someone told me never to underestimate the power of a spiritually committed support group: the people who help us fill all those buckets with those tiny drops of water, one spoonful at a time, only to find a small rust spot in the bottom of one of the buckets. They share the dream, the vision, the agony, and the frustration.

I think of that ragtag group of teachers who joined John Baptist de La Salle in the early days. I doubt whether they had much of an idea about what they were doing or where they were headed. If they had, they would never

have gotten involved. Knowing where you are going isn’t what it’s about.

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There’s a boy named Raef. He’s sixteen. In the eyes of the law, he’s an adult. He can go to jail. Some say he should go to jail.

Raef lost his mother in a drive-by shooting when he was two years old. She was waiting for Raef’s father to pick her up from work. He didn’t make it in time. Raef blames his father and says it’s his fault his mother is dead.

Raef arrives at La Salle School. He seems like a fairly typical young man. One on one, he’s very endearing. He needs a mama. He needs a daddy. He needs a life. He’s living in “the hood,” and “it doesn’t look like he’s gonna get out.” He already has a “hidden” adult charge: an ACOD (adjourned in contemplation of dismissal) assault charge. The judge has told Raef that if he doesn’t make it at La Salle, he’s going to bring the felony charge forward and send Raef to jail. Raef knows this.

You might think it would motivate him to do well. It doesn’t. He fights, he argues, he threatens. He has anxiety attacks. He uses drugs. He throws a chair at his teacher. When he’s done, he cries for his mama. He says it would never be like this if she were here. I tell him, “She is here, Raef. She lives inside of you.” He’s scared, but he wants to believe me, even if I am “a white woman.” He needs love so badly,

he'll take it from anyone. Until now, he's taken it from his boys on the streets, and if something doesn't change, that's what he'll go back to.

He's bright. He has choices; he just doesn't know it. So every day I give him a drop of life. I stand in the presence of his anger and show him I am not afraid. I leave my Saturday work projects and drive over to be with him, because he tells his staff he needs me. I let him know that even when things go wrong, he is good. I love him, but I never tell him with words.

I pray that what I am doing will make the difference. I pray for new ways to try. I lean on others for insight and support, for strength when I want to believe in Raef and everyone around me says they are afraid he will hurt someone. I pray that he doesn't. I pray God to give me enough time to help Raef through to a place where he needs me less than he needs me now. I work toward that moment when Raef will allow himself to be held in the hands of God, to trust in the beauty of his future as he finds the place where he was born to be.



So, what is association? None of this can be done alone. None of this can be done without the vision and the mission of John Baptist de La Salle. Association is our connection with one another. It's our bond, our synergy, and our driving force with the young people we serve. Association means that together we can "do it better" than we could ever do it alone.

Should our association be formalized? In my opinion, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit with the gift of association. This isn't something we can give one another but rather something we can share. We can choose to accept it or to walk away.

As I hear others reflect on this topic, it seems they are searching for a "marriage" with other Lasallians, a legal bond with certain responsibilities and entitlements, a financial commitment and some assurance that no one will ever say "You're fired." For me, that's not the

way it works. Association is not something bestowed upon us. It's a blessing, a presence in our life to which we are given the opportunity to respond. It's God's whisper in our ear, saying, "Listen, I have something I need you to do for me."



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