



Concluding Remarks at the 2nd Symposium of Young Lasallians

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with Diane Leugteb Munson & Daniela Massotti*

Recently, I came across a quotation that said that “teachers see the world differently. We see it in the eyes of our students.” In many ways, this quotation captures my feelings these days. I see in your eyes – your enthusiasm, your passion, your dedication, your competence, your hopefulness – that the Lasallian mission, the Lasallian family, and the Institute of the Brothers [and those of the Sisters] do have a future.

In your eyes, I see – as Emilio Baccharini said to us on Wednesday – that a new world is possible. You are the living proof that – first in Québec 2002 and now in Roma 2006 – a new day truly dawns!

We have lived together these days in an almost constant, and sometimes painful, awareness that ours is a broken and divided world. Emilio Baccharini said to us, “the home of the human family is in flames.” The absence at this Symposium – because of war – of Toni and Lara from Lebanon has been a kind of “icon,” which must not be forgotten, of the fragility of the present situation of division, discord, distrust, and distain in so many parts of the world.

We have also missed our fellow Lasallians from Colombia, India, and Nigeria who were blocked from being with us when they were refused Visas and thus not permitted to enter Europe and to attend the Symposium.

Yet, how extraordinarily grateful we are that our brothers and sisters from the war torn or conflicted lands of Palestine, Pakistan, Sudan, and Sri Lanka have

been with us. Welcome, tolerance, acceptance, inclusion, and belonging were realities lived in our international community this week.

During our morning prayer yesterday, we heard the quotation: "We are caught in the inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

In this world where the human family is so divided – rich vs. poor, north vs. south, powerful vs. weak, young vs. old, one religion or country or continent vs. another, my way of viewing things vs. your way of viewing things – you represent here today by your presence a hope and a vision of what can be if we are only willing to reach out in forgiveness and trust across the chasms that divide us. Despite occasional hints of nationalism and some very different perceptions of the same realities, we have forged community together.

Ricardo Moro asked us on Wednesday, "What are the priorities according to which I want to live my life?" As I heard some among you say these days, we want "to be people displaying acts of faith in one another" ... we want "to be people who give peace a chance" ... we want "to be people who work with the young and the poor" ... we want "to be a people in whom a coherence is visible between what we say and what we do." The question is not "where De La Salle is going," but "where am I going?" As we heard Adrian and Ricardo in their testimonies, "Let yourselves be taken outside of your comfort zones."

In drawing this Symposium toward its conclusion, I've asked two people [Daniela & Diane] to share these concluding remarks with me – one representing the Organizing Team of the Symposium and the other representing the International Council of Young Lasallians (ICYL) – both competent, dedicated, and generous women to assist me. Our world, our Church, and our Lasallian world have too often not allowed sufficient voice and place to this important part of our international family. Diane will speak first, and she will be followed by Daniela.

Remarks of Diane Leutgeb Munson: As both a member of the ICYL and as a passionate, committed Young Lasallian, this week has brought the dream to life for me in a new and exciting way. In the past five days, I have heard dozens of you express both what it is you are looking for and what it is you have to offer regarding the movement of Young Lasallians on an international level. The beauty has been the familiarity of your words – so many of them being ideas I too have dared to think.

As youth, I realize that we carry an important trait that is both difficult and vital for our families, communities, and the world – we are never willing to settle for something good when what we want is something great. Our intense passion is so often what places us in unexpected and

life-changing situations as well as being the driving force of our day to day activities.

I have heard many things from all of you this week, expressed in a variety of ways. I hear you asking for more opportunities: we want to volunteer, to experience other communities, other countries, and other cultures. I hear you asking for more information: we want to know what our Lasallian brothers and sisters are doing in other parts of the world. I hear you calling for even more open dialogue about religious, political, and social issues, so that we may all better understand one another and the reality of our world. I hear you asking to be a part of the Lasallian family in a new and serious way: as associates.

I have also heard both your criticisms and support as far as the tools that we already have in place. Some of you say that the ICYL has not done enough and that it is not the most appropriate tool in our working with the Institute as youth. Some of you have also said that the ICYL has begun its work in a good way and have been surprised at the success of the Council in meeting the goals laid out for it. We all agree that there are always ways to improve and change.

I have not heard anyone dispute the fact that it is through occasions like this one, where we meet and speak face to face, that we are best able to understand one another's realities and discover a common path. International gatherings must continue to be a part of our lived experience as Young Lasallians so that we can more fully share with our Districts and Regions the evolving face of the international movement.

As we look to the future, it is certain that the last five days we have spent together will shape the years that lay ahead. Our path will not be paved by one person or one idea. Our steps will continue to be small but steady so that we leave no one behind but constantly move in the direction of all of our dreams. As a Council, our role is to act as a connection between the Young Lasallians of the world and the Institute. That means that you will continue to be the ones that show us the way and that your voices will be the voices the Institute will hear. Our aims may be many, but we are clearly united by the mission that we live and the spirit that calls us to do just that.

I share the dream of my dear friend Toni, in Lebanon, that some day soon, we shall all gather in his country to celebrate our common identity as Young Lasallians. May we continue to teach each other, to learn from each other, and to inspire each other to work for a better world. Let us use the links we have as an international community of young people

committed to education, tolerance, and peace as an example for all of the nations from which we come. Each person in this room is responsible for our movement; let us continue to work together for something truly great.

Remarks of Daniela Massotti: As the Symposium draws to a close today - and as always at the end of any experience important for my life and my personal growth - I find myself taking stock of what has taken place, and thinking of what the future holds in store.

As I try to describe what I feel at the present moment, hoping that my voice will not betray my emotions too much, I have to say that there is a swirling mixture of thoughts and feelings inside me, which are now added to all the other questions I never stop asking myself, and to the thoughts which constantly guide me. And yet, they all merge harmoniously in a painting with striking colours, whose nuances are matched in number by the variety of situations those of us gathered here represent.

For me, the Symposium has been a **twofold experience**: the experience of preparing it, and the experience of these last few days. Both were very enriching, even if for different reasons and with different intensity. For more than a year, the Italian organizers and the ARLEP sub-committee worked on the organization of all aspects of this meeting, and if we obtained results and attained objectives, it is thanks to the **collaboration** with which we undertook and carried out every activity. It was work marked by personal attendance or by distant participation; work that was punctual and responsible; and which united us all and helped us to grow in our respect for diversity and appreciate its richness. It was work done behind the scenes which, without your participation, would have come to nothing. But we were not there as producers, and you were not there as actors, you did not play a part on the stage: you were there simply as yourselves, as real people. We were all protagonists; we, Young Lasallians from all over the world; we who pursue and **share** the Educational Mission, which we have made our outstanding characteristic.

During the opening Eucharistic celebration, we asked you for your eyes so that we could see the others, and with my eyes I came to know your faces and your smiles; and I was moved as the crucified Christ of San Damiano looked down upon me, the same Christ who had spoken to Francis, and I prayed he would speak to me also and show me the house I should rebuild. We asked you for your voices so as to sing and pray, and with those voices I shared my thoughts, my experience; I praised the Lord at times of prayers, and I enjoyed the journey by coach. We asked for your ears so as to listen to and understand diversity; and with my ears I listened to your testimony, the testimony of young people involved in

various educational situations; and it confirmed that what unites us, notwithstanding all our cultural differences, is our concern for young children and the defense of their rights. We asked for hands which would unite us, and with my hands I lit the candle during the vigil so that the sufferings of minors could light up our way. Finally, we asked for your hearts so that we could transmit what we had experienced; and now I speak to you with all my heart, a heart brimming with joy.

In these last few days our hearts have been touched, stimulated and enriched. Now, it is time to go, not simply return home, but go and resume from where we left off, and continue to work in the knowledge that we shall all be simultaneously pursuing the same dream: A POSSIBLE MISSION, because this is what we did during the Symposium.

Children are our founders; it was for them that our educational mission was begun and will continue; and we shall have to care for the seeds we have sown, so that they germinate and bear good fruit. Looking into the future, I see our contribution to Christian education continuing in all the different settings of our lives because if, derived from the Latin verb *educo*, education means to discover and develop the ability of each individual, we are called to help children become men, and to sustain their growth through the discovery of the Love of God. We are called to defend individual differences, making diversity an added value for humanity.

My thanks to everyone! A virtual hug to each one of you!

Some Words about the Symposium: First of all, I have to tell you that it was a bit difficult for me to be the 3rd or 4th oldest participant in the Symposium.

Our time together here in Rome has been a tremendously positive experience for me. Getting to meet so many of you ... hearing your stories ... witnessing the great progress of the past four years ... observing the great maturity and deep Lasallian commitment ... has been so very encouraging. About 15 of you were given the opportunity to share your Lasallian journey before the whole group. As I look around the room, it is clear that easily 65 or 75 more of you could have been asked to do the same.

My focus today is not on what has been accomplished and what has been completed during these six days. My focus is on the bonds of connection that have been made and the abundance of seeds that have been sown in our hearts these days for the mission. The seeds sown in Québec 2002 have borne good fruit, and you are its witnesses.

I would like here to mix a bit my images. In our opening prayer service, we sowed seeds of hope. Our names have been written on the flowers that adorn the front of our prayer gathering space. On that first night, however, we also lit candles. Each Region brought life and light into our gathering.

I remember watching Giacomo lighting the first candle and carrying it into our midst. He held the candle carefully, and he had to guard it lest it be too easily extinguished.

I implore you today. Guard carefully the dreams and the flame that burn these days in your hearts – guard them as carefully as Giacomo guarded the flame on Tuesday evening. Your Districts, Delegations, and Regions ... the young and the poor ... the Institute and the Lasallian educational mission ... need you to be the bearers of life and light; and no one else is possible of gifting them with the blessing that God has placed upon you ... in the people you have met and the ideas you have shared ... in this room ... or in prayer before the relics of John Baptist de La Salle or, as we blessed one another with oil, before the relics of Francis of Assisi.

As I have listened to you these days, five proposals about how we might go forward from here have presented themselves, and I want to share them with you. They are not exclusive of many other possibilities. I propose them to help you be concrete in your thinking and bold in your dreaming.

First, “association is also something for young people,” said Brother Superior this morning. “It can be lived in different ways.” Some of you are or have been Lasallian Volunteers, and consequently, already been associates. I believe that we have to find additional ways to allow Young Lasallians to associate – for one year at a time – on an international level. I believe that we have to be audacious in our creativity and find ways that respect both the necessary insertion of associates in Lasallian mission and structures on District, Delegation, and Regional levels and the expressed desire of a number of you to transcend the present structures and boundaries that were drawn up in another time and in response to other realities never before envisioned in your effort to live your Lasallian vocation.

Secondly, as I said in Québec 2002 and Brother Superior said again this morning in answering the questions that were posed by you, let us not forget the vocations of a De La Salle Brother and a La Salle Sister as a way of living out our Lasallian commitment. The presence of a La Salle Sister and of so many young Brothers – and here I am speaking of the 20 and 30 year olds! – is concrete testimony of the validity of this important vocation in the Lasallian Family and a witness of your commitment to walk with your brothers and sisters as we journey into the future together. You have a most significant role to play as

Young Lasallians – Brothers, Sisters, married and single lay Lasallians – engaged together in a diversity of vocations to assure the future of this holy work of God.

Thirdly, I have heard some of you suggest that the Movement of Young Lasallians would be strengthened and clarified if some common projects could be identified to be accomplished on an international level.

Army shared with us the other day her experience that identity is “formed in action more than in classrooms.” Is it too bold to dream of the project of the establishment of 2 to 5 international communities of Young Lasallians well situated in different corners of the Lasallian world as a symbol of our desire to go forward together? Is it too bold to begin to think of the project of inviting Young Lasallians to celebrate together Easter in the Casa Generalizia – a tridium of prayer, community, and service? Is it too bold to imagine a project in which Young Lasallians might be willing to commit for one or two years to support, strengthen, and serve the emergence of our Lasallian presence in the Sudan? We celebrate many 100th or 150th anniversaries of the birth of the Institute and Lasallian mission in different countries of the world. This would be an extraordinary opportunity to be present not for the anniversary but for the birth of the Lasallian implantation on behalf of some of the most abandoned young and poor in the world.

A few years ago no one even talked about having Lasallian Volunteers here at the Casa Generalizia. The first reaction to the proposal was that it could not be done, and yet it has been a great success. Wonderful Young Lasallians – like Mario and Nacho – have contributed greatly to the mission and the life here at the Center of the Institute.

Fourthly, let's not forget the invitation of the District of Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea – communicated to us by Tom – to come to Australia for a Young Lasallians gathering prior to World Youth Day 2008. This is not – at least for now – being proposed as the 3rd International Symposium; but it is a great opportunity to keep the flame burning.

Fifthly, the International Council of Young Lasallians needs to study carefully the suggestions and feedback that have been received during these days. From a challenging and imperfect beginning, the Council accomplished what was possible and successfully guided us from Québec 2002 to Roma 2006. The Council took the courageous and humble decision to ask Italy and ARLEP to organize the Symposium, and you have lived the success of that decision. As the reorganization of the Council continues to assist the Movement of Young Lasallians, I want to state clearly before you that, in my experience, ICYL cannot function properly (a) without someone full-time in service of the Institute working with the Council at the level of a Secretariat and (b) without the active

interest, support, and cooperation of the leaders of Districts, Delegations, and Regions. It is a hard work that demands much time, energy, patience, tolerance, mutual forbearance, and perseverance. Is it too bold to imagine? I do not think so.

Before concluding, I have – on your behalf – a few words of appreciation and thanks to make.

- to the Regions and Districts of Italia and ARLEP for having accepted the proposal of the International Council of Young Lasallians to organize the Symposium.
- to the Districts of Europe, the Superior General, and SECOLI for having provided substantial financial resources to help subsidize this experience and to guarantee that Young Lasallians of no sector of the Institute need be excluded.
- to the Staff, Brothers, and Sisters of the Casa Generalizia and of Casa La Salle – especially the translators – who welcomed, supported, and assisted us during these days.
- to the Prayer Teams and the Musicians who helped this whole experience to be so well grounded in the holy presence of God.
- to the Speakers, Group Leaders, Secretaries, Volunteers, and especially the Organizing Team – and most especially Brother Matteo, Brother José Angel, Daniela, and Txus as leaders – for the good and selfless work they have done.

Finally, my younger brothers and sisters, I want to thank all of you – in my own name and in the name of the General Council – for your presence and participation. We are deeply proud and honored that you have responded and continue to respond so positively to the call to give your life in association with us on behalf of the young and the poor. We feel great encouragement and hope to be in your company as we are held – all of us together – in the hands of God.

God bless you! God bless the Movement(s) of Young Lasallians!