

Jeffrey Gros, fsc

# Lasallian Ministry and the Unity of Christians



- What is your experience with other Christian churches in your Lasallian ministry?
- What challenges do you face in implementing the ecumenical initiatives of the Church in your ministry?
- What have been the most positive experiences for you and your ministry along the road of the Church toward deeper communion with other Christians?
- What resources would best serve your ministry in the process of uniting Christians?



## Introduction

In educational service of the poor, outreach to fellow Christians as partners in ministry and as communities we serve, is integral to Catholic identity and Lasallian ministry. The Catholic Church is committed to the long pilgrimage to full reconciliation among all Christian churches through the process of collaboration, prayer and dialogue. This is particularly important where Catholics are a majority in the community. The Catholic school is a privileged place for spiritual formation, dialogue and education.

The General Chapter reaffirmed this dimension of Lasallian commitment:

Among Lasallian institutions, the school is an ideal place for an interreligious and ecumenical dialogue which will bear witness to the values of all forms of faith. Lasallians working in universities have the opportunity to contribute to our mission, in a special way, by their commitment to research in the field of the faith development of young people, whatever their religion, and by training and accompaniment of those persons entrusted with the difficult task of sharing the Good News in an increasingly secularized and multi-religious context.

The Lasallian charism is already a source of inspiration in the context of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Young people from all cultures and religious traditions have the right and freedom to benefit from, and to live according to the Lasallian charism. (Circular 447, p. 23)

This contemporary commitment resonates with De La Salle's own commitment to the Church and its mission. His own affirmation of the universality of the Church sometimes placed him in a marginal relationship with ecclesiastical authorities. However, no matter how difficult was his catechetical mission, he attempted to help his Brothers and their students to be faithful to the larger pic-

ture of the Church and its reforms. De La Salle's admonitions are couched in the rhetoric of his day, and adapted to his context. His commitment to zeal for the Church and its unity are unmistakable:

I recommend my soul to God and, next, all the Brothers of the Society of the Christian Schools with whom he has associated me. I urge them, above all else, always to show entire submission to the church, especially in these evil times, and to give proof of this by never separating themselves in anything from our holy Father the Pope and from the Church of Rome, always remembering that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask God for the grace that their Society might always be entirely submissive thereto.<sup>1</sup>

Today this loyalty entails the commitment of Lasallian ministers in Catholic schools to the goal of visible unity among Christians, the nurturing of a firm faith in the Church and its commitment to dialogue, and zeal to know and seek unity with all other followers of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II emphasizes this commitment as central to the Catholic identity which is fostered in the Lasallian school:

...it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian Unity, is not just some sort of "appendix" which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature.

The quest for Christian unity is not a matter of choice or expediency, but a duty which springs from the very nature of the Christian community.

Concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the ability of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. "Last Testament and Final Words," in John Baptiste de La Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education, Jeffrey Calligan, Carl Koch, Jeffrey Gros, eds., New York: Paulist Press, 2004, p. 243.

2. John Paul, *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism, Origins*, 25:4, June 8, 1995, 49-72. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp2\\_ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut\\_unum? sint\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp2_ii_enc_25051995_ut_unum? sint_en.html), #19, 20.[UUS]

There has been a rather thorough development in Catholic commitments from the time of the Council, through the initiatives of the Holy See in providing directives, including incentives for the schools and religious communities; through the official dialogues with other Christian communities; and through the promotion of an ecumenical dimension to the spirituality of all Catholics.

The 1993 Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism provides helpful clarity:

The school, of every kind and grade, should give an ecumenical dimension to its religious teaching, and should aim in its own way to train hearts and minds in human and religious values, educating for dialogue, for peace and for personal relationships.

a) The spirit of charity, of respect, and of dialogue demands the elimination of language and prejudices which distort the image of other Christians. This holds especially for Catholic schools where the young must grow in faith, in prayer, in resolve to put into practice the Christian Gospel of unity. They should be taught genuine ecumenism, according to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

b) Where possible, in collaboration with other teachers, different subjects, e.g. history and art, should be treated in a way that underlines the ecumenical problems in a spirit of dialogue and unity. To this end it is also desirable that teachers be correctly and adequately informed about the origins, history and doctrines of other Churches and ecclesial Communities especially those that exist in their region.<sup>3</sup>

In this short volume we will indicate some of the principles that may help the Lasallian school realize the goal of being a place for nurturing the goal of visible unity as central to Catholic identity. Issues of administrative leadership, sacramental sharing, fellow Christians who are not Catholic, curriculum and higher education

---

3. Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, Origins, Vol. 23: No. 9., # 68.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_25031993\\_principles?and?norms?on?ecumenism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles?and?norms?on?ecumenism_en.html)

Directoire Pour L'Application des Principes et de Normes sur L'Oecuménisme, Paris: Les Édition du Cerf, 1994.

Directorio para la aplicación de los Principios y Normas sobre el Ecumenism, Bogotá: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1993.

will be broached. While interreligious dialogue is a key element in the Lasallian mission, and becomes a pressing priority in many Lasallian contexts where Christians are a minority, these issues will not be the subject of this volume.

The goal of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement is full communion with all Christians:

The Catholic Church solemnly pledged itself to work for Christian unity at the Second Vatican Council. The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* explains how the unity that Christ wishes for his Church is brought about “through the faithful preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles and their successors –the Bishops with Peter’s successor at their head– through their administering the sacraments, and through their governing in love”, and defines this unity as consisting of the “confession of one faith,... the common celebration of divine worship,... the fraternal harmony of the family of God.” This unity which of its very nature requires full visible communion of all Christians is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement. The Council affirms that this unity by no means requires the sacrifice of the rich diversity of spirituality, discipline, liturgical rites and elaborations of revealed truth that has grown up among Christians in the measure that this diversity remains faithful to the apostolic Tradition.<sup>4</sup>

In some cultures the churches experience a certain religious illiteracy. This is a common ecumenical challenge. Christians can hardly resolve our differences if our people do not know the core of the faith and do not even realize what has divided us in the past, or the Gospel call to unity. How do Christians collaborate to address the problem of the void of religious knowledge among Christians in some cultures?

A tendency, prevalent in the polarized and politicized religious atmosphere in many of the churches including Catholic, is to sacrifice authentic Catholic identity, with zeal for the unity of the Church as integral to it, to a sectarian stance that defines Catholicism over against other Christians. As Peter Phan notes: “Given the recent remarkable progress in ecumenical dialogue, doctrines and structures that at one time were regarded as exclu-

---

4. Directory, 20.

sive properties of the Catholic Church are today becoming common possessions of many in the mainline Christian churches. Rather than differentiation and exclusiveness, I conceive Catholic identity as intensification and deepening... [Dialogues] do not constitute a threat to Catholic identity; rather they provide a necessary means and the opportunities for deepening and intensifying the Catholic identity, not over against others but with them.”<sup>5</sup>

In other cultural contexts, where other churches predominate there can be a retreat from the ecumenical ideals of the Catholic Church because we are a beleaguered minority in an oppressive situation. In still other cultural contexts, outreach to other Christians is seen as irrelevant, or even a distraction, because the vast majority of people are Catholics, at least in a cultural sense. In all of these situations, Lasallians are challenged both to adapt to the culture to empower their students with an appropriate sense of their own faith, and a zeal for unity with other Christians, that sees beyond the limitations or challenges of any particular context.

Christian identity and affiliation with a specific tradition is a challenge for all Christians. There is a sectarian option that would make one's own community the center of the Christian universe, rather than Christ and the faith of the Church through the ages. Catholics are particularly tempted to sectarianism and triumphalism, because of our theological claims and sense of history and because of our large size, worldwide extension and isolation in some countries and neighborhoods where we are the majority. However, we also encounter this attitude in some Evangelicals who do not want to dialogue and will even proselytize Catholics. Orthodox claim, like Catholics did before the second Vatican Council, to be the one true Church. In some cases this leads to an ecumenical urgency for sharing in the pilgrimage toward restoring full, visible unity. In other cases, Orthodox leaders react like some Catholics, showing a prejudice against other Christians and seeing the only route to unity is by assimilating to their understanding of the Christian faith. The Lasallian educator will help students and faculty understand the Christian context of a local situation, and to reach out in dialogue and mutual respect where this is possible.

---

5. "To be Catholic or Not to Be: Is It Still the Question? Catholic Identity and Religious Education Today." *Horizons*, 25 (2), p.179.

In an interreligious context, where Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims predominate, there may be the possibility of better relations among Christians in this minority context, or it may create particular tensions. Obviously, interreligious dialogue will be the priority for the Church in these situations, but Lasallian catechesis will also need to provide students with the vision of unity and the progress in dialogue that is central to Catholic identity.

As the largest Church in the world, Catholics have a particular responsibility. Our size and our claims press us to be more ecumenical and respectful, while opening ourselves to dialogue and renewal. For catechesis, this means keeping both a clear identity and an open spirit as the goal of our formation. It is particularly important in communities that are majority Catholic, or among new immigrants coming from places where Catholics may be the majority, like Latin America or Eastern Europe, to help students to see relationships with fellow Christians as an integral value in Catholic life; and to see the difference among ecumenical fellow Christians who share the goal of full communion, those fellow Christians who are not ecumenical and even sometimes anti-Catholic, and non-Christian groups, like Witnesses and Mormons.

The other option that plagues Christian cultures is what we have classically called indifference. In some secularized and pluralistic North Atlantic cultures Catholicism often is understood as another denomination, where we live and let live. "The different churches are just one expression of the Church, which is a spiritual unity where full communion is only realized in heaven." Catholicism has a better tradition and a better hope for a catechesis for Church and for ecumenical urgency than evangelical Protestantism, with its individualistic, personal conversion orientation; and some forms of classical Protestantism, where the divisions of history are relativized in the face of God's call for peace among Christians. Ecumenism does not mean mere tolerance, any more than it means sectarian isolation.

Neither sectarianism nor indifferentism is the Catholic way. The current institutional suspicion that is so rife in some cultures, can make it difficult to engender a real sense of Catholic and ecumenical community that is sensitive to history, diversity and open to the future and to reconciliation.

The situation of religion in the schools, staff hiring and teacher training is influenced in different countries and different social

contexts by specific relationships between Church and state. In some of these relationships may be enhanced, where it is necessary for the churches to work together to provide a common core Christian curriculum. In others it may create difficulties. The churches in the educational mission will need to take these constraints into account as their ecumenical relations develop.<sup>6</sup>

## Catholic Principles for Lasallian Ecumenical Leadership

If the life and ministry of John Baptist de La Salle teaches us anything, it shows that a dedicated response to God's grace can accomplish great things in the minds and hearts of the young and in the edification of Christian educational structures. His view of providence leads him to interpret the pilgrimage of his own life and ministry in the light of God's guidance, no matter how illogical and circuitous the route. Certainly the developments of Christian relationships to one another and the Catholic Church's ecumenical pilgrimage are testimony to this marvelous providence.

After more than thirty years on the pilgrimage toward Christian unity, there is much to be learned and much to be taught. The Lasallian school is an important locus for nurturing not only the conversion that is necessary for the ecumenical vision among Christians, Catholic or not, but also for the instruction that gives this vision the religious, spiritual and experiential content of the ecumenical movement. The Lasallian school touches hearts, but it also informs minds about the hopes and progress of the churches together in response to Christ's prayer.

The quest for Christian unity is not a program of study, though it does have its catechetical component. It is not merely an institutional matter, though it has implications for all of our Catholic institutional life. It is above all an attitude of mind a conversion of heart.

---

6. Flavio Pajer, documents some of these relationships in Europe in *School-based Education and Religious Culture*, Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2003, p.25, nt. 21.

The Holy Father continually reminds Catholics that we are committed irrevocably to the full, visible unity of the Christian churches, that ecumenism is integral to Catholic identity. The magisterium has been very strong in its support of Catholic ecumenism and the dialogues that have developed since the Council.

The ecumenical dimension of the faith life of a Lasallian ministry cannot be left in the hands of catechists, chaplains and campus ministers alone. If we do not have a full faculty and staff with a basic commitment and support of Catholic values, and the commitment of the Church, in this case to the unity of Christians, then we are undermining our mission from within.

In building the Lasallian faith community in the school, we strive to foster a sacramental consciousness. This entails learning to live out the real, but imperfect communion Catholics share with all baptized Christians. That experience of communion is learned through direct personal experience, common prayer with other Christians, and appreciation of their leaders. However, how these experiences of ecumenism are made an integral part of the administrative plan of a particular ministry is a very practical decision adapted to the culture, needs and challenges of each situation

Catholic passion for unity is one of the elements that characterizes the shifts in the understanding of the Church emerging from the Council, like the renewal of the liturgy, empowering of the lay faithful, and understanding the quest for peace and justice as integral to evangelization.

- We recognize the real but imperfect communion that exists among our Church and other churches and ecclesial communities, and we have begun to live into a deeper communion.
- We no longer speak of “separated brethren” but of “fellow Christians.”
- Common Baptism, those things we share in faith and our common scripture help Catholic identity be formed within an understanding of our common Christianity.
- We have moved from an ecumenism of “return” to a mutual respect, using dialogue as the means for disclosing our agreements, those things needing resolution on the common pilgrimage toward that unity for which Christ prayed.

- Our theological understanding has shifted from seeing the Roman Catholic Church as the one, true Church to an affirmation of the fact that the one, true Church “subsists in” the Catholic Church, but that elements of the true Church are alive and saving in other churches, and that we are all wounded while the scandal of division remains.

## Resources

In the years since the Council and its Decrees on Education and on Ecumenism, specific directives have continued to emerge to strengthen and clarify the Church’s mission in serving the unity of the Church. During the 1990s there have been three very important documents: the 1993 Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, the 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, and the 1998 Ecumenical Dimension of Formation for Pastoral Workers.<sup>7</sup> These reinforce the impetus for ecumenical education articulated in the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the General Directory for Catechesis.

The Directory brings together the policies articulated in a dozen different Vatican documents and introduces an important new chapter on ecumenical formation. The Directory characterizes the ecumenical mission of the Church:

The ecumenical movement is a grace of God, given by the Father in answer to the prayer of Jesus and supplication of the Church inspired by the Holy Spirit. While it is carried out within the general mission of the Church to unite humanity in Christ, its own specific field is the restoration of unity among Christians. Those who are baptized in the name of Christ are, by that very fact, called to commit themselves to the search for unity. Baptismal communion tends toward full ecclesial communion. To live our Baptism is to be caught up in Christ’s mission of making all things one.<sup>8</sup>

---

7. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers,” *Origins*, 27:39, March 19, 1998, 653-661.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_16031998\\_ecumenical?dimension\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_16031998_ecumenical?dimension_en.html)

8. Directory, #9.

The *Directory* is designed to “motivate, enlighten and guide this [ecumenical] activity,” as well as to provide directives. It has been developed “in the light of the experience of the Church in the years since the Council and taking account of the present ecumenical situation.” Diocesan ecumenical commissions, ecumenical commissions within religious communities and special delegates with responsibility for promoting Christian unity in their sphere of action are all suggested by the *Directory*.

After the *Directory* was promulgated in 1993, the Institute set up a commission and designated a liaison in the Mother House in Rome to promote the ecumenical work within the Institute. In some regions and districts a similar leadership role may be helpful to the Lasallian ministries and their formation programs.

The school will find resource in collaboration with diocesan ecumenical programs, which as the *Directory* notes vary widely: “The situations being dealt with in ecumenism are often unprecedented, and vary from place to place and time to time. The initiatives of the faithful in the ecumenical domain are to be encouraged. But there is need for constant and careful discernment by those who have ultimate responsibility for the doctrine and the discipline of the Church.”<sup>9</sup> We are in the early decades of the reforms of Vatican II, so that we are being surprised by the Holy Spirit by new developments each day. We are also uncovering new challenges with which we are called to deal in God’s providence.

The school’s mission, according to the *Directory*, emphasizes both faith community and curriculum content:

The school, of every kind and grade, should give an ecumenical dimension to its religious teaching, and should aim in its own way to train hearts and minds in human and religious values, educating for dialogue, for peace and for personal relationships.

a) The spirit of charity, of respect, and of dialogue demands the elimination of language and prejudices which distort the image of other Christians. This holds especially for Catholic schools where the young must grow in faith, in prayer, in resolve to put into practice the Christian Gospel of unity. They should be taught genuine ecumenism, according to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

---

9. *Directory*, # 30-34.

b) Where possible, in collaboration with other teachers, different subjects, e.g. history and art, should be treated in a way that underlines the ecumenical problems in a spirit of dialogue and unity. To this end it is also desirable that teachers be correctly and adequately informed about the origins, history and doctrines of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, especially those that exist in their region.<sup>10</sup>

Pope John Paul devoted his twelfth encyclical letter in 1995 to Catholics worldwide on the unity of the Church, *Ut Unum Sint*, in order to help us as Catholics and educators to live up to our ecumenical vocation. This letter is a summary of the thirty years of Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement. It recounts the irreversible commitments made and the relationships developed. It outlines an agenda for dialogue, while affirming that Christians share more than divides us. Among its most dramatic encouragements for Catholics is to see every Christian, according to their position and formation, as called to serve the unity of the Church. The ecumenical mission of the Church is not to be an “appendix,” but central to the life of the Church.

Catholics no longer speak of “separated brethren” but of fellow Christians. As will be noted below, he challenges us as educators especially, to help the Church to “receive” the results of thirty years of dialogue so that all of our people can participate in the fruits of the Spirit that have enriched all of our churches by our common witness, dialogue and deepening spiritual ties with one another.<sup>11</sup>

Most recently, in this context of educational renewal for Catholics, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the office in the Holy See responsible for ecumenism, has developed a document, *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers*. It suggests that teachers and all pastoral workers begin their studies with a course on ecumenism, so that all Catholic theology and pastoral practice is seen through the prism of a zeal for the unity of the Church and an understanding of the Catholic faith in the context of this ecumenical commit-

---

10. *Ibid.*, #68.

11. UUS, # 41, 72, 80.

ment. Implementing this program provides a major challenge for our Lasallian schools, for our in-service programs, and for our collaboration with ecumenical partner. Lasallian formation programs will find in it principles and detailed resources for filling out their training for leadership, faith and mission. More will be said about its principles in the discussion of the catechetical curriculum in Lasallian ministries.

Many schools use the annual *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* as an opportunity to bring Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican leaders into the school for common prayer and possibly even some dialogue events. Many episcopal conferences collaborate with ecumenical groups in adapting the materials to their particular contexts.<sup>12</sup> Administrators can collaborate with the diocesan ecumenical officer in seeing that the materials get out to each class, possibly with suggestions and resources. Schools can use the week of prayer as an “ecumenism awareness week,” where other churches and our Catholic relationship with them can be lifted up.

## The Role of the Lasallian Administrator

Students pick up their attitudes about other Christians and about zeal for Christian unity from the interests, openness and enthusiasm of the administrators and teachers as much as they learn it in the content of religion classes. The encouragement given by administrators, and the symbolic leadership provided by presidents and principals, is a factor in the ecumenical horizon developed in the faculty community. Modeling ecumenical openness, prayer for the unity of the Church and promotion of dialogue on the part of leadership, provides both students and faculty with role models for bringing these Catholic commitments into the daily life of the school and community.

Essential to Catholic faith community formation is creating a context for ecumenical conversion. As the Holy Father notes: “The entire life of Christians is marked by a concern for ecumenism; and they are called to let themselves be shaped, as it were, by that

---

12. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index\\_weeks-prayer.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_weeks-prayer.htm)

concern ...there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform ...No Christian community can exempt itself from this call."<sup>13</sup>

For the school this means providing an environment where the commitment to the Catholic goal of visible unity, the Catholic openness to a dialogue of love and hospitality, and an enthusiasm about every step closer to the goal of unity among the churches, is an essential part of the atmosphere. The Catholic ecumenical climate is the unique responsibility of the administrative team, its leader and its entire faculty. School wide ecumenical services, during the Week of Prayer and at other times, ecumenical components to retreats, symbols of ecumenical events and developments in the religious decor of the school, all contribute to the community's sense of the ecumenical component of Catholic communal identity.

The spirit of charity, of respect, and of dialogue demands the elimination of language and prejudices which distort the image of other Christians. This holds especially for Catholic schools where the young must grow in faith, in prayer, in resolve to put into practice the Christian Gospel of unity. They should be taught genuine ecumenism, according to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Not many will be able to follow the ecumenical developments of the Church in detail, nor are all equally responsible for the religious vision of the school or ministry. However, the whole staff community needs to be attentive to this priority of the Church, and not leave it to specialized staff.

Administrators also oversee the hiring of faculty, being sensitive to the backgrounds of prospective teachers in Lasallian schools, and working carefully to see that there is strong ownership of the school's mission. While most mission statements will not be so detailed as to give specifics on the ecumenical dimension of the school's mission, faculty need to be selected, whether Catholic or not, who are sympathetic to the vision of visible unity articulated by the Church and are supportive of a faith environment where reconciliation and deepening relationships among the churches is a priority. Hiring for mission is an integral part of the administra-

---

13. UUS, #16.

tive challenge. We would not hire a teacher who sees Catholicism as just another denomination. Likewise, we would not hire a faculty member who was not open to and interested in deepening communion among Christians and their churches. Faculty who are not Catholic will need to understand Catholic commitments to Christian unity and dialogue.

While, teachers who do not specialize in religion or serve on campus ministry teams may not follow the Church's developments with other churches, they should have a supportive ecumenical spirit and be equipped by staff development programs to be receptive to the steps that are taken with other churches to build that communion for which we pray.

Studies in some cultures show an increasing number of Catholics seeing the Church as just one more option in the plethora of religious choices. In these situations we need a community committed together to strengthen the religious identity of our students and to touch their hearts with a love for the Church as well as insuring that they have a certain quantity of religious knowledge. The unity of the churches is not served by a culture of tolerance, indifference and religious neutrality.

The relationships with other churches are constantly changing, mostly for the better. Therefore, attention to these relationships is an ongoing challenge. Even when there are setbacks in particular relationships, these are occasions for prayer for one another, and for deeper understanding among Christians. As the ecumenical Directory notes: "Where ecumenical work is not being done, or not being done effectively, Catholics will seek to promote it. Where it is being opposed or hampered by sectarian attitudes and activities that lead to even greater divisions among those who confess the name of Christ, they should be patient and persevering."<sup>14</sup> From time to time, faculty meetings and staff retreats will provide a forum for updating, or signaling developments that are taking place, even without attempting to provide any depth of engagement.

Creating a climate in the school where other church leaders are common and welcome, provides an atmosphere that is both sym-

---

14. Directory, 23.

bolic and carries an educational potential in itself. When the school has the advantage of other committed Christians among its faculty, their witness to fellow colleagues through leading prayer, and to students in ecumenical prayer services can model the ecumenical community into which students are being initiated.

In a school that is all or predominantly Catholic, special effort will be necessary so that there are occasions for ministers and priests of other churches to participate in ecumenical services. Opportunities for dialogue and occasions to visit other churches will need particular attention. The curriculum will have to be attentive to learning about other churches and the history and content of Catholic relations with them.<sup>15</sup>

In schools that have other Christian communities represented, it will be important that the faculty know the churches of our nonCatholic students and faculty. These fellow Christians should feel welcome. All Christian students should understand their presence as an opportunity for ecumenical learning and fostering unity among the churches to which they belong. All attempts to undermine the Christian faith of students or faculty or any use of the school for proselytism is to be avoided.<sup>16</sup>

Engaging in theological dialogue is not something that can be done easily in a school wide context, but major ecumenical events can be celebrated and noted on a school wide basis. For example, on the occasion of the Pope's visits to a country like Greece or Sweden, the opportunity can be singled out as an occasion to have an Orthodox priest or a Lutheran pastor visit the school, or an ecumenical service can be celebrated for the student body to mark the occasion. The 1999 signing of the *Joint Declaration on Justification*, or its October anniversary, can be an opportunity for a celebration in prayer and recognition of how differently we see the Reformation today, as a result of these forty years of dialogue.

For young people, theological events may not be appropriate for study, but the events and the perspective on other churches can be celebrated liturgically. They can be helped to see themselves

---

15. Ecumenical Formation, # 22-26.

16. Directory, # 99.

as integral to historic moments on the path to reconciliation. In environments where there are particular tensions among Christians, it is important for students to be exposed to respectful and ecumenical leaders from those communities where relationships are most difficult.

Recruiting Lasallian staff for the mission proper to the ministry is an important challenge for the administrator. We are as serious about the recruiting and selection of Catholic school religion teachers as we are of Physics or German teachers. However, even with competent teachers, the results of the dialogues are so profuse, theologically technical and diverse, that it would be difficult for the normal teacher to keep up with them.

Workshops and staff development can be of some help. In assisting a ministry community to keep up with the life and ministry of the Church, it will be important to have in-service opportunities to review the Catholic ecumenical commitments, especially as they impact the particular situation of the community involved. Since ecumenical dialogue is a pilgrimage toward visible unity, the results of dialogues and new decisions are continually being made between the churches. These stages along the way need to have opportunities for celebration and reflection in Lasallian schools.

For all Lasallian staff it will be important to take account of the elements unique to the local culture that challenge Catholic identity and its ecumenical component. It will be important to avoid the sort of diffuse Christianity, noted above, which is no service to the ecumenical vision of the Church. Peter Phan notes, “while intra-Christian [ecumenical] and interreligious dialogue is imperative for contemporary Christian theology and practice, it is neither feasible nor productive in religious education to aim at the formation of a generically Christian attitude and identity, since it is only through a particular community of faith, with its own beliefs, rituals, and ethical and spiritual practices that a person gains access to and is socialized into the common Christian heritage.”<sup>17</sup> There is no real ecumenism without a robust and self-confident commitment to Catholicism to bring to the dialogue table.

---

17. Phan, p.171

On the other hand, some would prefer to see the commitment to unity and to other churches as an add-on, after “Catholic formation” is complete. This makes about as much sense as those who would want only Latin in the liturgy for young people until they had mastered an understanding of the Mass. There is no richer way to deepen one’s own appreciation of your own community than in sharing its gifts with others.

Where there is a campus ministry, the campus minister has an important role to play in the service of the ecumenical mission of the school. The ecumenical *Directory* explicitly recommends “encounters and discussions [that] can usefully be organized with other Christians,” including “meetings with students of other churches and ecclesial communities.” In this sort of experiential learning “the necessity for gradualness and adaptation is very important and unavoidable.” Ecumenical collaboration and placement is significant in service projects. Reflection on the ecumenical implications, for the Catholic Church, is an important dimension of both spiritual formation and theological reflection on ecumenical service projects.

Likewise, the school is the place where students and staff learn to differentiate between press reports about Catholicism and fellow Christians and the reality of what the churches stand for in faith, public witness and their relationships with one another. Each cultural context differs: “ecumenical formation requires a pedagogy that is adapted to the concrete situation of the life of persons.”<sup>18</sup>

In our ecumenical educational work this means taking advantage of the support of the diocesan ecumenical officers, being willing to provide educators to serve on the diocesan ecumenical commission and promoting, in the school, the relationships, covenants and conciliar ecumenical programs of the diocese. This interdependence in Catholic schooling does not mean that all ecumenical initiatives come from the diocese or clergy. The school has an important role in serving the bishop and the Church in developing new ecumenical relationships and models.

Many Lasallian ministries become creative and imaginative laboratories for ecumenical relationships and formation. Just to cite

---

18. *Directory*, # 55-56.

one example, the old Mother House of the former St. Louis, USA, district is now a conference center. Like many Catholic conference centers, it is a host for a multiplicity of Christian congregations and ecumenical ministries who make retreats there. It also is host to an Anglican parish which uses the old novitiate chapel as its church for Sunday liturgy. An African American Baptist congregation uses the visitor's old offices for its staff during the week.

The St. Gabriel's system in Philadelphia provides Catholic, Protestant and Muslim services and chaplains for those in Lasallian care. The Baltimore district Spirituality Center not only hosts a wide variety of church and ecumenical groups, but also collaborates regularly with the Claggett Episcopal retreat center near by. These initiatives could never emerge from Archdiocesan designs nor Institute wide directives.

There are two temptations into which leadership may fall.

1) There is the danger of identifying ecumenism and interreligious outreach as evacuating any religious content and therefore secularizing the institution. One thing is central in Catholic ecumenical identity, and that is theological clarity about the different goals of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the central role of strong faith convictions in both, and Catholic openness to the richness of the intellectual tradition and dialogue with those with whom we differ, from a position of honesty and truth.

2) The other temptation is to see the schools and other ministries as vehicles for proselytism or Catholic triumphalism, returning to a preconiliar theology of return. Catholicism sees itself in real, if yet imperfect, communion with all Christians and engages in dialogue with particular churches with the common goal of full communion. Therefore, ecumenical relations are an internal affair for Christians. Lasallian administrators have a particular challenge in avoiding these two pitfalls.

The administration of a Lasallian ministry will also need to be sensitive to the Catholic position on sacramental sharing, since it is often in the context of school liturgies, retreats, funerals and programs for parents that the question, especially of Eucharistic sharing, arises. How we share the mystery of the Eucharist is related to our understanding of the common baptism we share, the mystery of the Church and its unity, and the levels of communion in faith that have developed.

Some would like to reduce this question to a blanket prohibition of any sacramental sharing, or to an unreflective open hospitality. However, the ecclesial position of the Catholic is a more complex discernment. What better place than a Catholic school, or ministry in service of the poor, to become educated about the depths of the mystery of the Eucharist in the Church and its implications in practice?

All of the Christian churches recognize two principles about the celebration of the Eucharist: 1) it represents communion in Christ, and therefore is a sign of full unity among those who receive; and 2) it is a means for building up the unity among baptized Christians. These two basic principles are taken into account together, as the *Directory notes*, therefore:

...in general the Catholic Church permits access to its Eucharistic communion and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick, only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. For the same reasons, it also recognizes that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities.<sup>19</sup>

It is important that the Lasallian ministry be places where these conditions are known, and their particular application in the local diocese or episcopal conference is recognized. It is also important to realize that the application of these principles may vary from one episcopal conference or one diocese to another.

The criteria for the admission of Orthodox, Eastern and Oriental, the Assyrian Church of the East and Polish National Catholics in North American is much more open, pastorally, from the Catholic side because of the recognition of priestly ministry and therefore the full Eucharistic mystery in these churches. However, with the exception of the Syrian [Oriental] Orthodox, the Polish National Catholic, and the Assyrian Church of the East, these churches do not allow for Catholics to receive in their churches or for their members to receive from Catholic priests. Common Declarations between Pope John Paul II and the Syrian and Assyrian Patriarchs

---

19. *Ibid.*, # 129.

have opened the way for sacramental sharing when pastorally warranted, which would be applicable in the school context. The Polish National Catholic Church in North America has been judged by the Holy See to be in the same situation as the Eastern churches in this matter.

The issue with the churches of the Reformation is more complex, but not less important in the context of a school faith community. Catholics never receive penance or Eucharist in these churches because we have not yet resolved issues of ordained ministry, or fully recognized their sacramental celebrations, though we do recognize their sacred, grace-giving character. With some of them, like Lutheran and Anglican we have developed substantial agreement on the meaning of the Eucharist. However, our ability to commune with them awaits full Eucharistic reconciliation.

Occasions when members of these churches can receive at a Catholic mass, by way of pastoral exception, require more discernment - a general invitation or a general prohibition is not prescribed. The *Directory*, again, is very specific:

Catholic ministers will judge individual cases and administer these sacraments only in accord with these [diocesan or episcopal conference] established norms, where they exist. Otherwise they will judge according to the norms of this *Directory*.

The conditions under which a Catholic minister may administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, of penance and of the anointing of the sick to a baptized person who may be found in the circumstances given above are that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.<sup>20</sup>

The application of the norms can vary from diocese to diocese and episcopal conference, according to the pastoral needs of the situation and the judgment of the local bishop. For example, South Africa and the episcopal conferences of Britain and Ireland have issued guidelines, and the episcopal conference of the

---

20. *Ibid.*, 130-131.

United States has not, though many dioceses have done so. Some reserve the individual decision to the bishop or his ecumenical commission, other leave it in the hands of the individual presenting him or her self and the local Catholic minister, within the guidelines of the *Directory*.

A Catholic school administrator, especially in those schools with other Christians in the faculty and student body, will do well to know not only the Catholic position, but also the disposition of the local bishop, and where applicable, the bishops' conference. In the school context it is often possible for the elements of peer pressure and cultural relations between church groups to have an influence that can tend to override the understandings of the churches and their sacraments.

Some Christian churches, for example the Orthodox on one side and the Methodists on the other, have an understanding of the Church and its Eucharistic practice that varies widely from Catholic faith and practice. All concerned students, staff and administration need to understand these points of view and devise a pedagogical strategy that is both pastorally sensitive and educationally effective. We do not practice open communion, but we understand the faith on which it is based and respect the churches that practice it. We do not prohibit all sacramental sharing, but we observe the practices of the churches that do and do not put pressure on their members to commune with us, even though it is permitted.

These and other administrative sensitivities and initiatives are all part of what is appropriate in formation of Lasallians to serve as in the leadership of our ministries. There is no reason for Lasallian administration to be limited to Catholics, but is important that they be equipped with the vision and commitments of Catholic education, including its ecumenical resources, hopes and practices.

#### Administrative initiatives:

- Common prayer, Week of Prayer, etc.
- Ecumenical Faith Community Formation
- Recruiting faculty and administration for Mission, including unity
- In service ecumenical formation
- Ecumenically informed Catholic curriculum
- Ecumenical service projects and reflection
- Diocesan collaboration in ecumenical programming
- Celebrations and experiences of dialogue and events
- Ecumenically informed school/ministry policies
- Knowledge and sensitivity to ecumenical environment and cultures in which students and faculty live

## Fellow Christians in Lasallian Ministries

In educational service of the poor, outreach to non-Catholic fellow Christians as partners in ministry and as communities we serve, is integral to Catholic identity and Lasallian ministry. In some contexts, like Greece or Egypt students will come from Orthodox backgrounds. In these contexts there are many wounds of history to be mended.

For certain of our partner churches, like the African American churches in the United States, service of the poor and support of the faith of young people without proselytism, are primary bases for our common Christian spiritual development, mutual respect and understanding, and the foundation for dialogue and a lifelong commitment to unity. This grassroots educational calling, inherent in the Lasallian charism, is an important mark of African American Christians which we share. For Catholics this commitment emerges from our understanding of our Church as in real, if yet imperfect, communion with other churches.

This commitment to other Christians is not only reinforced by the Catholic commitment for Lasallians. It is also reinforced by the two dimensions of the Lasallian charism: "service of the poor through education," and "catechist by vocation."

In helping the poor enliven faith in Christ by touching hearts and promoting religious and human education, Lasallians take the

Christian faith of the poor, Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, with the utmost seriousness. We cannot love the poor without loving and desiring to know the faith and churches of the poor. In the US African American community, Catholic teachers will know that the Holy See has official dialogues with the Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal churches to which most of African American Christians belong. In other cultures, different dialogue resources will help approach our non-Catholic faculty and students.

However, as educators identifying with the needs of the poor, Lasallians also know that focus on Christ, on the relations in the community, and on the contribution of education to the liberation from the bonds of poverty, ignorance, and religious and racial prejudice, are basic in school age students, their teachers and clergy. Such liberating concerns are necessarily prior to issues about the nature and unity of the churches. Unity in service to the Kingdom, based in a common faith, precedes the study of reconciling sacramental and ecclesiological issues that divide. Catholic Lasallians build the human relations among peoples, churches and schools in the community, best adapted to human promotion and liberation.

Since the priorities of the ministry of Christians from different churches in service to the poor, are spiritual, prophetic, collaborative, and liberating in the community, rather than exclusively theological, the Lasallian school will be the privileged place for Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant fellow Christians to work shoulder to shoulder in building the Kingdom through the common educational enterprise. As Pope John Paul II says, collaboration will be the school for ecumenism. In this, the Lasallian School will be able to build reconciling bridges, to which the Catholic Church is committed. These schools are centers of reconciliation where neither bishops nor the theologians have the expertise or presence to take leadership.

However, Lasallians are also “catechists by vocation.” Therefore, an integral part of the formation of Lasallian educators will be knowledge of their students, their churches and their ministers. The dialogue between the Catholic Church and these Methodist, Pentecostal and Baptist churches will be a resource in working in the US African American community, as the dialogues with Anglicans, Protestants and Orthodox will be in other contexts. However, the leadership of these communities, the ministers of

the students and the neighborhood clergy of whatever church, will be partners in the religious education of students, family and school leaders.

Common prayer and spiritual sharing will be integral to any Lasallian school, but especially in those that are gifted with a diverse Christian population. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* notes, knowing the faith of fellow Christians should be an integral part of Catholic catechesis.

Opportunities for non-Catholic pastors and priests to minister to Lasallian students, as Catholic priests do to theirs, is important. Lasallian schools are in a unique position to bring local clergy in their communities into dialogue, about education, church collaboration, service to the families, the rights of the child, and even the dialogue of faith. The dialogue of love is the basis for the dialogue of truth. In this the Lasallian educator can be an instrument of ecumenical formation for both school and parish.

The practical dimension of the Lasallian charism will enable the Lasallian school to develop creative, innovative and pioneering strategies to bring the resources of the divided churches to bear on service of the poor through education and will engender new ways of letting the Gospel call for unity serve the churches that have a stake in the Lasallian school. When the Holy Father says that the results of the dialogues are to become a “common heritage” he is laying a challenge before the Lasallian catechist, to provide the bridges of religious reconciliation that are adapted to the learning styles and the curricula appropriate to the particular Lasallian School.

Priests and ministers from other communities who have appropriated the Lasallian vision will be particularly helpful partners in enabling us to discern catechetical priorities and ecumenical agendas in these communities. In generations to come, those schooled in the Gospel of Jesus Christ together in a knowledge of one another’s churches and a zeal for unity of Christians, will provide a cadre of leadership that will contribute to the renewal and understanding of our churches and their communion, turned to the service of the poor in our communities around the globe.

John Baptist de la Salle was committed to the Church and to its renewal, to the poor and their human and religious education, and to a corps of ministers whose faith and zeal would transform

the lives they touched. If Christians are to be reconciled and the community to be transformed by education, then this Lasallian vision will be a key factor in the ecumenical future of the Church.

Catholic principles for dealing with fellow Christians among our students are quite clear, as enunciated in the Directory:

In Catholic schools and institutions, every effort should be made to respect the faith and conscience of students or teachers who belong to other Churches or ecclesial Communities. In accordance with their own approved statutes, the authorities of these schools and institutions should take care that clergy of other Communities have every facility for giving spiritual and sacramental ministration to their own faithful who attend such schools or institutions. As far as circumstances allow, with the permission of the diocesan Bishop these facilities can be offered on the Catholic premises, including the church or chapel.<sup>21</sup>

Needless to say, how these policies will be implemented will depend on the demography, school resources and priorities and diocesan direction.

The experience of some of our United States schools is interesting, but obviously does not recommend itself elsewhere: We have a San Miguel middle school in Chicago, with only 3 Catholics, where they use one of the Black pastors among those who teach religion. Of course, what is important, for the Catholic Church, in that context is a) that the school creates a new image and understanding for Catholicism in a community where Catholics are a minority, and b) it is a school that does not rely on Catholic sources alone for funding, though it is explicitly religious and Catholic. Christian Brothers' High School in Memphis has always had a high proportion of other Christian and even Jewish students. Since 1940 these students attended special "ethics" classes. Today the teachers of these classes include a Greek Orthodox graduate of the school, and a Presbyterian deeply involved in the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle. A few years ago, the local Anglican Bishop received a distinguished alumnus award.

In most cases, both the school and the parents will have these fellow Christians take Catholic religion classes as is appropriate.

---

21. Directory, #141.

However, the religion faculty in these situations should be particularly attentive to the dialogues with the Christian churches to which their students belong, being sure that both Catholics and other students know where we have come in the dialogues, what the continuing differences are, and what steps are being taken to resolve these church dividing issues. It is important that we know the Vatican dialogues with the particular churches that predominate in the student body. The ideal would be catechists skilled in the Catholic heritage, but knowledgeable about other churches represented in the school and committed to following the ecumenical developments of our churches together. However, providing resources for such programs is a challenge.

Teachers in Lasallian schools, or at least a core of them, need to be openly committed to the mission of the school and the Gospel, including its ecumenical imperative. Of course, fellow Christians who are not Catholic may be as student oriented, mission directed and committed to the Christian faith as those who identify with our Church. Committed Christian colleagues who are devoted to the ecumenical agenda of their church and open to the developments their church has made with the Catholic Church over the decades are particularly valuable resources. *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers* is a resource for faculty and staff development for both Catholic and nonCatholic faculty.

In staff meetings and retreats it will be important to have fellow Christians from other churches share their stories. When agreements are announced between the Catholic Church and particular churches to which significant numbers of the administration, faculty or students belong, recognition of this fact and opportunities for celebration, sharing and common affirmation contribute to the deepening of the experience of faith community in the school.

A religiously diverse faculty can be a great advantage, if there is a strong commitment to the mission of the Catholic school and if, among them, there are those who follow with interest and appreciation the ecumenical commitments of their church with the Catholic Church on the pilgrimage toward unity. There is a caution, however, when there is not diligence in faculty selection, and the question of faith and mission are absent from the selection process.

It could be very useful to have committed non-Catholic Christians brought together to listen to their reflections on the Lasallian mission of our institutions as Christian and Catholic; how their particular heritage has influenced their vocation in our context; and how the Lasallian context has enriched their own faith life and church commitment. One can also reflect on the usefulness of religious communities in giving space to lay non-Catholic Christian colleagues to reflect on the relationship of the charism of John Baptist de La Salle to gifts of their own church and its spirituality. Indeed, the opportunities for sharing of gifts are limitless.

## The Lasallian Curriculum

The religion faculty needs to be selected so as to be part of this core of mission oriented colleagues. However, the religious dimension of the Lasallian school and its ecumenical program cannot be relegated to the religion faculty. The religion teachers need to be effective in their relational skills, and be able to touch the hearts of their students. There are always students for whom the relational dimension of the Gospel will be more important, at certain moments in their development, than the cognitive content of the tradition. The mission oriented faculty need to especially minister to those alienated from the faith because of family, developmental stage or personal conviction. This evangelical spirit should be characteristic of a wider circle than those who teach religion.

When we moved to a renewed catechetical model on the eve of the Council, and had much of our kerygmatic, liturgical and biblical catechetical principles supported by the Council documents, little did we know the challenges we would face in these 40 years of catechetical renewal. De La Salle's *Conduct of the Christian Schools* was still a guiding force in Lasallian education. Since the Council and the chapters of renewal, Lasallian catechesis has inculturated in a variety of contexts. Lasallian editorial houses and presses, and catechetical centers have made an important contribution to the renewal of religion teaching in the contexts where they are located.

A key element in the program of Lasallian renewal is the contribution of the ecumenical dialogues, and the teaching of the

Magisterium. While texts and curricula are supportive of the Lasallian educator, who is “catechist by vocation,” both the educator and the resources used need to be informed by the best principles of ecumenical formation the Catholic Church can provide. The steps we have taken toward deepening communion among Christians have been among some of the most exciting harvests of the conciliar vision of the Church. Their implications for our catechesis have been rich and challenging.

Of course, the basis of the Catholic school is providing a fully integrated curriculum, with the Catholic heritage having pride of place among the subjects taught. “Above all they [students] should know their own Church and be able to give an account of her teaching, her discipline and her principles of ecumenism. The more they know these, the better they can present them in discussions with other Christians and give sufficient reason for them. They should also have accurate knowledge of the other Churches and ecclesial Communities with whom they are in contact. Careful note must be taken of the various prerequisites for ecumenical engagement that are set out in the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>22</sup>

The Holy Father is particularly concerned that catechists take their role in incorporating the results of ecumenical progress into Catholic instruction. “At the stage which we have now reached, this process of mutual enrichment must be taken seriously into account,” “... a new task lies before us: that of receiving the results already achieved” which “must involve the whole people of God.” Results are not to remain “statements of bilateral commissions but must become a common heritage.”<sup>23</sup>

Before students can fully assimilate these results, catechists will want to know what has been done and help adapt it to the age levels and learning styles of students and the particular contexts.

Catechesis carries a particularly important role in both imparting knowledge and forming a “genuine ecumenical attitude.” The *Directory* outlines five elements of importance in the ecumenical dimension of catechesis: a) solid doctrinal content, taught within

---

22. *Directory*, # 74.

23. UUS, # 80.

an understanding of the “hierarchy of truths,” b) teaching about other churches honestly, recognizing them as means of salvation, c) help students purify themselves and nourishing them in a true desire for unity, d) prepare young and maturing Catholics for living with other Christians, and e) keep a clear perspective on the distinctions between the truths of faith and their expression.<sup>24</sup> These elements are echoed in the *General Directory for Catechesis*.

Among the most important segments of the Catholic curriculum for ecumenical content and sensitivity is that on spiritual ecumenism, rooted in common baptism and expressing the real, if imperfect communion among all Christians. The fourth chapter of the ecumenical *Directory: “Communion in Life and Spiritual Activity Among the Baptized,”* needs to inform any sacramental catechesis. It not only outlines Catholic priorities in spiritual ecumenism, but it also details the understanding and practice of sacramental sharing, especially Eucharist and marriage.

If the results of the dialogues in which the Catholic Church has been involved over the last thirty nine years are to become a common heritage as the Holy Father suggests, they must find ways of touching our curricula at all levels. The Holy See, through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and many episcopal conferences around the world, have entered into dialogue with many churches: Orthodox, Anglican, historic Protestant, Pentecostal, Evangelical and the like. The careful biblical and historical research has healed many differences on issues like Scripture and tradition, the Eucharist and ordained ministry, baptism and the nature of the church, church and authority, and the saints and Mary. However, these are technical texts with a variety of levels of agreement. The task is now before the educational communities to find way of making these remarkable results part of the mainstream of Catholic life through its catechetical programs and new lived relationships.

We are fortunate to have major results of dialogues with other churches gathered in research volumes that are available for

---

24. *Ibid.*, #6.

school and parish libraries.<sup>25</sup> However, these technical theological resources, as rich as they are, need to be translated into “teacher friendly” resources in text books, study guides and teachers’ manuals to accompany every element of the Catholic religious curriculum.

There are some text materials emerging that can be used in the formation of religion teachers and provide resources for administrators and board members.<sup>26</sup> However, the urgency with which the Holy Father speaks of reception requires more ecumenically informed catechetical materials adapted for every level of Catholic education.

We need to find a way for the pertinent dialogue results to find their way into teachers’ guides. When teaching the sacraments teachers need to know with which churches we have substantial agreement, which are in dialogue to resolve issues and which do not have a sacramental understanding of the church, and even rebaptize Catholics. When teaching grace and the Reformation, the fact that Lutherans and Catholics hold the same faith and no longer condemn one another over the issue that was central to the

---

25. Lukas Vischer and Harding Meyer eds., *Growth in Agreement Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, New York: Paulist Press, 1984. William Rusch, Harding Meyer, Jeffrey Gros, eds., *Growth in Agreement II*, Geneva/Grand Rapids: World Council of Churches/Wm B Eerdmans, 2000. [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/e\\_dialogues.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/e_dialogues.html)

André Birmelé et Terme, Jacques, eds. *Accords et dialogues oecuméniques. Bilatéraux et multilatéraux. Français, européens et internationaux*. Paris: Les Bergers et les Mages, 1995. *Groupe des Dombes. Pour la communion des Églises: L’apport du Groupe des Dombes 1937-1987*. Paris: Centurion, 1988.

I don’t have other French references, and I suspect you don’t need the German, but here is a Spanish set.

Comisión Mixta Católico-Luterana, *Iglesia y Justificación*, Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1996. *Comisión de Fe y Constitución, Confesar la Fe Común*, Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1994. Adolfo Gonzalez Montes, ed., *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*, Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1986, Vols.II, 1993.

26. Ann Riggs, Eamon McManus, Jeffrey Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, New York: Paulist Press, 1998. Fredrick Bliss, *Catholic and Ecumenical: History and Hope*, Ashland: Sheed and Ward, 1999. Jeffrey Gros, *That All May Be One: Ecumenism*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 2000. Gideon Goosen, *Bringing Churches Together: A Popular Introduction to Ecumenism*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001.

Tavard, George H. *L’œcuménisme*. Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1994.

Francisco Sampedro, *Manual de Ecumenismo: Iglesias Cristianas y Pastoral Ecumenica*, Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Paulinas, 1988.

Reformation: Justification - grace and good works, now colors all we teach both on Christian history and God's gracious love in Jesus Christ.

*Ecumenical Formation* emphasizes three principles in Catholic formation: 1) interpretation, 2) the hierarchy of truths, and 3) the importance of the results of the dialogues becoming a common heritage. We have discussed the third point in some detail.

Lasallian catechetics needs to interpret scripture and Church history, and the Christian Tradition within it, in reconciling ways. Thus Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, and the apostles meeting in the Council of Jerusalem are evidences of the ecumenical spirit from the very beginning of the Church. The variety of witnesses in the bible: the four Gospels, the different approaches Paul takes to the variety of local churches, the variety of forms of ministry, all point to the unity in diversity that characterizes the Christian community. Ecumenical agreements give us new lenses through which to read the texts of the Councils and tragic moments of Christian history, like the early councils (431, 451), the alienation of East and West and the Reformation; moments of estrangements which are beginning to be healed in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The hierarchy of truths is not about more and less important matters of faith, but rather about the relationships of what we believe to be the core revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For example, our belief in Mary and her role in redemption relates to our belief in the saving role of Christ in the mystery of salvation. All belief about the Most Blessed Virgin is faith about Christ and what he has done in his saving work for the Church, first among whose members is Mary, the Mother of God.

Catechists distinguish between what is necessary for Catholics to believe and private devotions that are so central to much of Catholic life. While the Church encourages devotions, which are private or liturgical, the Council admonishes against excess or confusion among the faithful. Christian faith, on the other hand, requires belief in Mary's role as the Mother of God.

We share with Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican Christians the belief in the role of Mary as Mother of God. These churches do not share our convictions about the Immaculate Conception or

the Assumption being dogmas necessary for salvation. Many believe them as did Luther. In explaining them to Catholic students and to fellow Christian educators in other churches, it is important to note that the Immaculate Conception is about God's grace being given to Mary prior to any action of her own. Its focus is primarily on the Incarnation and on God's initiative. The Assumption is about God's commitment to all of us, recognizing our Lady as the first fruits of our common resurrection in Christ.

There are many and rich devotions in the Church, sometimes competitive and appearing to others as more demonstrative than even our Eucharistic liturgical life. It is important for Catholic catechesis and for communication with fellow Christians to note the centrality of the faith as what binds Catholics together in our understanding of Mary. Within that common faith, a wide variety of devotions or none at all are tolerated.

As liturgical, biblical and Eucharistic renewal deepen, and catechesis helps our people differentiate between what is required in faith and what is permitted in devotion, Catholic perspectives on Mary will become a clearer witness to Gospel balance. Catholics will not expect, as we move more closely together, Orthodox and Protestant devotion to take on the same form as Catholics, any more than there is devotional uniformity among Catholics worldwide.

Lasallian catechesis at its best will incorporate the results of Catholic dialogues with other churches, an interpretive perspective which will show a historical understanding of the Catholic faith and a positive approach to other churches, and an exposition of the faith taking account of the "hierarchy of truths." It will teach skills of collaboration and dialogue. It will be clear on Catholic self understanding and the Church's priority for and principles of ecumenism. Above all, it will seek to touch the hearts of the Lasallian community with a conversion toward the Gospel imperative of reconciliation. If zeal for unity is stirred up in the heart, as commitment to Christ and his will for the Church, the information can be acquired as one develops in the faith according to the age and styles of learning of the individual.

## Catechetical challenges

- 1) What are the challenges in your ministry for engendering a commitment to the Church and to its ecumenical outreach?
- 2) What are the catechetical strategies most helpful in eliciting commitment to the Church and its goal of unity with other Christians?
- 3) What are the tension that young people and adults experience around understanding of and commitment to the Church, its specificity and its goal of unity with other Christians?
- 4) What have been the most positive ecumenical resources for communicating and engendering the Church's understanding of, and commitment to unity? What are resources that are most needed in this dimension of our catechetical work?

## Lasallian Higher Education

The role of Catholic colleges and universities is explicitly outlined in the Directory. These characteristics are to be found widely in Lasallian institutions:

[Universities] are called on to give sound ecumenical formation. Examples of the appropriate measures they may take are these:

a) to foster, when the subject calls for it, an ecumenical dimension to methods of teaching and research;

b) to organize discussions and study days on ecumenical questions;

c) to organize conferences and meetings for joint study, work and social activity, setting aside time for enquiry into Christian principles of social action and the means of putting them into practice. These occasions, whether involving only Catholics or bringing together Catholics and other Christians, should promote cooperation as far as possible with other advanced institutes in the area;

d) space could be given in university journals and reviews to reports on ecumenical events, and also to deeper ecumenical

studies, with preference given to comments on the documents resulting from inter-Church dialogue;

e) in academic halls of residence there is very much to recommend good relations between Catholics and other Christian students. With suitable guidance, they can learn, through these relations, to live together in a deeper ecumenical spirit and be faithful witnesses of their Christian faith;

f) it is important to give emphasis to prayer for unity, not only during the Week of Prayer for this purpose but also at other times during the year. Depending on circumstances of place and persons, and in conformity with the existing rules about shared worship joint retreats under the guidance of a spiritual master, may also be envisaged;

g) there is a wide field of common witness in social or welfare works. Students should be trained and encouraged in this – not only theology students, but also those of other faculties, such as law, sociology and political science. By their contribution these students will help to promote and realize such initiatives;

h) chaplains, student counselors and professors will have a particular concern to carry out their tasks in an ecumenical spirit, especially by organizing some of the initiatives indicated above. This obligation demands from them a deep knowledge of the doctrine of the Church, an adequate competence in academic subjects, unflinching prudence and a balanced attitude: all these qualities should enable them to help their students to harmonize their own life of faith with openness to others.<sup>27</sup>

Our boards and administrative teams in Lasallian higher education vary widely in the diversity of their composition, experience and communities served. The ways we do selection and formation are adapted to the needs of our institutions, and hopefully also to the vision of the Church. The ecumenical dimension of that mission can only be a small, if significant, dimension of the vision, formation and task of leadership tailored to each institution's needs and context. However, there is always a danger for it to be either taken for granted, or dismissed as insignificant.

---

27. Directory, #89

Boards, like students and faculties are often religiously pluralistic. It can be helpful to provide both interreligious and ecumenical partners on our boards, opportunities to lead in prayer and to understand developing Catholic relations with their particular communities. On occasion one can give a copy of a new dialogue result, say between Orthodox and Catholics, to an Orthodox colleague.

It is important to understand the contribution of curriculum and campus ministry to the relationship with the particular communities to which board and faculty members belong. If a particular faculty member or team has demonstrated their contribution to unity, mutual understanding and common witness, an opportunity can be found to celebrate or witness with the board or administration.

As the General Chapter notes, Lasallian universities provide an opportunity for research and service in the community that fosters unity among Christians. Training of catechists is a particular calling of Lasallian institutions of higher education. These training programs will have an ecumenical component, and often will serve other Christian catechists in churches beyond the Catholic community. This common learning of catechists together is both a resource for their own dialogue and an enrichment for their teaching.

University administrators can help Catholic board members see the inherent commitment to Christian unity and interreligious outreach as central to the Catholic identity of the institution, support of the magisterium, and the economic and recruiting well being of the institution. For example, the oldest Jesuit university in the United States, Georgetown in the nation's capital, has taken on a full time assistant to the president to promote interreligious concerns in the program and policy of the university.

## Conclusion

The Lasallian ministry is only one venue for the nurturing of Christians' commitment to the unity of the Church, albeit a privileged one. Schools do well to take account, and on occasion provide, adult Christian education programs that enrich the faith of the parents and wider community, including their understanding

of other churches, Catholic ecumenical principles and the results of our dialogue and work together as churches.

The parish is also an important locale for Christian nurture and ecumenical activity. Even when the school is not parish based, it prepares Christians for a life that will find its mature focus in parish community. Knowing the particular churches in the vicinity of students' parishes and the relationships that are in place or need to be nourished gives concrete content to the school faith community experience and curricular content.

## Survey

*You may return responses in Spanish, French or English to the address below*

- 1) What are the positive experiences and initiatives in your Lasallian ministry in promoting unity among Christians?
- 2) What are some of the challenges you face in your Lasallian ministry in building bridges among Christians and between churches?
- 3) What have you found to be the most effective ways of assisting non-Catholic Lasallians in their faith journey? In their understanding of Catholicism and its ecumenical commitments?
- 4) What particular gifts have you received from non-Catholic Lasallians?
- 5) How many faculty and students in your ministry come from other churches?
- 6) What are the Christian communities who share in your Lasallian ministry? Which ones predominate?

Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC  
Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs  
US Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4th St. NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
Tel. 202-541-3020  
FAX 202-541-3183  
jgros@uscgb.org



# CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Catholic Principles for Lasallian Ecumenical Leadership	13
Resources	15
The Role of the Lasallian Administrator	18
Fellow Christians in Lasallian Ministries	28
The Lasallian Curriculum	33
Lasallian Higher Education	39
Conclusion	41

## MEL bulletins - programme

*In these Bulletins you will find:*

- **Specific Lasallian schemes**
- **Thoughts on lasallian association and identities**
- **Educational/pastoral approaches**

*These Bulletins are intended to increase your knowledge of the Lasallian world, and to stimulate school staffs by speaking of what is done in other Lasallian schools throughout the world.*

### Specific Lasallian schemes

- In view of 2006
- Listening to youngsters: an Australian scheme
- Dealing with the marginalised: itinerants
- Educational service of the poor in Districts
- Lasallian Educational Statistics
- Lasallian Universities and the mission statement
- Lasallian innovations
- San Miguel schools in the USA
- Lasallian solidarity

### Lasallian association and identities

- Lasallian association: the story goes on
- Sociology of associative membership

### Educational/pastoral approaches

- The Rights of the Child
- Working with families
- Lasallian mission statements
- Education today in different continents
- Building personal identity
- Living in the presence of God
- Educating for life
- Religious knowledge and catechesis
- Inter-religious dialogue
- Lasallian Volunteer Movement
- Catechesis in Lasallian history
- Challenges for the Christian school
- Bible and Catechesis
- Ecumenism