

# Pastoral Letter to the Lasallian Family 2025

**Unpacking education** may be the biggest challenge for an Institute that has outlived and outsmarted social and political upheavals in many parts of the world for 344 years. **The tercentenary of the issuance of Pope Benedict XIII's Bull of Approbation this coming year is an opportune time to celebrate the stability and social protection that an official recognition of the Church or State affords.** But our long history, tradition, reputation, or legal status should not numb us to complacency; on the contrary, it should sensitize us to the continuing threats to schools and the fragility even of long-established institutions. Today, we are all painfully aware of the global crises in education and some very real threats to the sustainability of our schools.

As I pen these lines, military offensives continue to escalate in Lebanon and in the Holy Land. A secondary school student shares his seemingly mundane fears:

*“Our house is barely standing, and I haven’t seen it since Israel has put up the 500-meter radius security zone. The roads are blocked by big rocks, and we cannot access our house. We cannot get there by car and could only cross on foot. Who do I talk to if we start school on October 7? We don’t have electricity so I don’t know if I can even join the virtual sessions. But I don’t want to miss my classes”.*

A good-hearted person may easily give up upon realizing that one is caught in a precarious situation or is facing an impregnable wall; more so, if one relies solely on one’s talents, strengths, and resources. But what if one’s passion to make a difference is cultivated into a conviction that the desired result is worth the fight? Such faith and zeal would surely generate creative thinking, gain support from like-minded dreamers, and nurture grit and resilience. This is the heart of our founding story:

*“A brilliant and creative innovator in his vision of the school, in the concept of the teacher and in teaching methods, Saint John Baptist de La Salle developed the firm conviction that education was a right for all,*

*including the poor. Therefore, to dedicate himself to the education of the most disadvantaged social class, he established a lay community to pursue this ideal, convinced, the Holy Father emphasized, that ‘the Church could not continue to ignore the social contradictions of the time that she is called to confront’” (Pope Francis. Address to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019 May 16).*

While rooted in our founding story and attentive to the emerging needs of the young and the poor, we cannot keep repeating the same formula of success documented in many versions of the Conduct of Schools and modern manuals that have been the playbook for many Lasallian schools through the centuries. Neither should we just focus our energies on the continuous improvement of internal systems and processes. **Sometimes, the best insights come about when we plunge into an unexplored blue ocean, or because of a serendipitous encounter during an unplanned trip, or with the discovery of an ancient wisdom that has been forgotten.**

We certainly cannot continue to ignore the social contradictions of our time. Faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, we could learn invaluable lessons from those who have realized a long time ago that it truly takes a village—and many generations—to educate a child.

*Indigenous Communities from the peripheries of the world have never wavered in their commitment to preserve, enrich, and pass on to the next generation their values, knowledge, and spirituality despite oppression and marginalization from society at large.*

**I imagine John Baptist de La Salle would have been thrilled if he had the chance to encounter Indigenous Peoples in his lifetime.** Why miss the opportunity now? But before we can even take the first step, we need to remove the sandals from our feet, dispose ourselves to silence, and then heed the gentle voice of the Spirit leading God’s people to a wisdom ever ancient, ever new.

**This year’s pastoral letter invites you, dear reader, to consider the lessons one may glean from the cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and profound wisdom of many Indigenous Communities.** If we are open to surprises, we may stumble upon a pearl of great price that could revolutionize the

way we conduct schools and eventually develop an effective solution to the existing education crises in our world. The stories and reflections shared in this pastoral letter are not just narratives of service but testimonies to the transformative power of accompaniment, solidarity, and friendship. Some vignettes highlight the need for awareness, others spark empathy, while a few others describe the learning moments with Indigenous Peoples.

The introductory essay (I) describes how an encounter between Lasallians and Indigenous Communities may lead to a real conversion experience for both. The first three vignettes (II-IV) narrate early experiences leading to such an encounter, identifying some initial obstacles but also a few helpful openings that lead to greater awareness, respect, appreciation, and acceptance of marginalized communities. These are followed by three other narratives (V-VII) which provide us with a deeper insight into the world of Indigenous Peoples and the treasures of wisdom and spirituality in their care. Four Lasallian educators and a researcher (VIII-XII) undergo a soul-searching as they look back on their experience in IP education and name their struggles and missteps but also their small victories and profound insights. The last four vignettes (XIII - XVI) provide us a sneak peek into the inner journey—mind and heart, soul and being—of the main characters in this transformational engagement.

**Drawing from the lived experience of selected Lasallians who have dared to go beyond their comfort zones, I invite you to take an exciting journey as we deconstruct education, this time from the prism of Indigenous Communities in selected areas of the globe.** I have invited them to contribute to a collaborative writing project for this year’s pastoral letter as a first step to our synodal pilgrimage towards “building a fraternal world through education, evangelization and the promotion of justice” (FSC. *Circular 478: Documents of the 46th General Chapter*, p. 22).

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