

**The Challenge
Of the Lasallian Catechist
Today**

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We have been richly blessed in the catechetical ministry of the Church and the Lasallian tradition since the time of John Baptist de la Salle. Lasallians especially pass on a noble heritage of handing on the faith inspired by the vision, creativity and professionalism of Brothers John Joseph and Alphonsus. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to listen to skilled practitioners who embody in your vocation the gift of the Lasallian heritage to the Church today.

These very personal reflections will touch on three points: 1) Lasallian catechetical identity, 2) reflections on the present moment in the Church's catechetical mission in the US, and 3) some observations from my own catechetical calling. John Vitek, after our discussion of the paper, has asked me to add a fourth section on Lasallian ecumenical catechesis.

I Lasallians as Catechist by Vocation

Lasallians can be justly proud of a long heritage of catechetical leadership in the classroom, in special creative leadership, and in publication. For this group it is not necessary to recount the primacy of the catechetical mission in Lasallian identity:

The Brothers [today we would say Lasallians] make known the divine mysteries by exercising the ministry of the Word of God. The [Lasallians] are catechists by vocation; this is their "principal function."¹

However, it is important for us as stewards of this dimension of the Lasallian charism to keep this conviction before our fellow Lasallians and to be equipped with the resources to help them to understand how we are all called to embody this charism, whether in the

religion classroom or not.² Brother Pérez Navarro's 10 challenges provide a solid foundation for any Lasallian formation program.³

Characteristic of the charism of the Lasallian catechist recognized by all are: a) a lay orientation, b) creative inculturation, c) the schools of whatever type as the preferred vehicle, and d) the option for the poor.

More challenging dimensions of the charism as we inherent the commitments of Vatican II are: a) the commitment to a critical service of the Church's mission, b) the collaborative transition from a Brother-centered to a Lasallian-centered catechetical identity, and c) a collegial style of mission in a Church centered on baptism and Eucharist, to which the ordained ministry gives appropriate – but not exclusive -- service.⁴

II The Catechetical Situation in the Church Today

The characteristics of the present challenge can be seen from a variety of points of view. These are very personal observations for the sake of discussion, which may or may not correspond with the wider experience represented in this discussion.

The Catholic catechetical future in the US, it seems to me will be marked by:

a) lay leadership.

b) informed by the Council:

1) Christocentric: focusing on Christ and grace, the biblical message and the sacraments, the unity of Christians, recognizing the primary image of the Church as a community (koinonia) of the baptized – a pilgrim people.

2) Oriented to the Church's mission in the world in proclamation, dialogue, social justice and service.

- 3) Recognizing the centrality of the person, with the educators and church leadership and the Christian heritage as resources for witnessing to the Gospel.
- c) continued polarization in the interpretations of Vatican II.
 - d) parish and family rather than school centered, for demographic more than theological reasons.
 - e) multicultural, and therefore multi-ideological with a rich variety of Catholic spiritualities.

The Catholic Church in the US, it seems to me will be marked by these continuing realities:

- a) continued clerical governance structures, even as the quantity and quality control of the ordained decreases.
- b) increased emphasis on discipleship, parish community and recognition of a diversity of family situations.
- c) decreased religious literacy on the part of Catholics and other Christians. Of course, over simplified sociological surveys need to be used critically.⁵ However, some studies have shown Catholics among the weakest US religious bodies in their teen religious education. Parents' religion is a greater predictor of religious knowledge and practice than parish or school.

To what extent might this be due to the shift from school based to parish based catechesis without the concomitant shift of resources or pastoral priority setting? Might the concern about censoring text books be better placed in encouraging attendance at parish religious education, and in adult faith formation for parents and catechists?

- d) increased intellectual (but not necessarily religious) sophistication among Catholic elites.
- e) receding experience of, and possibly even knowledge of Vatican II by Catholics and even some of their leadership.⁶
- f) decreased ethnocentric cultural Catholicism and increased “denominational” cultural Christian Catholicism, and consequent continued drain of Catholics to the right and left into communities where they feel “more comfortable.”⁷
- g) the universal-catholic vision in ecclesial, political, economic and social life become increasingly marginal to the individual Catholic.
- h) continued encroachment of the anti-intellectualism of American culture into Catholic life, even for the devout. Piety and institutional loyalty may continue to outweigh a serious attention to the content of the faith and the quest for a deeper, critical knowledge of the tradition.
- i) As to the theological and pastoral competence of those being appointed bishops, the future is not at all clear.

The polarization caused by the variety of interpretations of Vatican II will continue for many years, as will the traditional and necessary tensions about emphases on method and/or content; propositional vs relational emphases in our understanding of revelation; and approaches to dealing with religious and theological pluralism. These strains in our catechetical mission are God given opportunities for deepening our skills at dialogue and our quest for more knowledge of the tradition.⁸

Some implications for catechetical leadership in the US seem to me:

a) In the new, lay catechetical context the leaders (principals, DREs, department chairs, etc.) will need to be more theologically trained because there are no religious community structures of formation, support and continuing education.

We all know that the catechist's position is subject to the change of pastor, principal, or bishop, no matter what the competence, qualifications, contractual agreements or lack there of, are in place. The positions of school teachers are more secure, but there need to be leaders in the schools skillful enough to manage conflicts with parents, diocese and local clergy.

Therefore, there need to be support structures provided for those with the catechetical vocation: spiritual, economic and political; so that lay catechists can minister with security, hope and enrichment. While this will entail support systems enabled by the Lasallian system and its Mission & Ministry councils, it will also entail Lasallian structures which will recruit, provide for the training, gather and advocate for Lasallian catechists in the Lasallian systems and in the Church.

The catechetical leader needs to know as much if not more than the bishop or clergy about handing on the tradition in order to make clear the position of the Church, and to be able to clarify where programs serving the particular needs of students are supported in the magisterium and tradition.

There are many good resources out there. Though I have not surveyed the literature, I agree with Peter Steinfels that there is no dearth of competent Catholic text materials.⁹ The major question will be: do we have the competent educators who have both the pedagogical expertise and the theological knowledge to adapt the message to the

needs of the folks being served? Do we have vehicles of bringing adults and young people into a context where there can be a credible witness to the tradition?

Most of our lay religious sponsored Catholic colleges and universities were founded to train prospective religious, including in their catechetical vocation. When these communities disappeared from campus, often the professional catechetical formation programs dried up as well, often because of survival, marketing and cultural forces, rather than through specific missional decisions.

Likewise, when the residential religious market dried up, many of the theology or catechetical masters' degree programs were terminated as well. It is encouraging to see some of our Lasallian universities reviving or initiating programs designed specifically for the lay catechists of the future.¹⁰

It has been my contention for years that we should be no less rigorous in our selection of catechists, in Lasallian schools, than in the selection of physics or German teachers. However, our systems, Lasallian or academic, need to be as intentional about the recruiting, training and support of these prospective catechists as we once were about religious.

We are still benefiting by the residual religious, the former priests and religious who have continued their catechetical calling while changing their life style, and schools with theologically formed and catechetically experienced administrators at the helm. How can we project the next twenty years to see that these dedicated catechists are succeeded by folks of equal competence who can be as intentionally supported and mentored into leadership?

As Brother Alvaro says:

Looking over our three-hundred years of history, we come across the fact that our Founder dedicated himself more to teacher formation than to the direct education of children. (A p.5)

It will be useful to reflect on the implications of this fact for our Lasallian life and future.

b) The governance structures in the Church will call for deeper sensitivity and collaboration on the part of educators, especially those who are catechetically trained.

The bishop has the canonical responsibility as teacher in the local church. The called, trained and experienced catechist has the pedagogical charism. The wisest bishops are those who inform their responsibilities with the wisdom and experience of those whose mission it is to hand on the faith.

It is fascinating to see Brother Alvaro holding up the Latin American bishops' models for evangelization education rather than some operative in the US bishops' conference, or even emphases evident in some Vatican documents. (p. 44)

We all have stories of how parishes, schools and programs have been changed with the change of leadership. We need to find ways of building roots for quality catechetical programs so that they can endure the ups and downs of changes in clerical leadership and pressures that these bring on teachers.

Lasallian catechists, when they have developed security and seasoning, have important resources to share with dioceses and parishes, not to mention national structures – of the Lasallian networks and of the Church. How is appropriate leadership exercised in a clerically governed, often polarized, Church by competent and visionary Lasallian catechists?

c) Catechesis for the future will continue to work in an environment that is increasingly pluralistic for the students and their families. As Brother Alvaro notes, the

ecumenical and the interreligious dialogue are key elements in Lasallian pedagogy.

(p.59)¹¹

However, possibly more urgent is the dialogue within the Church, with its variety of cultures, interpretations of Vatican II, and expectations of the catechetical programs. With the increasing new Hispanic populations as well as the regional, ideological, economic and cultural diversities traditional in our American multicultural Church, we are challenged not to allow our catechetical programs to become the captive of the devotional or ideological preferences of particular dimensions of Catholic life.

We have to help to interpret and help students interpret to one another the rich variety of forms of Catholicism, not to mention the variety of Christian churches with which we share communion – even if yet imperfect, and those of other faiths with whom we must work out our common life in society.

d) Finally, a realistic historical perspective is an important resource in our spiritual lives. We are a few years away from Vatican II, so its catechetical ideals are only slowly filtering into the lives of our people and institutions. We need to see the touching of the hearts and minds of each individual in each class as building the ground work for the future of the Church. We are hoping to open the joy of God's gift in Jesus Christ to as many as are willing to respond. We are also hoping to set many on the pilgrimage of a life of learning about the Christian faith. We trust that there will be those in each class who take up the call to leadership in the world rooted in the Christian faith, and leadership in the Church rooted in Christ's call to discipleship.

Yet we know that each era of reform, each council, and each movement – like the Lasallian movement – has had its ups and downs, its gradual process of reception, a

reception that entailed many rejections along the way. Therefore, the catechist is sustained by the Holy Spirit in his or her vocation, and not deterred by the challenges placed before us in our educational task.

When, in my ecumenical work, ministers are discouraged by the volume of ignorance they encounter among the people, pews to bishops, I can only say that this ignorance is a verification of our calling to educate the Church to its heritage and its calling to unity, and the theological and pastoral resources we have for responding to Christ's prayer that they all may be one.

III Reflections on my own personal catechetical ministry

I have just returned to the classroom after 24 years of a more specialized Lasallian catechetical ministry. It is great, again, to be applying my learnings, grassroots and research, in an environment characterized by the Lasallian values of justice, community and faith.

The relevance of my comments for a general group of catechists is both a witness to the passion for Christian learning engendered by Alphonsus and others at SMU; and a comment on strategies for implementing a Lasallian vision.

All of our students will live in a pluralistic world, no matter how homogeneous our school or parish. The Catholic Church is irreversibly committed to the full visible unity of the Christian Churches. The late Pope John Paul challenged us with the catechetical task of making the last (now) 40 years of ecumenical progress a "common heritage." I have been blessed to serve the Lasallian catechetical enterprise from this relatively insignificant specialization in the whole spectrum of Vatican II catechetical renewal.

When we graduated from SMU some of us were energized by the commitment to bring the worship and social justice dimensions of Catholic catechesis alive. We found that this vision was not shared by all Lasallians. My master's work done under Brother Alphonsus was on liturgical catechesis for junior high school *Living With Christ* texts, early 60s but preVatican II.

My most recent publication uses exactly the same model given for those liturgy lessons: providing the busy catechists with primary texts – in *this* case ecumenical – organized around the themes of – in *that* case the lectionary -- in this book: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹² By the way, it is great to see the quantity of lectionary-based catechetical material emerging from SMP and other publishers.

I use this illustration from my own story to make four points: a) the importance of adapting the resources of the tradition to the needs of catechists and their students; b) the enduring importance of quality content; c) the importance of not pitting the grassroots practicality against the content of the faith; and d) the importance of persistence in catechetical renewal.

While we need to give primary attention to the students and their needs, we need to have at our fingertips the full range of resources to touch their hearts and enrich their minds.

In the 1950s and early 60s it seemed almost fruitless initiating high school students into the liturgical reforms, providing Masses facing them, teaching the lectionary each week, holding out the values of lay participation, even acknowledge that possibilities of vernacular liturgies. Yet these were the values with which we were inculcated at SMU.

By Alphonsus pressing me to provide teachable, “bite sized,” texts for the busy catechist, I learned that building a firm and deep foundation is key to the catechetical enterprise, even if it is not valued by all ecclesiastical leadership or even by many of the teachers themselves.

The sociologists noted above identify four things young Catholic adults see as needed in their catechetical formation:

- 1) Knowledge of Vatican II. (44% of confirmed non-Latino, and 68% of Latino Catholics claim not to have heard of the Council!)
- 2) Preparation for Catholic identity in an ecumenical context,
- 3) Adult faith formation, and
- 4) Education for interfaith settings.¹³

The times have engendered a quest of interfaith formation, which is a teachable moment. Unfortunately, however, sometimes this thirst and our catechetical response to it have obscured the Catholic primary commitment to Christian unity. Some of our young people have lost the distinction between our ecumenical zeal for unity with our fellow Christians, and our openness to other believers in interreligious dialogue.

Whether it be liturgy in the 1950s and 60s, social justice in the 1970s and 80s, or ecumenism in the 1980s and 90s, it is always essential to have a core of competent trained catechists who can field the questions, provide the resources and inform the authorities and parents as well as generate enthusiasm among the students.

In this group we should be appreciative of Brother Damien’s willingness to serve on the committee working on social justice education, and to the late Archbishop Roach for inviting him. Would that all the catechetical initiatives of the bishops were so filled with foresight and collegial sharing. Would that Lasallians were as willing to be engaged in consultation processes on various national leadership proposals.¹⁴

Not all are called to this second level catechetical leadership and very few of us are called to the sort of catechetical specialization I have experienced, but the leadership, publication and specialization are all important services.

I must say that I have backed into the ecumenical dimension of our common catechetical task because when I emerged from graduate school, the leadership in liturgical and social justice catechetics were, thankfully, already “taken,” so I have been “assigned” to a catechetical need that was “left over.” In the 70s, it seemed there was a new initiative implementing an aspect of Vatican II rolling out of the Vatican and into the classroom/parish/diocese every month, for which a new educational program and model had to be developed.

Secondly, some of the current tensions in catechetical work are unfortunate, but inevitable dimensions of the reception of Vatican II. As with every council, the resistance, reception and inculturation of all of the conciliar reforms vary. Certainly, De La Salle’s France is an historical example of that, where the reform decrees of Trent were only promulgated with the 1801 Concordat with Napoleon, and the Gallican liturgy only suppressed finally in the late 19th century.

I have tried to follow the reception of religious liberty and ecumenism in Latin America as closely as I can. I am currently working on a Lilly grant on Hispanic ecumenism, one which will have a very intentional youth component. Any best-case stories in Hispanic catechesis and ecumenism would be most welcome! We are always working to bring the vision to corners of the Church where the development is gradual.

I find this gradual reception particularly evident in ecumenical catechesis.¹⁵
There have been many teachable moments in the last 40 years, which have given me

many splendid opportunities for interpretation in the magisterial texts and ecumenical agreements. It has also helped to affirm the grassroots developments in interchurch marriages, diocesan initiatives and ecumenical models of such programs as Renew. As catechetical leaders we learn as much from the students and grassroots catechists, their challenges, attention to cultural shifts and needs and questions as we do from the magisterium, the theological heritage, and – in my case – from the ecumenical research, agreements and international initiatives.

While we know that a robust and confident sense of Catholic identity is necessary to enter into dialogue and to be an authentically ecumenical Catholic, it has taken some time for this vision to inform Catholic catechesis.¹⁶ It is significant to note that both the grassroots studies and the directions of the Holy See identify the same needs in different language:

- 1) Being clear about the core elements of the faith (Hierarchy of Truths),¹⁷
- 2) Being clear about the setting of boundaries (knowing common faith, differences and results of the dialogues),¹⁸ and
- 3) Helping people interpret the elements of their faith and the moral teaching of the Church, and – for the Holy See’s directives in ecumenical formation – to interpret the tradition and fellow Christians and their churches in the light of the hierarchy of truths and the issues that need to be resolved.¹⁹

While most pastoral agents are not able to keep up with the details of ecumenical progress, a receptive spirituality and attentiveness to the lines of ecumenical development nourish the ecumenical ideals of the Church at every level. For this reason, when I was at the bishops’ conference, we did our best never to turn down a bishop’s request for a priests’ retreat or a catechetical congress. As some of you would know, the bishops’ catechetical leadership and most of the publishers have been otherwise engaged in recent

years, but we have been able to do our ecumenical catechetical resourcing through NCCL, NCEA and Paulist Press – and on the Lasallian circuit through the MEL series.²⁰

Finally, it is perseverance in the attentiveness to the needs of the people of God, a fidelity to our marvelous Lasallian Catholic heritage, and the horizon of the Holy Spirit's ever evolving future, that makes the journey, whatever the challenges, a most exciting pilgrimage. As the *Declaration* exhorts us:

Societies, like individuals, grow old and die once habits inherited from the past outweigh the will to renewal in the light of a twofold fidelity both to the institutions that sparked our origins and the demands of life today. In the long run the future of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers. [and one might add: The future of Lasallian catechesis is in the hands of all Lasallians.] They must not wait for ready-made solutions from those in authority for the new problems that come from a world in evolution. (D 53:2)

IV Lasallian Ecumenical Catechesis

And the additional note: As Lasallians we are committed to touching hearts with the love of Christ, the commitment to the Church that entails, and the call for the visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed. In a Lasallian school students learn to pray with and for fellow Christians and their churches and for the unity of the Church. Ideally there are positive experiences with fellow Christians and of their churches. A sense of pain over the divisions among the churches and a true zeal for the unity of all Christians characterizes an authentic Catholic and Lasallian education today.

In addition to touching hearts, we are also called to enliven the mind. Those of us who teach church, sacraments, Church history and Scripture have particular opportunities in formation for Christian unity. This is not the place to recount Catholic ecumenical principles and the results of the dialogues (notes 4, 12, 17, 20). My preference would be to listen to your successes and challenges in the ecumenical dimension of your catechetical ministry today.

However, I have selected an example to spark dialogue: Teaching the ecumenical dimension of the Mass for today. The Eucharist is central to Lasallian spirituality, so this becomes an apt topic both for the classroom and for our own Lasallian development. Teaching the Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection celebrated by the community can be among the most exciting and daunting of our catechetical challenges. Engendering a hunger for full communion around the Lord's Table is central to our task.

For all Christians the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the Divine Liturgy, the Mass focuses on our encounter with Christ. Catholics, like other Christians, recognize that Christ comes to us in a multiplicity of ways. However, the differences that keep us from a common celebration are the tragic legacy of our divisions. Catholics approach the task of Christian unity with a sense of humility and repentance.

The three issues that have traditionally divided us are: 1) different understandings of how the once and for all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is related to our celebration of the Eucharist; 2) how Christ is present in the Eucharist; and 3) our different practices of sacramental hospitality based on different understandings of the relationship of the Eucharist to the Church.

Even with nonsacramental Christians, we share a focus on encountering Christ through faith in communion. Baptists, Pentecostal and some other Christians emphasize the faith of the believer however, because of their fears of superstition and idolatry. With Methodists and Presbyterians we share the faith in the objective, sacramental presence of Christ received in communion. With Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans we share not only common faith in Christ's sacramental presence for us as believers, but also the change that takes place so that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

In teaching the positive gifts of these different approaches, with adults I use visual images in a power point presentation, so as to be clear on the common elements, and our differences – both positive and complimentary, as with the Orthodox; or church dividing, as with the nonsacramental churches. Only when these are clear do I introduced selected texts on the real presence from the World Council *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to outline a more general basis of agreement formulated by a wide representation of Christian traditions; and from the Anglican Roman Catholic dialogue which gives more specific and officially recognized agreements on sacrifice, masses for the dead, real presence and adoration of the reserved sacrament.²¹

Of course, it is key to keep before students the fact that agreement on communion is not taken in isolation from the full understanding of Church communion, including recognition of ordained ministry. A positive, yet realistic interpretation of communion in other churches is the key focus for this presentation.²²

For Catholic, and ecumenically sophisticated groups, I also use slides of some of the Eucharistic miracles, to demonstrate what can be found in some Catholic devotion, but is NOT part of the Catholic faith. Ideally an experience of an Orthodox Divine Liturgy and of a liturgical Protestant's Lord's Supper can stimulate discussion on the basis of direct experience. I have found many of my Protestant students, after their first experience at Catholic Mass able to comprehend for the first time what we mean by transubstantiation and the necessity of full ecclesial communion as a basis for communion together at the Lord's Table.

With this discussion of real presence I use hand outs of 1) parallel liturgical formulations in the Western churches since mid-20th century, 2) variety of emphases among the churches, and 3) a bibliography to show the quantity of agreements available. For priest and catechist groups I also provide a chart of the variety of magisterial texts enumerating the multiple ways we encounter Christ's presence in the celebration. Interestingly enough, in lay groups, I find more questions about the reason for a variety of Eucharistic prayers and their meaning. The religious content of these prayers was not nearly so much of a concern, or a teachable element, as they are now are in English and in a variety of forms.

I find it less necessary to discuss the tensions over sacrifice that once characterized Protestants and Catholics, since Catholic liturgical renewal, emphasis on the Paschal and therefore communal meal dimension of sacrifice, and Trent's insistence on the once and for all character of the sacrifice of Calvary to which the Mass is related,

have all created a new context of understanding. However, in teaching the sacrifice of the Mass, it is always important to keep a biblical, sacramental and ecumenical horizon so that old stereotypes do not reemerge.

Our differences on sacramental sharing are both among the most painful and most frequently experienced in the lives of our students. This is because 1) many would like a simple solution. However, the Catholic faith links Eucharist communion to full visible ecclesial communion in such a way, that a simple response like “just say no,” or “y’all come” is not the Catholic way.

2) Although the 1984 canon law and the 1993 ecumenical directory²³ provide general guidelines for making this pastoral decision, specific guidelines are up to the local bishop, if there are no national guidelines. The US pastoral situations and bishops’ understandings vary so widely that there are not likely to be national guidelines.

Therefore, students need to know the principles of faith that guide our practice, the expectations of the local bishop, and the fact that bishops vary widely across the world and country. This dimension is particularly important for interchurch families, where the Vatican notes that an exceptional situation exists. However, it also becomes a teachable moment in retreat settings or in school wide liturgies where there is a diversity within the student body.

Finally, 3) teaching our practice is challenging and important since the practice of our Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox partners vary so widely. Again, rather than using texts initially, I use a spectrum of visuals: from the Pope and Patriarch concelebrating the liturgy of the Word at the high altar in St. Peter’s, separating with the kiss of peace before the canon; a Eucharist presided over by Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers as an interim exception on the road to full ecclesial and sacramental communion when both doctrine and ordained ministry are fully reconciled; and the United Methods communion open to all committed and disposed Christians.

Following these visual demonstrations and discussions, I will then talk about the two common principles among the churches: 1) the Eucharist builds communion, and 2) the Eucharist celebrates communion achieved. It is then I outline the spectrum of points of view from Orthodox and some Protestants; to the open table of the Methodists, where even sometimes baptism comes after a conversion to Christ in the Eucharist; with Catholics in the middle, seeking full communion as the normal occasion where communion together at the Lord’s Table is appropriate, but open to pastoral exception so that every inquiry becomes a matter of pastoral discernment. With these I use texts from Pope John Paul emphasizing the urgency of moving toward Eucharist communion while respecting the present situation, and from the United Methodists emphasizing Christ’s call to all Christians at the open table.

With these I use handouts of the schema of Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic positions, and the understandings of Church on which they are based. With high school students, I would also provide a chart of the Catholic criteria, and some of the church agreements which would lead different people to different decisions.

Again, ideally field experiences in other worship contexts and dialogue with other churches will give substance to the teaching. However, guest speakers and class interaction, including role playing, can provide the experiential dimension to such learning.

With adults there is seldom a class where most have not had an experience at a wedding or funeral of a fellow Christian asking their counsel on sacramental participation, or where they have been in situations of being invited to communion, sometimes in awkward situations. For young people, we help them understand that there are matters of faith at stake and not merely questions of civility, tolerance, or of “protecting” the treasures of the community.

I have never been a dialogue on how Christ touches the hearts of fellow Christians in their Eucharist without my faith in Christ’s Paschal gift to us in the Mass being deepened, even when these dialogues unearth deep and painful differences, many of which will not be healed in my life time. Yet, since I first began to teach high school religion 47 years ago, and church and sacraments at a Protestant seminary and CBU 30 years ago, there has been such a rich harvest of agreements, liturgical reforms and Catholic ecumenical progress so that every new class and new group of students become an adventure in opening up the Paschal Mystery in ever new and deeper ways for each generation.

¹ De La Salle Christian Brothers, *A Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*, Lincroft, NJ: La Salle Provincialate, 1997, (original 1967). #38:1. (hereafter D)

² John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, (Romeville, IL: Christian Brothers Conference, 1975). Ávaro Rodríguez Echeverría, “Associated with the God of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of God: ministers and Servants of the Word,” Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, December 25, 2004. (hereafter A)

³ José Pérez Navarro. FSC. *The Teaching of Catechism in Lasallian History*, Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2005, (MEL Bulletin 17), 64.

<http://www.lasalle2.org/English/Resources/Publications/PDF/Education/Cahier17.pdf>

⁴ See Jeffrey Calligan, Carl Koch, Jeffrey Gros, eds., *John Baptist de La Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004. Jeffrey Gros, *Lasallian Ministry and the Unity of Christians*, Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2004. This is not the place to go into how De La Salle’s theology of the Church and the human person, unpopular in Gallican Jansenist France, served to save the Institute in 1801 and 1904, see Pedro Maria Gil, *Three Centuries of Lasallian Identity*, Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1998.

⁵ See Christian Smith, et al., *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teen Aged*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 65, 193-217. For a more nuanced and detailed exploration of this theme, see: Dean Hoge, et al., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

⁶ Op.cit. 146.

⁷ Hoge and his sociological colleagues identify this as a “culture of choice.”

⁸ Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments*. New York: Continuum, 2006. 21-25, US Conference of

Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*, Washington: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

⁹ Peter Steinfelds, *A People Adrift : The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

¹⁰ Of course, Lasallian Us are not the only creative initiatives underway. Us like Dayton, Marquette, Boston College etc. have shown important leadership. Gerry Baumbach's program at Notre Dame for prospective religious educators, ECHO, is particularly instructive <http://www.nd.edu/~cci/>

¹¹ See also Hoge, 143.

¹² Daniel Mulhall, Jeffrey Gros, eds., *The Ecumenical Christian Dialogues and the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, New York: Paulist Press, 2006.

¹³ Hoge 146.

¹⁴ I can recall the 1970s leadership the Regional Conference supplied in the Roman Synod on Catechesis, and on the National Catechetical Directory. In recent years much consultation has gone into the new National Directory for Catechesis and the National Adult Catechism.

¹⁵ Without going into a lengthy discussion of ecumenical formation, one US statistic that indicates how far we have to go in this dimension of catechesis, is the figure that 48 % of confirmed non-Latino, and 64% of Latino Catholics believe that "the Catholic Church is the one true Church," a position that was definitively put aside in 1964 for the affirmation that the one true Church "subsists in" the Catholic Church. Hoge 57.

¹⁶ As sociologists note: "...the Church cannot function as a lazy monopoly...Catholicism will need to present itself as distinct, vital, relevant, and worthwhile – as a living tradition of discipleship, community, and sacramental consciousness." Ibid 238.

¹⁷ Ibid 196, 208. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers," *Origins*, 27:39, March 19, 1998, 653-661. # 12

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_16031998_ecumenical-dimension_en.html

(hereafter EF)

¹⁸ Hoge 205, EF # 13, 16-19.

¹⁹ Hoge 198, EF # 11, 25-26.

²⁰ Jeffrey Gros, *Handing on the Faith in an Ecumenical World: Resources for Catholic Administrators and Religious Educators In Serving Christian Unity in School and Parish*, Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 2005. Jeffrey Gros, *That All May Be One: Ecumenism*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 2000. Ann Riggs, Eamon McManus, Jeffrey Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

²¹ Jeffrey Gros, "One Table of the Lord: The Goal of Ecumenism," *Living Light*, Fall, 1999, 36:1, 26-43. "Our Hunger for Communion at the One Table of the Lord," *Midstream*, 41:1, January, 2002, 1-16.

²² Can you guess the source of either or both of these quotes? 1) "In fact, one of the main doctrines that distinguishes us Catholics from our brothers and sisters in other Christian traditions is our Catholic belief that when we receive Holy Communion, we are receiving the body and blood of Christ." 2) "I count among the most important results of the

ecumenical dialogues the insight that the issue of the eucharist cannot be narrowed to the problem of ‘validity.’ Even a theology oriented to the concept of succession, such as that which holds in the Catholic and in the Orthodox church, need not in any way deny the salvation-granting presence of the Lord in a Lutheran Lord’s Supper.” Of these two bishops, you know at least one of them very well.

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

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html