

WITNESSES TO A NEW PENTECOST: LASALLIANS BUILDING A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is three-fold: first, to reflect on the intersection of the reign of God, the rights of children, and the Lasallian mission; second, to assess the current reality of the Children's Convention in the United States; third, to explore how Lasallians in the United States are exercising responsibility for children's rights. The author concludes by inviting note that faith and Lasallian heritage beyond rhetoric and become permanent invitation to defend the rights of the most vulnerable children and young people.

Key-words: rights of children, Children's Convention, testimony, social action

We must establish "a culture of action on behalf of the rights of the children and youth, a culture that will shape the way we see, the way we think, the way we judge, the way we decide, the way we act as individuals, as educational communities, as Districts, as regions, as international Lasallian association."

BROTHER JOHN JOHNSTON, FSC, SUPERIOR GENERAL, 1986-2000
KEYNOTE ADDRESS, NOVEMBER 2001
HUETHER LASALLIAN EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Introduction

The title "Witnesses to a New Pentecost" evokes the perpetual movement of the Holy Spirit that we must continuously discern. Pentecost, touted as Christianity's birthday, was the first stroke of the apostolic mission—building the reign of God on earth— following the death and resurrection of Jesus. On Pentecost, the Christians gathered in the Upper Room witnessed a theophany of the Spirit – storm, wind and flame. The fire divided, and its destination was to *all* members of the assembly. The joyful task for the Lasallian educational community across the globe is to attend to the destination of the Spirit's outpouring in our own time. We must discharge this grand task of religion contributing to the common good.

The spirit of Brother John Johnston, FSC, inspires this writing. Serving as Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (hereafter “Institute”) for fourteen years, he commanded our attention because, just as a new millennium was dawning, he authored a bold Pastoral Letter titled *On the Defense of Children, the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission*. Informed by De La Salle’s “progressive awareness” of the human and spiritual distress of poor and abandoned children, the Pastoral Letter seizes on this quandary that John Paul II confronts in his annual peace message: “How many exploited children do not even know they have rights?” [Message, *World Day of Peace*, 1996] Because this question is pertinent to the heart of the Pastoral Letter, it is important to quote further from the text.

The Pope’s message calls attention to the children who are victims of armed conflicts and other kinds of physical and sexual violence, and to those who live in the streets, are illiterate, become addicted to drugs, become involved in criminal activity, are obliged to serve as soldiers and are taught to kill. He reminds us of those who suffer the consequences of unhappy, unhealthy, and ‘broken’ homes [Pastoral Letter, 1999, p. 8].

These children, the letter testifies, are our children. It is for them we can and must respond with creativity and love.

Nearly twelve years later after it’s writing, the *On the Defense of Children* still reads as a compelling piece of moral reflection for social action. He pondered how the growing Lasallian movement might take greater advantage of its numerical power to “... respond with love and creativity... to the struggle against the destitution, injustice manipulation, and exploitation that prevent children from being children and make a mockery of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*” [Pastoral Letter, 1999, p 8]. Brother John fervently believed, as did De La Salle, that we Lasallians first “reveal” God’s goodness and mercy to those confided to our care not merely as teachers but as *witnesses*. Speaking ardently to the Brothers, he writes: “Like Jesus we have to be men who are attentive, loving, compassionate, men who reach out effectively to the needy, men who defend the rights of the poor and oppressed, who ‘bear witness with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even his life’...” [Pastoral Letter, 1999, pp 6-7]. He goes on to say that this letter’s message is intended for all members of the Lasallian community.

The purpose of this article is three-fold:

1. To reflect on the intersection of the reign of God, the rights of children, and the Lasallian mission.
2. To assess the current reality of the Children’s Convention in the United States.
3. To explore how Lasallians in the United States are exercising responsibility for children’s rights.

This article aims to highlight the urgent task of educating for justice across the curriculum and advocating on behalf of children and youth, especially those who constitute the least, the last, and the lost—those most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. Like De La Salle, we must contemplate, that is, see (not simply have the facts about) the realities of the children and youth in the cities and towns where we live, and beyond.

Part I**Proclaiming the reign of God: To “See” with Eyes Wide Open**

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A fundamental focal point of the preaching of Jesus is the proclamation of the reign of God. It is also a central focus in De La Salle’s writings. In his Pastoral Letter of 2004, Brother Superior General Alvaro Rodriguez, FSC, illuminates why we are associated with God’s reign: “The proclamation of the Kingdom is, for its part, the good news that we are all brothers and sisters who are called to build a Kingdom of truth and life, holiness and grace, love and peace” [Pastoral Letter, 2004, p. 30]. Put another way, “[the reign of God] is a spiritual symbol calling Christians to holiness of life and a social symbol demanding that they work for justice in the world” [Groome, 12]. In God’s Providence, John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, viewed the Christian school as a visible instrument of the reign of God, making salvation (it means “wholeness”) real for children and youth, with a special concern towards those who are impoverished and marginalized. What De La Salle told the first Brothers echoes today for all Lasallians; that is, the mission of Jesus given to us “seeks to spread God’s reign”. “This God of goodness,” De La Salle writes in the *Meditations*, “places these children in your hands” (MTR, 37.3). Thus, Lasallian education and evangelization desires to lead those entrusted to our care to discover their inherent dignity, find freedom in faith, and grow as persons for others in a “sense of universal brotherhood and sisterhood” [*Declaration*, 32.1.2].

Various sources provide a basis for exploring the intersection of God’s reign, children’s rights, and the Lasallian mission. Mark’s Gospel speaks powerfully of Jesus’ attentiveness to children, with his eyes wide open. The Catholic Social Tradition instructs us that the preservation of human dignity can only be attained if human rights are affirmed and protected. In addition to the rich and complex tradition of Christian life and thought, we have at our disposal the Children’s Convention, the foundation text that articulates children’s rights, offering a global vision of the child with a moral and spiritual dimension. Faithful to the Lasallian heritage, recent General Chapters, the International Mission Assembly, and Superiors General Pastoral Letters call for Lasallians to take up the challenging agenda of defending and promoting the rights of children. These high ideals and concrete tasks -what the reign of God requires of us- entail critical understanding and deep conviction, with vibrant faith and steadfast hope.

Probing the inert response by Lasallians to the CRC, the Institute’s 43rd General Chapter offers this candid critique: “Although the Convention was recommended by the 42nd General Chapter and again in the Pastoral Letter of the Superior of 1999, its contents are little known and understood by Brothers and Partners” (Documents of the 43rd General Chapter, p. 9). Meeting in May 2000, in Rome, and listening to the movement of the Holy Spirit, the Chapter delegates adopted Proposition 14. It directs that the rights of the child become “a major focus of concern for the Lasallian mission of education... each District, Sub-District and Delegation should include this question in their plan of action” (Documents of the 43rd General Chapter, p. 9). The International Mission Assembly and the 44th General Chapter, convened in 2006 and 2007 respectively, reaffirm the Institute’s commitment to promoting and protecting children’s rights.

Part II –The Current Reality in the United States: The Campaign to Ratify the CRC

The United Nations General Assembly (hereafter UNGA) adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC or Convention) in its 61st session in New York City, on 20 November 1989, a landmark treaty for human rights. For the first time, the international community accepted a treaty that specifically addressed the particular needs of children, putting forward basic standards for the protection of their rights. The CRC (also known as the Children’s Convention) is the first international

agreement that brings together in one legal instrument commitments governments to protect children's rights to survival, health, education, and freedom from exploitation and abuse and to support the roles of families and parents in providing a safe and nurturing environment. "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child marked a turning point," asserts Maud de Beur-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe, "recognizing worldwide that children are not only subjects of protection but also holders of civil and political rights" [Conference on International Justice for Children, 2007]. The Convention states that everyone under the age of 18 (the definition of a child), regardless of gender, origin, religion or possible disabilities, needs special care and protection because children are often the most vulnerable in society.

Today, 193 States have ratified the Convention; the world's most widely ratified human rights agreement. Three States have yet to ratify the CRC: Somalia, the South Sudan, and the United States. In Part II, we will assess the current situation in the US.

Four principal international texts set the stage for the promulgation of the CRC in 1989, following nearly a decade of debate and negotiation that included UN Member States and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), the United Nations Charter (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). Building on these earlier pronouncements, the CRC contains new-fangled approaches to children's rights. It emphasizes the importance of family -its role, authority, and responsibility- to a child's well-being. In addition, it also recognizes the child as a holder of rights, guaranteeing them, as appropriate to their evolving capacity, the right to identity, to privacy, to information, to thought, conscience, and religion, to expression, and to association. Since its unanimous adoption in 1989, the CRC has proven a significant tool in the improvement of human rights laws and policies around the world.

During the 1980s, the US played a significant role in negotiating the Convention. Nevertheless, due to political opposition, neither Presidents Ronald Reagan nor George H.W. Bush signed nor submitted the treaty to the US Senate for advice and consent for ratification. In 1992, the election of President William Clinton brought support for CRC. In February 1995, Madeline Albright, then US Ambassador to the UN, signed the Convention on behalf of the United States. However, after more than two decades since its unanimous adoption by the UNGA that included the US, the treaty has never been submitted to the Senate. The United States remains one of only three countries that have not adopted the most ratified human rights agreement in history. The process for the United States to join any international treaty is one that involves essentially nine steps; it is only at step two -signing the agreement. The next major step is the transmittal of the text to the US Senate.

The Campaign for US Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a national coalition, is leading the earnest effort to achieve ratification of the CRC by the U.S., and to implement its standards in this country. It is a volunteer-driven network of academics, attorneys, child and human rights advocates, educators, members of religious and faith-based communities, physicians, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), students, and other concerned citizens. The Campaign was launched in 2002, in the aftermath of the UNGA Special Session on Children, a landmark gathering of more than 7,000 participants including many Heads of State or Government. During the Special Session, members of the US delegation criticized the CRC and its basic principles, a grave disappointment to the large segment of the American public that supports the treaty.

Through the leadership of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), a core group of child advocates convened in August 2002, the first meeting of the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the CRC. Participants focused on efforts needed to build a national coalition (this article will later take up the Institute's call for Lasallians to collaborate with other organizations.). In 2003, representatives from more than 50 US NGOs met in Washington, DC, for a two-day strategy session entitled "Moving the CRC Forward in the United States" and formalized the Campaign for US Ratification of the CRC. The Campaign has since grown to encompass membership from 200 organizations and academic institutions.

Currently, the Campaign is pursuing an initiative to urge the Barack Obama Administration to send the CRC to the US Senate for advice and consent for ratification by next Universal Children's Day, 20 November 2012. In a letter to President Obama recently, the Brothers Visitor in the US joined 54 leaders of American nonprofit organizations (including the Leadership Conference of Women Religious) that work in support children and families both in the US and abroad to urge him to submit the CRC to the Senate. To date the required Department of State's legal review, which takes at least six months, has not begun. Time is of the essence. Therefore, the Presidents of Covenant House and the Child Welfare League have also contacted Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and asked her ensure the State Department completes its review of the CRC and submits it to the Senate for advice and consent before she leaves office.

Part III

The Lasallian Response in the United States: "Jesus Was Indignant...Are We?"

The Huether Lasallian Education Conference held in Chicago, 15-17 November 2001, marked the first significant response to the challenging orientations of the 43rd General Chapter (Proposition 14) to emphasize the rights of children. Brother John Johnston, FSC, who had now become Director of Education for the USA-Toronto Region, delivered the opening keynote address titled "Jesus Was Indignant...Are We?" He situated this provocative oration within the context of the theology of the reign of God, drawing on a familiar portion of the tenth chapter of Mark's Gospel, a dramatic little story:

*People were bringing little children to Jesus, for him to touch them.
The disciples spoke sternly to them.
But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them,
'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them.
For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.'
Then he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.
(Mk 10: 13-14, 16, NSRV)*

In this seminal address, a significant contribution to the Lasallian discourse on political advocacy and educating for justice, Brother John put forward four possibilities for action by Lasallians towards building a culture of action on behalf of the rights of children and youth. Recognizing that other possibilities may exist, these four serve as points of departure for dialogue:

- a. Create ongoing education and formation programs centered on the rights of children
- b. Strengthen existing schools, centers, and programs that serve children, youth, and young adults “at risk”
- c. Continue the momentum of new schools for children who are “poor, abandoned, and far from salvation”
- d. Mobilize Lasallians as advocates for children and for their rights [Huether Address, pp 7-12].

These four ideas provide substance for further reflection on and analysis of the ethical responsibility Lasallians must bring to bear on current realities through a lens that looks at the world through the eyes of oppressed peoples. Turning Christian values into social action for moral aims mediates the Lasallian collective praxis to strengthen and nurture the common good -what the reign of God requires.

For this article, we will examine point four—what has been happening in the US to educate and mobilize Lasallians to advocate for the principles enshrined in the Children’s Convention.

Enlivened by the hope that Lasallians can contribute to transforming the public sphere, Brother John’s testimony about the distinguishing features of the Lasallian heritage presents a striking picture: “Few international bodies [exist] in education today with the kind of numerical power, long history, common heritage, unified vision, multi-ethnic/multi-religious composition, and cohesiveness that increasingly characterize Lasallian Association” [Huether Address, p 11]. In this Region, we have more than 70,000 children, youth and adults served across over 100 schools, colleges and centers of education with more than 7,000 educators ministering in Lasallian educational institutions [Regional Statistics, 2011-12]. These numbers do not include all the others with whom we are associated: parents, board members, alumni, benefactors, and friends.

Despite this numerical strength, Lasallians in the United States generally have not demonstrated a propensity to leverage this power with the rich communal heritage in the practice of political advocacy, taking full advantage of the democratic process to struggle in the political arena for improving the lives of children, youth and their families. Assertively, Brother John confronts us with these two essential questions: “Is it not possible for us to actualize the potential for good these figures suggest? Can we not mobilize this enormous force in order to defend and promote *together and by association* the rights of children and youth?” [Huether Address, p 12].

In light of this overview, we will present a series of activities Lasallians in this Region have undertaken in the last few years.

1. The Lasallian Convocation at the United Nations: With the Brother Superior and the General Council present, the official launch of this educational-evangelical initiative took place at the Huether Conference in November 2009, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Opening on the Feast of Mark the Evangelist, the Lasallian Convocation at the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, was held in New York, on 25-27 April 2010, falling between the two great Christian celebrations of Easter and Pentecost. A project of the then USA-Toronto Region

(now the Lasallian Region of North America, or RELAN), about 140 Lasallians (students and educators) from Ontario, Canada, and across the US came together for the three-day event. 32

Inspired by the Gospel values of love and mercy, justice and peace, as well as the Lasallian Story and Vision, the Convocation signified a faith-filled response to the Institute's concern that Lasallians commit themselves to "...[taking] part in building a more just and sharing world, [supporting] and [participating] in programs, movements, structures, and educational initiatives that respond effectively to all forms of poverty, new and old" [Documents of the 44th General Chapter, p 34]. Put differently, the hope is that the UN gathering serves as a beginning towards actualizing our numerical power to advocate for social change, transforming those structures in society that. "The Convocation was inspiring in its call- to-action," says Brian Linehan, a student Cretin-Derham Hall High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Martin Luther King, Jr., the great American preacher and civil rights leader, teaches that the call of Jesus to action is not simply to be a Good Samaritan; rather, the call is to change—to transform—the Jericho Roads of life.

The Convocation has increased awareness and inspired action by Lasallian students and educators. Activities include testimony before a legislative committee of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, a distribution of mosquito nets to five Lasallian schools in East Africa to prevent malaria, and a host of educational assemblies and other forums focused on the rights of the child on secondary and college campuses.

Guiding Principles: Three broad, overlapping principles formed guided the Lasallian Convocation and continuing initiatives to promote and realize the vision and standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

- a. Evangelization and Catechesis is at the heart of the Lasallian mission: "In their educational activity the Brothers seek to *integrate* the effort of human advancement with the announcement of God's word". "The Brothers consider that their "principal function" consists in the work of evangelization and catechesis whereby they contribute to growth in faith..." (*The Mission of the Institute*, Ch 2, the *Rule*).
- b. Actualizing the Lasallian numerical power for US ratification of the CRC and for fostering a culture of action, a culture of advocacy. Lasallians, Huether 2001 must give birth to a *culture of action on behalf of children and youth*. It must launch the United States/Toronto Region, each District, and each institution on the path of new and effective initiatives to benefit children in need. Huether 2001 must not end Saturday night. The conversation that we start and the commitments that we make during these three days must continue to influence us long after we leave this hotel. We have to make our own, and then live, what I am calling a *culture of action on behalf of the rights of children and youth* [Johnston, Huether Address, p. 6].
- c. Integrating the Catholic Social Tradition, Lasallian Insights, and Critical Pedagogy. Advancing a critical pedagogy provides a three-step method that can underscore local and regional social action—a way to change the reality of what can be in God's time: a critical reflection upon our world; proposing steps (solutions) for curing our world; actualizing, or implementing, the proposed steps or solutions—putting into practice the results of critical reflection (cf. Thomas Oldneski, SM, 1997).

Content:

Welcome and Context

- Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, FSC, Superior General
- Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, General Councilor

Three Keynote Speakers

- Archbishop Celestino Miglore, then Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
- Mr. Jimmy Briggs, former UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador; Co-Founder, Man Up Campaign
- Mrs. Ann Veneman, then Executive Director of UNICEF

Teach-in Sessions

- *Fair Trade: Towards Achieving World Without Poverty and Injustice*
Peter Buck
Worker/Owner & Interfaith Program Representative
Equal Exchange Co-operative
www.equalexchange.coop
- *Countering the Trafficking of Persons*
Mary Jo Toll, SND
Sisters of Notre Dame
Representative to the United Nations
www.snd1.org/NewInitNGO.html
www.usccb.org/mrs/trafficking/index.shtml
- *Child Poverty in America: Prevalence, Causes, Impact and Solutions*
Jan Jackson
Senior Fellow, Policy Reform and Advocacy
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org
- *The United Nations Agenda for the Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*
Tonderai Chikuhwa
Senior Programme Officer, Office of the Special Representative of the

Small Group Visits to 11 United Nations Missions (embassies)

Objective: to learn more about the CRC's implementation in these countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, People's Republic of China, United States.

2. Huether Lasallian Conferences

The Huether Lasallian Conference is the premier event for Lasallian educators from across the Region, exploring a variety of topics pertinent to our Catholic and Lasallian education and evangelization today. Since the 2001 conference highlighted above, the two of the last three Huether gatherings have focused either directly or indirectly on the rights of children and the call for Lasallians in this Region to struggle with implementing the ethics of the CRC locally in the US, and in solidarity with others around the globe who are committed to the same high purpose.

Huether 2009: "Our Lasallian Mission: Providing Sanctuary to All in Times of Crisis". At this gathering in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Huether Conference had the distinct honor to have Brother Superior General and the whole General Council present. Brothers Alvaro and Thomas each offered a keynote address.

"One of the Lasallian sanctuaries which we should give more importance to is that of the defense of the rights of children and adolescents. Tomorrow we will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As we will remember, Brother John Johnston wanted to make this defense a banner for all Lasallians. Today we can consider this cause as one of our sanctuaries."

"Today the entity we call La Salle must be a sanctuary for all. The Founder made a clear option for poor children and, therefore, faithful to his spirit, we should be open and willing to lend a hand against any type of poverty, wherever persons are suffering, where they experience poverty or abandonment, or where they their lives have lost meaning. No one should stay on the outside; all can find a welcoming place – families in crisis, victims of alcohol and drugs, the mentally challenged, immigrants."

"So I say to you, dear participants in the Huether Lasallian Conference, as members of the Lasallian Family, *the call that was made to us at our last General Chapter, is directed also to you*: To be Lasallians with open eyes and burning hearts, with open eyes to see the needs of our neighbors, and with burning hearts to offer a sanctuary to all those who feel alone and aimless." [Italics added]

Opening Keynote Address
 Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, FSC

"Last week in Costa Rica, with Brothers Alvaro and Edgar, I was honored to sign the

part of support of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child put forward by the Visitors of Latin America. Can we not do the same in the USA-Toronto Region?"

"We can give more attention to BICE, the International Catholic Child Bureau of which one of our Brothers, Stephen Tuhoy, Director of SECOLI, is Vice-President. We can advocate in this country for the chance of children of undocumented immigrants to attend state universities through the DREAM ACT (*The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act*). These young people, children of undocumented people, are eligible to attend public schools are ineligible in most states to attend public universities. Some of our own Lasallian universities deserve great credit as do our secondary and San Miguel Schools who do not bar undocumented students."

"Most of all we can be a sanctuary for students that we meet each day, providing a safe place, from family difficulties, from bullying, and all the problems that beset kids today, but not only sanctuary but the tools, the hope and the encouragement, to move ahead as young adults."

Sending Forth Keynote Address
Brother Thomas Johnson, FSC

Huether 2011: "Faith in Action: Civic Engagement through Lasallian Education". Held in Washington, DC, participants experienced stimulating talks from three inspirational American leaders: Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, AZ, opened the conference with a talk titled "Forming Ambassadors of Justice and Peace". Bruce Lesley, President of First Focus, and Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, two important figures that are significant voices in the public policy arena in Washington, both addressed the participants on "Becoming a Voice for Children".

A momentous moment at this Huether Conference was the signing of a public statement titled "Standing for Children" by the Visitors and General Councilor of the Region. The statement reads in part:

The Regional Conference of Christian Brothers, representative of the Lasallian education ministries of the United States-Toronto Region, assume as our moral duty the promotion and the protection of the rights of children and commit ourselves to helping them achieve their full human dignity. This foundational duty is consistent with our Christian vocation to educate and evangelize the young, especially those who are impoverished and marginalized.

Part IV – Concluding Thoughts

The Gospel of Jesus and De La Salle's Christian approach to education and evangelization remain the foundation stones for Lasallian thought and practice in our time. These stones—faith and heritage—provide us meaning and hope, binding the Lasallian movement to engage in serious ethical discourse and social action. An unwavering commitment in the American political context requires a compelling vision and ethic that unleashes the potential for the justice-oriented action our numerical power in the United States suggests and the Institute desires. This joyful task is not something we can accomplish once and for all. Rather, with a discerning spirit, it is an ideal we keep working towards, to keep

exploring and implementing an education for solidarity and justice that is oriented towards achieving the common good—what the reign of God requires of us.

The measure of our efficacy is not predicated just on what Lasallians do, but who they become—advocates with a well-educated, heartfelt solidarity with the agony and anguish of oppressed peoples [International Mission Assembly, Main Orientation 4]. Drawing on critical pedagogy, 21st century Lasallian education ought to implement a *faith-justice* oriented education (educating for justice) across the curriculum while also penetrating other facets of an educational community. Brother Alvaro underscores its significance: “Education for justice should not be merely a specific subject area but a common thread that runs through the whole curriculum”. He states further: “This common thread should be reinforced by daily practice within the school” [Pastoral Letter, 2003, p 50]. Faith-justice moves us beyond mere rhetoric to a self-critical and imaginative disposition that exerts real influence - enacting laws and practices- that protects the dignity and rights of all children and youth, with a special concern for the least, the last, and the lost.

Our commitment to keep the Lasallian mission vital and vibrant in our time moves us to continue listening attentively to God’s invitation to transform and adapt our lives to changing circumstances in the Institute, the larger Lasallian community, the Church, and the world.

Recognizing the complex time and place in which we live, the road we must travel to building a *culture of action on behalf of the rights of children* is long, but it leads to making the world fit for children. In a meditation on the spirituality of service, Josiah Royce, who taught the philosophy of religion and community at Harvard more than a century ago, puts it so well in his famous letter to one of his devotees who asked, ““Why live?” He wrote, ‘I must live because my help is needed, there is something here that I can uniquely do on an individual, interpersonal level and on a collective level’” [quoted by Cornel West in Divinity School Address]. Believing that Lasallians are called to be witnesses to a new Pentecost, what we think and what we do does make a difference for the proclamation of the reign of God.

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