

Research Article

Non-Catholic Lasallians' Experiences in Living Out the Lasallian Values

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Abstract

Not all Lasallians are Catholics. Moreover, those who belong to different religious denominations share their experiences why religion should not be a cause for misunderstanding, but instead it is a venue for them to feel and experience the power and beauty of interfaith dialogue that a Catholic university like La Salle represents. This study examined the lived experiences of non-Catholic Lasallians in living out the Lasallian values of faith, service, and communion in mission. Since it is a phenomenological study, it derived from the lived experiences of six (6) co-researchers who were chosen from DLSU Dasmariñas; 3 undergrad students, 1 graduate school student, 1 faculty, 1 staff. The Lasallian Philosophy of Education guided the study to extract the meaning of phenomenon. The study presented first thematic reflections as fruits of significant stories, experiences, thoughts, description and the second thematic reflections are the five themes that emerged from individual structural descriptions. An eidetic insight with three postulates such as prayer in understanding one's religion, integration of faith and service and unity in diversity serve as open-ended conclusion of the study. The Christian education and the Lasallian formation the non-Catholics receive can be the most systematic approaches to concretize the Lasallian spirituality and mission in living out the Lasallian core values.

Keywords: *Non-Catholic, Lasallians, Lasallian Values, Phenomenology, Lasallian Philosophy of Education*

Introduction

De La Salle schools in the Philippines is a Catholic co-educational institution founded in 1911 by the brothers of the Christian schools. It continues to share the ministry and charism whom La Salle entrusted, “to teach the minds of the young, to touch their hearts and to transform their lives.” There are currently seventeen (17) schools under the supervision of the brothers. These are all Catholic educational institutions. By virtue of the lasallian experience, people who are engaged in the lasallian activities are called ‘Lasallians.’ According to Cabanias (2017), Lasallian is a term to describe a person who is personally fulfilling the mission set forth by St. John Baptist De La Salle. Collins (2001) expounds that a lasallian is

someone who is personally committed to living the gospel values here and now. It is one way of turning the general Christian call to discipleship into personal vocation. It is very Catholic and Christian identity of a Lasallian to manifest all these perspectives.

However, not all Lasallians are Catholics. There are some who call themselves Lasallians but not practicing the way Catholics do. It is precisely because of different dominations existing in the school. Tan and Se (2015) said that as early as TREDONE, students explore other religions apart from Catholicism. A block mate, seatmate or a friend might be a Buddhist, Muslim, Atheist or non-Catholic, moreover, those who belong to religious minorities as they are demographically labeled, share their views why religion should not be a cause for conflict, but instead reflect the values of respect and acceptable that a Catholic university like La Salle represents. Every student in La Salle whether a Catholic or non-Catholic institution is required to undergo Lasallian formation and Catholic Religious education. Salm (2015) reflected that it is necessary to take a fresh look on the history of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from its 17th century origin to its situation in the world today. When La Salle devoted himself to form schoolmasters for the youth at risk, he focused in all aspects to train the first brothers. Hence, non-Catholic Lasallians are aware of who the La Salle is vis-a-vis the Lasallian mission, values and spirituality. Inspired by the “five core principles of the Lasallian school (Collin, 2017) which are Faith in the presence of God, Quality education, Concern for the poor and social justice, respect for all persons and inclusive community,” the schools continue to nurture an awareness of the living presence of God, develop individual to transform society, call every member to be in solidarity with poor, provide a formation as a united and respectful community and to live in the Lasallian core values of Faith, Service and Communion in Mission. The Lasallian Education is anchored to the legacy of the founder, and so it is expected for every Lasallian to carry this legacy.

In living out the Lasallian core values of faith, service and communion in mission, it is not confined to the Catholic perspective. As long as you are enrolled as student and working in any Lasallian institution, there is a big responsibility to live out these values – Catholic and non-Catholic members.

Research Problem

The study explored on the experiences of the non-Catholic Lasallians in De La Salle-Dasmarias in living out the Lasallian values of faith, service and communion in mission. Hence, it clearly responded to know the significant and personal experiences of these non-Catholic Lasallians as they value the Lasallian tradition and La Salle’s legacy. These experiences were described. Through phenomenological reflections, Themes, Learnings, Insights and possible Implications of these experiences were answered.

We focused our study on the non-Catholic Lasallians who were: faculty member, staff/employee of the institution, undergraduate and graduate students of DLSU-D.

1. Theoretical Orientation and Related Studies

The Lasallian philosophy of education developed by Mistades (2008) guided the study to extract the meaning of phenomenon. It discusses components of paradigm and expounds on the Lasallian Shared Mission of providing “a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor”. The elements of Lasallian spirituality – faith, zeal, and community – are

presented from the perspective of the Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, John Baptist de La Salle. It articulates how contemporary Lasallians could embody this spirituality in daily life. Finally, it describes the image of a teacher as culled from the writings of the Patron of Teachers, De La Salle. For La Salle, Religious Education is most important subject to be taught, there is a need to carry out the implication of this philosophy to be routinely embedded in the educational and Lasallian formation conducted by the Religious educators.

Lasallian Values and Spirituality

Short (2018) suggested that we must commit to firmly establish the spirit of faith as foundational and effective reality in each and every one of our works. We must ask how prayer and spirituality especially the spirit of faith the core of who we are and what we are about. Likewise, Salm (2015) believed that it is necessary to take a fresh look on the history of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from its 17th century origin to its situation in the world today. This can be linked to the preamble of the Foundational Principles of Lasallian Formation in LGP (2009) which articulates the core values of Lasallian identity, in this sense, it is the heart of the three documents. The values of faith, zeal for service and communion, taken together as dimensions of one spirit, capture an important dynamism that goes back to the time of the founder and his first associates. Fecker, et al (2010) in the educational theory of La Salle includes value which concerns goals of education; knowledge which considers views on beliefs; human nature which focuses on the human being, limits and potentials; learning models how to acquire skills and knowledge; transmission by what methods, who is going to teach and what will be the curriculum; society which the institutions involved in the educational process; and the opportunity which defines who is to be formed.

The Non- Catholics in Catholic Schools

Penn (1985) in her study conducted on non-Catholic parents who enrolled their children in Catholic secondary schools found out that non-Catholic parents expressed a number of motivations, primarily educational and social in nature, for enrolling their children in Catholic secondary schools. Her research indicated that the parents in the sample were motivated to enroll their children in Catholic secondary schools due to perceived positive attributes of the Catholic schools and to perceived negative attributes of the available public schools. Most interesting is Penn's finding that non-Catholic, as well as Catholic parents expressed religious motivations for Catholic school enrollment.

In the Declaration on Christian Education proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1965, the sacred Ecumenical Council has considered with care how extremely important education is in the life of man and how its influence ever grows in the social progress of this age. Since all Christians have become children of God, they have a right to a Christian education. The present Church documents (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977, 1982, 1988) recognize that some students enrolled in the Catholic schools are not of the Catholic faith. Indeed, the non-Catholic population has been addressed in Roman documents:

Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians... The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognized by the Church. On

the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in Christian education; this is its right and its duty

Donlevy (2006) examined the impact of the inclusion of non-Catholic students on Catholic students in four urban Western Canadian Catholic high schools. The study employs grounded theory as the methodology and focus groups as the method. The qualitative findings indicate that although inclusion was beneficial to Catholic students' sense of faith, appreciation of diversity and the school's faith community, the issue of orthopraxis overwhelming orthodoxy led to questions concerning religious relativism, perhaps in part due to inclusion, which has implications for the evangelization of Catholic students in Catholic schools. Hickey (1983) investigate change, planned or unplanned, which has occurred in Catholic schools because of non-Catholic students in attendance. Respondents include school staff, Catholic parents and non-Catholic parents in selected urban and suburban Catholic schools. A new instrument, the Catholic School Participants' Scale, was devised to suit the purposes of the study.

There are Catholic schools spread all over the Philippines, offering different levels of education and types of formation. Furthermore, a number of these schools are not exclusive to Catholics, but serve peoples of other faiths especially in Mindanao according to A Pastoral Letter of the CBCP on the occasion of the 400 years of Catholic Education in the Philippines (2012). Garcia & Ramirez (2019) uncovered the lived experiences of non-Catholic students who studied in a Catholic school and attended religious education subject as part of the requirement. The study showed that the co-researchers' experiences are marked with positive impact on their lives as non-Catholics. The positive effect of religious education classes enabled them to grow spiritually and even deepened their spiritual lives through awareness and understanding of what religion is all about and how it is integrated in their own. It showed that religious education subject has contributed much in the values formation of each individual.

Methodology

The present paper is a qualitative study with Phenomenology as a specific method. "Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity" (Husserl, 2001). Modern phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel (2008) discussed it well on taking the lived experience through hermeneutics and from experience to reflection. Phenomenology represents a new empiricism which "contrasts with traditional empiricism in [its] epistemological acceptance of intuitive experience, [its] emphasis on the concreteness of 'lived experience', [its] radical openness to modes of consciousness, and [its] inclination to interpret 'essences'" (Ramirez, 2012). To clearly state the process of doing phenomenology, Moustakas' (1994) presentation on conducting human research was used.

discovering a topic and question; Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature; Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers; Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation; Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process; Conducting and reporting a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and

question; A follow-up interview; Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description and synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences.

Participants of the study

The six (6) co-researchers were faculty, staff and students of DLSUD. Table 1 presents the profile of the co-researchers.

Table 1. Profile of Co-Researchers

Pseudonym	Age	Religion	Status	Years in La Salle
Kris	45	Born Again	Faculty	15
Lovely	39	Born Again	Staff	13
Belle	24	Buddhist	Student	4
Ramon	59	Born Again	GS Student	3
Micah	23	Protestant	Student	3
Ron	25	Muslim	Student	3

Data Collection Techniques

We personally approached the co-researchers to conduct an in-depth interview or story telling in conversational manner (Braud,1998). We advised our co-researchers that since their participation is voluntary, they may refuse to answer any question and they can withdraw from the study anytime they want to. The interview sessions were audio recorded, transcribed, collected and became the subject for data analysis. Table 2 presents a list of questions that served as my springboard and guide during the interview. Although the questions were in English, I used both Filipino and English during the actual interview based on the preference of the participants. During the follow up interviews, the questions were more on clarifications regarding the initial results of the analysis.

Table 2. InterviewGuide

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as a non-Catholic believer/Lasallian? ?
2. Please describe the significant experiences as a non- Catholic Lasallian in De La Salle University - Dasmaringas.
3. Please describe your experiences before, during and after making your decision to be a part of DLSU-D. What/Who influenced/motivated you?
4. As a non-Catholic Lasallian, what were the struggles or difficulties in the insitution?
5. Personally describe the impact of De La Salle's history to your life. How would you describe that experience in living out the Lasallian values?

Data Analysis

Moustakas' Phenomenological method of research, organization and analysis of the data was employed to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions. Even before I started the in -depth interview, I practiced "epoche" (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas,

1994). I set aside all the biases so I could extract the meaning and essence of the phenomenon. Epoche is an invitation to enter into a reflection of my co-researchers' experiences. To fully obtain its full descriptions, Moustaka's modified works of phenomenological steps were done:

The First Thematic reflections. After the reflection of the narrative as a way of information from interview to a narrative form, thematic reflections emerged as fruits of stories and sharing of my co-researchers. I focused on the significant stories, striking words and thoughts to give much emphasis on their lived experiences. I then, put a title of each story describing my co- researchers which was drawn from the essence of their experiences.

The Second Thematic Reflections. Five (5) themes emerged from the individual structural descriptions which can be found also in the first thematic reflections. Using the significant experiences which include my co-researchers' feelings, thoughts and consciousness, I clustered them into a group as a whole. This composite structural description represented my co- researchers as a group to understand how they experienced phenomenon. The textural descriptions were examined from the different perspectives (imaginative variation) and eventually arrived at a description of the structure (the how). A textural – structural description that emerges represents the meaning and essence of the experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustajas, 1994). Meaning, from the textural description, I constructed the structural epitome of the experiences which required imaginations and reflections of the relationships or themes pertinent to the experiences.

The Eidetic Insight. From the first and second thematic reflections, all the individual textural and structural descriptions into a group and themes were integrated. It is an open ended and original insight as my personal contribution.

Symbolic Representation and creative synthesis. It summarized the whole experiences to develop a symbol about their experiences.

Results and Discussion

3.1 The First Thematic Reflections. These are fruits of stories and sharing of my co-researchers. The table 3 presents sample significant statements and meaning of the experiences.

Table 3. Sample significant statements and meaning

I like the Lasallian prayers	My co- researchers agreed that what they most liked in the class was the prayer being taught.
I follow what is expected	My co-researchers signed waiver to follow the services and activities here. They followed rules and Catholic teachings.
There is always an excitement.	They felt the excitement of being a part of the Lasallian community despite different religious convictions.
I was formed and was satisfied.	My co- researchers expressed the feeling of satisfaction in this institution. The formation being given and the Christian education taught to them.
Living the Animo La Salle	They all agreed that living the Lasallian spirituality coincides to what they believe in as non- Catholic.

It is indeed a Lasallian Education	It is in their experiences that they consider their stay here as a Lasallian education
I learned a lot in the Lasalian Modules and Formation	They really appreciated much the formation and Lasallian modules of the University Lasallian Family Office (ULFO)

In general, the foregoing significant statements of these experiences in the first thematic reflections revealed the essence of the narratives by each co-researcher. Their striking stories, thoughts and descriptions stated the real essence both as non-Catholic Lasallians. The meaning of the lived experiences was synthesized and values were reflected upon. This can be linked to the preamble of the Foundational Principles of Lasallian Formation in LGP (2009) which articulates the core values of Lasallian identity, in this sense, it is the heart of the three documents. The values of faith, zeal for service and communion, taken together as dimensions of one spirit, capture an important dynamism that goes back to the time of the founder and his first associates.

3.2 The Second Thematic Reflections

An analysis of the experiences of the participants revealed a thematic structure composed of five themes that describe the experiences they went through. These five themes emerged from the individual structural descriptions: Inspired by Lasallian prayers, A Lasallian Believer, A Lasallian Journey, A Great Follower and Personal Satisfaction.

Theme 1. Inspired by the Lasallian prayers. It is the first common theme from the individual structural descriptions. This could be exemplified through the co-researchers' encounter with God and De La Salle through prayer. This could be illustrated in co-researchers' responses:

Lovely: They always request my presence to lead the Lasallian prayer

Kris: When I lead the prayer in class, I feel obliged to say the last part of the Lasallian prayer, "St. John Baptist De La Salle, Pray For Us"

Micah: attending prayer vigil was honestly new to me, leading prayer in the congregation fellowship using rosary and even joining "Lakbay Maria" and station of the cross was very life changing.

Theme 2. A Lasallian Believer. The second common theme is a Lasallian Believer. Co-researchers were fully convinced that it was God and De La Salle himself who made a way for them to see that what they are doing is a Lasallian belief in a tradition. It could be highlighted in the experiences of our co-researchers.

Belle: As a believer, It is a different feeling when you are in the presence of God, it feels greater in a Lasallian context

Ramon: I'm immersed to new belief and culture that is open to all

Ron: My personal belief is just contextualized in a lasallian perspective

Theme 3. A Lasallian Journey. The third common theme is the expression of every co-researcher that it is a journey in the Lasallian education and formation. It is classified into two subthemes: Journey in Christian education and Journey to a Lasallian formation. This could be illustrated in our co-researchers' responses:

Lovely: As a non- Catholic, I learned a lot from Lasallian modules of ULFO. I will never forget in my journey the learnings from our facilitators.

Ron: I consider my life here in La Salle as a journey. Forever I'll be grateful to DLSUD.

Belle: The Religious education as requirement plus the retreat and reco make my journey more meaningful

Theme 4. A Responsible Lasallian Follower. This is the fourth theme. It has become a passion for my co- researchers to commit themselves to follow whatever rules and regulations are imposed to non-Catholic believers. It connotes respect and responsibility as they carry out the Lasallian principles. As faculty, staff and students, they gave their own responsibility to follow:

Micah: After enrolling in DLSUD as I signed the waiver for attending and obeying their services inside the campus changes my perspective in life

Kris: My religion did not hinder me to proceed with my application as faculty in this institution. It is because our church teaches us to submit to authorities and as employees, we Christians are taught to comply with an organization's or institutions policies.

Ramon: I respect and I follow what is being asked of me. Participation in the institution's religious activities will not at all compromise my faith.

Theme 5. Personal Satisfaction. It is the fifth theme identified in the experiences of my co-researchers. They consider it as one of the decisive reasons of staying in DLSUD. It is grouped into the subthemes of social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. This could be illustrated in the responses of my co-researchers:

Belle: It is my dream to be here in one of the prestigious schools in Cavite

Ron: I opted to be here because of what I hear about Lasallians. The "One La Salle"

Ramon: Though it is a struggle for me to study here at first, I was able to overcome those as I value the Lasallian experience which brought me to a tremendous realization

3.3 Eidetic Insight

It is known to individuals who call themselves Lasallians that De La Salle University – Dasmariñas they consider second home, a refuge and a stronghold is faithful institution to Catholic tradition. As they become members, their respective religions shouldn't be a reason not to imbibe the Lasallian values of faith, service, and communion in communion. It is rather a huge opportunity to reflect on the values of respect and acceptability that a Catholic school like La Salle represent. The Christian education and the Lasallian formation they receive can be the most systematic approaches to concretize the Lasallian spirituality and mission in living out the Lasallian core values. It can define Lasallian and Catholic identity.

The following postulates can add positive insights to buttress the above eidetic insight: **Prayer and understanding one's own religion.** To see realities in the eyes of faith is one of De La Salle's strengths. Co- researchers were aware that prayers can have an advantage, vocal or mental prayers. Different traditional spiritual activities and formations like the karakol, recollections, retreats and Lasallian modules played vital roles in their spiritual life to understand one's faith. It is definitive meaning of value of faith. The Lasallian education is

imbued with this value which enables persons to interpret, judge and evaluate realities in the light of the gospel (LGP.13).

Integration of faith and service. A Lasallian's life is not confined to spiritual activity and formation. There is a need to concretize it through service. The Declaration on Christian Education no. 6 asserts that "Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole man with its duty to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right in accordance with its particular mission that is to serve all men." Since Lasallian education is marked by zeal. The whole hearted giving of oneself to the service of others in gratuity and generosity, in creativity and fortitude, in compassion and commitment (LGP, 14).

Unity in Diversity. Non-Catholic Lasallians show respect of each other's differences. It needs to be true because there is no other way to achieve unity amidst diversity through mutual respect. Every religion has a unique way of worshipping God, but it all leads to a worship of one God. One common denominator is calling each one "lasallian." This is the value of communion in mission. Lasallian education is exercised as a communion in mission marked by the fraternal spirit which enables all sectors of community and all those who support its work to collaboration in educating toward world that is more humane just and fraternal where no one is excluded (LGP,14).

3.4 Creative Representation and Synthesis

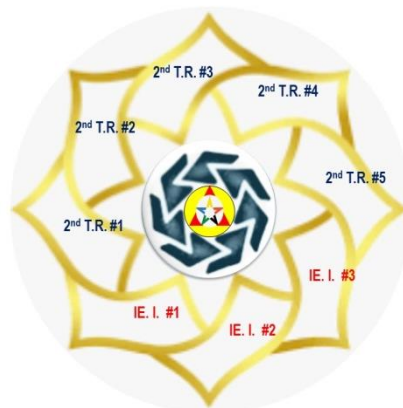


Figure 1. Non-Catholic Lasallians in Lasallian Values

The Creative Symbol of the study is being depicted in a form of STAR. According to the Lasallian Module of DLSUD, in the Lasallian story, star means a sign of faith or *signum fidei* in latin. In the Old Testament, the star as a great sign of faith can be traced in the story of the Patriarch Abraham whom God Yahweh had a covenant with. It is where the formation of faith came from the descendant of Abraham. In the New Testament, a sign of a big star would depict the faith being professed by the three Astrologers who came from the Arab country but interestingly these three great men were looking forward to the birth of Jesus. Obviously, the study discloses the faith and lived-experiences of the six Co-Researchers who live-out the three Lasallian Core Values namely: Faith, Zeal for service and Communion in Mission.

1. The Small Star in the Middle-depicts the identity of a Lasallian (in Latin it is known as 'signum fidei', sign of faith in English). It also portrays the faith-experiences of our six Co-Researchers. The different colors (blue, yellow, red, green and black) stand for the different denominations where our Co-Researchers belong with. Faith is being professed and

obviously live out even in the Non-Roman Catholic, Non-Christian Religions and other Denominations.

The Five Edges of the Star- present the Five Steps or Process that are being applied in the study namely: 1) The Creative Presentation of Lived-Experiences, 2) First Thematic Reflection, 3) Second Thematic Reflection, 4) Eidetic Insights and 5) Creative Synthesis.

2. Triangle- portrays the Three Lasallian Core Values of Faith, Zeal for Service, and Communion in Mission rooted from the lived-experiences of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

3. The Hands in Heptagonal Shape- signify the seven themes that were derived from the First Thematic Reflection. These are fruits of stories and sharing of our co- researchers.

4. The Elegant Islamic Octagonal Star- manifests the five significant statements derived from the Second Thematic Reflection and three significant statements taken from the Eidetic Insights.

Implication to their Personal Lives

As they live the values of faith, service and communion in conducting the Lasallian formation, my co- researchers experienced different implications in their life:

1. Just like the catholic faculty, students and staff, the non- catholic participants of the study are very particular about their spiritual growth. Understanding and appreciating the Lasallian values thru the different activities made them aware that you don't need to be catholic to appreciate God's presence in one's life as long as you learn to appreciate your faith, express it by serving others and lean to live as one Christian community (faith,service and communion)
2. Although, they comply with the school's requirements to attend all religious activities, it is a venue for them to feel and experience the power and beauty of interfaith dialogue.
3. Even though they belong to other denominations, The Non-Catholic participants felt and recognized the presence of acceptance and adjust to their environment peacefully in the company of other religious affiliations.
4. By understanding the Lasallian values the Non-Catholics experienced and nurtured, the communitarian aspect, mutual responsibility and well-rounded values that permeates the spirit of freedom and love between them and the Catholics in their daily association whether inside or outside the university.
5. By letting the Non-Catholic understand the Lasallian values, its philosophy of education, vision and mission, and the policy of inclusion; they eventually recognized the greater rights of an individual, the principle of fairness, of equality ,respect for diversity and the experience of dignity as a person.
6. By letting the Non-Catholics to appreciate the Lasallian values, the school is not only promoting its Catholic identity but the promotion of formation of the whole person and the need to ensure the Christian identity and mentality.
7. By inculcating to the Non-Catholics the Lasallian values, we form students of strong values,selfless,spiritually and physically healthy, wholesome, and making a positive contribution to society.

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