

President's Page December 17, 2016

"Let it be your chief study to put the Gospel into practice." (St. John Baptist de La Salle's Meditation 171.3 on the Feast of St. Remigius, Patron of Rheims)

"So this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year over, and a new one just begun...."

("So This Is Christmas," John Lennon, 1971)

Christmas time is upon us, and it is so easy to become consumed by the "busy"ness of the season. I have quoted here the opening lyrics of John Lennon's 1971 song "***So This Is Christmas***" because the words prompt us to pause, to reflect honestly about how we have been living our lives, and to make changes for the better going forward into the new year. As people of God, it is our hope that we can answer John Lennon's question—"What have you done?"--by the actions to which St. John Baptist de La Salle calls us above; namely, that we have been " ***[putting] the gospel into practice.***"

Of course, wanting to put the gospel into practice and actually doing that on a daily basis can sometimes get suffocated by the frenetic nature of day-to-day of living. But, in his just-released December 25, 2016 pastoral letter to the Brothers of the Christian Schools and to their lay Partners, Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, the Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, breathes new life into our understanding of the evolving mindset that is necessary for us continually to put the Gospel into practice. In his pastoral letter, Brother Robert reinforces the call to put the Gospel into practice by challenging the Brothers and their lay Partners to " ***constantly adapt, improve, and enrich the way we announce the Gospel to our students. We must commit to a never-ending process of openness to the Holy Spirit breaking into our lives, and the Spirit subtly breaks into our lives through 'many voices' and events.***" (p.6)

And so, as we enter more deeply into this year's Christmas season, and as we are poised, once again, to embark on all the promise of a new year, my prayer for our De La Salle students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and friends of De La Salle High School is that we take time during the "busy"ness of the season to pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is speaking to each of us through the many voices and events in our lives. And my additional prayer is that we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us in these voices and events to help us more faithfully and more fully put the Gospel into practice.

Additionally, I have the privilege here to reflect on those "many [recent] voices and events" at De La Salle High School which have allowed the Holy Spirit to break into the lives of the members of our school community. While I will mention numerous events worthy of note, I will focus on five which had special significance as examples of putting the Gospel into practice.

First, on December 1, we had an event on campus related to the book students and faculty were asked to read as part of our annual ***One Book for Justice*** program. The book for this past summer was ***I am Malala***, by Malala Yousafzai. This book recounts the recent, true story of Malala, a young Pakistani girl, who fought to receive an education against the orders of the Taliban. Because of Malala's insistence on receiving an education, the Taliban shot her and nearly killed her.

To help our students more fully appreciate the reality of what Malala and other young women in Pakistan had to endure in their desire to be educated, our campus minister, Tony Behan, and several other members of our campus ministry team, created an environment on December 1 for our young

women to be physically separated from their fellow male students during the lunch period and placed in the unenviable position of not being allowed to attend the first fifteen minutes of their classes during the period immediately after lunch, classes which their male classmates were allowed to attend. While I will not go into everything that occurred during the day, suffice it to say that the experience was a powerful one not only for our students, but also for our faculty and staff who have come to appreciate the vitality, breadth, and depth of our school life because of the co-educational nature of De La Salle. Of course, the Gospel lesson that every person is worthy of love, and thus of being educated, was driven home by the voices and events of the day.

Second, on December 5, our school community had the privilege of ***providing baked goods to the members of our local Second District Police Force***. It was around 10:00 a.m. when nearly a dozen male and female police officers representing all the members from the Second District gathered in our lobby foyer along with approximately 100 of our students. All of the officers had the opportunity to speak about why they chose their careers in law enforcement, and they answered questions from several of our students. It was a wonderful opportunity for our students to be with these individuals who have chosen a profession that is so important to the well-being of our city. And it was important for us as a school community to live the Gospel message of giving back and thanking them for their selfless vocation as police officers in protecting others. Of course, they left campus with dozens and dozens of delicious baked goods.

I will mention the third and fourth events together because they are related. December 6 was the deadline for our school community to gather food for the ***Second Harvest Food Drive***, and we collected over 2,000 cans of food to help feed the most needy people in our city. Also, just days ago we concluded our annual ***Helping Hands*** program. This is a program that faculty member Peggy St. John coordinates among the members of our own school community to raise money at Christmas time to help the most needy students in our own school community. Feeding and providing in other ways for the hungry and needy are core Gospel values of our Christian faith.

Last but not least, I mention a December 13 ***meeting for the parents of our winter sports' student-athletes***. Now, on its face, this would seem to be an event that does not belong with the four events mentioned previously. However, three Gospel values were referenced during the meeting. Tony Bonura, our athletic director, conducted the meeting for the parents, and he delved into some very specific and practical matters that parents simply need to know about their children participating in athletics. I will not go into those matters. But I will definitely go into Tony's comments on how De La Salle defines a successful athletic season. Yes, as Tony said, it is nice to win. But true team success is measured at De La Salle by whether a team reaches its potential, whether healthy relationships are nurtured in the process, and whether at the end of the season a team and its members can look back and honestly say that they have no regrets.

These three measurements for athletic success apply to how success is measured in every aspect of what we are doing here at De La Salle High School, and they are core Gospel values. Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are "to love your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind and to love your neighbor as yourself." If every member of our school community lives these two Gospel values, he/she will be reaching his/her potential, will be nurturing healthy relationships, and will have no regrets—whether their thoughts and actions relate to school, sports, the arts, band, theatre, retreats, and any and all other curricular and co-curricular activities.

Speaking of curricular and co-curricular activities, I do not want this opportunity to pass without calling attention to other positive “voices and events” that have occurred at De La Salle since my November communication. Our band parents coordinated a **Breakfast with Santa** on December 3 here at De La Salle, and a grand time was had by children of all ages who attended. Many thanks to our band parents and to development office members Ann Heslin and Jessica Atwood for making the event possible. And many thanks to those of you reading this who attended. Also on December 3 in other areas of campus, De La Salle hosted the **annual math tournament for local Catholic elementary school students**. Many thanks to math faculty member Hussein Dossaji for his overall coordination of this very successful event which enables local elementary students and their parents to experience De La Salle in a meaningful way.

Just a few days after the Breakfast with Santa event, the various musical ensembles of the band and the strings orchestra did a wonderful job performing the **Christmas Concert** for all members of our school community on the evening of December 5 and then for students, faculty, and staff the next morning. Many thanks to the band members, to band director, Duncan Pray, to strings orchestra members, and to strings orchestra director, Christina Towell.

Our La Troupe De la Salle staged the wonderfully funny “**A Tuna Christmas**” play with performances on December 8, 9, 10, and 12. There was an additional, dress-rehearsal, dinner-theatre performance on December 7 reserved for faculty and performers’ families. Many thanks to director, Michael Selser, to set design director, Donna Pizanie, to stage manager, Mia Mata, to light board manager, Anna Kushnir, and to sound managers, Trenton Burke and Matthew Vollmer. Of course, many thanks are also in order for the more than two-dozen actors and actresses, including faculty actors and actresses Sean Stair, David Pierson, Jennifer Blanchard, Michael Selser, and Duncan Pray.

On December 8, our school community celebrated **mass on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception**, and our **freshmen participated in a full-day retreat** at three locations off-campus on December 9. Many thanks to Fr. Michael Schneller for celebrating the December 8 mass, and many thanks to Tony Behan for coordinating the freshmen retreat. We are placing special emphasis on celebrating mass as often as possible and on ensuring our students have especially meaningful retreat experiences.

Congratulations are in order for **five members of this year’s De La Salle football team** who were named to **the 2016 Clarion-Herald’s Elite Football Team**. Those selected to the Elite Team are seniors Rico Wheat, Danquan Edwards, and Josh Paul and juniors Jeremiah and Jamiran James. Of special note is the fact that among all metro New Orleans Catholic high schools, only our brother Lasallian school St. Paul’s had as many football student-athletes selected to the Elite Team. Many thanks to head football coach Ryan Manale and his staff for all they do to place our football student-athletes in the best position for success on and off the field. Congratulations as well to **head coach Paul Kelly, his staff, and the boys’ basketball team for winning the CYO basketball tournament on December 3**. This was the first CYO championship for De La Salle since 1988.

I had the privilege to attend a recent **luncheon of the Class of 1963** at Lakeview Harbor on December 5 and the **Christmas luncheon of the Class of 1976** at Bourbon House on December 9. It was truly enjoyable to spend time with the members of these two classes, to witness their special bond to each other and to De La Salle, and to share with them the current news of “all good things De La Salle.” If other classes are having these types of events, I would be honored to attend. Just let me know by calling my direct number 504-503-7554 or by emailing me at mgiambelluca@delasallenola.com.

As I wrap up this month's newsletter, I remind you that it is not too late to purchase one or more copies of the **Terrance Osborne print, "Under the Oaks Where the Cavaliers Dwell."** Prints cost as little as \$65, and they make great Christmas gifts. You may purchase prints on-line at www.delasallenola.com. Speaking of www.delasallenola.com, please go on-line and **view our newly refurbished site**. Many thanks to our social media specialist, Jessica Atwood, and to our technology coordinator, Michael Rigamer, for their excellent work to remake our website.

As we share the joy of these coming holidays with family, let us remember to keep in our prayers the family of Yvonne Gelpi, the former president of De La Salle from 1991-2003 who passed away on December 15. Mrs. Gelpi's leadership was driven by her love for the Lasallian mission, by her love for our students, and by her determination to create lasting, life-giving relationships among all members of the De La Salle school community. In his pastoral letter referenced earlier in this communication, Superior General Brother Robert Schieler calls the Brothers and their lay Partners to be "authentic protagonists in the Lasallian mission." For those who knew her, there was no truer example of an authentic protagonist in the Lasallian mission than Mrs. Gelpi.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.

Live, Jesus, in our hearts, forever.

In Him,

Michael Giambelluca
President
De La Salle High School