



The Messenger

A LASALLIAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE



Paris: The Educational Establishment

Dear friends, welcome to Issue Nine of "The Messenger". As always, we begin by answering our discussion questions from the previous issue - Paris: The Educational Establishment. Control of education at the time of the Founder was a complex tangle of organisations - there was the Guild of Writing Masters, the Corporation of the Masters of the Little Schools and the Charity Schools, under the control of local pastors. Unfortunately, DLS policies introduced into his newly formed Christian Schools were in direct conflict with all three! On Feb. 14th 1704, after taking DLS to court, the Masters of the Little Schools win a victory with an edict from the Diocesan Chancery that forbids DLS to teach, to engage or assign other teachers to conduct schools in Paris. The final compromise with De La Chétardie was his agreement to personally accept responsibility for the Brothers return to Paris and went on to

provide lodging, salaries and rent. This was to appease the Writing Masters who insisted that the Brothers must receive no payment from students and only serve the poor who had no means to pay. Effectively ensuring that the paying customers kept coming to their door instead.

'Domine Opus Tuum' - means "Lord, the work is Yours"

Issue 9: Beginnings in Rouen and Elsewhere

Live Jesus in our hearts!

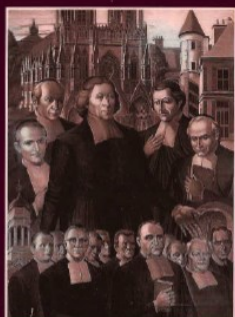
Mr. Kane Raukura

Chairperson - NZMAC

(NZ Mission Action Committee)

THE WORK IS YOURS

The Life of
Saint John Baptist de La Salle



Luke Salvo, FSC
Second Edition



- Q1. What was an immediate success and opened in Darnétal in 1704?
- Q2. What was founded on the west bank of the Seine? Why was this important?
- Q3. What accident befell DLS as entered the Tuileries Garden?
- Q4. What new foundations were created in the South of France?



Beginnings in Rouen and Elsewhere (1704–1708)

During all the time that the legal proceedings in Paris were moving toward their inexorable conclusion, De La Salle was trying to find an alternate location for the Brothers and for the novitiate that had been forced to close down on the Rue de Charonne. When an invitation came to open a school on the Rue Saint Honoré in the parish of Saint Roch on the right bank of the Seine, he sent two Brothers there and went himself to live with them. In a residence that they shared with two or three priests, the Brothers were far enough away from the faubourg Saint Germain and the parish of Saint Sulpice to be able to keep a somewhat independent foothold in the capital. The Saint Roch school did not last long, but it served its purpose for the time being. The five or six novices from the Rue de Charonne were sent to the Rue Princesse until a suitable permanent location could be found for the novitiate.

Darnétal

In the circumstances, it is no wonder that De La Salle responded eagerly to an invitation to open a school in Darnétal, just outside Rouen. It was in Darnétal that Madame Maillefer had earlier founded a gratuitous school for girls. A similar school for boys had been supported for some time by a group of former students of the Jesuit College. The schoolmaster had just died in the summer of 1704, and they were looking for a replacement. Father Deshayes, who had known De La Salle in his seminary days at Saint Sulpice, had heard about the work of the Brothers in Paris and recommended that they be invited to take over the school. De La Salle expressed interest, but insisted that he could not send fewer than two Brothers. The best stipend that the sponsors could afford was 150 livres for the two Brothers plus the use of lodgings that had been occupied by the deceased schoolmaster.

De La Salle made a quick trip to Rouen to visit the parish. Once he was sure that the population was sufficient to support a school, and the living conditions suitable for a Brothers' community, he

agreed to the less-than-generous terms. He was evidently anxious to establish a foothold in or near Rouen, the capital of Normandy and a city hallowed by memories of Barré, Roland, and Nyel. It was more than 25 years since Nyel had left Rouen to open a school in Reims; it was time for De La Salle to bring the maturing project back to the site of its origins. The school in Darnétal opened after the September vacation period in 1704 with Brother Ponce, the "strong man" from the Rue Princesse, as the Director, and another Brother to assist him.

As happened everywhere, the school was an immediate success and was soon filled to capacity. But the living conditions of the two Brothers were far from ideal. The house was badly in need of repairs that the pastor was unwilling or unable to provide. The promised stipend was often delayed and sometimes not paid at all. The parish managed to support the Brothers in this hand-to-mouth existence by taking up special collections whenever the Brothers seemed to be getting ready to give up the school. Canon Blain writing from Rouen, devotes long pages in his biography of the Founder to the stinginess of his fellow townspeople.

Archbishop Colbert

The Archbishop of Rouen at the time was Jacques-Nicolas Colbert, 80 years old, the son of the famous Minister of Finance in the early years of the reign of Louis XIV, a doctor of the Sorbonne, and a member of the French Academy. Toward the end of Lent in 1704 he was in Rouen to preside at the ordinations for the archdiocese. When the Brothers from Darnétal came to pay their respects, the archbishop inquired about the possibility of obtaining Brothers for the charity schools in Rouen. The Brothers assured him that De La Salle would probably be willing to send as many as he could spare.

Archbishop Colbert instructed his vicar-general, Father Couët to write to De La Salle asking him to come to Rouen, before Easter if possible, since the archbishop had to leave town shortly after that. In his letter, the vicar-general assured De La Salle of a warm welcome and even hinted at the possibility of allowing him to establish a novitiate. It seems that De La Salle's difficulties in Paris were already becoming widely known. The Brothers wrote to the Founder urging him to accept the invitation. This he did, making the journey from Paris to Rouen by stagecoach. The interview was fruitful, and it was agreed on both sides to move the plan forward.

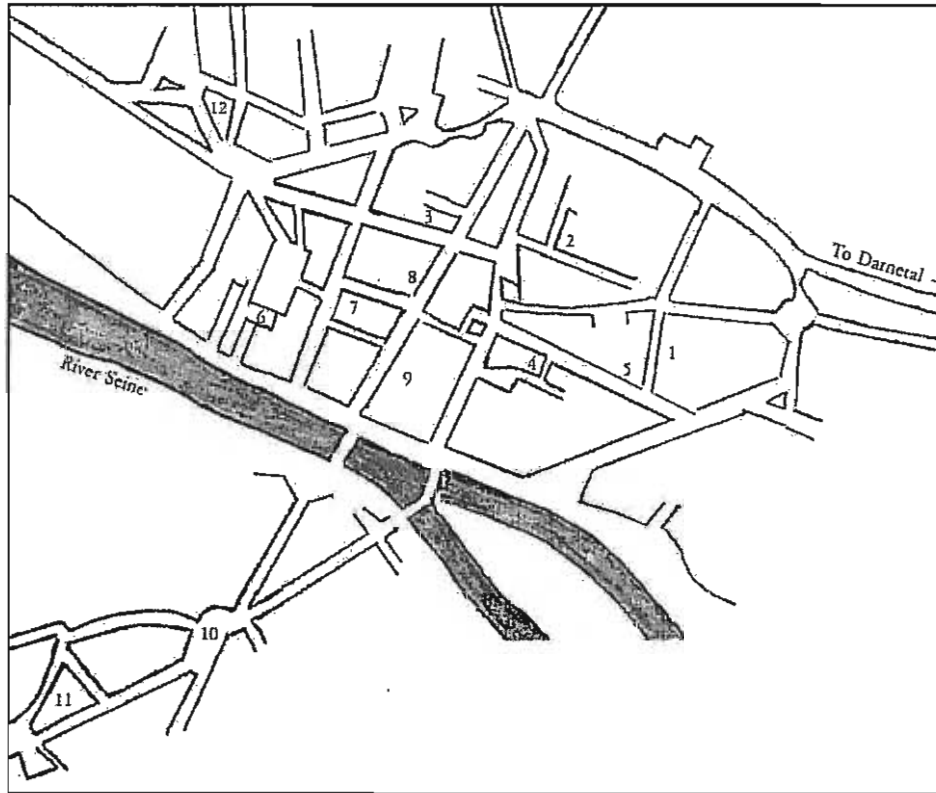
The supervision of the charity schools in Rouen was rather different from the system in Paris. There was a charity school in each of the four quarters of the city: Saint Maclou, Saint Goddard, Saint Eloi, and Saint Vivien. These were administered, not by the pastors of the parishes, but by the administrative board of the General Hospice, otherwise known as the Bureau of the Ablebodied Paupers. Adrien Nyel had at one time been Director General of the institution. The teachers lived in the hospice and set out each day for their respective schools. The greater number of them were seminarians working to finance their studies for the priesthood; in addition, there were a few unmarried laymen, the successors of the group that had worked with Adrien Nyel.

Under this system, the charity schools were not functioning very well. The problems were similar to those that plagued the charity schools everywhere: poor discipline, ragged attendance, unsanitary conditions, and segregation of the poor. The teachers had little or no training and little motivation or interest in their work. To earn their food and lodging at the hospice, they were required after school hours to serve the meals and otherwise care for the needs of all the “ablebodied paupers” who lived there. For most of them, seminarians and laymen alike, teaching in the schools was a temporary way of earning one’s keep until something better came along.

Impressed by the success of the school in Darnétal, the archbishop conceived a plan to have the Brothers replace the teachers and take over the direction of the four schools. But any such new contractual agreement needed to be approved beforehand by the municipal charity board. To help win the necessary approval, Archbishop Colbert enlisted the support of an interested and influential layman, the President of the Parliament of Normandy, Monsieur Nicolas-Pierre Camus, the Seigneur de Pontcarré. Already well disposed to the Brothers, that gentleman promised to do all he could to have the proposal succeed.

The board showed little enthusiasm for the archbishop’s plan, with one or two of the more influential members totally opposed. For one thing, they were fearful that the introduction of the Brothers might require more money than they could afford; for another, they were reluctant to give up control over the charity schools. It took all the powers of persuasion of Archbishop Colbert and President De Pontcarré to get the board to agree at least to try the plan on an experimental basis. As soon as he was able to squeeze this concession from the reluctant board members, the archbishop suggested to De La Salle

Seventeenth-century Rouen



1. General Hospice (Nyel)
2. Minims (Fr. Barré)
3. St. Godard (school)
4. St. Maclou (school)
5. St. Vivien (school)
6. St. Eloi (school)
7. President (Pontcarré)
8. City Hall (parliament)
9. Cathedral (archbishop)
10. St Sever (parish)
11. St. Yon (novitiate, boarders)
12. FSC Boarding School (1880)

that he send some Brothers at once before the board had a chance to change its mind—which it did, several times, before the Brothers finally were in control of all four schools.

Although Archbishop Colbert was unable to control the policies of the charity board, he did what he could to make De La Salle feel welcome in the archdiocese. He gave him extensive faculties to exercise his priestly ministry, even expressing the hope that the holy priest might use them rather widely in spiritual direction, as he had often done in Paris. But De La Salle was content to function in this ministry only rarely, restricting himself for the most part to the direction of his novices.

The General Hospice

In mid-May of 1705 De La Salle set out for Rouen from Paris with two Brothers to begin the new enterprise. They travelled by foot, making all the community exercises en route, staying overnight at wayside inns, where their pious demeanor and unusual habit, unknown in the countryside, attracted a good bit of attention. On May 19, a few days after they arrived in Rouen, they were formally admitted to the General Hospice, where they were to live and take their meals. They were, in effect, assimilated into the prevailing program designed for seminarians, with the same duties and the same stipend (36 livres a year in addition to room and board).

The Brothers were able to take charge of the schools only gradually. One Brother went to the school at Saint Maclou, which was the first to open, then the other was sent to Saint Goddard. By the end of the year two more Brothers had arrived, one for Saint Eloi and the other to teach the children resident in the hospice. Meanwhile, De La Salle transferred Brother Ponce from Darnétal to serve as Director of the community and to teach at Saint Maclou. It was not until some years later, after the Brothers had left the hospice, that a Brother was assigned to Saint Vivien.

The reluctance of the charity board to have the Brothers at all, much less to allow them to effect any change in the conduct of the charity schools, was soon made evident. Heavy demands were put upon them in an obvious effort to have the experiment fail. The Brothers were required to get the residents of the hospice out of bed in the morning, get them dressed, and preside over their prayers before going off to school. They were expected to provide instruction for the children living in the hospice as well as in the outside schools.

There were over 100 students in each of the classes; the Brother who remained to teach at the hospice had even more. The Brothers had to come back from even the distant schools to serve the noon meal to the residents before they themselves could eat, and then return in a hurry to be on time for the afternoon classes. At the end of the day they had again to preside at religious instruction and night prayers of the residents and put them to bed.

The situation was made the more intolerable when the board refused to allow De La Salle to increase the number of Brothers beyond the five that had been originally bargained for. The health of the Brothers suffered from all the overwork. It became impossible, besides, to maintain any kind of community life or regular religious exercises. When one of the Brothers succumbed to illness or exhaustion, De La Salle would send another more vigorous Brother to replace him, but that could not go on indefinitely. The board was determined to get rid of the Brothers, but De La Salle was equally determined to keep his foothold in Rouen.

After two years, and with the help of President Pontcarré, an alternate plan was worked out. The Brothers would leave the hospice, move into a rented house of their own, and continue to direct the charity schools on their own terms. De La Salle, for his part, agreed to supply ten Brothers for the four schools, plus two to take care of the temporal affairs, and to accept the wholly inadequate stipend of 600 livres a year for the 12 of them (200 livres per Brother was the usual sum). Poor as they were, they at least had the freedom to live their own community life, free from the burden and distraction of caring for the residents in the hospice. Pontcarré and Archbishop Colbert provided what assistance they could, and often visited the schools. One such occasion has been immortalized in a well-known nineteenth-century painting by the artist Gagliardi.

The Novitiate at Saint Yon

Without any doubt, one of the principal reasons that motivated De La Salle to encourage the Brothers to endure the privations at Darnétal and at the General Hospice in Rouen was the prospect of establishing a permanent novitiate in the archdiocese. The archbishop and his vicar-general were well disposed to the idea; it remained only to find a suitable location. In the summer of 1705 an ideal property in the faubourg Saint Sever on the west bank of the Seine was put up for lease. Known as Saint Yon, the property had originally belonged to an

aristocrat of that name who built a chapel there dedicated to his patron, Saint Yon, a disciple of Saint Denis. More recently, the property had housed a community of Sisters. The owner in 1705 was Madame De Louvois, the sister-in-law of Archbishop Le Tellier of Reims. Knowing the high esteem in which that prelate held De La Salle, she agreed to let him have the property for a modest sum and signed a lease for six years.

It was in August 1705 that De La Salle had the novitiate furnishings and then the novices themselves brought from Paris to Rouen. The Sisters who had recently vacated the premises donated to the Brothers the tapestries and paintings that still adorned the chapel, and all of the furniture that they had left behind. Monsieur De Pontcarré contributed handsomely to the expenses of the installation. He continued to show support for the Brothers whenever possible. They, in turn, reserved an area of the property for him to come, as he often did, to walk and otherwise enjoy the serenity of the grounds in undisturbed isolation.

De La Salle, too, loved the place. The house was large and comfortable, the gardens spacious, the fresh air invigorating, and the peace and quiet a welcome relief from the bustle of the city. Yet the faubourg Saint Sever was close enough to Rouen to maintain regular contact with the Brothers in the schools. De La Salle spent as much time at Saint Yon as he could. As he had done earlier at Vaugirard and the Grande Maison, he brought the community Brothers to the novitiate as often as they could get free, at least once a year, for recreation, retreat, and renewal.

The novitiate itself was soon thriving under the Director of Novices, Brother Barthélemy. Only six novices had come with him from Paris in August 1705; ten more joined before the end of the year, and another ten in the following year. These developments at Saint Yon were of critical importance at this moment in the history of the Society still struggling for its existence. On the one hand there were the disturbances and disruptions to contend with in Paris; on the other, the many new foundations being established in cities all over France. Saint Yon served as a secure and salutary center to hold the entire enterprise together.

Diversification at Saint Yon

The spacious manorhouse and the extensive property at Saint Yon made it possible for De La Salle to respond to a request to open a

school for boarding students. This venture proved to be quite successful. The parents were pleased at the transformation the boarding experience accomplished in the children they sent there, a good number of them somewhat older and from well-to-do bourgeois families. In addition to the elementary curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic, more advanced courses were offered in drawing, geometry, and architecture. The fame of the school soon spread, and applications for admission began to come from as far away as Paris.

The significance of this introduction of advanced practical courses should not be missed. Brother Clair Battersby, in his biography of De La Salle, cites an impressive list of authorities who have considered this an important step in the history of education. It was one of the few educational ventures of the time that aimed to bridge the gap between the charity schools established for the poor and the colleges that prepared the children of the upper classes for university studies. The curriculum at Saint Yon was advanced well beyond the elementary level, but it was also practical. Instead of the Latin and Greek classics in literature and philosophy that constituted the curriculum in the colleges, the courses at Saint Yon were professional and even scientific, designed to advance the education of the sons of the bourgeoisie who were destined for careers in commerce and industry.

The success of the boarding school led inevitably to another educational adventure. There was soon pressure to extend the facilities of Saint Yon by offering a center for delinquent children whose presence in the boarding school would only be disruptive. And so a special program was developed just for them. Outside of class time, the boys in the house of correction, as it was called, were kept separate from those in the boarding school, and the supervision was much more strict. When facilities had to be shared, as at meals and chapel services, the delinquents were kept with the Brothers. It was a relief to the troubled parents and the concerned magistrates of Rouen to discover that the Brothers of Saint Yon could achieve remarkable results in a short time with young lads in need of correction and reform.

Some years later, yet a third group of paying residents was accepted at Saint Yon, this time turning part of the facilities into a house of detention that was effectively a prison. It was probably at the suggestion of De Pontcarré that De La Salle agreed to accept a certain number of young men condemned in the courts by *lettres de cachet*. That was the legal term for sealed orders signed by the king ordering such persons to be kept under confinement for a specified time. This

device was used for renegades among the upper classes, including some clergy, to remove them from society where they could be an embarrassment to their families.

Upon their arrival at Saint Yon, these men had to be confined to cells that were locked and barred. Many of them were violent, yelling and screaming, cursing and swearing at the Brothers, who now became their jailers. But as they calmed down, the inmates were given more freedom and privileges until they were considered ready for release. Some of them responded well to the unselfish treatment and kindly services provided by the Brothers. Blain tells us that religious conversions were not rare at Saint Yon. But some inmates proved to be incorrigible. The records over the years show that episodes of resistance and violence were rather common. It was an occasional source of merriment for the neighbors to see the Brothers chasing after an escaped prisoner in the dead of night; needless to say, the popular tendency on those occasions was to cheer for the escapee.

With all of these programs functioning in addition to the novitiate, the population of Saint Yon at any one time might reach as many as a hundred persons. Yet the order and the discipline were such, especially the insistence on silence, that visitors could hardly believe all that was going on in the place. The varied programs provided the Brothers with new opportunities to exercise their spirit of faith and zeal as they acquired more and more expertise in these creative educational activities. The resident programs also provided a much needed source of revenue to support the novitiate and to supplement the inadequate stipends provided for the Brothers teaching in the gratuitous schools in the city. This pattern would constitute a valuable precedent for the future.

Away on Business in Paris

Much as De La Salle loved the peace and solitude of Saint Yon, he found that he could not always spend as much time there as he would have liked. Affairs in the capital often demanded his presence there; at the same time, the expansion at Saint Yon and the problems with the charity board sometimes required him to be in Rouen. During the years from 1705 to 1708 he frequently had to commute between the two centers.

The novitiate was barely settled at Saint Yon when De La Salle decided to close the schools at Saint Sulpice and reassign the Brothers. Then he had to deal with De La Chétardie, who was begging to

have the 18 Brothers return to Paris. Once a satisfactory agreement was worked out, he found that he could spare only 12 Brothers for Saint Sulpice, one as Director, ten for the schools, and one, named Brother Thomas, to take charge of the temporal affairs of the community. The schools in Paris were soon working normally again, although with reduced numbers because of the restrictions imposed by the agreement with the writing masters.

Once things were somewhat back to normal De La Salle came to Paris to pay his respects to Father De La Chétardie. Although the pastor was happy to have the Brothers back, he continued to nurse his old resentment against De La Salle. He received him ungraciously and continued to create difficulties over money matters. Sensing that the pastor had a much better rapport with Brother Thomas, De La Salle stayed in the background.

On one occasion, when a discussion over finances was at a critical stage, De La Salle disappeared from the scene altogether. Always a devotee of Saint Teresa of Avila, he went to make a prolonged retreat at the nearby monastery of the discalced Carmelites. No one knew where he was, least of all De La Chétardie. Blain suggests that the pastor may have taken advantage of the Founder's absence to try to persuade Brother Thomas to take over as Superior under his protection. Fortunately, that good Brother had an unswerving loyalty to De La Salle. None was more relieved than he when the Founder reappeared to free him from the embarrassing situation in which he had been placed.

One day during the winter of 1706–1707, De La Salle was returning from the schools in Saint Sulpice to Saint Roch on the other side of the Seine, where he usually stayed when he was in Paris. He had just left the Brothers on the Rue du Bac, crossed the Pont Royal, and was about to enter the path through the Tuileries gardens when he stumbled and fell. His knee, which had already been cut open to drain an inflamed swelling, was pierced through by a concealed spike in the gateway. He fainted on the spot. The bystanders at first thought he was drunk, but when they realized his condition they half carried him across to the Rue Saint Honoré. Barely able to knock on the door, he fainted again in the arms of the Brother who opened it.

It was during his convalescence at Saint Honoré that De La Salle was visited for the first time by a young layman named Jean-Charles Clément. As we shall see in a later chapter, this encounter would eventually have far-reaching and dire consequences for De La Salle and the Brothers.

Another problem that engaged the attention of De La Salle every time he came to Paris concerned the living conditions on the Rue Princesse. For some 20 years the Brothers had been living there in a facility that was never intended as a residence in the first place. There was no privacy: the front of the building opened directly on the street, there was no surrounding lawn or garden, the courtyard in the rear was exposed to the view of all the neighbors. Also, the living accommodations within were not adequate for the number of Brothers. For a long time it had been evident that they needed a suitable residence; it was equally obvious that it might be difficult to obtain the permission of the pastor for them to live elsewhere while teaching in his parish schools.

De La Salle wisely commissioned Brother Thomas to take full charge of the matter. It did not take him long to find a suitable property on the Rue de la Barouillère near the Sèvres gate. The house was large enough, the property isolated, and there was a garden. De La Salle went personally to look it over and was much pleased with it. Brother Thomas then approached the pastor for permission to lease it. After a favorable report from his assistant pastor, Father Languet de Gergy, whom he sent to investigate, De La Chétardie gave his consent. The Brothers now had a house of their own, apart from the building in which they taught class.

The Wise Administrator

These problems in Paris were not the only ones that occupied the Founder during the years from 1705 to 1708. Much as he loved the solitude and opportunities for extended periods of prayer that he found at Saint Yon, he had to deal with a multitude of administrative affairs connected with the rapid expansion of his Institute. It was during this time that the crucial negotiations with the charity board in Rouen were taking place. There were legal problems back in Reims as well, involving legacies of funds and properties in various places and the extension of the holdings adjacent to the house on the Rue Neuve. Then there were requests coming all the time to open up new foundations to the South and to the North. It is only recently that letters and documents have come to light that give us a glimpse of John Baptist de La Salle as a conscientious and efficient administrator.

Another time-consuming burden was the correspondence the Founder kept with all of the Brothers, widely scattered as they now were. All of them were required to write to him once a month giving

an account of their conduct in the school and the community, their life of prayer, and their interior dispositions. Out of the thousands of letters he must have written over the years, a precious handful have survived. These are sufficient to give an insight into the personality of the Founder, especially his compassion and patience in dealing with the Brothers in their personal and professional difficulties.

Among the most interesting letters are those addressed to Gabriel Drolin living in Rome. In them De La Salle shares with his isolated disciple the major developments affecting the Institute— usually the “good news” first and very little of the “bad news,” except perhaps the lack of money. He is sometimes encouraging to Drolin, sometimes impatient with his lack of progress in getting established in Rome, always promising to send help, and now and then enclosing whatever money he could spare.

New Foundations in the South: Dijon

Two Brothers were sent to Dijon in May 1705 at the request of Monsieur Claude Rigolet, a renowned magistrate of the city, a member of the city council, and royal secretary. He had a reputation for great piety as well, and was the brother-in-law of Father Languet de Gergy, the assistant pastor of Saint Sulpice in Paris. Through the generosity of the Rigolet family, and with the approval of the mayor and the city council, the Brothers were soon entrusted with schools in three sectors of the city.

Marseille

One of the results of the success of the Brothers' schools in Avignon was the first foundation in Marseille, a completely different and much more tumultuous city. The parishes surrounding the old port were filled with wandering ragamuffins with nothing to do but watch the coming and going of the ships. The sailors themselves could neither read nor write. Most of them had no religious training, some were Moslems, and a good number found it profitable to sign up with whatever band of pirates made the best offer. Faced with this situation, the municipal authorities had opened a school in the port district of Saint Laurent, but neither the young deacon who had been hired as schoolmaster nor the results with the pupils had been very satisfactory.

It so happened that two rich merchants from Marseille named Morelet and Jourdan were visiting Avignon in 1705. There they saw

the Brothers' work first hand. On their return to Marseille they persuaded the authorities to extend an invitation to De La Salle to supply some Brothers to take over the school at Saint Laurent. Two were sent from Avignon for this purpose, and classes began on March 6, 1706. The success was instantaneous: more than 200 pupils presented themselves on the second day the school was opened. This encouraged the officials in Marseille to think of entrusting all four parish schools in the city to the Brothers, but specific action was delayed for some years. By that time the Founder himself was on the scene.

Mende

Avignon and Marseille are on a direct route along the Rhone River, south from Paris and Lyon. But there were other southern towns to the west that were also seeking the Brothers for their schools. Farthest west and most important of these was Mende, the capital of the Gévaudan, more than 140 miles from the Rhone valley. The countryside between is most beautiful but difficult of passage, even today, with roads ascending and descending through canyons and gorges, twisting and turning up steep mountains and across rough plateaus.

This whole area had been thoroughly infiltrated with Calvinist Huguenots during the seventeenth century and served as a hideout and center of resistance against the religious policies of the Catholic Louis XIV. To support the king in his attempt to eliminate the Protestant religion from Catholic France, bishops in this region were particularly anxious to obtain competent and orthodox teachers to counteract the Protestant influence and to give a thorough and effective indoctrination into the Roman Catholic faith.

In 1707 François-Placide de Piencourt had been Bishop of Mende for almost 30 years during the worst of the war and the bloodshed between the forces of the king and the Protestant resistance. After an agreement with the municipal authorities, by which he would provide the necessary funds from his personal fortune, he appealed to De La Salle for Brothers to train the new generation in the Catholic faith. De La Salle sent Brother Ponce, the tough disciplinarian of the Rue Princesse, and more recently the pioneer in Darnétal and Director-General in Rouen, to go personally to Mende to investigate.

Brother Ponce took over the first class in the school all by himself. On April 8, 1707, the bishop wrote to De La Salle to say how pleased he was with Brother Ponce and asked for "another Brother able to teach both writing and arithmetic." When Ponce fell sick after

two weeks, De La Salle sent two Brothers to fill out the community. One of them was Brother Matthias, a good teacher but a rather unstable young man at the time. The ten letters of De La Salle to Brother Matthias that have survived give a marvelous insight into the personal relationship between De La Salle and his Brothers: the Brother impatient with the harsh superior, always asking for a change of assignment; the Founder counselling patience, asking that the Brother be reasonable, and chiding him for his sloppy penmanship.

Toward the end of the year 1707, Bishop Piencourt died, but not before leaving a legacy that would provide for the maintenance of three teachers in perpetuity, with specific instructions that preference be given to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He was the only bishop in De La Salle's lifetime to provide in this way for the Brothers. But the small size of the Mende community, its distance from the principal centers of the Institute, and the constant changes in its personnel made this remote outpost a source of great concern to De La Salle.

Alès

A few months after the foundation in Mende, De La Salle received a request to take over a school in Alès, not quite half-way on the road from Avignon to Mende. In the heart of the mountainous Cévennes, Alès was one of the last strongholds of the Huguenots, staunch adherents of the French Calvinism that Blain describes as "the cruel hydra that Calvin had nurtured for the misfortune of his own country." It was hardly an ecumenical age.

The request came to De La Salle from Father Guillaume-Ignace de Mérez, the vicar-general of Alès, writing at the request of François Maurice de Saulx, the first Bishop of Alès, recently created a diocese precisely to combat the residual Calvinism in the town. After recalling their time together at Saint Sulpice, in his letter of June 2, 1707, Father Mérez explained the reasons why the Bishop wanted the Brothers in Alès:

We need them here, where it is difficult for us to find Catholic teachers to whom we can entrust the education of the young. We need two right now at Alès. The problem is to root out heresy in this area and to establish the Catholic religion. It is an important task, calling for excellent workers. We shall have their expenses paid by the town; thus, your

Brothers will not need to ask anything from the children's parents. The salaries of the teachers have already been fixed by His Majesty; hence it will be nothing new. But we need to make these Huguenots understand where their true interest lies by showing them that these new teachers will train their children in good penmanship.

As at Mende, De La Salle seems to have been attracted by the opportunity to have the Brothers enlisted in the struggle against heresy. In 1708, a year after the school was opened, the bishop was so pleased with the Brothers that he wrote De La Salle asking for more. In his concern for orthodoxy the bishop would allow no other teachers in his diocese, and parents who refused to send their children to the schools were fined. In this situation, neither the parents nor the Brothers were quite so happy. The parents, most of them still convinced Calvinists, would get the children at home and refute all that the Brothers had taught in the religion classes. This made it difficult for the Brothers, who were used to a more strictly Catholic clientele.

Grenoble

Grenoble is situated in the heart of the French Alps, southeast of Lyon and not far from the Swiss border in the region known as the Dauphiné. Although the Huguenots had been strong there at one time, by 1707 the region was thoroughly Catholic. The negotiations for a Christian School in Grenoble had begun in Paris as early as 1705, under the initiative of two alumni of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, subsequently canons of the collegiate church of Saint André in Grenoble, Fathers Yse de Saléon and Claude Canel. They were leaders of a movement to provide all kinds of social benefits for the poor of the city, including a suitable education for the children.

Arrangements were completed in 1707 for the Brothers to come to Grenoble, with the sponsors paying their travelling expenses. That had never happened before. But the death of the bishop apparently caused a delay. Finally in 1708 the Brothers arrived and were entrusted with the school in the parish of Saint Laurent. A house was provided for them where the Founder himself would one day come to live. It still stands today. Also in the future was another school that would be opened in the parish of Saint Hugh, but that would not be until 1715.

Saint Denis

It was during this period when De La Salle was directing the expansion of the Institute in the South from the center at Rouen, that negotiations were underway to open a school in Saint Denis. An extensive suburban town just to the north of Paris, Saint Denis is famous for its abbey church, one of the oldest examples of French gothic architecture, and it is there that the tombs of the French monarchs are to be found. The initiative for a Christian school at Saint Denis came from a Mlle Poignant. As early as 1705, she had declared her intention to provide the necessary funds to establish and endow the school.

De La Salle was reluctant at first to send only two Brothers to such an isolated outpost. Yet there were certain advantages. Saint Denis was far from the center of the troubles and outside the jurisdiction of the authorities in Paris. Besides, the generous disposition of Mlle Poignant gave promise that the enterprise might eventually involve a greater number of Brothers. Finally, persuaded by the prior of the monastery of Saint Denis, De La Salle agreed to send two Brothers, and the school opened in 1708.

Unfortunately, Mlle Poignant died shortly thereafter. As a result, the school was never able to expand. Other developments at Saint Denis, however, would soon be the occasion of a major crisis in the life of De La Salle and his Institute.

New Problems in Rouen

With the death of Archbishop Colbert of Rouen in December 1707, De La Salle and the Brothers lost a good friend and a source of support. The new archbishop was Claude-Maur d'Aubigné. He had been vicar-general to Bishop Godet des Marais in Chartres and so was well acquainted with the Brothers. But he had little interest in them and was even less kindly disposed to De La Salle personally. The appointment did not augur well for the future.

De La Salle was finding it increasingly difficult to administer his rapidly expanding Society from his remote northern outpost in Rouen. In 1708 he began to delegate some of his powers as Superior to help preserve the essential spirit of the Society as one community conducting schools "together and by association." Brother Ponce, a strong personality with wide experience, was put in charge of all the schools in the South, with the center at Avignon. On July 15, 1708, De La Salle

commissioned Brother Joseph to visit the schools in Reims and the neighboring towns. Thus, in the Founder's lifetime, the structure of regions and districts headed by a Brother Visitor was already beginning to emerge.

Before the year 1708 came to an end, a combination of an early and severe winter, coupled with a series of military defeats suffered by the French army, brought about a devastating famine through all of France. This created the necessity for the Founder to shift the base of his operations back to Paris.