



The Messenger

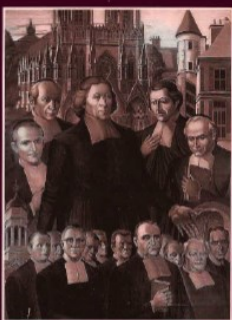
A LASALLIAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE

OUR JOURNEY WITH THE FOUNDER HAS BEGUN

Dear friends, welcome to Issue Two of "The Messenger". Our Founders parents were Louis de La Salle (a magistrate) and Nicole Moët. He had 10 siblings but four died at birth. They were survived by Marie, Rose-Marie, Jacques-Joseph, Jean-Louis, Pierre and Jean-Remy. The clerical tonsure was conferred on De La Salle when he was just 11 years old. This was a ceremony that formally marked the entrance of De La Salle onto the path that would lead to priesthood. Education for someone like De La Salle was privileged as his family were upper middle class. He received private tutors for lessons and went to University and the seminary to train. This was in stark contrast to the near non-existent education of the working classes. This disparity was to become a driving force in John's work later in life. Charles-Maurice Le Tellier was the Arch Bishop of Reims, he presided over John's ordination and was influential in his support of John's early missions.

THE WORK IS YOURS

The Life of
Saint John Baptist de La Salle



Luke Salm, FSC
Second Edition

Issue 2: Beginnings in Reims!

Live Jesus in our hearts!

Mr. Kane Raukura

Chairperson - NZMAC

(NZ Mission Action Committee)



Q1. What was the importance of the man Adrien Nyel in De La Salle's life?

Q2. What was De La Salle's critical decision?

Q3. Did Le Tellier remain supportive of all of De La Salle's ventures?

Q4. What major event happened at the First General Assembly of the Brothers?

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Beginnings in Reims (1679–1688)

We go back to the spring of 1679. At the age of 28, John Baptist de La Salle was settling gradually into the routine and the lifestyle of a pious and zealous but rather comfortable and respected young priest. All the signs, internal and external, pointed to a brilliant career in the Church, with the promise of high ecclesiastical offices and dignities for which his family background and his university education had prepared him.

However, the chance encounter with Adrien Nyel at the door of the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Reims was to set his life's course in a totally new direction. De La Salle had never before met this man, but once the two of them had been admitted to the convent parlor, they were introduced to each other by the Sister Superior, Françoise Duval.

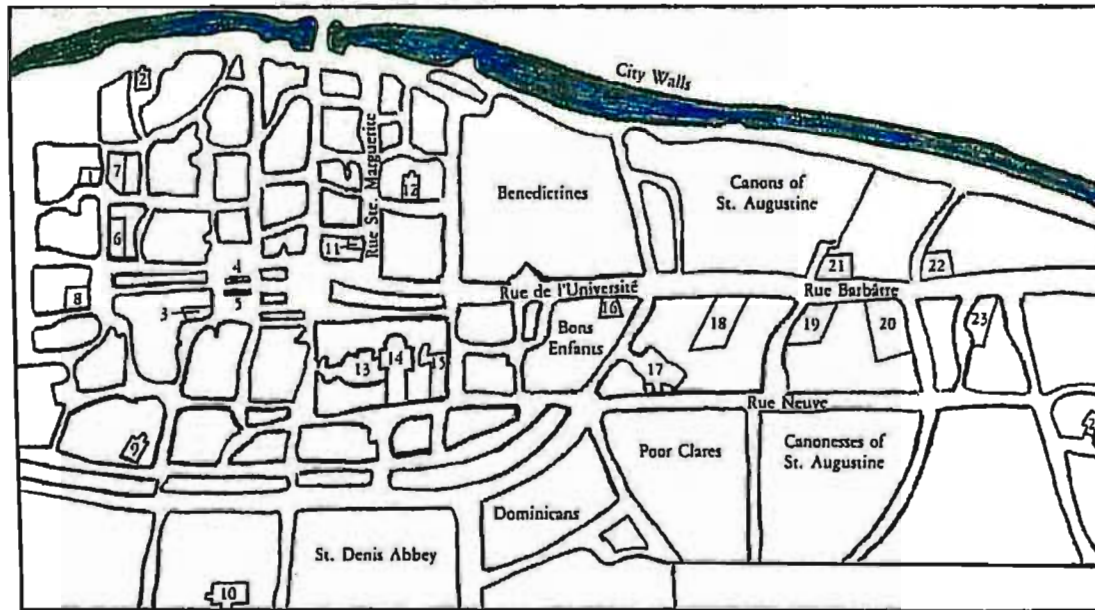
Adrien Nyel

Nyel, a zealous layman in his early 50s, had been sent from Rouen by Madame Maillefer, herself a native of Reims with connections by marriage to the De La Salle family. This fortunate meeting gave Nyel an opportunity to explain the purpose of his mission to the young and influential canon of Reims.

For some time now, Father Nicolas Barré, a priest of the congregation known as the Minims, had been spearheading a movement in Rouen, supported by the generosity of Madame Maillefer, to establish quality schools, first for poor girls, then for boys. Nyel, as an administrator of the General Hospice in Rouen, had been recruiting young men for the same mission. Father Nicolas Roland, too, had been in contact with Barré and was so impressed by the zeal and effectiveness of the educational reforms in Rouen that he was inspired to try to do something for Reims. If the community of Sisters, founded by Roland in Reims, had done so much for the education of poor girls, modeled on the schools in Rouen, why could not something be done for the poor boys of Reims? That in short was the message that Nyel brought from Madame Maillefer.

De La Salle listened to the proposal with interest. His recent experience in obtaining approval for Roland's congregation of Sisters

Seventeenth-century Reims



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|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Moët House | 7. Financial center | 13. Canons' courtyard | 19. Sisters of Child Jesus |
| 2. St. Hilary | 8. City Hall | 14. Notre Dame Cathedral | 20. Carmelites |
| 3. Hôtel de la Cloche | 9. Old St. Peter's | 15. Archbishop's palace | 21. Carthusians |
| 4. Cloth market | 10. St. Jacques | 16. St. Patrick's Hall | 22. St. Maurice |
| 5. Grain market | 11. De La Salle House | 17. First Lasallian community | 23. Jesuit College |
| 6. Praesidial court | 12. St. Symphorien | 18. Sisters of Notre Dame | 24. Basilica of St. Remy |

taught him that it would not be an easy matter to win the approval of the archdiocese and the city council of Reims. There were already too many charity institutions for the resources of the city to support. If anything were to be accomplished, it would have to be done with the greatest discretion, without publicity, and without arousing the suspicions of the authorities.

After some thought, De La Salle suggested that Nyel come to stay in his house for a while. It was not unusual for his priest friends from the country to stay with him. Nyel could easily be mistaken for one of them. In that way there would be time to discuss the problems and the possibilities of the new venture.

For a whole week, in the house on the Rue Sainte Marguerite, Adrien Nyel and John Baptist de La Salle spent time together working out strategies to get the project off the ground. De La Salle called in priests he could trust and who had experience, in order to get their advice. Among them were the rector of the seminary and the prior of the Benedictine monastery attached to the Basilica of Saint Remy. Then some of the local pastors were invited to offer suggestions. They all seemed to agree that there was an urgent need to provide for the education of the poor boys who were running wild through the streets and alleys in the worst neighborhoods of Reims.

The First Schools

It was finally decided that Father Nicolas Dorigny, the pastor of the church of Saint Maurice, would provide room and board for Nyel and the 14-year-old assistant who accompanied him. Shortly thereafter (the traditional date is April 15, 1679), the first Christian School for the poor boys of Reims was opened in a small building opposite the side entrance to the parish church. It was a start. Satisfied that he had done all he could, De La Salle no doubt felt that his part in the enterprise was over. He was willing, of course, to be available again if needed, but from now on it was the responsibility of Nyel and whatever teachers he could recruit to work with him.

That is not the way things turned out. News of the success of the school in Saint Maurice soon got around. A wealthy widow named Catherine Lévesque, aware that she was mortally ill, let it be known that she was interested in endowing a similar school for her parish of Saint Jacques. Nyel did not hesitate to make contact, using the name of De La Salle to help win her confidence. Madame Lévesque, a bit suspicious of the much too eager Nyel, insisted that De La Salle be

party to the contract. She agreed to endow three classes with an annual salary to support the teachers. The school opened in September 1679; six months later the foundress died leaving in her will provision for the continuation of the school.

Now there were two schools at opposite ends of the town, while the additional teachers hired by Nyel continued to be housed at Saint Maurice. The facilities of the rectory and the resources of Father Dorigny, the pastor, were not adequate to provide for the growing numbers. De La Salle at first paid the additional expenses out of his own pocket. By December 1679 it was evident that a more permanent solution was needed. Once again De La Salle came to the rescue, moving the teachers into a house he had rented for them near his own. The lease was for eighteen months.

Nyel could not resist the opportunity to open up yet another school, in the parish of Saint Symphorien where the teachers now resided. The new school, like the others, was an instant success. But it soon became clear that, although Nyel was quite capable of establishing schools, he was not the best person to control or inspire the teachers. These rather young men were neither sufficiently trained nor adequately supervised for the work they were expected to do.

A Community in the Making

It was at this point, most probably at Easter in 1680, that De La Salle decided to invite the schoolteachers into his own home for meals. This would give him a chance to work a bit more closely with them to help overcome their deficiencies. In later years, it was this date that was selected to mark the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle.

There can be no doubt that this event marked a turning point in the involvement of De La Salle with the teachers. Even at that time, however, he may well have thought of the arrangement as temporary, that the primary responsibility for the teachers and the schools lay with Nyel. There was as yet no fixed organizational structure, no plan for the future, no commitment on the part of the teachers, and they had not yet formed a community of any kind, much less one based on a religious mission.

De La Salle may well have reflected that some such steps needed to be taken if the work were to have stability. But in 1680 he little realized to what an extent he was becoming personally involved. In a memoir written much later, he expressed it thus: "I had thought that

the care which I took of the schools and the teachers would only be external, something which would not involve me any further than to provide for their subsistence and to see to it that they carried out their duties in a religious and conscientious manner."

It was in the spring of that year, 1680, while all of this was going on, that De La Salle successfully passed the examinations for the doctorate in theology at the University of Reims. Both the subject matter and the significance of this degree would suggest that De La Salle had long-range plans far removed from the concerns of the barely literate teachers in the schools founded by Nyel.

It was also in that same year, 1680, that John Baptist de La Salle effectively resumed the guardianship of his younger brothers and sisters. In 1676 the court had assigned this responsibility to Nicolas Lespagnol, his grandmother's cousin, in order to enable the young canon to complete his theological studies. Now John Baptist would have more time to devote to his family. This is yet another indication that he was concerned at the time at least as much about his family responsibilities as he was over the fate of the teachers and the schools.

During the following winter, De La Salle came close to losing his life. He was returning from a visit to the country, probably on family business as was his custom, when he was caught in a blinding snow-storm. The road became obliterated, and he fell into a deep ditch. The more he struggled to free himself, the deeper he sank into the mire. Close to exhaustion and about to lose consciousness, he made one desperate effort and was finally able to free himself. He suffered a rupture as a result; whenever it acted up in later years, he would be reminded to thank divine Providence for saving him from almost certain death in the freezing snow.

Meanwhile, the situation in the schools during the year between Easter 1680 and Easter 1681 only served to make the problems with the teachers more acute. Nyel was frequently absent; the teachers were becoming either careless or independent or both; there was no uniform policy or method to be followed in the schools; the students were becoming increasingly restless and discipline was suffering. All the good that had been hoped for seemed on the verge of falling apart.

During Holy Week of 1681, De La Salle took advantage of the absence of Nyel to call the teachers into his home for a spiritual retreat. Contrary to De La Salle's advice, Nyel had gone off to negotiate for yet another school at the invitation of the officials in the town of

Guise. Although the negotiations did not succeed, this situation gave De La Salle the opportunity to spend more time with the teachers, to instill in them some sense of discipline, and to open to them a vision of the spiritual significance of the work they were doing.

On his return from his fruitless errand, Nyel was well pleased with the change he saw in the teachers. So, too, was De La Salle, even though he began to realize that if the change were to be permanent he himself would have to provide the follow-up. The lease on the house where the teachers were lodged was due to expire in another two months; a decision had to be made whether to renew it, or whether to take the next step and move the teachers into his own home.

De La Salle was torn in two. On the one hand, during the Holy Week retreat he had seen the advantages of having the teachers under his tutelage for an extended period. On the other hand, he had to consider the social status of his family, especially in the matter of a suitable upbringing for his three younger brothers, who were still living at home with him. It was bad enough to have these rough and tumble schoolteachers in for meals; to share the experience of daily living with them in such close quarters was, on the face of it, preposterous.

There was also the problem of where this was leading De La Salle personally. His original desire to help Nyel was beginning to turn into more than he had bargained for. What of his duties as a canon, for example? It was not so long ago that the cathedral chapter had to reprimand Nicolas Roland for neglecting his choir duties in favor of his work for the Sisters. Now De La Salle himself was being confronted with a similar conflict of interest. If he took one more step in favor of the teachers, there was no telling where it would lead.

True to his Sulpician training and his personal need to discern the will of God, De La Salle decided to seek spiritual direction. Accordingly he went to Paris to consult with Father Barré. In a matter of this kind it was a natural choice. Barré had known both Roland and Nyel and had long been active in the cause of education for the poor classes. Now that Barré was in Paris, De La Salle came to the monastery near the Place Royale to seek his advice.

Barré had a reputation as a gifted director who could see intuitively into the heart of a problem and the heart of a person. Sizing up both the situation and his client, Barré responded with a direct and uncompromising challenge. He advised De La Salle to take the teachers into his house and live with them.

A Critical Decision

De La Salle hesitated no longer. He was fully aware of what it would cost him by way of opposition from the family, shock in the social and ecclesiastical world in which he moved, and the need to defer or to put aside forever whatever other ambitions he may have had for himself. When the lease on their house expired on June 24, 1681, De La Salle moved the teachers into his own home on the Rue Sainte Marguerite.

The reaction of the family was not long in coming. At a family gathering, the expressions of indignation were explicit and bitter. Objections were raised concerning the impropriety of having such unworthy persons in the house at all, with special emphasis on the negative effect this would have on the training and social status of the three younger brothers still living at home. De La Salle listened patiently, but did not give an inch. As a result it was decided that Pierre, who was almost 15 years old, would go to live with their married sister, Marie Maillefer. Jean-Remy, who was not quite 12, would be sent off to boarding school. Only Jean-Louis, 18 years old at the time, opted to stay with his older brother and the schoolteachers.

This solution enabled De La Salle to devote more and more of his time to the teachers, and so to form them into a genuine community with a common spirit and purpose. A uniform schedule was adopted for each hour of the day, both in the house and in the schools. The customary religious exercises and ascetical practices of that era determined the routine in the house, while the best practical educational methods were consistently adopted for the schools. De La Salle was careful to move slowly. He was content to lead the teachers by the hand, so to speak, to let them see from their own experience and from his exhortations and example what was the best course to follow.

In view of these developments, Adrien Nyel was more and more content to leave the direction of the teachers in Reims to De La Salle while he occupied himself with new foundations in the important towns outside Reims. But even there a difference became apparent. Now it was De La Salle who took charge of the negotiations for new foundations. In this way, during the year 1682, schools were opened in Rethel, Chateau-Porcien, and Laon. At Guise, the earlier efforts of Nyel finally bore fruit when teachers from Reims, trained by De La Salle, came to take charge of the school.

All during this time, De La Salle personally supervised the situation that was developing in his family home, where the small com-

munity of pioneers had its center. Each morning and afternoon they set out for the distant schools of Saint Maurice and Saint Jacques and the one in Saint Symphorien near the Rue Sainte Marguerite. When they returned they shared their experiences and discussed their mistakes. De La Salle listened and gave his advice. In this situation there were present all the elements that were to characterize the organization to come: one central house servicing several schools; one person as the uncontested leader; a team of teachers, growing in professional competence and indisputably dedicated to the Christian education of the children of the poor.

The First Permanent Community

The next step was inevitable. In the spring of 1682 De La Salle lost title to the family mansion on the Rue Sainte Marguerite when it was put up for auction. Only Jean-Louis was still living at home, and he was preparing to go to Paris to enter the seminary. It was a decisive moment. In that year, on June 24, the feast of Saint John the Baptist and the traditional “moving day” in France, John Baptist de La Salle took his little band of teachers to live in a rented house on the Rue Neuve. In time the house would be known as the “cradle of the Institute,” the date as the birthday of the community. It is not known exactly how many teachers followed the Founder there, probably no more than five or six.

For John Baptist de La Salle, this move meant more than a change of residence. He was in fact leaving behind once and for all the comfortable world in which he had grown up to become part of the world of the poor. It is difficult for a modern reader to realize the repugnance felt by this sensitive and delicately brought-up priest when he first experienced the cramped quarters, the sounds, and the smells of a quite different social milieu. The coarse food especially brought him to the point of physical nausea, which he was able to overcome only by going without food altogether for days at a time. But once committed, there was no turning back.

In the new situation, the group of teachers that gathered around De La Salle began to assume more and more the appearances of a religious community. He was already their superior by reason of his education, his social status, and his priestly character. Now, with Nyel busy with new foundations outside Reims, De La Salle was recognized by the teachers as the superior of their community. Despite his own reluctance and the contrary custom of the time he also agreed to their

insistent demands that he serve as their confessor and spiritual director.

For a time everything seemed to be going well in the schools and in the house on the Rue Neuve. Once the novelty wore off, however, many of the young men began to chafe at the discipline imposed on them and the boredom of the routine in the school. Originally recruited by Nyel for the work of the schools, many of them were not prepared to sacrifice permanently either their salary or their independence for the sake of a venture that was chancy at best. They came to realize that the sort of commitment to a community and to a vocation that De La Salle envisioned for them was more than they were willing to bear.

De La Salle did nothing to stop those who wished to leave; in fact, he actively encouraged some of them to do so once he realized that they were unfit for either teaching or community life. Within six months all but one or two of the original group had gone to seek greener pastures elsewhere. It seemed for a time as if the entire enterprise were about to collapse. Convinced that the work was in God's hands, De La Salle remained calm, and within a short time new recruits presented themselves. These proved to be of better quality and to have higher motives than those they replaced.

Filled with new confidence, De La Salle did all he could to fortify these new candidates against the dangers of inconstancy. The new regulations he proposed were more carefully thought out and less severe. He was not in any hurry, preferring to be guided by events and by counsel before deciding what precise form the new community should take. It would be another two years or so before he would be ready to give a public and definitive sign of its existence. Meanwhile, he encouraged the teachers to be faithful to their duties in the community and the school, leaving to divine Providence any concern for the future.

A Critical Challenge

It wasn't very long before this approach began to create a certain uneasiness among the teachers. With no real guarantee for the future, they began to be concerned about what might happen to them if the fragile structure of the community should collapse. De La Salle responded by quoting the words of Jesus about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. He renewed his appeals to them to leave everything to God and to abandon themselves to his Providence.

These pious exhortations fell on deaf ears. "It is easy for you to talk," they told him. "You have everything you need. You are a rich

canon with a regular source of income and a guaranteed inheritance. You don't know what it is to have to do without. If our enterprise falls apart, you will survive and the collapse of our situation will not involve your own. But we are without property, without income, and we don't even have a marketable skill. Where will we go or what will we do if the schools fail and the people no longer want us? The only thing we will have left is our poverty and the only solution will be to go out and beg."

Their words struck home. De La Salle entered into a long period of profound meditation where he began to see the futility of giving a discourse on the Gospel that was so contrary to what he himself was living. He sought divine guidance in extended periods of prayer, sometimes lasting the whole night through. In an effort to discern God's will in his regard, to prayer he added fasting and severe forms of bodily penance. Such was to become the pattern of De La Salle's response in the many subsequent crises that he would face again and again throughout his life. After all, it was the Lord's work he was trying to accomplish.

This time, the divine imperative was clear. It was a moment of conversion, a decision even more radical than those he had already experienced leading up to this one. Remembering a suggestion that Father Barré had made once before, he knew how to meet the challenge of the teachers once and for all. Accordingly, on August 16, 1683, John Baptist de La Salle resigned his canonry in favor of an unknown priest, Jean Faubert. In this designation of a successor, he shocked the family—and the archbishop, who did all he could to dissuade him from his choice—by failing to name his own brother, Jean-Louis, then a seminarian in Paris, to the lucrative post.

De La Salle's decision had not been arrived at hastily. Not only did he ponder the move and pray over it for some time, but he afterwards put his reasons in writing, listing them under ten points. The last of these is perhaps the most interesting: "Since I no longer feel myself drawn to the vocation of a canon, it seems to me that this particular vocation has already left me long before I have abandoned it. This state in life is no longer for me. Although I entered it freely through an open door, it seems to me that today God is opening the door again so that I can leave it."

If De La Salle took his time in coming to a decision, he was not one to do things by halves. Divested of his source of regular income, he yet retained his other financial assets. These, too, he was determined to give up. It would seem quite natural, and it was the expectation of the teachers as well, that he would use his wealth to endow

the schools. The memory of Father Barré's advice that "founded schools founder" seemed to suggest a different solution. De La Salle addressed himself in prayer to his Lord in these words: "If you, my God, endow the schools, they will be well endowed; if you do not, they will have no endowment. I beseech you to let me know your will."

An unexpected and tragic famine in the winter of 1683-1684 provided an answer. The high price of food and the rigor of the winter turned the city of Reims into one vast almshouse. To the three schools and to the house on the Rue Neuve the poor came in droves, children and adults alike, all close to starvation. None of them went away unprovided for. The daily distribution continued until there was nothing left. It got to the point where De La Salle himself had to beg for the bread that he could no longer afford to buy. Yet when it was all over, De La Salle reminded his community that, through it all and relying now on Providence alone, they had never lacked the basic necessities.

Going Public

With De La Salle now firmly committed to the community and the teachers themselves following his example, it was time to begin to go public with a new-found sense of identity. The best way to do so was to adopt a distinctive habit, a decision that was made most probably in the winter of 1684-1685. Up until that time the teachers had worn a waisted jacket like other laymen, with the white rabat as the only distinguishing mark to give them quasi-professional status in the schools. To protect themselves from the cold in winter, they wore a heavy mantle with pendant sleeves, but without collar or buttons in the front, the usual winter garment for ordinary folk in the Champagne region.

In order to distinguish themselves from laymen on the one hand, and from the clergy on the other, they decided to keep the mantle but to exchange the jacket for a kind of short cassock which extended half-way down the calf. The cassock was without buttons and was fastened on the inside with hooks from the top to midway down the front; from there down it was sewn. The purpose of this insistence on a short cassock without buttons but with hooks that did not show was to avoid the ostentation prevalent in the clerical garb of the time. The habit included a black skull cap known as the calotte, a broad-brimmed hat for outdoor wear, and heavy thick-soled shoes such as the peasants and workmen of the region were accustomed to wear.

This distinctive habit of the teachers made their existence as a community visible to their pupils, the parishioners, and the general public of Reims. It was time then to adopt a corporate title. Up until then they had been known simply as the schoolteachers of Father De La Salle. From now on they were to be known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools. And De La Salle could appropriately be called their Founder.

It is not known to what extent De La Salle wore this habit himself. He certainly did when, after the death of three young Brothers between 1684 and 1685, he offered to take over some of the classes until replacements could be found. Twice a day he walked through the streets on his way to the school at Saint Jacques clothed in the short cassock, mantle with pendant sleeves, wide-brimmed hat, and thick-soled boots. People thought he had gone mad and accused him of an exaggerated public display of mortification and humility.

During the period from 1682 to 1685, by a sort of unwritten agreement, Adrien Nyel looked after the schools in the outlying towns of Guise, Laon, Rethel, and Chateau-Porcien, while De La Salle assumed control over affairs in Reims. But Nyel, some 25 years older than De La Salle, was getting tired. He decided to return to the General Hospice in Rouen, whence he had started out some six years before. The entire community was now entirely in the hands of De La Salle. When news came of Nyel's death a few years later, De La Salle had a solemn requiem celebrated as a fitting tribute to the man who in one sense had been the original founder of the Christian Schools.

Training Teachers

Nyel had barely left the scene in 1685 when the Duke of Mazarin let it be known that he intended to endow a house or community of young men to be trained as teachers for the towns and villages of his dukedom. De La Salle was called to help draw up a program that would provide for 17 young candidates to be lodged in a house at Rethel. De La Salle was expected to supply the teachers from his community at Reims. This plan for a teacher-training center fell through, however, due in part to the vacillation of the duke, and partially because of the opposition of Archbishop Le Tellier of Reims.

The involvement of De La Salle in this plan is evidence that he saw from the beginning the importance of extending the work of the Society to training teachers for the schools. The concept became a reality a year or two later at the ever-expanding center in the Rue

Neuve. Parish priests around Reims had been for some time sending repeated requests to De La Salle to send a Brother to take over one or another of the schools in the rural parishes. By this time the sense of community and a communal mission was so strong that De La Salle and the Brothers had adopted a policy of never sending fewer than two Brothers to a given school. The pastors, for their part, had all they could do to support even one such teacher in their country schools.

It was decided, then, that the pastors would select the school-teachers for their parishes and send them to De La Salle to be trained. When the first group of about 25 arrived in the fall of 1687, De La Salle found room for them, apart from the Brothers, in an adjacent building which had been recently acquired for the purpose. They were put under the direction of the very capable Brother Henri L'Heureux, who taught them plainchant, written composition, arithmetic, and methods of teaching. They followed a regular schedule of religious exercises but dressed in secular clothing, and otherwise retained their independence and lay character.

This program was an outstanding success in every way. Once they returned to the parishes, the teachers were able to accomplish so much good that both the pastors and the teachers themselves remained ever grateful to De La Salle for the training he had given them. Yet, once the first class or two had completed their formation, the needs of the parishes were sufficiently provided for, and no new candidates were forthcoming.

In that same year, 1687, in addition to the Brothers and the student teachers in the training center, a third community was added to the house on the Rue Neuve. This was composed of young lads 14 or 15 years old who were interested in joining the newly formed Society of Brothers. They formed a community apart, but were introduced gradually into the religious practices and educational methods of the Brothers. At the time this group was referred to as a junior community, but in fact it was a novitiate of sorts; the program was much the same as that eventually adopted for the novitiates of the Institute.

The First General Assembly

A major factor that served to put the finishing touches on the foundation of the Institute was an assembly held prior to the opening of the teacher-training center at the Rue Neuve. By that time De La Salle realized the need to consolidate the gains that had been made up until then and to plan for the future direction of the community. For that

purpose, he called the principal Brothers to come to the Rue Neuve for a period of prolonged reflection together. This first general deliberative assembly took place from the feast of the Ascension until Trinity Sunday, most probably in the year 1686.

The assembly opened with an intense spiritual retreat under the leadership of De La Salle himself, to guarantee that the negotiations would be undertaken in the presence of God and in a common search for his will. De La Salle insisted that there be a free exchange of ideas; he imposed nothing on his own authority and did not even let his own opinion be known beforehand. The topics to be discussed included the recent decisions to adopt a habit and a distinctive name for the Society, the daily regulation for the schools and the communities, and the possibility of taking vows.

Although a daily regulation of sorts was agreed upon, it was decided that it would be better to defer the drafting of a definitive Rule for the time being. More experience was needed with the regulations then in force with the possibility of adaptation to meet new situations. It was agreed that the food served should be adequate to the needs of active young men, but the quality should not exceed what was customary among the families of the poor children who attended the schools. The habit, which had been introduced probably during the previous year, 1685, was made official, as was the title, Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The biographer Blain would have us believe that there was discussion on the possibility of taking the three traditional vows of religion. More likely, without legal status either in church or state, the Brothers realized that the best guarantee of stability would be to bind themselves by a vow, consecrating themselves to God to be available for the mission. That explains why the assembled Brothers finally decided to take a private vow of obedience for three years, renewable annually. And so, on Trinity Sunday 1686, De La Salle and the Brothers pronounced the vow of obedience for the first time. The next day they made a pilgrimage, fasting and on foot, to the shrine of Our Lady of Liesse some 30 miles distant. There they renewed the vows they had made the day before and entrusted the future of the Institute to the Most Blessed Virgin under her title of Our Lady of Liesse, derived from *laetitia*, which means joy.

As De La Salle reflected on the vow of obedience he had made, along with the others, to obey the body of the Society, he began to think that he, too, ought to be prepared to obey as well as command. When the Brothers assembled a year later to renew their vow, De La Salle insisted that it was time to elect one of their own as superior.

With the greatest reluctance, the Brothers finally agreed and elected Brother Henri L'Heureux. De La Salle immediately submitted to the new superior.

Much to the embarrassment of Brother Henri, the Founder excelled all the others in demonstrations of deference and dependency. As soon as the diocesan officials heard about the matter, they were horrified that a priest and former canon should be subject to a mere lay Brother. It was only a direct order from Archbishop Le Tellier that persuaded De La Salle to resume his position at the head of the Society.

Thus, within five years, the little group that moved into the crowded house on the Rue Neuve with De La Salle in 1682 had expanded to encompass three distinct communities occupying a cluster of buildings. From out of this center there was a network of Christian Schools in Reims and in the neighboring towns providing for the children of the poor new opportunities for a Christian education according to the vision and the methods adopted by the Founder and the pioneering Brothers. The nascent Society already had an increasingly clear sense of identity and purpose. By this time the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was well on its way to completion.