

The Times Are a Changin’



2012-2013 Lasallian Volunteers women

As Lasallian Volunteers (LV) approaches its 25th year, one major trend continues to unfold—the steady increase of women volunteers year after year.

The three-year, groundbreaking effort of Betsy Nolan encouraged an eventual 425 combined years of service by women, volunteering anywhere from the Tenderloin in California to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana to the South Bronx in New York. As an early volunteer for the Christian Brothers, this one courageous woman worked with boys at La Salle Academy on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from 1983 to 1985.

In 2010, an estimated 79,000 Lasallian partners and Brothers across the world numbered more than 50% women for the first time in the history of St. John Baptist de La Salle’s mission to educate children. Within the modest Lasallian Volunteers program alone, women numbered 50% by 1998—over 10 years prior to the world average. Today, women make up over 75% of Lasallian Volunteers.

The first ever Lasallian Women’s Conference, held in Thailand in 2011, attracted participants from around the world. Could North America be next?

Women who decide to leave the comfort of home and college set out on the pilgrimage to volunteer in unfamiliar urban cities, and find themselves welcome in community with the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

“I still keep in touch with the Brothers I lived with and I am blessed to have had the opportunity to build relationships with even more Brothers through my work,” says Alisa Macksey (LV 00-02) programs director for Christian Brothers Conference. “These amazing men in my life have become role models, mentors and family. They are who I go to for advice, feedback and guidance. They lift me up when I am down or struggling, and are constantly encouraging and supporting me.”

Including women has been a new and courageous development for this 330 year old male religious order.

“The Brothers told us frequently that we women brought a special touch to both the community and to the kids at the LEO Center that they hadn’t experienced prior to living with female LVs,” says Ashley Salvaggio (LV 07-09). “We were softer and sometimes could relate to our kids in a unique way.”

This “special touch” in communities has softened many of the Brothers’ personalities into becoming wedding guests, namesakes for children of Lasallian women, and overall lifelong friends. Under the influence of these amazing



women, I personally have learned the meaning of love. I realize daily the wisdom I hold within because of them.

For many women, there is deep respect in community for their gifts. Their touch becomes part of a broader fabric we call Lasallian family.

“I am a better woman, daughter, sister, friend and educator because I am a part of the Lasallian family,” says Heather Ruple (LV 01-03) director of Lasallian Student Programs at De La Salle Institute. “The Lasallian family has opened doors of leadership and shared responsibility for the vitality of mission to me.”

Historically, leadership for this Lasallian circle has been characterized by achievement, focus, responsibility, command, discipline and strategic thinking. In this circle, women bring leadership strengths of adaptability, connectedness, empathy, and harmony. Superior General Brother Álvaro called the woman’s participation essential in Circular 461:

“Their presence will help to construct a more humane and community-centered society; help to reexamine ways of thinking; help to situate the entire Lasallian world a bit differently in history and help to organize social, political, economic and religious life in a way that can be more intuitive and relational.”



Intuitive and relational skills are increasingly in demand by Lasallian Volunteers’ sites seeking college grads to work with small groups or individual young people outside of class settings.

“During and since my LV experience, it became obvious to me that the Lasallian mission is one where the focus is always the children,” recalls Jolleen Wagner (LV 04 -07), current director of Lasallian Volunteers. “Whether male or

female, Brother or Partner, our existence is one that is child, client and student centered.”

A woman’s natural ability to *include* and *embrace* students where they are inspires young women to step up to the challenge of being their best selves in the Lasallian world. They fit very comfortably and naturally into the traditional Lasallian value of association.

“I grew as a person and as a woman when I was an LV,” says Ashley. “In prayer, in relationships—especially challenging ones—in confidence in my own abilities. I am a much stronger woman now for having the [volunteer] experience, and I am a better wife and will someday be a better physician because of it.”

Women Lasallian Volunteers are a small but significant part of the refounding of the Lasallian family in our century. Any doubt? Consider some of the inspiring women of De La Salle’s life, like Nicolle Moët de Brouillet, Madame Maillefer and Sister Louise. The Lasallian women today demonstrate, in real time, Brother Alvaro’s words “...*once again the founding story continues to be lived out anew.*”



Thank you, Lasallian women, for being the special hands, hearts and minds that continue the circle of faith, service and community.



Brother Ed Phelan, FSC, is eternally grateful for Lasallian women in his life over the past 25 years. They have made a man out of him.