

15 Senior Moment

EMBRACED BY THE VASTNESS

I did not get much direct feedback on the previous year's Institute Pastoral Letter, so this email message from a wise one came as a very pleasant surprise and one that I read with much delight:



As a senior Brother, I was taken by one particular paragraph in your letter, Lasallian Stories on the Road. Every word except the last sentence struck home for me ever since reading it last January. Recently, I used it at our Community Annual Program to express to my fellow Lasallian mates a significant personal learning in my life. Your words touched me deeply and sparked in me a response I call surrender. It is far from giving up or just complaining. In many ways, it borders



on resurrection. I apologized to my community for writing down my thoughts. I feared that emotions would get in my way if I tried to do otherwise. Avoiding the sadness of your last sentence is one of the main reasons I have undertaken a book project on the significance of retirement.



He was referring to this section of my 2022 Pastoral Letter:

“We experience these little losses and deaths many times over. When an initiative is swept aside by the next administration. When a dear friend and brother chooses to leave the congregation. When

an innovation in which I am invested has not passed the board’s approval. When my youthful, idealistic plans are dismissed by my superiors as not worth the risk. When what I have expended almost all of my energies in does not seem to be appreciated by the District. When in my retirement years, I have this nagging feeling not only that I have nothing but also that I am nobody.”



He looks back at this life and realizes that his creative instincts have often led to an experience of personal losses, frustrations, and hurts from the very community of Brothers he has vowed to live and work with all his life. On the other hand, he also acknowledges that his creative instincts on the Lasallian Mission have led to many positive experiences of personal and communal successes. Since then, he feels he is near a personal synthesis of this segment of his life's journey and, though it is still work in progress, he feels confident enough to share his three steps to personal creative health —

**STEP 1**

Affirm the good you envision.
Move on it with all your energy.

STEP 2

Receive the certain denying or pushback.

STEP 3

Where possible, encourage a reconciling or new arising.



He considers the virtue of surrender as a necessary ingredient to managing Step 2. In order not to kill his creativity, he knows he needs to surrender and embrace the pushback he is experiencing so he can move to Step 3 and begin the new arising. More than just strategies to cope with disappointment and frustration, there is certainly something holy in each step and in all three segments of this chapter in our lives.

It may seem a bit early for me to think or speak openly about my own retirement plans. However, my recent visits to a few of our retirement and nursing communities have helped me appreciate the value of our Senior Brothers to the Institute and the Lasallian Mission, especially today.

Paul Weinfield describes what it means to let the hero die. I quote him extensively below as his insights speak not only to the young once but also the young ones:¹⁰



Leonard Cohen said his teacher once told him that, the older you get, the lonelier you become, and the deeper the love you need. This is because, as we go through life, we tend to over-identify with being the hero of our stories.



This hero isn't exactly having fun: he's getting kicked around, humiliated, and disgraced. But if we can let go of identifying with him, we can find our rightful place in the universe, and a love more satisfying than any we've ever known.

People constantly throw around the term "hero's journey" without having any idea what it really means. Everyone from CEOs to wellness-influencers thinks the hero's journey means facing your fears, slaying a dragon, and gaining 25k followers on Instagram. But that's not the real hero's journey.

In the real hero's journey, the dragon slays YOU... If you are foolish, this is where you will abort the journey and start another, and another, abusing your heart over and over for the brief illusion of winning. But if you are wise, you will let yourself be shattered, and return to the village, humbled, but with a newfound sense that you don't have to identify with the part of you that needs to win, needs



to be recognized, needs to know. This is where your transcendent life begins.

So, embrace humility in everything. Life isn't out to get you, nor are your struggles your fault. Every defeat is just an angel, tugging at your sleeve, telling you that you don't have to keep banging your head against the wall. Leave that striver there, trapped in his lonely ambitions. Just walk away, and life in its vastness will embrace you.