



# De La Salle University

## PRINCIPLES OF LASALLIAN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Across the globe, in spite of the perceived bridging effect of advancements in information and communications technology, the multiple forms of exclusion and deprivation indicate the continuance of human suffering.<sup>1</sup> The deprivation ranges from environmental degradation, material deficiencies as indicated by income poverty, gender discrimination, to the denial of fundamental freedoms or rights.<sup>2</sup> Unless such prolonged social malaise is addressed, conflict within and between societies are expected to be aggravated.<sup>3</sup> In the Philippines, the progress in addressing persistent social woes — from poverty, unemployment, and landlessness, among others — has been irregular.<sup>4</sup> While the blame could be squarely put on the feeble nature of the state and the deficiencies of the concomitant political institutions, as well as the interrupted growth of the economy, the persistence of these problems could also be attributed to the inability of the relevant social institutions to engender individuals who will constitute the social capital that will push for significant social change. Of these institutions, the schools must reflect on their roles and the transformative action they must take to help bring forth genuine social development, a society where everyone is liberated, and work towards the fullness of life.<sup>5</sup> As Lasallian institutions we understand that genuine social development and the fullness of life for everyone in God's plan requires our institutions to fulfill our educational mission and subsequently:

### BRING FORTH AWARENESS AND A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL REALITIES.

Lasallian institutions, must strive to **develop among its members greater recognition** of the realities of human suffering and the stewardship<sup>6</sup> role that each shares in preserving the integrity of God's creation<sup>7</sup> and creating a humane and just society. In developing such awareness, our institutions should recognize the following:

- Awareness is the **first level** in a prolonged **process of formation-conscientization** that is **integral to our educational mission**.
- Every individual needs to be constantly exposed to or immersed in the pressing social problems to which we subsequently aim to contribute a resolution. Such **recursive and multi-sensory experience** should enable the Lasallian to **transcend his/her class** in the same manner that our Founder, St. John Baptist de la Salle, gave up the comforts of the canonry in favor of providing educational services to the poor.
- **Heightened awareness of social realities** subsequently **aids the Lasallian in reading the signs of the times**, discerning from this expansive assessment of social realities the various modes of life-affirming action that could be implemented to address prolonged social problems.



# De La Salle University

**EFFECT LIBERATING ACTION.** Individually and collectively, Lasallians must act to eliminate forms of human suffering that contradict the God's plan of fullness of life. Avenues and opportunities for self-propelled individual, collective and institutional life-affirming action to respond to varied social issues must be provided in every Lasallian institution.<sup>8</sup> In carrying out all forms of social development interventions, Lasallian individuals and institutions must be guided by the following:

- The action to be undertaken must be **context-sensitive** so that it could be purposeful and sustainable, necessary attributes of social interventions owing to the depth/ magnitude of the social problems to which we hope to contribute resolutions. The contexts for social development intervention cover two dimensions — **institutional** and **societal**. As regards the first, the actions to be undertaken must be aligned to the core mission/purpose of their institution while the second requires that all actions are appropriate to the social milieu where such intervention will be effected. A thorough appreciation of the context would allow for a nuanced selection among the various forms of liberating action (from providing support services [resources and skills sharing] to community and institutional partners, advocating policies to address social and ecological issues, to capacity-building engagements).
- Actions must always be **life-affirming**. The goal of social development interventions is to preserve and bring forth the fullness of life.
- Liberating action is **mutually empowering**, enabling the individuals and institutions engaged in such action to increasingly realize their own worth as individuals and as a collective, deriving joy and fulfillment from the faith strengthening experience of inducing social change.
- Liberating action should be **capacitating** and not a mere transfer of the endowments of a Lasallian individual or institution to less privileged and impoverished groups. The latter simply reproduces the conditions that perpetuate dependence, helplessness, indifference, benevolence and structural inequality.

**BE IN SOLIDARITY WITH PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS OF THE LARGER COMMUNITY TO BRING FORTH A SOCIETY THAT IS IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S PLAN.** As a member of a community, of the nation, and of the global village, **Lasallian institutions must work in solidarity with peoples and institutions** that share the conviction in denouncing and working towards the elimination of unjust practices and social structures that deal death on the suffering majorities, promoting the participation of the underrepresented and implementing other life giving interventions.

- The institutions and peoples that our institutions could partner with locate themselves in communities, at the regional and national levels, in the Asia-Pacific region, and across the world. **Lasallian institutions**, individually and as a Philippine Family, **have the capacities**



# De La Salle University

**to effectively work in partnership** with larger organizations, be they Church-based, multisectoral, or a network of civil society organizations.

- At the District level, the District Justice and Peace Commission (DJPC) shall be the chief vehicle in forging partnerships with national and international organizations that share the same conviction for social change and emancipation in keeping with God's plan.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Human suffering, when brought about by faceless forces and structures that are within human control, direction and influence, or when directly inflicted by a human being to another human being, thwarts the will of God and moves the reflection towards theodicy, or the question of the presence of evil in the world. The Lasallian project is intrinsically and constitutively aligned with the Deity that creates and sustains life, wills its well-being and brings it towards fullness.

<sup>2</sup> As regards freedom, while the Freedom House survey on Freedom in the World reports in 2002 that a record number of countries, 89, have been classified as free, where there is such as broad scope for political competition, respect for civil liberties, independent civic life and media, among others, there are still 103 countries that are categorized as partially free/not free, representing more than 55% of the world's population, where basic political rights are absent and basic civil liberties were widely and systematically denied. From <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2003/akessay.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> In 2002, 37 conflicts in 29 countries in 2002 were recorded. The Philippines was one of the four states to have more than one conflict within its territory. See the website <http://www.ploughshares.ca/content/ACR/ACR00/ACR03-Introduction.html>

<sup>4</sup> The latest Philippine Human Development Report notes that the country, unlike other Asian nations, has been beset by interrupted growth, which has had a deleterious effect on employment conditions and poverty levels. From the period 1998 to 2001, absolute poverty in the country, in terms of percentage and actual number of people affected has also increased despite the pronouncements of government that they have prioritized poverty reduction. See <http://www.census.gov.ph>

<sup>5</sup> While fullness of life is understood to be consummated in the as yet continuously unfolding Reign of God and the unrealized *eschaton*, and as such involves a "not yet" dimension that will be fully realized only in God's own time, the human being's own efforts to contribute to it and consequently to the building of the Reign of God has always been held in highest value in Christianity. All individual and collective efforts then towards praxis in favor of life sustenance and fullness therefore hasten the manifestation of the Reign of God in all its plenitude.

<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in its January 29, 1988 Pastoral Letter on Ecology states:

*The Bible tells us that God created this beautiful and fruitful world for all his creatures to live in (Gen 1:1-2:4), and that He has given us the task of being stewards of His creation (Gen 2:19-20). The relationship which links God, human beings, and all the community of the living is emphasized in the covenant which God made with Noah after the flood. (Gen 9:9-12). This covenant recognizes the very close bonds which bind living forms together in what are called ecosystems. The implications of this covenant for us today are clear. As people of the covenant, we are called to protect endangered ecosystems, like our forests, mangroves and coral reefs*



# De La Salle University

*and to establish just human communities in our land. More and more we must recognize that the commitment to work for justice and to preserve the integrity of creation are two inseparable dimensions of our Christian vocation to work for the coming of the kingdom of God in our times. (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, What is Happening to our Beautiful Land? [A Pastoral Letter on Ecology]. January 29, 1998)*

Stewardship, therefore, means that creation is entrusted to humans, not to exploit and use as they please, but to rule with mercy, love and real concern for the welfare of all. (Sean McDonagh, Passion for the Earth. Claretian Publication 1994 p.140)

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:26-28 is often used as the basis of the notion of stewardship as one of the most appropriate Judeo-Christian concepts for addressing the environmental question. "Human beings were created in the 'image' of God and commanded to rule over other creatures." Many have taken this to mean that "all created goods are directed to the good of humanity" and may be used for such. This is an erroneous interpretation that has resulted in the wanton exploitation of non-renewable resources, pollution of the environment, destruction of ecosystems and extinction of species, all in the name of development.

The anthropocentric ethical norms of our Western humanist and religious traditions are not adequate for the challenges which the earth community now faces. In these traditions, only humans have rights; other members of the earth community are mere instruments to be used by humans to meet their needs. The bottom line is that the earth is at the service of humans. (Opcit, McDonagh p. 134)

Integrity of creation means firstly, that all of creation has its own intrinsic value, dignity and reason for being; and secondly, that all of creation is closely linked and interdependent. Humans must broaden their horizons and begin to see themselves within the larger context of the earth, as an integral community of all living and non-living components. Thomas Berry contends that if we are to have a proper ethical framework adequate for the present task of stopping the destruction of our planet and rebuilding it according to God's plan, we must recognize that:

*The human community is subordinate to the ecological community. The ecological imperative is not derivative from human ethics. Human ethics is derivative from the ecological imperative. The basic ethical norm is the wellbeing of the comprehensive community, not the well-being of the human community. The earth is a single ethical system, as the universe itself is a single ethical system. (Thomas Berry, "Ethics and Ecology" unpublished paper (1994))*

This does not mean abandoning the traditional Christian insistence on the dignity and value of the human person and opting for what some call a 'biospheric democracy.' But it does mean respecting the intrinsic value of other creatures and acting accordingly. (Opcit, McDonagh p. 140).

<sup>8</sup> Self-propelled individuals are people who take it upon themselves to advocate and work for personal and societal change due to strong personal convictions.