

What is going on in the world? We ask our faculty members to make sense of what we need to know, understand, and reflect upon. They agree to share insights and observations about their respective fields or special interests. Field Notes serves as a window to different worlds where we all belong.



Oscar M. Lopez

It is with great honor and a deep sense of humility that I accept the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, that you confer upon me, in recognition of, the citation reads, my "various initiatives in Corporate Social Responsibility, specifically in education, the environment, entrepreneurship, health and wellness, and humanitarian assistance."

I did not have the good fortune to be able to study in La Salle and I cannot, therefore, call myself a Lasallian, or to you of the older generation of alumni, a La Sallite. But, let me also say that I am not completely bereft of any connection with La Salle, because during the wartime years I happened to have been tutored for a very short period of time by some La Salle

brothers. This happened in Baguio City in early 1945 during the closing chapters of World War II. Baguio came under severe attack by U.S. planes prior to its capture by the U.S. ground troops. Because of the air-raids, our school then, St. Louis High School, had to shut down. But my father was insistent that we continue our studies despite the bombings. So he found some La Salle Brothers who were living in Baguio at the time who could tutor us, namely my elder brother Geny and I and three other cousins. The name of our new teachers were Brother Alfonse, a German, and Brother Felix, an American. How Brother Felix remained free, I don't know. Perhaps being a peaceful non-combatant he was left alone by the Japanese.

Anyway, every morning our group of five boys would hike across Burnham Park to reach the La Salle retreat house to have our lesson in chemistry from Brother Alfonse and typing from Br. Felix.

Unfortunately, our La Salle education was cut short by the intense carpet bombing of Baguio, which forced my family to evacuate to a nearby mountain barrio, but we eventually decided to cross many mountains for three nights and days to reach the American lines in Tubao, La Union by early April 1945. Nevertheless, I hold your university in the highest regard as one of the leading institutions in the Philippines today that both educates the Filipino youth and builds their character. I am sure that a number of my sons and daughters, 5 in total, who are your fellow alumni, share the pride that I feel in being honored, in the manner that you have chosen to honor me today.

As a way of honoring you, in turn, I had to do a bit of reading to try to gain a deeper understanding of what, in effect, is the essence of being Lasallian...of what has sustained your brotherhood since

you were founded more than three hundred years ago. And of what has made De La Salle the force that it has become as an educational institution in the Philippines since its establishment in 1911.

In an article by Br. Gerard Rummery, I read about the spirit of community, the spirit of faith, the spirit of zeal, and the practical spirituality that impart a distinct character to the manner by which you live your Christian faith. I read that the brotherhood started by St. John Baptist de La Salle in the 17th Century began, principally for the purpose of educating the youth, particularly poor boys. And I learned that the Lasallian spirit of faith came to be defined in terms of touching the hearts of students in order to bring them closer to God, and in terms of seeing God in all the students, regardless of their social status or level of intelligence.

And I thought, these principles have parallels in the values that we were taught to live by my father, Eugenio Lopez, Sr. and in the values by which we conduct our businesses today in the service of all Filipinos.

I was fortunate to have come into the world at a time when the sense of duty and of service was a very strong element in the way that Filipino families were brought up.

Parents stood proud when one of their children chose to serve in government, because serving in government was looked upon as a way of serving one's country. At least one child was encouraged to enter the priesthood or the convent because one's faith, too, had to be served. But if you chose a life in commerce, or in law, or in accountancy, or in education, you were still expected to live a life

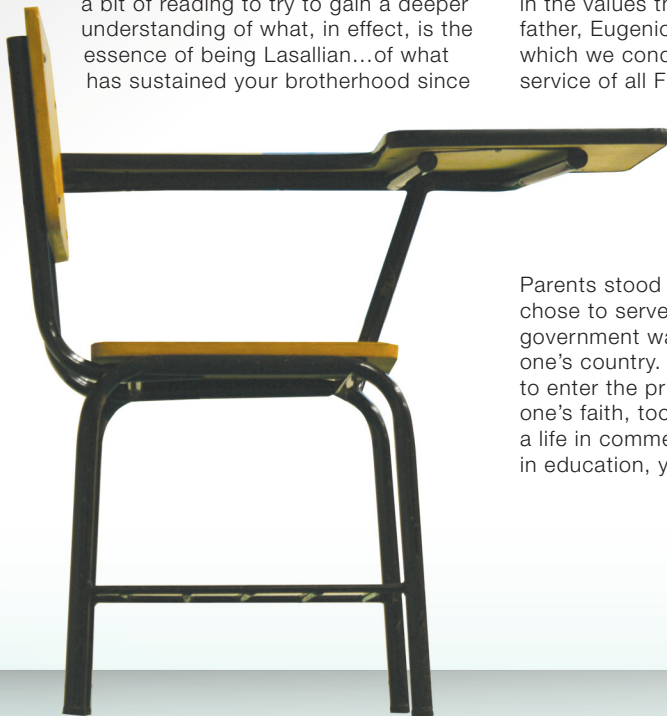
of duty and of service, to God, to country and to the society of which you were a part. It is possible that these expectations were heightened by our country's quest for independence at the time, and once independence was won, by our desire to be recognized as being capable and worthy of self rule. Then again, that generation also had to pay the price of living through, and surviving, an invasion, an occupation and a war. De La Salle knows this only too well. Sometimes I wonder. If the sense of duty and service seems more remote to us today, is it because this generation hasn't had to pay much of a price for the liberties it enjoys? I have many friends and associates who are graduates of De La Salle and I have long been impressed by, among others, their entrepreneurial acumen, the strength of their Christian values and their sense of nationalism.

But from my point of view, the one who stands out above all as a model product of La Salle who had all the values mentioned here is the late Don Ernesto Rufino, who happens to be my father-in-law and he was a La Sallite through and through. He started out in the third grade and finished grade school and high school and his college degree all in La Salle. He was not only a successful businessman, owning most of the big movie houses in Manila at a time when television was still not known, and he was also one of the founders of the first Filipino bank in the country, the Philippine Bank of Commerce. But when World War II broke out, he was one of the first to respond to the call of duty by joining in the quarter master corp of the 41st Infantry Division under Brig. Gen. Vicente Lim and fought alongside his comrades in Bataan. He was in the Death March and was interned in Capas for many months. He came out of the ordeal weighing only ½ his original weight of 190 lbs. But above all else, he was a very devout

Catholic and toward the end of his life in 1997, at the age of 92, he devoted himself almost exclusively to prayer and meditation. This is why La Salle decided to honor him in 1979 by making him an honorary La Salle Brother or AFSC.

And so, along with my brothers Geny and Manolo, I joined and was groomed by my father in the Lopez Family business, where we imbibed the spirit of the corporate family, grounded on a very rigorous value system that emphasized integrity, family unity, entrepreneurship, nationalism, and a strong work ethic, but also characterized by my father's unique zeal as a crusading journalist. The value of education was also well recognized within the Lopez Family tradition and my father ensured that we received the best education that could be obtained. The commitment to education, even in business, was given greater substance in the 1960's when, along with La Salle, Ateneo and the Ayala Family, my father saw fit to support the establishment of the Asian Institute of Management.

Today, this family tradition recognizing the value of education continues, perhaps even more meaningfully, in the aspirations and life's work of my daughter Rina, a Lasallian incidentally, in using available modern technology in a practical manner, to try to bring quality teaching within the reach of the poorest and most isolated Filipino communities through her Knowledge Channel. At the same time she works concurrently as a member of the De La Salle University Board of Trustees chaired by Francis Estrada.



In helping to manage the businesses, before and after Martial Law, and in eventually taking my turn as head of the Lopez businesses, I have tried to be totally faithful to the traditions established by my father. And I have found, like my father and brother before me, that it is possible to be successful in business even as one serves God, his country and his fellow men. Not easy, mind you, but possible. You just have to be totally committed, totally determined and totally true to yourself. Perhaps, this too, is what you Lasallians refer to as "practical spirituality."

Once upon a time, I sought my doctorate in public administration, but I never really got to complete it. I would like to think that, as you honor me today with this degree, I did finally earn that doctorate by living a life of duty and service. So once again, I thank you for this great honor. I am not through yet, however. Even as I turned 80 earlier this year, and acquired the status of Chairman Emeritus, I feel that there is still so much to do and so much to aspire for in the service of our country and of our people. And so I will continue to try to serve and contribute in every way I know how.

This speech was delivered by Oscar M. Lopez, Chairman Emeritus of the Lopez Group of Companies, on the occasion of his conferment of the Doctor of Humanities degree, honoris causa, by De La Salle University held at the Philippine International Convention Center on October 9, 2010.

To the graduating class today, this is my advice:

- 1) Find a good job and do your work well.
- 2) After you have established yourself with a good job, I suggest you look around for a worthy cause in your local community or in the nation at large. There is always something you can do to help out your community or your country. Better still, find a group that is already helping in the community. Working with a group is better than working alone. Things get done faster and better --- end of advice.

Let me now take this opportunity to congratulate all of you in this graduating class of 2010. May you all find the things you are looking for in this life.

Thank you again and have a pleasant graduation day to all of you.

Good morning to you all, and have a blessed day.

