

DLSU Service-Learning Experience: A Story of Hope in Communion

Jimi D. Caldea

*DLSU-COSCA Service-Learning Specialist
jimi.caldea@dlsu.edu.ph*

ABSTRACT:

Existential existence is far greater than functional existence with others. I present the value of communion that shows the importance of service-learning experience in De La Salle University (DLSU) students. It is specifically on students' SL experience with the persons deprived of liberty (PDL) at the Medium Security Camp, National Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, Philippines. Communion, as to be present with someone, is characterized and is elucidated through Gabriel Marcel's concept of communion. Hope, in the context of communion, involves giving a part of oneself to others, which one does by sharing time, presence and friendship. By some means, communion, shared through SL, offers PDL strength to continually live or rekindle life meaningfully. Communion guarantees SL in its delivery of hope to be utilized by PDL along with their individual battle of overcoming the temptations of desolation. This SL experience likewise creatively develops the student who bridges the gap between oneself and others when one makes oneself available to others. SL connects the students to others, recognizing the others' subjectivity while expressing their own. This paper offers a fresh perspective on the importance of SL through the use of these unique perspectives on communion. The research method used is an integration of the philosophical reflections with the relevant personal reflection of students.

Keywords: Service-Learning; Communion; Hope; Gabriel Marcel; DLSU

I. INTRODUCTION

De La Salle University (DLSU) works to transform students to be not only academically excellent but also altruistic and steeped in social engagement. Like St. John Baptist de La Salle, he devoted his life to be of service to the poor and abandoned children. "As inheritors of De La Salle's legacy, Lasallian education is imbued with the spirit of faith, marked by zeal and communion in mission" (Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family, 2nd Ed., 2009, p. 13). Accordingly, DLSU provides avenues where Lasallian can be immersed and develop themselves to be one. "...active service has remained at the center of Lasallian education through its curriculum and core values. In 2012, the University took an important approach in teaching and learning that students needed to achieve to become service-driven Lasallians" (DLSU Service-Learning Framework, 2017). To realize this, the University mandated that "all academic programs have community engagement components through the integration of Service-Learning (SL) in the curriculum" (DLSU Strategic Plan 2012-2016, p. 11).

We are called to open ourselves up and engage others into the state of intersubjectivity (an interpersonal relationship and a value that develops human dignity). We are obliged to engage others in communion to leave the self out and to be involved into the humanity of intersubjectivity in order for us to enter the being of others. "This act that considers others as a person in communion is also those acts that can give us access to their being. And it is only in communion that reveals the possibility of this order" (Florentino I. Cadigal, 1967).

SL with the PDL of the Medium Security Camp, National Bilibid Prison (MSC-NBP) is only one of the many SL activities conducted by students of DLSU. The Master of Business

Administration program of the Ramon V. Del Rosario College of Business, Management and Organization Department of DLSU, through its foundation course, the BUS560M or the Lasallian Business Leadership, Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility course is one, where SL is integrated, that focuses to mold its students to be competent, humanistic, nationalistic, and socially responsible individual in business organization and in society. The formation is not only borne out on Lasallian Guiding Principles but also on Catholic Social teachings.

DLSU Service-Learning (SL) Program is adapted from Bringle and Hatcher's definition as:

Credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified needs of a social development entity, marginalized community or cultural institution and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

DLSU-SL is one of the many social engagement avenues for students to develop DLSU's core values and, at the same time, to further harness their classroom learning by applying it to real human needs. It is a course-based pedagogical teaching-learning experience that is responsive to the identified needs of the partner organizations (POs). It is a collaborative effort among the academic department, faculty, POs, students, and SL Program. It is through this program that "DLSU students and faculty are exposed to the community following the Lasallian Reflection Framework (LRF), inspiring them to become more service-driven and socially committed Filipinos" (COSCA, 2012).

The context where PDL yearn for a family member visit and the impact of various prisons services to prepare them for reintegration to society and the necessity for them to be accepted and treated fairly, without fear, by society is paramount. PDL who received these opportunities made significant contributions along with their rehabilitation. Considering the situation where PDL stand, delimited by all forms of predicaments brought before them by their individual crimes, they are certainly in the position to be led in the state of desolation. Hence, SL activity at MSC-NBP with PDL is advocated regularly.

While the temptation to experience desolation is great, students' SL through actual and genuine presence in communion can certainly bring light and hope in their lives. This is what DLSU-SL carries each time it is with PDL. Students are not just called to contribute along alleviation of psychological and emotional poverty experienced by these PDL, but also through their LRF they will be able to have a deeper understanding of reality, for them to have a life-changing contribution to society. Such SL activity may not be enough to succeed due to time limitation, however with the realization of the importance of communion for hope to flourish is recognized, all can be well for everyone.

However, the danger of thinking PDL objectively, according to Gabriel Marcel, a French philosopher, and an existentialist, can result to a distorted view: one can appear to be a spectator, rather than a participatory, and hence regards of oneself as external to, and as detached from the other. Marcel is pointing out that "the other cannot be comprehended individualistically as isolated

egos and that cannot be understood as something opposed to subjectivity. Rather, the other must be comprehended primarily in terms of his involvements in the world and with others” (Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 1952, p. 179).

Considering SL to be academic in nature, the danger of considering PDL objectively along the engagement, by way of just complying with the course-requirement, is possible. This presents a challenge for the course to be addressed with. “By way of relating and participating with the others, one gets to have a good grasp and a genuine communion with the others” (Critchley & Schroeder, 1998, p. 340).

Marcel highlights MBA students’ SL activity with PDL to be necessary for relieving the kind of predicaments they experience. The sincerity of students’ presence with PDL makes the encounter genuine and beneficial for both the PDL and the students. “Marcel challenges everyone to be engaged in a relationship where one does not consider the other objectively, like an isolated other, but as intimately involved with one’s life” (Cf. Marcel, *Being and Having*, 1949, p. 139).

This way, students are developed holistically. Their act of communion through SL with PDL contributes to their respective self-development. Thus, they not only learn academically but also mature as they socially engage and work with others in service. SL empowers them to be steeped in social engagement and to be altruistic individual. It also contributes to community development. MSC-NBP benefits from the direct service of SL and through their active participation. “They are empowered through students’ investment of knowledge, resources, talents, skills in their communities. Students are considered to be their greatest resources” (Cf. Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

Accordingly, this paper presents a fresh perspective on the importance of SL through the use of these unique perspectives on communion. I present how SL is done in DLSU and its elements that reciprocally benefit essentially everyone who is involved. And then I present the processes of deploying SL at the MSC-NBP: the students’ “See and Experience” (First stage of LRF, Lasallian Mission Office, 2011) activity to ascertain the situation of the PDL; the students’ “Analysis and Reflection” (Second stage of LRF, LMO, 2011) activity to go deeper from the previous activity by way of asking the why of the situation, looking for interconnections of personal and social structures, and looking beyond the surface of the problems to identify the root causes of issues, problems and crises; and the “Commitment-Action” (Third stage of LRF, LMO, 2011) activity to engage PDL and their families into the work-mission where plans are put into action. I end this paper with the presentation of the value of communion and hope that brings forth life to PDL and that allows students to experience communion and hope through SL, hence a new perspective on the importance of SL. The research method used is an integration of the philosophical reflections with the relevant personal reflection of students characterized and elucidated through Gabriel Marcel’s concept of communion.

II. DLSU SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

St. John Baptist de La Salle and his companions discerned God’s call to service in the human and spiritual distress of the poor and abandoned children. As a concrete response to this divine call, they associated together to conduct schools that would make the benefits

of a quality human and Christian education accessible to the poor. By giving visible and effective expression to the creative and redemptive love of God for the young people, such schools became “signs of God’s Kingdom and instrument of salvation (La Salle Provinciate, 2009, p. 13).

Accordingly, “Lasallian education is imbued with a spirit of faith, marked by zeal and communion in mission” (La Salle Provinciate, 2009, p. 13). In accordance with and in everyone’s commitment to these values, Lasallian education.... “impel learners to translate their knowledge into actual practice for the betterment of society; and prepare learners for responsible participation in the world of work, the family, the community, the wider society and the local Church” (La Salle Provinciate, 2009, p. 13).

Inspired by this, the De La Salle University (DLSU) commits to advocate and instill Lasallian core values of faith, service, and communion to not only among its students but also to every person within the organization i.e. to be responsive to the call of becoming a genuine Lasallian; and to be responsive to the plight of the poor and the marginalized of our community. This is similarly expressed in its vision-mission statement, i.e. to be “A leading learner-centered and research University bridging faith and scholarship, attuned to a sustainable Earth, and in the service of Church and society, especially the poor and marginalized” (DLSU Mission-Vision, 2012).

DLSU has a long practice of promoting social engagements (SE) that are extra-curricular. However, like all other colleges and universities, curricular SE programs in nature were also established. With the enactment into law of the National Service Training Program (NSTP), DLSU implements NSTP for freshmen that provides them the option of doing military training, participating in literacy training services or civic welfare training services. Successively, another curricular SE program had been put in place. As part of the Theology and Religious Education 2 (TREDTWO) class, students are required to undergo center orientation, field exposure, and deployments of projects. And in just 2012, DLSU mandated all academic programs to have one course that has an SL component. Unlike SL i.e. course-based, TREDTWO and NSTP are not directly relevant to students’ academic discipline. In effect, social engagement formation happens throughout students’ academic formation: through NSTP, TREDTWO, and SL.

In past years, DLSU has made a deliberate effort to integrate SL in at least one course in all offered academic programs. To foster the zeal for service among Lasallians, DLSU mandated that all academic programs have community engagement components through the integration of SL in the curriculum (DLSU Strategic Plan 2012-2016, 2012, p. 13). And just this AY 2018-2019, DLSU, as part of its institutional quality targets, announced a 100% key performance indicator of SL integration in one course in all offered academic programs in the year 2022 (DLSU Strategic Plan 2018-2022, 2018, p. 5). This is instituted for the purpose of developing its students by utilizing or sharing their God-given talents, skills, and acquired knowledge with the needing communities. Thus, they not only serve to further learn the course-contents and objectives but also they eventually learn to serve the marginalized and the poor. Thus, a service-driven citizen and other-centered Lasallian.

Such characterization of SL emphasizes various important points. SL is course-based needed for training in their profession. In effect, the necessity of its inclusion in the academic course follows that it must be graded, as well. Also, it is clear that “SL is a form of community engagement and a teaching pedagogy based on experiential education where students can provide meaningful service activities to the community” (Jacoby, 1996). Thus, it is expected upon students who undergo SL will achieve their goals academically while making unique contributions to addressing community needs.

DLSU Center for Social Concern and Action, Service-Learning Program (COSCA-SLP) who manages the implementation and the coordination of SL among stakeholders is required to ensure engagement with everyone in a responsible and inspiring manner for its success. It is manifested by closely observing the following SL processes: by meticulously complying ChED Memorandum Order 63, S. 2017; by allowing POs to present their background and define their needs. Though some SL projects could be turned down by faculty if they do not adequately involve students’ application of knowledge and skills; by designing mechanism and opportunities for students to critically reflect the SL experience. This way, they will be able to articulate the necessity of SL programs with the PO, and also for them who try to further harness the learnings inside the classroom through this experiential learning process; by leveling expectations and defining responsibilities among stakeholders; by integrating students’ God-given talents, skills, knowledge with the identified POs’ needs; by maintaining and sustaining genuine and mutual respectable organizational commitment; by setting quality plans along capacity building with POs, teachers, and SL specialist; by conducting supervision, monitoring and evaluation if the established service and learning goals are met; and by ascertaining that time allotment for SL is flexible and applicable for everyone’s interest (Cf. Jane Kendall & Associates, 1990).

Apparently, learning is not only borne out from exposure to the community alone but from reflection on and conceiving the meaning from that experience. Reflections and processing of the whole SL experience are critical in SL experience. DLSU ensures that all SL programs have this process at the end of the whole experience. Through reflection “students get to gain deeper understating of the course-content and broader appreciation of the discipline they are in” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Reflection deepens and answers significant instances along the process. For both academic or course understanding and personal development, guided reflection can serve to substantiate SL experience. “We had the experience but missed the meaning, and approach to the meaning restores the experience” (Ash & Clayton, 2004). Sometimes students fail to connect their service experience with significant learning about themselves, the course materials and their civic responsibility. They miss the meaning of the experience. “Reflective exercises help students to make appropriate connections between the service and significant areas of learning” (Cf. Ash & Clayton, 2004). John Dewey says, “Reflection is turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant is overlooked – almost as one might turn a stone over to see what is hidden inside is like or what is covered by it” (Dewey, 1910).

In effect, with the whole SL experience for its stakeholders, what is in there that can benefit students, faculty, and POs?

SL benefits students by Linking theory to practice; deepening understanding of course materials; enhancing the sense of civic responsibility through civic engagement; promoting

interaction with people from diverse backgrounds; and instilling a sense of empowerment that enhances self-esteem; Equally, SL benefits faculty by allowing themselves to engage in meaningful interactions with the community at large; and reminding themselves of the direct consequences of their teaching for society; and, lastly, SL benefits communities by forming partnerships that foster positive campus-community interactions; identifying, addressing, and solving local problems in effective and creative ways (University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 1993).

From an academic perspective, SL, in general, embodies the amalgamation of academic work, teaching, learning, and social engagement. The students do social engagement work along with their academic requirements.

III. GABRIEL MARCEL'S CONCEPT OF COMMUNION

Communion in Gabriel Marcel's philosophy suggests intersubjectivity as a paradigm to be observed for a meaningful SL experience. In his lecture on "Ontological Exigence" at the University of Aberdeen, he begins to highlight the significance of communion in our life:

We have already seen that the more my existence takes on the character of including others, the narrower becomes the gap which separates it from being; the more, in the other words, I am... There is a sense in which it is literally true to say that the more exclusively it is I who exist, the less do I exist; and conversely, the more I free myself from the prison of ego-centrism, the more do I exist (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 2, *Faith and Reality*, 1951, pp. 37-8).

The hindrance with genuine encounter to ensue lies in the misunderstanding of one's perception of the others; others who are actually intersubjective. In effect, it is emphasized how important it is in communion, and to be in communion on a personal level.

This type of communion requires openness, availability, fidelity from both persons involved. Accordingly, having this perspective to ascertain SL experience success, consciousness on the basic problem with communion, which is the ignorance of the true 'nature' of being, must be avoided (Marcel, 1951, p. 179).

Marcel claims that the fundamental human experience and awareness of existence is communal: "Existence in its higher forms is inseparable from intersubjectivity (Marcel, *Presence and Immortality*, 1967, pp. 201-202). Communal dealings with others are internal rather than external. In Marcel's words: "Between two people, who have an intimate relationship, a kind of unity tends to be created which makes a third person, who has not been initiated into the relationship, who does not participate in it, feel an intruder" (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1, *Reflection and Mystery*, 1951, p. 222).

Human dignity has been founded on the affirmation of persons, thus upholding the value all human life. However, to simply position it on the basis of the self only is wrong because it must be founded upon our shared humanness. Marcel argues that human dignity is grounded "not on the

affirmation of the self and the pretensions it exudes, but on a stronger consciousness of the living tie which unites all men” (Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, 1963, p. 135).

A community is an internal togetherness of persons made possible by their openness to and concern for each other. A community is essential for personality because the intersubjectivity on which it is based provides us with a mean of discovering ourselves and of finding our bearings in the world (Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 1964, pp. 343-8).

Essential to this kind of relationship of persons is a gift: the gift of one’s self. In Marcel’s book *Creative Fidelity*, he recommends that care be taken in understanding the statement of belonging: “I should like to point out here the curious incongruity, phenomenological rather than logical, between the statement I belong to you and its counterpart or rejoinder: you belong to me. The latter implies a claim, the former a commitment” (Marcel, 1964, p. 97).

You belong to me may be, especially in certain emotive, passionate, circumstances, a compelling statement to hear from someone who is loved or desired, but there is something fundamentally wrong with it. A book or a phone may belong to a person but never another person because human beings are not possessions. Communion with others cannot be demanded, claimed, forced, purchased, or willed to occur. Ultimately, it can only be received as a free gift. However, Marcel warns us that such gift can either be affirmed or denied by the ones being offered to. In other words, presence can only be offered as a free gift and received as a free offering. In his *Aberdeen Lectures*, Marcel states that “a presence is something which can only be gathered to oneself or shut off from oneself, be welcome or rebuffed, [A] presence lies beyond the grasp of any possible comprehension. A presence can, in the last analysis, only be invoked or evoked” (Marcel, 1951, pp.255-6). Moreover, presence requires availability. In Marcel’s words, “presence as a response to the act by which the subject opens himself to receive; in this sense, it is the gift of oneself. Presence belongs only to the being who is capable of giving himself” (Marcel, 1967, p. 153).

Only a person capable of personal relationships can be a presence; consequently, fidelity can only be experienced in relation to the personal. Fidelity is one of the ways in which communion is experienced. From this explanation, it should be clear that fidelity is a quality of the relationship between two persons who have becoming available to one another, a relationship between two presences. Fidelity cannot be forced or demanded, Marcel states: “It is true in a general way to say that the quality of a being can be recognized and proved by the fidelity of which he is capable. Moreover, fidelity cannot be humanly exacted. I cannot force another to reply to me” (Marcel, *Homo Viator*, Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope, 1962, p. 133).

Marcel further relates presence to creativity. He indicates that real presence involves creativity. In other words, presence involves that openness of mind and spirit to change and growth which is the basis for any kind of creativity: “The channel starting from the presence of the other to myself: it is mysterious. In reality, everything becomes clear from the moment one understands that presence is blended with creativity” (Marcel, 1967, pp. 143-4). Thus, it grows from an openness of spirit, a renewal of self, and an empathy unburdened by egotism and selfishness. This implies presence to be a revelation, as well. Not only does presence reveal communion, it also reveals “me to myself,” a theme Marcel emphasized at Aberdeen: “When somebody’s presence

really does make itself felt, it can refresh my inner being; it reveals me to myself, it makes me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact” (Marcel, 1951, pp. 252-3). Hence, one’s personalities are born and grow out of that intersubjective interaction between his inner self and other selves who become present to him and, therefore, become present to his self. Our personalities are significantly the gift of communion.

In light of the preceding discussions, Marcel claims that it is at the level of communion that hope becomes possible because hope requires a relationship of presence, i.e., an actualization of communion. Marcel explicitly points out the shared-humanness nature of hope, he says: “hope is only possible on the level of us, or we might say of the agape, and that it does not exist on the level of the solitary ego self-hypnotized and concentrating exclusively on individual aims” (Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 1962, p. 10).

In his Aberdeen Lectures, Marcel states that hope must spread beyond one’s self because each human’s “personal reality is itself intersubjective,” that is, *esse* is *co-esse*:

The being who hopes is putting forth a sort of interior activity even though it may not be easy to define the nature of that activity. Once again intersubjectivity will be found to supply the key to the riddle. It is well to bear in mind the ordeals of those whose country was for a time enslaved and who yet persisted in their hope of liberation. Hope was not simply a hope for one’s own self; it means spreading one’s hope, keeping its flame a radiance of hope burning around one. We may go further and say that it is probably only by so doing that a man can keep it alive in the depths of his own being. But, as we have already seen, each man’s personal reality is itself intersubjective (Marcel, 1951, p. 179).

Again, hope is actualized only at the level of communion through an affirmation of being. Since hope is an affirmation of being, i.e., a participation in being, hope frees rather than binds the self.

IV. DLSU STUDENTS’ ENCOUNTER WITH MSC-NBP PDL

SL for BUS560M or the Master of Business Administration – Lasallian Business Leadership and Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility class of the Graduate School of Business is partnered with the Philippine Jesuit Prison Services (PJPS). PJPS is one of DLSU’s partner organizations. It is a partnership that is focused on the fulfillment of PJPS’ various prison advocacies. DLSU proposes SL deployments at MSC-NBP, whereas PJPS processes and coordinates our request for MSC-NBP PDL encounter with the Bureau of Corrections (BOC); gives general orientation about PJPS and the BOC NBP in general, and invites PDL’ families outside the prison for some related SL activities.

The situation where PDL serve their sentences is characterized as a cradle of desolation. The lure of having the feeling of complete absence of enchantment, wonder, and interest in things around and to a feeling of loss of appetite for all the values of life is pervasive. It is as if they are there; however, all things that are in there have lost their meaning due to surrounding circumstances and due to separation from their loved ones. This is what Marcel calls “tediousness” (Marcel, 1951, p. 163) or for PDL “*buryong*” (a Tagalog word meaning “bored”) or that when it

spreads itself over the whole field of their life inside, it becomes something more than tedium. It becomes despair.

MSC-NBP encloses over 22,000 men, who are confined to different facilities within a 551-hectare prison reservation (Philippine Jesuit Prison Service, 2017). These men have been legally convicted by the courts and are serving their sentences inside the prison. For most DLSU students, they consider the place to be extremely risky and unwelcoming. And the mere thought of setting foot inside affected discomfort, fear, or anxiety. “Undeniably, I was once part of the society who judge people who were convicted or who are in jail as bad people. Most of us say that these people deserve where they are (Gonzales, 2018). However, with the encouragement and sharing of experiences of those who think differently and those who had the first-hand experience of the many blessings it brings among stakeholders, they were calmed. Fr. Joseph Haw, SJ, Executive Director of PJPS, said:

Inside the prison, there is something good happening with the rehabilitation of this people. We have to start with the basic premise that not all of these inmates are hardened criminals. Some of them were incarcerated because of the force of circumstances. Some are victims of injustices. With our work, we are able to provide them a new perspective that it is not the end that your incarceration has a limit and you can go beyond it (Philippine Jesuit Prison Service, 2017).

PJPS does not try to provide programs that are responsive to PDL immediate and daily needs but also tries to change the perspective of the free society towards them. Thus, PJPS organize the bringing of people in and they facilitate school visit. Most of these PDL need ears to hear their stories and hopes in life. PJSP also helps the families of PDL residing around the vicinity by offering them livelihood programs and by providing their children scholarship and allowances (Cf. Philippine Jesuit Prison Service, 2017).

DLSU’s formations among Lasallian are embedded with a unique framework called the Lasallian Reflection Framework or commonly known as the LRF. It is uniquely Lasallian because it is primarily patterned from St. John Baptist de la Salle’s life story. Such a process was very much evident in De La Salle’s life. His coming across with poor children and poverty (*Masid-Danas*); his prayers and discernment for his vocation that further shaped concrete plan of actions to alleviate poverty and elevate the life condition of his flock (*Suri-Nilay*); and his pledge to God to help the poor and marginalized by establishing educational programs and building Christian Schools (*Taya-Kilos*). SL program is no exception from observing this framework (Cf. La Salle Provinciate, 2009).

Students’ *Masid-Danas* in MSC-NBP did not only give them a glimpse of the actual penal system of the country and physical structure of the penitentiary but also allowed them to see and experience the daily lived-experiences of PDL by hearing their personal stories and struggles inside the penitentiary. MBA student, April Balabat said: “I experienced having a conversation with one of them, Kuya Reggie. He was a little bit shy about expressing his thoughts but he welcomed my inquiries and shared his own story” (Balabat, 2018).

In other words, the encounter did not only encourage students to see the condition of the PDL but also to experience it firsthand. This allows students to have a conscious sense-experience to a genuine encounter with themselves and others. MBA student, Avril Gonzalez said: "... during the encounter, I've realized how wrong I was with my perception of them. I've realized that not all PDL are naturally bad. They may have faced difficulties in life that pushed them to do the mistakes they've made" (Gonzales, 2018). This is the actuality or a genuine encounter of being in communion that can draw out hope both from the students and PDL.

Closely after the encounter, considering the weight of experience for students, the necessity of processing is a must. Students were asked about their respective thoughts or impressions about the experience; and how were their knowledge, values, attitudes, assumptions or past experiences influence the way they felt or acted in this same issue? This is the *Suri-Nilay* part of SL. It is considered to be the heart of every Lasallian formation because it allows them to process the experience analytically and its possible implications for them. Avril said: "it made me realize how blessed we are outside we don't see the value of freedom that we sometimes take everything for granted not acknowledging that what we have now may be taken from us" (Gonzales, 2018). He also observed that these PDL are "facing depression" because of the absence or infrequency of their loved ones' presence or visits. Thus, causing "distracted and poor mental health" (Gonzales, 2018). On the part of April, she realized "the importance of effecting change among others' perception, from the outside, about the PDL and the "*Bagong laya*" (Balabat, 2018). According to Fr. Haw, "In jail, many inmates become depressed, taken down by the gravity of their crimes. Many feel hopeless and feel shame especially because of the thought that they are no longer able to provide for their families" (Philippine Jesuit Prison Service, 2017).

With such representations, students got to examine their own personal values and biases in life. They were further asked to link and ground the experience with their respective religious orientations and with the Lasallian Core Values. It actually invites them to reflect on their faith, principles and being a Christian and Lasallian. Avril said, "The experience I had made me realize, for as long as I am still capable of helping, I should always extend a helping hand" (Gonzales, 2018). For April, she said: "...there are lessons in life that we need to learn the hardest way. ... we just need to turn them into something positive. I will always be thankful that I could enjoy the freedom I have today (Balabat, 2018).

The final part of SL, to complete the process and to effect change both for students and the beneficiaries, is the *Taya-Kilos*. It is the committed action based on the previously and carefully processed and reflected experience. A kind of action that has a lot of sacrifice for the sake of others because it is anchored on one's commitment to being responsive to God's imposed sacred duty upon everyone, i.e. to be the stewards of his creation. Accordingly, it is the actual emergence of a concrete plan of actions, responsive to the identified needs, i.e. context-sensitive, life-affirming, mutually empowering and capacitating. Students were initially grouped to plan and implement such plans, check its effectiveness, and may again act on the same, based on the collated learnings. In other words, students' SL implementation can also serve as a new *Masid-Danas* for another LRF cycle until the identified needs get to be fully satisfied.

As a Filipino, we should involve ourselves and reach out to those who need our help. It may not be at all times about money or material things, but our own presence will make

the experience valuable and meaningful. Engaging in conversation with PDL is one of a kind experiences that I was not expected to do. And with that, my group and I will support related drives for the welfare of PDL. For me, I will spread the good news to whom I am surrounded with and be an instrument of hope for those who want second chances in life. Be an inspiration to those who experience sadness and failures (Balabat, 2018).

V. CONCLUSION: SERVICE-LEARNING IN COMMUNION AND HOPE

Marcel concept of communion indeed has a lot to offer to the world for hope to flourish. Communion with others through DLSU SL certainly brings life-changing moments to all its stakeholders. I began this paper by presenting DLSU SL experience, from its context, conception, framework, and development. I then proceeded to present one of DLSU's many SL activities that is creating hope both for its students and the beneficiaries, the MSC-NBP PDL.

From various SL principles, DLSU identifies its SL key elements: first, SL is course-based experiential learning at all levels and credit-bearing i.e. part of the course assessment. It provides extensive opportunities for students to link theory to practice through active service to the community. It highlights students to critically reflect on their experience by linking it with learning outcomes for them to gain deeper understanding of the course content; second, it promotes university-wide participation i.e. applicable to at least one course in each academic programs, not confined to social development related-courses. It also requires active faculty involvement and supervision, institutionalized along the university structure; third, it is consistent with DLSU Vision-Mission, i.e. by bridging faith and scholarship in the service of the Church and society, service to the poor and marginalized sector of the Philippine society, and participation in addressing community needs; fourth, it applies the Lasallian Reflection Framework, i.e. a step by step process of reflection that ensures the integration of Lasallian core values and principles; and fifth, it is reciprocal, i.e. everyone's involved benefit from the general scheme of SL experience: the students who ultimately embody the Expected Lasallian Graduate Attributes; faculty who are socially engaged; partner community that is empowered; and the university that becomes civically responsible and committed (DLSU Service-Learning Framework, 2017).

Though the risk to experience desolation for MSC-NBP PDL is inevitable or the temptation to be in the state of *buryong* is very strong, where PDL can be like seeing nothing worthwhile around him, communion with them certainly brings light and hope for their lives. Consistently, without fault, this is what DLSU students carry with them each time they are with PDL. Students are not just called to contribute along alleviation of psychological and emotional poverty experienced by these PDL, but also through their LRF they gain a deeper understanding of reality, for them to have a life-changing contribution to society. Such SL activity may not be enough to succeed due to time limitation, however with the realization of the importance of communion for hope to flourish is recognized, all can be well for everyone.

Challenges for students to effect life-changing moments for PDL along SL program cannot be discounted. Primarily, students' inability to recognize the worth of the PDL or a misconception of their being, cannot create a meaningful communion experience for hope to emerge. For a concrete SL experience to transpire, students' concrete presence in communion has to be available, because it is the encounter of the concrete presences that makes communion and hope to emerge.

Hope in such experience of communion is only possible through a genuine encounter of persons; both encounter of students and PDL to each other can only be substantiated when they meet with respect, love, and friendship or in intersubjective communion.

SL of students affects this attitude among themselves and PDL. Through their presence to make lives around them better, SL makes life inside the penitentiary meaningful vis-à-vis their rehabilitation; SL makes everything around each person matter; SL makes one appreciate whatever effort is put in; SL makes difficulties to ameliorate: and SL makes one realize that desolation has no value because of communion.

The certainty of hope through SL is inevitable. The students showed fidelity with PDL to not give up in their personal struggles in life. PDL struggling with desolation no longer cares and gives up because he believes that whatever efforts he will do will no longer matter. E.g. why take the Alternative Learning System if failing is certain? Why play, work, and mingle with other inmates if they don't even care? Why support for what is common good if they cannot be achieved? Students chose to hope with PDL without assurance that their efforts will improve both their individual lives and those of PDL. In other words, SL with PDL is not about future expectations of measurable impacts on all stakeholders but rather it is one's willingness to be open through communion. It does not depend on the idea that a favorable outcome is apparent. Thus, though students' SL experience is not quantifiable they willingly chose to hope, without expectation of success. By not just *acknowledging PDL as PDL but others who are beings with human dignity and life, such SL experience is successful and meaningful. This way, such SL not just manifests hope but carries concrete hope.*

Apart from satisfying the course requirement of undergoing SL, what other benefits can a student gain from SL? According to Marcel:

A really alive person is not merely someone who has a taste for life, but somebody who spreads that taste, showering it, as it were, around him; and a person who is really alive in this way has, quite apart from any tangible achievements of [theirs], something essentially creative about [them] ..." (Marcel, 1951, p. 139).

Students become creatively developed individual. Marcel calls this "creative fidelity". It is the opening of oneself to others in friendship, love, and communication. This way, two individuals connect with each other, acknowledging their individual subjectivity. SL in MSC-NBP through the encounter with PDL, both parties showed desires to articulate who they are, offering to each other a chance to experience their respective being. More than the students, PDL need such an offering of hope in communion experience to counter the lure of desolation. It gives them the spirit to continually live life meaningfully. Likewise, more than the PDL, students creatively develop themselves when they willingly provide a link on the space between their being and the PDL' when they make themselves available to them.

Students learn holistically through SL. Everything about it contributes to self-development. Thus, students mature and learn as they socially engage and work with others in service. SL empowers them to be steeped in social engagement and to be service-driven persons and leaders. They were able to develop the ability to communicate and lead project management and

implementations, i.e. very much needed in the society (Cf. Cairn & Kielsmeier, 1995). Accordingly, SL, as it contributes to students' personal and career development, it also contributes to community development. POs benefit from direct service and through participation. They are empowered through students' investment of knowledge, resources, talents, skills in their communities. Students are considered to be their greatest resources (Cf. Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

This experience of an active willingness of availability of the students is hope. It is not compliance to the course; it is not surrendering to what the faculty wants, but rather a wanting, not only for themselves but for the PDL, thus genuine act of hope in communion. The idea of hope helps the students confront the challenges of SL in MSC-NBP, ready themselves and completely and willingly give themselves to the process. Along the way, while keeping the thought of providing a better and more profound experience for PDL, students unconsciously blessing and creatively developing themselves along the process. What they had was a mindset of the need to willingly commit and act, to be present, and to be a hope in communion. Their SLP is most precious in communion and in hope.

VI. REFERENCES

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