

Saint John Baptist de La Salle



Saint John Baptist de La Salle established a unique group of lay religious men dedicated exclusively to education – the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Today, the educational movement that he began continues to inspire all Catholic educators.

First Steps on Life's Path



Born in Reims, France, into an influential family on April 30, 1651, John Baptist de La Salle decided early on to become a priest. His parents died when he was 20 and De La Salle became responsible for the family estate and took care of his six younger brothers and sisters while completing his studies.

He was ordained in 1678, and two years later he received his doctorate in theology. While serving as a Canon in the Cathedral of Reims, a chance encounter with a layman establishing schools for poor

boys set him on a new life path. Gradually De La Salle became involved in the project and soon assumed leadership of a group of rough and barely literate teachers possessing little preparation for their craft.

God Sets Him on a New Path



His first step on this new path was to invite the teachers into his home for a retreat and some basic teacher training. Later he moved with the teachers to a new house, renounced his Church position, gave away his wealth, and formed the community that became known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools (also known as De La Salle Christian Brothers). God, he said, led him “in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.” Church authorities resisted this new form of lay religious life, and the educational establishment resented the Brothers’ innovative methods and their insistence on educating people regardless of their ability to pay.

Building a Foundation

In 40 years, De La Salle and his Brothers succeeded in creating a network of schools throughout France that featured the teaching of reading in French (instead of Latin), students grouped according to ability, the integration of religious instruction with secular subjects, and well-prepared teachers with a sense of vocation and mission. De La Salle also pioneered programs for training lay teachers, Sunday classes for working young men, and one of the first institutions in France for delinquent youth.



The Mission Carries On

De La Salle died near Rouen on Good Friday, April 7, 1719, with 23 active communities and 100 Brothers continuing the mission he set forth. He was canonized a saint in 1900 and named the Patron Saint of Teachers in 1950. His charism, educational spirituality, and extensive writings inspired Catholic educators in his own time and continue to inspire educators from many