

March 2000

Chuck and Sally Sylva
123 4th Street
Clarksburg, CA 99999

Dear Chuck and Sally,

Welcome to the first edition of *To the Friends of the Brothers*.

My brothers and I were talking the other day about our experiences in Catholic education. We told old stories and reminisced about our days in uniforms. I still remember hating the blue bow ties we had to wear in grammar school. We talked about the football games we had played and the articles we had written for the school newspaper. We remembered Mother Carmella striking fear into our hearts, and our football coaches striking fear into our bodies.

During this trip down memory lane, I realized that I have spent the better part of my life – forty-six of my fifty years – involved with Catholic education.

I have vivid memories of playing PAL (Parochial Athletic League) football at St. Patricks and PAL basketball in our Christian Brothers' gymnasium.

I recall my high school days as being tumultuous. The Vietnam War, Vatican II, the revolt against authority, and a multitude of other societal changes created a confusing time in which to grow up. But I clearly remember my Catholic school experiences as being a lifeline, a calm "port," a reasoned, sensible caring and loving environment. I was not a person who was headed down some perilous path, ready to bury myself in drugs. I was not a "tune-in, turn-on, and drop-out" kind of person. I was just a Catholic kid from a Catholic grammar school, who needed some help and guidance and reassurance. I found it in Catholic high school.

I am a blessed man. I chose to serve in the Catholic education system. I chose to give back some of what was given to me by that system. And I was lucky enough to have picked up the skills in 24 years as teacher, coach and fundraiser to allow me to further serve Catholic education here at Christian Brothers.

I am not a person who gets effusive and gushy, but it is hard for me not to do so when I talk about Brothers. Our school has been serving Sacramento for over a century. Many of my good friends are “Brothers Boys,” and I have some equally good female friends who graduated from Bishop Armstrong (BA to those of us from the 60’s). Our school has made a lasting mark on the Sacramento landscape. I hear from many, many alumni who tell me they were kids who were in trouble and follow that with “The Brothers took me in.” I have heard countless stories about students who had a parent die, and who could not afford tuition. “The Brothers told me not to worry about it, and they gave me an education.”

In my three years here in Oak Park, I have found a common theme, one of which I am proud to now be a part. Christian Brothers is an inclusive school. We serve students with a wide range of academic abilities. We serve students who come from a variety of economic, social and ethnic backgrounds. We are diverse, and we are inclusive. And we have graduates who are beginning to understand the whole concept of giving back.

I am very happy to have been given the opportunity to give back some of what I received from the Catholic education system, to give back to, and at, Christian Brothers.

We have a young man, whom I will call Martin. I am not using his real name for reasons that will become obvious. Martin, a young man who struggles academically, receives substantial tuition assistance. He works hard – extra hard – for his grades. Martin, it seems, got a part-time job.

Just before Christmas, Martin hunted down the Principal, Tom Rutten. “What can I do for you, Martin,” asked Mr. Rutten. “I want to start paying you back,” was the reply. Mr. Rutten, puzzled, asked what Martin meant. Martin said that he wanted to start paying Christian Brothers back for the tuition assistance he and his family had been given.

This young man, who struggles academically and who comes from a family that struggles financially, this young man wanted to start paying us back from the money he was earning at a part time job. Mr. Rutten explained to Martin that his tuition assistance was not a loan and told him that the money he earned was for him and his family to keep.

“To give back to the community from which you have received so much.” Martin, a young sophomore, already gets it.

God bless,

Mark L. Warren
President



TO THE FRIENDS OF THE BROTHERS



Chuck and Sally Sylva
8850 River Rd
Sacramento, CA 95832

Dear Chuck and Sally,

A pretty remarkable thing is happening in the world of the Christian Brothers – the world of Lasallian education. Twenty years ago we had 12,000 Brothers and 15,000 total Lasallian educators. Today, we have fewer than 7,500 Brothers worldwide but we have 65,000 total Lasallian educators – Brothers plus lay men and lay women who are focused on keeping the spirit and charism of St. John Baptist de la Salle alive and well.

Brother Bertram and I were discussing this a couple of weeks ago. He believes it is the work of the Holy Spirit. He said he felt that Lasallian spirituality and Lasallian education have never been stronger. When Bertram speaks, I listen.

I don't want to use up your valuable time by singing the praises of the lay men and women who are dedicated to the Lasallian mission. I want to use up your valuable time by singing the praises of the Brothers.

I am a relative newcomer to this enterprise called Lasallian education. I have, however, come to know some of the Brothers fairly well. I knew Brother Bede from years ago when he was at CBHS. What a fabulous man. He was always friendly, always had a smile, and a kind word. I will miss Brother Bede who recently passed away. But I have gotten to know others like Brothers George, Dat, Rich and Warren who currently teach at Christian Brothers. I have worked with and have high respect for Brother David (our Brother Visitor) and Brother Stan (our Auxilliary Visitor). I met and spent time with Brother John Johnston, our Superior General from Rome. There are others.

This past October I sat in the main banquet room at the San Francisco Airport Hyatt. Seven hundred and fifty Lasallian educators from the San Francisco District of the Brothers sat at dinner on the final night of the Convocation. The evening was a tribute to the Brothers – those who came before like Edward and Eugene and Jerome and Richard. We saluted Brothers like those who taught a number of our older alumni. We also saluted those who continue to serve today like Brothers Kevin Slate, John Montgomery, Chris Brady and our four Brothers at CB.

The Brothers in attendance, hundreds of Brothers from all over the world, stood and sang *Honneur a Toi* – the theme song, the fight song, the rallying song for the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It was a rousing moment and a glorious evening of tributes and thank you's and honors – all bestowed on the Brothers.

I turned to Allison Cagley, our Director of Development, and said "It doesn't get any better than this."

And then the Brothers invited us – me – to stand and join them in singing their song.

We speak of collaboration and collegiality. We talk about shared ministry and shared duties and responsibilities. Brothers and Partners, Lasallians united in one mission – to educate kids, especially the poor, the working class, the marginalized.

And we were invited to stand and sing. A night to remember.

Remember Joey, the student from my last letter who wanted to pay us back for his tuition assistance? I have another story about different student on another day.

It seems that Michael (a fictitious name for obvious reasons) wanted to be involved in the Oak Ridge Project. You will soon read about this program in the Connection. We have 50 students who tutor low achieving readers at Oak Ridge Elementary next door. This is an amazing program that pairs our fifty kids with Oak Ridge students in a one-on-one tutoring situation.

Michael wanted to be one of our tutors. Because we had more volunteers than we had places, Michael almost was not chosen as one of the fifty. I don't know the exact story, but some had misgivings about Michael, and he was almost eliminated from the tutor pool.

One day, Michael was heading to Oak Ridge for his early morning, before-school tutoring session. Michael had a package under his arm. One of our teachers asked what he had. Michael was reluctant to answer. If you are a veteran teacher and you ask a student "what they have in the box" and they fumble the answer, bells and whistles and red flags tend to go off.

The teacher pressed on. It seems that Michael tutors a little Hmong third grader. Michael – the lad we almost dropped as a tutor – found out that this little girl had a birthday ... but no party was given by her parents or her classmates. No one celebrated this little girl's birthday. Michael had purchased and wrapped a Barbie doll for his tutoree. Michael would have made a clean get-away and never been caught in this act of kindness if it weren't for a nosy teacher.

How does it go, "Whatever you sow, so you shall reap"?

God Bless,

Mark L. Warren
President

To the Friends of the Brothers July 2000

A few weeks ago, one of our junior students, Katrina, contracted meningitis. The night following her admission to Mercy Hospital, a group of our students, all young men, showed up to offer Katrina their support. She was in the Mercy's Medical Intensive Care Unit, critically ill. Because the doctors did not know how contagious the meningitis might be, the young men were not allowed to see Katrina.

They were not discouraged. These students went to Mercy's Chapel to pray for their classmate. They had no Brother, no parent, no adult with them. They just decided on their own to go to the chapel, to be in God's holy presence, and to ask for help for their friend.

When this group of young men finished their prayers and left Mercy's Chapel, they had – on their own – put together a schedule. One of them would be praying every hour until Katrina recovered.

This brave young lady will return to us for her senior year. Unfortunately, Katrina lost the lower portion of her left leg and parts of two fingers as a result of complications from the meningitis.

As Lasallian educators, we don't always know the impact our program at Christian Brothers has on our young charges. We talk about being in God's holy presence. We have community service programs, campus liturgies, and theology classes. We pray before every class and try to model the behaviors that St. John Baptist de la Salle so wisely left us as critical to a Lasallian education. We just don't always know what lasting impact this has on the students.

These young men's response to another's need and Katrina's strength to overcome her illness make me proud to be a Lasallian educator.

God Bless,

Mark L. Warren
President

October 6, 2000

Name
Address
City . . .

Dear first name,

For 125 years, the Christian Brothers have been educating and nurturing the youth of Sacramento. Originally at 12th and K Streets, then at 21st and Broadway, we have served students at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (formerly Sacramento Boulevard) for the last 40 years.

One thousand and twenty seven students began classes in August. In a school designed in the early 1950's for 750 students, classes are now held in portable buildings, the Brothers' Residence, and every square inch of the original classroom wings. This winter, six basketball teams will practice in one gym. Lunches are served in a split shift as students jostle for food in mass numbers.

Yet even with these challenges, 100% of the Class of 2000 declared their intention to attend college. 100% is a remarkable feat – a testament to the quality of our instruction, to the motivation of our students, and to the character of our community.

For example, Oak Ridge Elementary's principal, Aida Molina, is thrilled with the reading program we piloted last spring. This fall she has requested, and we will have, 120 of our students tutoring at Oak Ridge, the public school next door. The reading levels of the students involved last spring increased 25%. This increase does not, however, quantify other positive results. History, Math and English scores improved. Truancy dropped, and behavior improved.

And consistent with our Lasallian tradition, this fall we began a four-year phase-in of a program that will have 5% of our student body coming to CB from families at or below the Federal Poverty Level – tuition free. We must reach those who most need a Lasallian education . . . and we are working at it.

The school day is still going strong when classes end for the day. Fall sports include three football teams, two soccer teams, two volleyball teams, twenty young women golfers, women's tennis and two cross country teams. Cheerleading squads and the drill team lift the spirit of the games. Drama, jazz choir, student council and key club give students an opportunity to participate in activities on campus.

Before every women's golf contest, a student leads the team in prayer – an activity duplicated by every team. Quality, motivation, and character – Lasallian values.

We held our annual Red and Blue Football Scrimmage a few weekends ago. All of our fall sports athletes scrimmage at Red and Blue, and our Boosters' Club puts on a great day with beverages, food, and entertainment. I was speaking with Greg Meegan, our head football coach, after the scrimmage, and he said, "See those two little kids over there? They have been coming to CB since I've been here. They live in the neighborhood, and we've kind of adopted them." I'm thinking, "This is good." Neighborhood kids coming around is good. These are young people we can reach and get into CB when they're ready for high school.

Greg went on, "I asked them where their brother was." It seems their little brother was also adopted by our coaches. "He's dead," one of the kids replied. Meegan was stunned. "He got run over by a car. I got hit too, but I'm OK." Like it was no big deal. These little children didn't cry.

Meegan, "Those are the kinds of kids we have to get to."

We must reach those who most need a Lasallian education ... and we have to work at it ... even harder.

God Bless,

Mark L. Warren
President