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## Christian Brothers turn to laypeople

By Matt Krupnick  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Drawing on 300 years of educational service, the Christian Brothers have built a proud tradition of high-quality colleges and high schools around the world.

But with the number of Christian Brothers declining in the United States, schools like St. Mary's College in Moraga and De La Salle High School in Concord have increasingly turned to laypeople to fill administrative and teaching roles.

About 800 Christian Brothers live in the United States, less than half of the peak number in the 1960s. The order is thriving overseas, but only three U.S. men are in the first stage of becoming Brothers, down sharply from past years.

St. Mary's has 24 Brothers on its 4,700-student campus, while De La Salle has six on its 970-student campus. The Catholic order's other East Bay school, St. Mary's College High School in Berkeley, has two Brothers on campus, both in administrative roles.

But the Catholic order's leaders are not panicking about the possibility of Christian Brothers, who dedicate themselves to the Lasallian ideal of teaching the poor, disappearing from the schools.

"We've done an incredible amount of (preparation) for our teachers and staffs so they know what the Lasallian mission is about," said Brother James Joost, co-director of vocation ministry for the Brothers' West Coast region.

"It is important the Lasallian mission continue, whether the Brothers are involved in that or not."

Brothers, who are not ordained clergy, take vows of chastity and poverty and usually work in one of the order's schools or educational centers. They train for several years, living with other Brothers, praying and studying Catholicism and other subjects.

The order once made wine at its Napa County retreat but has since sold those operations.

Laypeople take on larger role At St. Mary's, the college presidency was open only to Brothers until last year, when administrators concerned about the shrinking pool of candidates agreed to accept applications from laypeople if no qualified Brothers were found. The Brothers' College of Santa Fe in New Mexico has had lay presidents since 1987.

La Salle High School, just outside Portland, Ore., has no Christian Brothers on its 610-student campus, but administrators have worked especially hard to maintain Lasallian values, said school president Denise Jones.

"For us, it's the honoring and embracing of the (ideals) on a daily basis" that keeps the school connected to the Brothers, she said. "We are very overtly Lasallian."

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of laypeople working with the order as its reach has expanded around the world. While relatively few non-Brothers worked with the order 30 years ago, 90,000 laypeople now help carry out the mission worldwide, scholars and Brothers said.

"We fully share our mission with the people who join," said Brother Michael Meister, a St. Mary's religious studies professor and former De La Salle High principal. "You don't work for the Christian Brothers, you work with the Christian Brothers."

That inclusiveness persuaded Carole Swain to work at St. Mary's. Now the dean of mission and faculty development, Swain said the Christian Brothers have made great strides in making laypeople feel welcome in their communities in the past few years.

"From my point of view, they're doing everything within their power to give us access," she said. "I think they're an evolving group who has listened to the future."

Brother Ronald Gallagher, the lone finalist for the soon-to-be-vacant St. Mary's presidency, cited the need for outside help in a letter to the college community last week.

"If St. Mary's is to remain faithful to its traditions, many more faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends should become partners in the mission," he wrote. "The institution should not only invite the participation of these groups and individuals, but also provide the means to educate and train all in the fundamental traditions."

### **Other options for young people**

Those who have joined the order in recent years tend to be older men who have put years of thought into the decision.

A cornucopia of alternatives tends to prevent young men from choosing a life of chastity and poverty, said Brother Michael Sanderl, St. Mary's assistant dean of student life for mission and leadership and one of the newest Brothers.

"I just think this generation struggles with making some kinds of commitments," said Sanderl, 30, who took his final vows in July, eight years after graduating from St. Mary's. "There are just so many options out there for young people."

Sanderl said he has spoken to a few students about becoming Brothers, but he does not actively recruit them. The best he can hope for is that his holy lifestyle becomes "contagious," he said.

Budget officials at Christian Brothers schools probably wouldn't complain about having more Brothers on

staff. The Brothers' vow of poverty helps schools contain their costs because they must pay lay teachers and administrators much higher salaries.

De La Salle's six Brothers and one Jesuit priest each receive \$20,000 a year, which they pool to cover food and other basic costs, said Brother Christopher Brady, De La Salle's principal.

"We buy our food at Safeway, just like you do," Brady said.

Even though the stipends have risen from \$3,000 in the 1970s, they still save the school tens of thousands of dollars a year.

Between ideological and financial changes, some schools may have a tough time surviving, said Sandra Yocum Mize, chairwoman of the religious-studies department at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

Administrators will have to address the cultural changes by making tough decisions, Mize said.

The decline in the number of Brothers "raises questions about the identity of the institution," she said. "A lot of this will be locally determined, based in part by the financial strength of the institution and the leadership."

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