



Dr. Lisa Rizopoulos
Distinguished Lasallian-Educator
2012-2013

One of my favorite authors is David McCullough, the Pulitzer Prize winner for two incredible best sellers, John Adams and Truman. David McCullough is a strong supporter of teachers and has stated many times that “Teachers are the most important people in our society. They need far more pay, obviously, but they need more encouragement. They need more respect. They need more appreciation from all of us.” That’s why these regular get-togethers here at Manhattan College, to celebrate and honor teachers and staff members, are such important events.

A few years ago, when speaking at a convention for teachers, David McCullough use the following Theodore Roosevelt quote: “Embody ghosts, put flesh and blood on dry bones, and make dead men living before our eyes.” He was encouraging teachers to not only be interesting, informative, and passionate about their subject, but urged them to bring the subject-matter to life.

This quote also captures our Lasallian Educator of the Year, Dr. Lisa Rizopoulos. John Baptist De La Salle is no longer physically with us, but Lisa works very hard to bring his “spirit” to Manhattan College and make him “living” before our eyes. She does this through her words, her actions, and her interactions with students, colleagues, and staff members. She brings John Baptist De La Salle to “life” in powerful and creative ways. She embodies the “ghost” of the Founder.

Two years ago, Lisa attended the “International Leadership Program for Lasallian Universities” at our Generalate in Rome. Before this experience, she had a good understanding of what it meant to serve “together and by association” in the Lasallian educational mission. But, after her experience of praying and reflecting in the presence of the relics of our Founder, she realized that she wanted to play a more critical role in this great Lasallian adventure. She came back with a renewed determination and enthusiasm to get even more involved in continuing to bring De La Salle and his teachings “to life” here on campus and to continue developing the “sense of community” where caring, respect, and understanding are lived out each day.

How does Lisa bring De La Salle and his teachings “to life” here at Manhattan College? De La Salle states in one of his meditations that, “a great concern must be to know each student individually, so as to better able to understand them and discern the best way to guide them.” Lisa takes this great concern to heart by developing and sustaining caring, respectful, and growth-producing relationships with each of her students so she can get to know them. It is clear that she is a genuine human presence in their lives, just as she is in the lives of her colleague here at Manhattan College. As one of her students stated, “Being a new student and a transfer, I was worried about fitting in. After meeting with Dr. Rizopoulos, I had an overwhelming feeling of relief. She was so enthusiastic in helping me in whatever way I needed. She is amazing, genuinely cares for her students, and is a great role-model for future educators.”

De La Salle also states that, “To touch hearts is the greatest miracle you can perform.” Great statement! But, one of the things I admire about Lisa is that she truly knows what these words “touching hearts” meant to De La Salle and what they should mean to all of us. They should not be interpreted as a sentimental expression. De La Salle was no “wimp.” To “touch hearts” means more than just “to stroke

lightly”, it also means to push, to prod, and to challenge. Lisa strokes lightly the hearts of her students every day – but she also pushes, prods, and challenges them because she is well aware that this is essential to their academic success. Lisa understands that students invest themselves into their educational efforts when they know the teacher genuinely cares about them and their progress. Another student stated, “When I consider all you have taught me and reflect on the kind of person you are, I want to be like you, smart, well-informed, interesting, and confident. You gently push us to do our best to ensure the brightest possible future for each of us.”

Lisa loves to be with her students. While in Rome, she knew that there were 30 Manhattan College students studying in Florence. She knew a good number of them and wanted to visit with them, but that would mean she would have to miss a critical part of the Rome program – the one day of silent retreat. She skillfully persuaded and justified to the other three members of the Manhattan College contingent to follow her lead. She also told them that she could not possibly keep quiet for that long a period of time. She planned the “great escape” in true James Bond fashion. She put up a “Do Not Disturb” sign on her door and the four of them left separately and met outside the gates of the Generalate and were on their way to Florence. They met up with the students in Florence and traveled with them the next day to Venice, where they enjoyed each other’s company and had their first Gondola rides around the Grand Canal.

On the way back to Rome, Lisa was worried about getting caught. After getting off the Metro and approaching the Generalate, they saw the two Program Directors. They were out for their evening walk and gelato. Lisa had everyone run into the closest store so they wouldn’t be spotted. They eventually reached the Generalate without getting caught. It was a happy ending and Lisa saw her students.

Lisa passionately believes in the importance of family. She is delighted that her son and her daughter, Perry and Christina, chose to come to Manhattan College. Besides her two beautiful children, Lisa has been blessed with a loving and understanding husband, Bill. He is a wonderful and caring dad. I feel that is appropriate to end this presentation with two quotes from her son and daughter, which show that Lisa truly embodies the “ghost of De La Salle.”

Perry: “This award is a tremendous honor and something that we as a family value greatly. My mom represents everything that a Lasallian should be through her passion for teaching and her great work in the community. My mom relentlessly aims to improve the lives of those around her.”

Christina: “My mom is my inspiration and my idol. She is not only the most amazing and caring mom, daughter, sister, wife, and friend, but an incredible Lasallian.”

Brother Ray Meagher
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