

The Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Christian Brothers)

The pioneer endeavors of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the South and Southwest United States are among the most storied and respected in the Christian Brothers' 325-year history. Their labors and sacrifices contributed in no small part to the great cause of Catholic education in these regions, bringing it to its current extraordinary standing. For many Mexican immigrants in the El Paso borderland during the early 20th century, Cathedral High School was a vital first step to transitioning into American society. The Catholic Church, through the community of Saint Patrick parish, established in 1917, fought and struggled through overwhelming odds to aid and minister to the faithful who crossed the border daily. The establishment of Cathedral High School by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1925 has allowed many generations of young men from both sides of the border -- many of whom were the first in their families to attend school -- to benefit from a Lasallian education that prepared them for college and professional success, thus lifting countless families into the middle class.

El Paso del Norte in 1924 was a small city, yet a diverse community consisting of people from many walks of life, from different corners of the Southwest. It was also home to the poorest diocese in the United States. The Catholic Diocese of El Paso covered an area of 68,394 square miles, with a Catholic population of well over 200,000, with fewer than eighty priests, most of them foreign born, to meet their spiritual needs. The Catholic Church in El Paso was in abject poverty, unable to support her priests, most of whom were living in their sacristies. The Diocese also encountered an immigration problem that, relatively speaking, surpassed that of New York City, with over 16% of all immigrants to the United States passing through the port of El Paso. The duty of caring for them spiritually and materially fell on the Diocese.

In addition to the struggle of meeting the needs of Catholic immigrants, the Diocese faced the menace of the Ku Klux Klan. In response, Catholic families of El Paso formed branches of the National Council of Men and Women, developed their own press, and advocated for programs in Catholic Education. Furthermore, through the efforts of Reverend Malachi O'Leary, Rector of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Catholic businessmen and Catholic families established the Catholic Community Center, serving as a means to unite all families, regardless of religious affiliation, for social and spiritual good, thereby enriching family life and building relations among good citizens of the region. A high priority for Catholic families in El Paso at this time was sound Catholic education for children; given the ongoing struggle with the KKK and the Texas legislature narrowly defeated a proposed bill to banish parochial schools in the state.

The Sisters of Loretto established and began to expand several Catholic elementary schools as well as Loretto Academy, a boarding school for girls. However, Bishop Schuler and most Catholic families held a long-cherished dream that a good education coupled with moral and religious instruction be provided for young men of El Paso. There was, indeed, a great need to find a means to continue the Catholic instruction that many boys received in their younger.

years. At this time, Reverend Robert O'Loughran, Chancellor of the Diocese and newly appointed Rector of St. Patrick Cathedral began to work with the Bishop on a formidable solution to the problem. Mr. William H. Fryer, an Irish Catholic and prominent lawyer in El Paso, emphatically encouraged the Bishop to appeal to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He was himself a "Brothers' boy," a recipient of a Lasallian education from both St. James High School and Manhattan College in New York. He readily volunteered to make all the arrangements necessary to bring the Christian Brothers to El Paso and have them conduct the new Cathedral High School for Boys in the fall of 1925.

Then Sub-Director of St. Paul's College in Louisiana, Br. Ernest Cocagne, F.S.C. was called upon to be first Community Director and Principal. On September 1, 1925, he arrived with the first faculty: Br. Edouard Bernard, F.S.C., and Br. Charles Frieden, F.S.C. The first Brothers who co-founded Cathedral High School began their work establishing Lasallian schools in Mexico until the Venustiano Carranza Revolution forced them to flee for their lives to the United States. Soon following in their footsteps were Br. Emil Guyot, F.S.C., Br. Benedict Lacas, F.S.C., Br. John Meynadier, F.S.C., and Br. Basile Fosses, F.S.C. With passion and zeal, these Brothers seized the opportunity to return to this part of the world and establish Cathedral High School, ensuring that Catholic families and the Diocese of El Paso could realize their long-cherished dream.

The arrival of the Brothers brought great news to El Paso. Prominent Catholic and non-Catholic businessmen as well as other important city figures, including Mayor pro-tem, William K. Ramsey, gave the city's official welcome to the Christian Brothers. He stated confidently that Cathedral High School "would lead to the establishment here of a higher educational institute of tremendous value." Reverend O'Loughran expressed how the coming of the Christian Brothers to El Paso was the realization of that most cherished dream held by Catholic families in El Paso -- the Christian Brothers would furnish "a moral and intellectual foundation for the education of the youth of the land." Aiding the Brothers was Mr. Robert J. Carson, a prominent El Paso athlete and coach, who was solely responsible for building the school's athletic programs. Though the state of Texas discouraged Catholic schools from participating in athletic competition, the outmatched "fighting Irish" football and basketball teams won the respect of every opponent. Irish basketball, under Coach Carson's tutelage won five state championships.

During Cathedral's infancy, the Christian Brothers were teaching as well as building athletic programs without resources. Many parents lived in poverty. The First National Bank of El Paso closed during the Great Depression and the Brothers lost every penny they had. When newspaper editorials and city leaders reported that Cathedral High School would need to close her doors, the "Irish" fought on. The fighting "Irish" became a symbol to the Brothers, their students, and families who have an uphill fight for the fundamental decencies of life, a determination to become educated, and defending basic moral principles woven into the texture of the Cathedral community.

During the 1940s, the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice instilled by the Christian Brothers in all of their students was unparalleled. By 1945, 66% (two-thirds) of Cathedral alumni served our country in the armed services during the greatest conflagration of the 20th Century, World War II. Fourteen alumni answered the Call to Duty in defense of freedom and made the supreme sacrifice. The nation honored those alumni -- from the oldest, LT Lionel V.O Smith, class of 1929, who volunteered for flying duty with the Royal Canadian Air Force before the United States entered the war -- to the youngest, PVT James Carr Foester, class of 1944, who died on Christmas Eve of that year when his troopship, the ill-fated Leopoldville, was torpedoed in the English Channel. These brave men's example continues to inspire new generations of Cathedral alumni for they truly were members of America's Greatest Generation.

Over the course of five more decades, the Christian Brothers continued to uphold their vows "to teach minds and to touch hearts" and to be "watchful guides, lighting the path for youth," in the words of their founder, St. John Baptist De La Salle, the patron saint of teachers. Their commitment to the young men in the border region has never waned. Alumni from the 1950s to the present day always recognize the impact of whom we call the most influential members of the Lasallian family, whose faith and determination kept Cathedral open and successful during the most turbulent of

times in El Paso and America: Br. Stephen Teissandier, F.S.C.; Br. Amedy Long, F.S.C.; Br. Ignatius McGowan, F.S.C.; Br. Ambrose LeBlanc, F.S.C.; Br. Alphonsus Abeyta, F.S.C.; Br. Henry Herrera, F.S.C.; Br. Raphael Bodin, F.S.C.; Br. Adrian Pfarr, F.S.C; and Br. Nick Gonzalez, F.S.C. Among the members of the Lasallian Family are teachers affiliated to the worldwide Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. With joy and gratitude, the Christian Brothers acknowledge them as partners in the mission to educate the young and as those who show a strong devotion to Saint De La Salle and Lasallian spirituality. Affiliated members are bestowed the official title, Affiliated Christian Brother (A.F.S.C.) and include Mr. Robert J. Carson, Mrs. Luz Ulrickson, Mr. Raul Guereca, Mr. Sabino Carrejo, Mr. Harry Kelleher, and Mr. Leo Cancellare.

Cathedral High School has graduated over 4000 young men. They became loyal sons, fighting “Irishmen,” who defended their faith and who worked tirelessly to cultivate lives of learning and service. For nearly a century, the Christian Brothers and affiliated Lasallian educators have produced local, state, and national leaders, including the first Mexican-American mayor of El Paso and Ambassador to Costa Rica, Raymond Telles, and former mayor of Juarez, Rene Mascarenas; over seven hundred military veterans; the largest number of Gates Scholars in the United States; the most state titles in high school athletics in the city and the only state title in football. Cathedral has also produced a number of alumni who entered the religious including Br. Leo Baltz, F.S.C., Br. Joseph M. Walsh, F.S.C., and Br. Nick Gonzalez, F.S.C. Since 1990, Cathedral has realized a nearly uninterrupted record of a 100% acceptance rate of her graduates to an institution of higher learning, amassing an average of over one million dollars in scholarships. From its humble origins in 1925, Cathedral soon enters its 100th year of existence, with the same mission it set out to accomplish upon conception -- to help young men become the best versions of themselves. Cathedral High School was founded in the Truth that each student is created in the image of God with infinite worth. Students cultivate their intellectual, athletic, social, and spiritual gifts, acknowledging that they exist to better the world around them. In the deepest sense, the Alumni of Cathedral High School have drafted a resolution of appreciation to the Christian Brothers. They owe a great debt and have a deep abiding love for the Brothers and Lasallian lay teachers under the Brothers’ direction that taught them not only the sciences and the arts but also fides, fidelity to principle; mores, spiritual integrity and way-of-life; and cultura, enrichment of life through learning. It is often said that no greater love does man have than that he lay down his life for his brother. The Christian Brothers have devoted their lives to their mission – to educate their students. The alumni can never repay the Brothers and their Lasallian educators except to do all in their power to help secure future years for Cathedral High School in order for the Brothers to nurture men of intellect, character, and faith, who develop a lifelong brotherhood based on respect and love.