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## 'Soup and Substance' Invites Discussion of Lasallian Education

By A. K. Carroll



A simple table set with bread and soup awaits a small group for discussion at Saint Mary's College. Photo A. K. Carroll

A long wooden table is blanketed in red, laden with baskets of fresh sourdough and set with clean glass goblets, stiff white napkins and white ceramic plates and bowls. Around the table, 14 wooden chairs wait to be filled. A vat of steaming vegetable barley soup stands off to the side, in the center of the Alemany Brother's Community Dining Room at Saint Mary's College. Beside it is a stack of thick cardstock handouts.

In the middle of the month, in the middle of the day, at the center of Saint Mary's campus, there is an integrated meal that nourishes more than just the body. "Soup and Substance," a year-round series of mid-day meals, gathers members of the SMC community for a communion of mind, soul and body. Now in its 14th year, "Soup and Substance" is a catalyst for conversation, an opportunity for faculty, staff, Brothers and students to come together and discuss the text of one of the De La Salle Brothers.

One text is selected each year by the Office of Mission. This year they have chosen to discuss the thoughts that Brother Armin Luistro shared in his 2014 Convocation Address, which challenged the members of the SMC community to rethink the process of education, to problem-solve a way of reaching the 57 million uneducated children in the Philippines. "Bringing education is more than just access," remarked one of the recent attendees. "It's also about creating a condition in which you can learn."

Each "Soup and Substance" meal is hosted by a different member of the SMC community. In October, that member was Brother Dominic Berardelli, special assistant to the president.

"They like to call me SAP," Berardelli joked as October's group took turns introducing themselves and identifying their various roles on campus. Among the dozen or so present were a professor of mathematics and computer science, representatives from the Office of Institutional Research, a staff member from Information Technology, a representative from Mission and Ministries and an undergraduate biology major preparing for a Lasallian Service Internship in Nepal.

"This is the 12 disciples," Berardelli remarked with a smile and a laugh. He opened the group in prayer, then ushered them to the red-clothed table, where they dipped hunks of bread into steaming bowls of soup while delving into the thoughts of Brother Armin and discussing the work of the Christian Brothers in the Philippines.

The first "Soup and Substance" was originated by Brother Stan Sobczyk in 1994 as a response to SMC President Brother Mel Anderson's conversations defining the mission of the college. Brother Stan gathered faculty and staff to discuss the college's three traditions of Catholicism, the Liberal Arts, and Lasallian teaching in relation to the college mission, suggesting that Saint Mary's revisit the practice of dining and Lasallian discussion.

After a several-year break, "Soup and Substance" gatherings have been re-instituted and are currently organized by Coordinator of Mission Sally Jamison. "I do most of the inviting through personal contact, email, the SMC web page and a news flash in the Collegian," said Jamison, who is always happy to see new faces around the table. A full table is anywhere from 12-14 participants,

which Jamison noted, "allows for comfortable (or uncomfortable) conversation." There are regulars who participate, but variety is key.

"Both Carole (Swain, vice president for Mission) and I agree that meeting new community members is a highlight," said Jamison. "The discussions are also a highlight. Even though they revolve around the same reading, they vary, focusing on different themes in the text."

The key purpose of "Soup and Substance" isn't to brainstorm or problem-solve as much as it is to foster thought, build community and provide participants with an introduction to the Christian Brothers and an understanding of Lasallian traditions and the mission of Saint Mary's College. The meals provide food for the body, food for spirit and food for the soul.

The next "Soup and Substance" will be held on the SMC Rheem campus in January. "Soup and Substance" was started as a means of generating discussion about Lasallian education, and though this is typically contained within the SMC community, anyone with an interest in such discussions is welcome to join the conversation. To reserve a spot or inquire about future meals, contact Sally Jamison in the Office of Mission at (925) 631-4406 or [sjamison@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:sjamison@stmarys-ca.edu).

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