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Christian Brothers anchor innovative North Portland school11/10/2004 [Ed Langlois](#)Related: [Brothers completely dedicated to education](#)

"Where are we stuck?" Brother Dan Fenton asks the chemistry student.

"Everywhere," she replies.

After 20 minutes of one-on-one tutoring — which includes writing illustrations on the board and opening a drawer to reinforce the concept of volume — Brother Dan helps the girl get it. That done, he asks her to help peers in an upcoming class.

The De La Salle Christian Brothers are taking on education work where others have pulled out. De La Salle North Catholic High School in inner-city Portland, where Brother Dan and three other brothers serve, opened in 2001. It is one of several innovative schools the community's San Francisco Province has sponsored in the past 10 years.

Founded in pre-revolutionary France, the brothers have always aimed to bring upper-class education to those who are not necessarily upper-crust.

"I want students to realize that there is much more to learn than what I was able to teach them, and I want them to be hungry for more," says the bearded Brother Dan, a Christian Brother for 20 years.

"The need is greater than ever," says Brother Dan, who made vows at age 30, having already been a teacher. "When I joined, I had discovered a real love for teaching and, at the same time, I was excited about the leadership that the Church was demonstrating in the areas of peace and social justice."

Brother Dan, who rises well before dawn to set up the science lab, loves to teach and students love to learn from him.

"Brother Dan is one of the best teachers I have ever had," says Mariana Lindsay, a senior. "He is so dedicated. He'll be there on weekends and wants people to come in for help any time. It's amazing."

The brothers serve in 93 countries, including many developing nations. Last summer, Brother Dan taught science in a residential school in the Philippines for boys who have been taken from jails and prisons.

For the fall, he returned to the 1950s-era cinder-block house in North Portland, adjacent to De La Salle. The four brothers and two volunteers live in community there.

Community life, Brother Dan explains, is not only lively, faith-based and supportive — it also prevents him from being overly concerned with himself.

Early each weekday morning, the community members rise early. By 6:45 a.m. they are at prayer in a small chapel. Using gender-inclusive language, they pray for students, a sick community member in California, and for families in general. For the sign of peace, they offer hugs.

Then comes a quick breakfast of cereal or toast and a speedy perusal of the newspaper. They discuss politics and other world events.

By 7:30 a.m., Brother Dominic Berardelli slips a coat over his full-length habit and steps out to greet students and parents. He knows them and their stories.

"Some kids may be grumpy, and I try to cheer them up," says the brother, director of school and community relations.



Sentinel photos by Bob Kerns
 Junior Matt Weeks receives help on his chemistry assignment from Br. Daniel Fenton.

Some families hand him homemade cookies out the car window or deliver warm cups of coffee. When the weather turned cold, one group bought him a pair of gloves.

The extroverted brother seems made for the task of hospitality.

"Brother Dominic is a beast," says senior Lech Kaiel, a member of De La Salle North's state-tourney-bound soccer team. Kaiel's statement is a lofty compliment among high-school athletes, denoting toughness, loyalty and liveliness.

Brother Dominic laughs at the hip-hop kudos. A Christian Brother for almost 50 years and a former missionary to the Philippines, he is keen on learning new cultures. He recalls the time he mistakenly insulted a Thai cardinal by crossing his legs as they spoke.

Brother Dominic met the Christian Brothers in high school during the 1950s in Pittsburgh. Still awed, he remembers Brother Edward Baldwin walking into class and getting on his knees for a moment of silence before starting the lesson.

"I knew I wanted to be a brother," Brother Dominic says from his simple North Portland office. "I wanted to teach. The brothers engendered in me a love for teaching and the communal life." He entered a year of postulancy in 1955 at age 17.

Now the brothers' common life is what sustains him.

"It's the community that for me is critical — the strength of living together and praying together and doing the mission together," he explains.

He is enthusiastic about the De La Salle North ministry. "This is so important," he says. "I think it will change North Portland."

At 7:45 a.m. in the school parking lot, Brent Rempe makes his way to a large De La Salle North van. One of what are called Lasallian volunteers, the recent marketing and finance graduate of Oklahoma State University will deliver a dozen youths to internship sites.

De La Salle students spend one day per week working in law firms, public relations offices, medical research labs, schools, even the zoo. The idea is to give students real-world experience and offset their tuition.

Rempe volunteered precisely to help lead the internship program, which he says combines business and ethics beautifully.

"Our kids graduating from high school this year will be more prepared for the real world than I was when I left college," he says.

Lasallian volunteers are unique in the world of religious order associates. They actually live with the brothers and are fully vested in the common life.

"The hardest thing is to submit your personal schedule to the community schedule," Rempe says. Sometimes he shows up at morning worship in sweat pants and rumped.

But the experience has led him so far to a "new respect" for consecrated life. He feels "deeply committed" to the brothers' mission.

Brother Jonathan Cord, who has returned from driving a morning van, handles some office work. He then walks across campus to the cafeteria, where he will collect lunch money.

As he makes change, he laughs with students and offers each a free cookie.

Brother Jonathan, director of the brothers' community, grew up in Sacramento and attended a brothers' high school. A brother asked the young Jonathan if he had ever thought of being a teacher. That set the lad on his vocational course. Attracted by the spiritual richness of the life, he took the habit in 1961 at age 18.

His formation paralleled the Second Vatican Council, and he embraced the changes, as did the Christian Brothers in general. He does recall vigorous debates among classmates over the reforms.

Brother Jonathan has served in schools all over California and has fond memories of his time at La Salle High School in Milwaukie, where was stationed from 1986 to 1988.

About 60 percent of De La Salle North students are Catholic. For all, Brother Jonathan hopes for an education that will not only bring them smoothly into college, but will keep them "grounded in the presence of God." He hopes graduates who leave are respectful of others, and of themselves, and are "committed to action for justice in the world."

Among his hopes for the De La Salle venture are increased outreach to Latino and Asian students.

Not far from the cafeteria in the fine arts class, Brother Martin Vu, 35, helps several dozen students draw different views of a tiny cocktail umbrella. He is giving them an Asian artistic perspective.

A native of Saigon, he came to the United States in 1995. He joined family in Orange County, Calif. and resumed a vocational exploration that had begun with the Christian Brothers in Vietnam.

As a schoolboy, he had been deeply impressed with his teachers, who were lay people. He felt called to the profession and trained in computer science and art.

He saw teachers conflicted between family life and dedication to their calling in the classroom. So he began to look at Catholic teaching orders and found a home with the brothers.

"It not only gives me time to devote to ministry, but being a brother helps connect me to people," he says. "There is no wall between us, nothing to block us."

Jonathan Dackow, a 23-year-old graduate of the brothers' Manhattan College in New York, runs an errand at mid-day across campus before he gets back to helping in art class. The Lasallian Volunteer also helps lead campus ministry and student government.

"I wanted to give something back," he says of his decision to spend a year living in community and serving at the school so far from home. A Long Island native who earned a degree in psychology, he does not plan on becoming a brother. But he remains open to the option.

"They have all the values I want," Dackow says.

When he is away from the community, he misses it and appreciates being able to ask the experienced teachers' advice.

"I'm not as into prayer as the brothers," Dackow confesses. "But I use that time to relax, to de-stress."

As the afternoon proceeds, Dackow hops into a van. He will head to Wilsonville to pick up students after work.

By the day's end, back at the cinder-block house, one of the community has prepared dinner. Everyone takes a turn. Lively conversation flits around the table. There is more prayer before quiet time and sleep.

Students at De La Salle North value the fellows who live in the house next door.

"I appreciate the brothers," says Josh Rossman, a senior. "They work without getting paid."

Mariana Lindsay calls the brothers "fascinating" and marvels at their dedication. "I think we're very lucky as a school to have the brothers," she says.

Lech Kaiel says the men "are giving their time and energy to the school all the time."

Parents are also impressed with the brothers.

"They are always there. They are so committed," says Jackie Walsh, mother of a sophomore. "You will not find many teachers doing as much as they do."

Even the staff can hardly say enough about the men.

"We are so lucky here," says cafeteria manager Pam McClung as she makes meatball sandwiches. "The brothers bring a kindness, a faith. They are so approachable. They are so warm."

Luke Powell, the maintenance manager, says that the brothers are "like that special uncle you can talk to."

The brothers have decided to form strong ministry partnerships with laity.

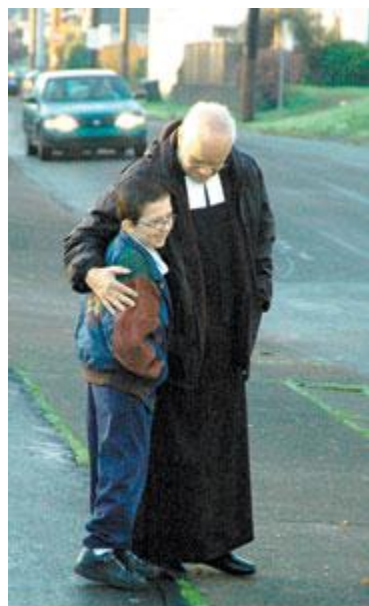
"I feel very included in the ministry," says Matt Powell, president of De La Salle North. "It's about shared mission."

Powell, a 1979 graduate of La Salle High in Milwaukie, says that the brothers model hospitality and abiding care for students. Their presence on campus around the clock "animates" the ideals of the school, he adds.

"They are just truly men of faith who live out their charism in simple ways," Powell says. "They are really about touching the hearts of people."

The Holy Cross Fathers and Brothers and others at the University of Portland assisted with the startup of De La Salle North. There is something akin to a "love affair" between the two religious communities, says Holy Cross Father Claude Pomerleau, superior at the university. He was chaplain at the Christian Brothers' high school in Denver.

"At this point, they represent the finest of the mission of Jesus to reach out to the poor and needy," the priest says.



Br. Dominic Beradelli chats with 10-year-old John Zabell, brother of De La Salle junior Brittany Zabell.

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