DATE: **November 10, 2026**

TO: **THE LASALLIAN COMMUNITY (USLS)**

SGD.
FROM: **BR. IRWIN ANTHONY CLIMACO FSC**
Community Director, La Salle Bacolod Brothers Community

SUBJECT: **SHINE LIKE STARS**
Pastoral Letter on the Christmas Celebrations 2026

"*Those who instruct others unto justice*
shall shine like stars for all eternity"
— Daniel 12:3

Dear Lasallian Community,

Grace, peace, and the joy of Christ's coming be with you!

As we once again enter the season of Christmas, our University community gathers to celebrate one of the most cherished traditions that has become part of our institutional identity: Christmas at the University of St. La Salle.

For ten years, this tradition has brought us together through music, poetry, creativity, fellowship, and meaningful expressions of our shared Lasallian spirit. Each year, our Christmas celebrations have carried a particular message, reflecting not only the joy of the season but also the experiences, aspirations, and circumstances of our community.

As we welcome Christmas 2026 with the theme **"Shine Like Stars,"** we are invited to look back with gratitude, recognize the light that has sustained us through the years, and renew our commitment to becoming bearers of Christ's light to one another.

A decade of Christmas, a journey of faith and hope

Our Christmas tradition began in 2017 through the initiative of Br. Butch Alcudia FSC, with the production of our first-ever USLS Christmas song, *La Salle is Our Home*. Composed by our resident musician par excellence, Mr. Nel Dingcong, the song became our Christmas anthem from 2017 to 2019. What began as a celebration within our University eventually became a gift to the worldwide Lasallian community during the Tercentenary of the passing of our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle.

It was a beautiful expression of how a local Lasallian community could share its gifts with the greater Lasallian family.

In 2020, however, the world experienced an unprecedented interruption. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from gathering in the ways we had always known. Yet, the absence of physical gatherings did not extinguish the Christmas spirit. Through Sir Jonathan Davila's poem, *Let Us Go On*, we found words that encouraged us to persevere, hold on to hope, and continue moving forward despite the uncertainties of the time.

As we gradually emerged from the pandemic, music once again became an expression of our renewed togetherness.

In 2021, *The Miracle of Christmas* became our Christmas anthem, followed by *Dream FORWARD: Better Together This Christmas* in 2022 and *Illuminate the Lasallian DNA* in 2023. These compositions, once again crafted by Mr. Nel Dingcong, carried the distinct sound and spirit of Christmas at La Salle.

Following his retirement, we opened another chapter in this tradition by inviting members of our own Lasallian community to share their creativity and musical talents through our annual Christmas song competition. In 2024, we celebrated *Lasallify the Joy of Christmas: Lasallify His Love*, followed in 2025 by *Light Up the Vibe: Spark Hope this Christmas*.

Behind these songs were also the creative contributions of Sir Julius De La Peña and our Center for Marketing and Communications, whose graphics and video productions helped bring each Christmas theme to life. Alongside our composers, performers, organizers, and the many members of the community who have shared their talents, they have helped make this tradition a collective expression of our Lasallian identity.

To all who have contributed to this ten-year journey, we express our heartfelt gratitude. Your gifts have helped create memories, strengthen our sense of belonging, and remind us that Christmas becomes more meaningful when celebrated and created together.

When the light shines brightest in darkness

Among these ten years, Christmas 2025 remains particularly significant.

It was a difficult year for Negros Occidental and the surrounding communities. The eruption of Kanlaon Volcano, a strong earthquake in September, and the devastation brought by Typhoon Tino during the first week of November tested the resilience of our people.

As a University and as members of this province, we were not spared from the anxieties and difficulties brought about by these successive calamities. Many families and communities experienced loss, displacement, uncertainty, and the difficult task of rebuilding their lives.

Yet, in the midst of these challenges, we witnessed something profoundly beautiful: the spirit of *Bayanihan*.

Our University made the meaningful decision to forego its annual Christmas party and redirect the budget intended for the celebration to assist communities affected by the calamities. It was a decision that placed compassion above convenience and solidarity above celebration.

This experience reminded us that the true spirit of Christmas is not measured by the grandeur of our festivities, the beauty of our decorations, or the abundance of our celebrations. Rather, it is revealed in our willingness to share what we have, reach out to those in need, and become a source of hope for others.

Perhaps, without even realizing it, we were already living out what our Christmas theme proclaimed.

We were shining.

Not because of the lights that illuminated our campus, but because of the compassion, generosity, and solidarity that illuminated the lives of others.

Indeed, sometimes, our light becomes most visible not when circumstances are favorable, but when we choose to remain generous despite our own difficulties. Sometimes, we shine brightest precisely when the world around us seems darkest.

Shine Like Stars: Called to illuminate lives

This year, our University embraces the institutional theme **Stars ALIGN**, a reminder of our continuing responsibility to remain faithful to the mission and identity entrusted to us by our founders.

We are called to be Serving, Transforming, Accompanying, Responding, and Striving together as one Lasallian community.

These are not simply words that define an institutional celebration. They are commitments that must find expression in our everyday encounters, decisions, relationships, and responsibilities.

As we celebrate Christmas, our theme, **"Shine Like Stars,"** gives this institutional commitment another meaningful expression.

Inspired by the Book of Daniel, particularly Daniel 12:3, we are reminded:

"Those who instruct others shall shine like stars for all eternity."

In its biblical context, this passage speaks of the enduring significance of those who lead others towards wisdom and righteousness. It reminds us that the influence of those who guide, teach, and form others extends far beyond the immediate moment. Their contribution leaves a lasting mark on the lives they touch.

For us as Lasallians, this invitation carries a special significance.

Our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle, understood education as a ministry of faith, service, and transformation. He recognized that educators are entrusted not merely with the transmission of knowledge but with the formation of young people entrusted to their care.

To shine, therefore, is not simply to be recognized, admired, or placed in the spotlight. It is to become a source of light for others.

We shine when our teachers do more than deliver lessons, when they recognize the potential of every learner and patiently accompany those who struggle.

We shine when our administrators lead not simply by managing offices and resources, but by ensuring that every decision and institutional priority remains faithful to our mission.

We shine when our staff members perform their responsibilities with dedication, recognizing that even the most ordinary tasks contribute to something greater.

We shine when our students choose kindness over indifference, integrity over convenience, and service over self-interest.

We shine when our Brothers and Lasallian Partners make God's presence felt through their commitment to the young, especially those who are most vulnerable and in need of accompaniment.

We shine when our alumni carry the values they have learned beyond the walls of our University, becoming instruments of goodness in their respective professions and communities.

And we shine when, as one Lasallian family, we recognize that the mission of this University does not belong to a single office, department, or group of people. It belongs to all of us.

The true measure of our Lasallian identity is not simply how brightly our institution shines, but how many lives are transformed because of the light we share.

Reflecting the Light of Christ

As we reflect on what it means to shine, we must remember that we do not generate this light on our own.

The source of our light is Jesus Christ.

Christmas celebrates the mystery of God's love made visible in the birth of His Son. In the humility of a manger in Bethlehem, God enters the darkness of our human experience, bringing hope where there is despair, peace where there is conflict, and love where there is indifference.

Jesus does not simply invite us to admire His light. He calls us to reflect it.

This is an important distinction. We are not called to shine so that others may admire us, but so that through our words, actions, and presence, others may encounter the goodness and love of God.

The star of Bethlehem did not draw attention to itself. It pointed towards Christ.

May this be our inspiration as Lasallians. Whatever our positions, responsibilities, talents, and contributions may be, may our lives continually point others towards what is good, meaningful, and life-giving.

There may be members of our community who approach this Christmas with overflowing joy and gratitude. There may also be those who quietly carry personal struggles, family concerns, disappointments, grief, or uncertainties about the future.

May we become a community where no one feels invisible, where no one is left behind, and where everyone is reminded that they matter and that they belong.

Sometimes, shining does not require grand gestures. It may mean listening to someone who needs to be heard, extending forgiveness when it is difficult, offering encouragement to someone who is losing hope, or simply showing up for someone who needs our presence.

These seemingly ordinary moments may be the very moments when we shine the brightest.

Becoming stars for one another

As we celebrate ten years of our USLS Christmas tradition, we are reminded that the story of Christmas at La Salle has never been limited to songs, poems, decorations, and festivities.

It is a story of a community that continues to find hope amid uncertainty, creativity amid limitations, generosity amid difficulties, and faith amid changing circumstances.

From *La Salle is Our Home* to *Let Us Go On*, from *The Miracle of Christmas* to *Dream FORWARD*, from *Illuminate the Lasallian DNA* to *Lasallify the Joy of Christmas*, and from *Spark Hope this Christmas* to *Shine Like Stars*, each expression has become part of our shared journey.

These themes may change from year to year, but the invitation remains the same: to make the spirit of Christmas visible in the way we live and relate with one another.

As we continue our journey towards the University's 75th year and beyond, may we remain aligned with the mission entrusted to us by our founders. May we continue to strengthen our commitment to the young, deepen our relationships as a community, and make our Lasallian identity evident in the decisions we make and the lives we touch.

Tonight, as our campus comes alive with the lights of Christmas, may we look beyond what illuminates our surroundings and recognize the greater light that we are called to share.

Let us not be content with having a beautifully illuminated campus. Let us build a community that illuminates lives.

Let us not simply admire the stars above us. Let us become stars for one another.

And may we remember that the most beautiful lights of Christmas are not the ones we install, but the ones we ignite in the hearts of others.

May we shine not for recognition, but for service; not for ourselves, but for others; and not merely for a season, but for a lifetime.

For indeed, those who lead others towards wisdom, goodness, and the light of Christ shall shine like stars for all eternity.

May the light of Christ shine in our hearts, in our homes, and throughout our Lasallian community.

A blessed and meaningful Christmas Season to everyone!

Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever.