

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CIRCULAR 422

1 July 1986

THE 41st GENERAL CHAPTER

PROPOSITIONS AND MESSAGES



GENERAL COUNCIL

Via Aurelia, 476 - 00165 Rome - Italy

Rome, July 1, 1986

Our Very Dear Brothers,

We are pleased to greet all of you through this Circular letter which offers you the official texts of the propositions and messages voted by the 41st General Chapter.

This Chapter, which took place in an atmosphere of brotherhood and of prayer, has been a very special grace for the Institute. So that all may profit by this auspicious time for our religious family, we must now share it with all of the Brothers. It is for this reason that we are now distributing the text of the Rule which has been voted by the chapter and has already been submitted to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRIS). In the same spirit, we should like to complete the task of sharing by publishing the texts of the propositions and messages which are found in the two first parts of this circular.

For a better understanding of the texts which follow, we need to put ourselves in the position of the delegates at the beginning of the Chapter. They found themselves confronted by a considerable amount of written material coming from the following sources:

1. Notes written directly to the Chapter;
2. The Draft Rule, issued August 15, 1985;
3. Notes written in response to the Draft Rule;
4. The Report of the Institute made by Brother José Pablo, Superior General and Council;
5. The Reports of the Four Study Commissions:
 - Ministry of the Brother;
 - Ageing Districts;
 - The Brothers' Presence in Islamic and Buddhist Countries;

— Lasallian Associations.

6. The Reports of the various General Services of the Institute.

As announced in Circular Letter No. 416, convoking the 41st General Chapter, one of the major objectives was the revision of the Rule and the definitive voting on it by the Chapter prior to the submission of that Rule to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRIS). But this chapter was also faced with the present situation of the Institute and the decisions to be taken to improve its pastoral work as part of the Church's mission.

Faced with these two main objectives, the Preparatory Commission proposed making the study of the Rule the main axis of the Chapter. Still, by annexing other material to the relevant section of the Draft Rule, the Commission attempted to offer the capitulants an integrated approach to their work. This, in practice, was the path followed by the Chapter. However, before forming Commissions and entering into the work on the Rule, an important period of discernment took place: for a few days, the capitulants tried to listen to one another, to understand better the situation of the Institute in the various parts of the world and then, from this experience of sharing, to gather together the priority questions of the life of our religious family today.

We should like to share these priorities with you, presenting them in the form of questions, because in a certain manner, they can be found in one part or other of the Rule, in the propositions, or in the messages:

1. In the light of our finality and of our mission, how can we, through education, promote justice and serve the poor?

2. In the light of the international character of our Institute, how can we become effectively more interdependent?

3. How can we foster and integrate the contemplative dimension of our life?

4. What are our long-term objectives in sharing the Lasallian tradition with the different groups who constitute the Lasallian Family? How can we help these groups to attain their goals?

5. What means can the General Chapter offer to the Brothers in view of this radical and personal conversion which will entail the creativity, the prophetic leadership, and the hope in the future of the Institute?

6. In view of the directions taken with regard to the mission of the Institute, how can we build up our internal structures, especially our community life, in order to integrate the life of community, mission, and consecration?

We trust that you have already received the text of the Rule, voted by the Chapter which has also adopted the following proposition.

PROPOSITION 1

The General Chapter entrusts to the Superior General and his Council the final printing of the Rule and the negotiations for the approval of the official text by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

The reading of this Rule will show you that the Chapter intended it to be linked with the origins of the Institute and, at the same time, be attuned to the present day situation. We entrust this text to your study, your consideration, and your prayers, so that it might continue to express our way of following Christ and of serving the Church as modern heirs of Saint John Baptist De La Salle. The 119 Constitutions and the more than 200 Statutes of the Rule are thus the principal decisions of the Chapter.

The Chapter has entrusted to us the publication of all these texts. There are, to begin with, the PROPOSITIONS,

the MESSAGES and the ADDRESS given at the close of the Chapter which you will find here in the present Circular.

Once it is approved by the CRIS, the final text of the RULE will be distributed to all.

In keeping with the stipulations of the Draft Rule, certain legislation formerly published in the Rule of Government, as well as some decisions and aspirations of the Chapter, will appear in a future DIRECTORY.

There are other subjects which, even though there may be some reference to them in the Rule, required a more immediate decision and implementation by the Chapter. We will present these to you in the pages which follow.

PART ONE

1.1. MISSIONARY SOLIDARITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

The 41st General Chapter wished to reaffirm and even further revitalize the missionary sense of the Institute. Most often we exercise our mission of *announcing the Gospel to those who are far from salvation* in our own countries; usually we are not able to meet all the enormous educational needs that exist there.

However, the importance of our own home mission, does not diminish our obligations and responsibilities to the foreign missions. By virtue of our Christian vocation, reaffirmed by our religious consecration, we are called to bring the Gospel to all nations even to the ends of the earth. So, already in the history of our religious family, we can congratulate ourselves in being able to count a respectable number of Brothers who have left their native land and who have offered their missionary services either by front line evangelization and Christianization, or simply by assuring the presence of the Church by means of the Christian school.

a) Mutual help in personnel

Numerous appeals for help still come to us from poor countries and from developing countries, asking for our collaboration in the field of the Christian education of youth. Still, what has attracted the attention of the Chapter is that vocations to our life are becoming ever more numerous in these countries, but the Brothers on the spot are far from being enough to provide the necessary basic formation. It has come to such a stage in these sectors, that the future of the Institute is at risk because of the insufficiency or lack of

qualified formators. The Chapter, concerned by the serious deficiencies of this situation, has made an appeal for more solidarity. The initial formation of these young men who are entering our postulancy programs, novitiates, and scholasticates is a missionary priority which ought to arouse further cooperation on the part of all the Districts.

Brothers, these pressing appeals of the local Churches towards the least favoured, these urgent appeals of the young Districts which need formators and lack financial means, should not leave you indifferent. We profess the same religious ideals, we exercise the same apostolic ministry; we are called to build together the Institute of tomorrow.

In the past few years studies and initiatives have been made and intensified to respond to these appeals. Districts and Regions, often within the framework of twinning, have made some important and significant efforts; Brothers have set out to live the experiences of cooperation and brotherly mutual assistance in the developing countries.

These efforts and initiatives must develop even more so that they will involve a greater number of Brothers. It is for this reason that the Chapter has invited each Regional Conference to establish generous quotas which aim to have at least ten percent of their Brothers render service in those regions of the world which have the greatest need of their competence and presence.

The Missionary Secretariats of some Districts have played an important role in gathering, elucidating, and spreading much information about their missionary activities and projects in order to establish an awareness of the missions and to prepare and assist missionaries. This activity should also be developed further. In those Districts which are already Mission conscious, such consciousness must be further developed; it must be introduced into those Districts which are still lethargic in this area.

b) Financial Contributions

Our solidarity and our interdependence must also be manifested in our financial planning. The sharing fund, set

up at the centre of the Institute is supported by the Districts through voluntary contributions, left to each District's discretion, to assist in the formation of Brothers in the Young Churches.

Still, it can be seen that at present these voluntary contributions are on a downward trend and that the needs are greater than the means to satisfy them; and as this is a question of vital need for an important sector of our own religious family, some necessary readjustments must be made regarding this contribution to the sharing fund.

It is clear that the purpose of this readjustment is not to put limits on your generosity nor on that of your students who wish to assist developing countries. You are always at liberty to take charge of mini-projects which are available to you through the medium of SECOLI.

It is in this sense that the following Chapter proposition states:

PROPOSITION 2

The General Chapter asks the Superior General and his Council:

- to extend the sharing fund so as to help the Districts in difficulty, particularly with regard to initial and continuing formation;
- to encourage the Districts to share personnel — according to their means — with the sectors of the Institute in need of it.

For this Purpose:

1. Every year, the General Council will make a study of those needs. It will apportion among the Districts — taking into consideration their true financial situation and the twinning commitments they have in this regard — the contribution necessary to make up the sharing fund.

2. The present twinning system will be maintained. The General Council will study the best way to extend the twinning system to other missionary sectors.

3. As for "mini-projects", the present policy will be maintained. SECOLI will collect and study the requests and will then propose them to some Districts. Those Districts that contribute to the implementation of such "mini-projects" will be directly informed of the use of the funds.

Our contribution to the sharing fund will in no way diminish our financial obligations to the Institute as a whole. The central administration cannot function normally without a minimum budget based upon the support of the Districts of the Institute. This is the purpose of the Chapter proposition concerning the financial contribution of each District.

PROPOSITION 3

"That the General Chapter in accord with Statute 110d approve the system of contributions from the Districts to the Central Administration of the Institute that have been in use for the past ten years."

1.2. LASALLIAN STUDIES AND CONTINUING FORMATION

The life of the Founder as well as his various pedagogical and spiritual writings continue to attract the interest of the Brothers more and more. The different basic formation programmes, the themes of the annual retreats and various sessions organized within the Districts are largely inspired by these writings. That is to say that the Brothers today are more and more seeking the benefits of this invaluable treasure which the Founder has left us in his person as well as in his works.

The current of interest in De La Salle is not limited to the confines of our communities. More and more the young people in our schools, a great number of the lay teachers, as well as other personnel who are close to us in our ministry, are asking us to share the Lasallian spirit with them.

This desire and love to know the Founder better, this wish to share the Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality with those alongside whom they work, has spurred the Brothers on to become better acquainted with the Founder by a systematic study of his writings and his life.

The Lasallian studies pursued during the last 30 years have strongly contributed to the spiritual renovation of the Institute. This has been possible thanks to the perseverance, and a remarkable professional competence, of an entire team of "Lasallian researchers" inspired by their love of the Founder and by their desire of making him better known to the Brothers and to the entire Lasallian family.

This first generation of "researchers" has deserved well of the Institute, but the reward which would honor them best, would be to find successors to whom to pass on the torch. We must think about replacements. In this perspective, the Institute ought to promote the training of new specialists on the Founder, not only at the center of the Institute but also at the Regional and District levels; they will be called upon, in the next 10 to 15 years, to succeed these valiant pioneers.

We must also popularize the results of this research, to

put them in the hands and at the disposal of all Brothers and other persons interested in Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy. Hence, popularization of this research has an important role. Therefore, at all levels of the Institute the proper means should be taken to bring this about effectively.

This consistent and on-going La Sallian research is written about elsewhere in the perspective of the conversion to which we are invited by the Chapter. In fact, each one of us is invited to search for our origins; was not the Institute in its beginnings, the fruit of the personal conversion of John Baptist De La Salle and his first disciples?

The following proposition, voted by the Chapter, incorporates this same idea.

PROPOSITION 4

During the intercapitular period, Brother Superior and his Council will entrust those in charge of CIL with the organisation of two long sessions (7-9 months) on Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Lasallian tradition.

The following objectives will be sought:

- a)** to form Brothers with a good knowledge of the Founder and of the history of the Institute, so that they will be ready to be at the service of the formation of Brothers and lay people;
- b)** to continue the work undertaken within the framework of Lasallian studies;
- c)** to multiply the centres for diffusion of Lasallian thinking on the ministry of Christian education.

1.3. THE MINISTRY OF THE BROTHERS AT RETIREMENT AGE

Statistics show that the rising of the average age is a phenomenon obtaining in the majority of the Districts of the Institute; and these ageing Districts comprise around 33% of the total number of Brothers. The Chapter has acted on this fact as well as on the multiple consequences which flow from it: the paucity of personnel for our works, overburdening our apostolate, reluctance with regard to our vocation programme, questioning the future, etc. The Chapter equally took cognizance of the fact that this ageing affects all the Regions of the Institute, in varying degree it is true, but the average age is rising in all the Districts with very rare exceptions.

Further, in several regions, government legislation is forcing our Brothers to give up their teaching activities at an age when it is still possible to have direct apostolic commitments. The novelty of the phenomenon lies in the substantial number of Brothers each year who have to experience the beginning of a veritable exodus. We must go ahead, delving deeper in the search for an appropriate ministry which is in keeping with the Lasallian charism, with the conviction that "every Brother, whatever his age may be, has a role to play in the vitality of the Institute."

The situation of the ageing Districts, difficult though it may be, is not however without a solution and a way of hope lies ahead. If at retirement age, we can say that one way of living out our apostolate is drawing to a close, we can also affirm that a thousand other apostolic possibilities, some of them never tried before, are beginning. We therefore must engage ourselves in a collective experience of prayer and faith in order to discover the will of God for us "here and now"; we have to specify the new developments and emphases of the elements of our identity as Brothers, and we must build up an association of a spiritual and apostolic nature with the laity seeking this from us. We must find an expression, a renewed image of our Lasallian identity, attract youth in search of a vocation. All of this requires us to be in the state

of continuing formation. So, it is within this perspective that the General Chapter calls upon the Institute at all levels to offer to retired Brothers and those approaching retirement the means of renewing themselves according to the charism of the Institute during this stage of their existence.

PROPOSITION 5

In order to help Brothers close to retirement or already retired, to look for new adapted forms of apostolic ministry, as a response to a new call by God, it is proposed that:

1. The Superior General and his Council organise an international session of formation to prepare animators to be at the service of the Brothers.

2. Regions or Districts organise programmes of formation, retreats, and meetings in order to allow Brothers to live fully this stage of their life.

1.4. OUR LAY TEACHERS AND THE LASALLIAN FAMILY

The General Chapter has allowed us to investigate both the impact and the novelty of the Lasallian Family. To our amazement, we have witnessed how the spirit of Saint John Baptist De La Salle can animate numerous Christian educators who wish to live out their educational commitment, inspired by the experience and teaching of our Founder. Many of them also wish to multiply and deepen their relations with us, with our Brothers, our Communities, our Districts, and even with the Institute as a whole.

We believe that this fact, every day more widespread, is a call from God to us Brothers to change our perspective and our way of fulfilling the ministry the Church has confided to us.

If, up until the past couple of decades we considered ourselves as the "proprietors" of our work and mission, now we are being asked to consider our work as a ministry in which a great number of lay people who are already working with us are being called upon to participate. Thanks to this integration of Brothers and lay people working together in a common ministry, our schools will be better and we will be able to offer a service of greater quality to the Church.

This was already indicated by the Brothers Visitors united together for the Intercapitular Meeting here in Rome in 1981. We invite the Brothers to reread and share the wisdom and timely words directed to us during that time (cf. Circular 415, pages 22 to 26).

Now, under the impulse of the Chapter, all of us must assume the new dimension which the Lasallian Family is progressively taking on. There is opening before us a new path along which we must travel.

We Brothers continue to be the mainstay of the Lasallian experience. In the years to come, we shall have to continue deepening our charism and developing our spirituality. Thus, we shall be disposed to accompany, sustain, and educate numerous groups of Christians — above all Christian educators — who wish to derive their inspiration from De La

Salle in order to grow as men and women of faith, at the service of the local Church, and as people particularly committed to the field of education.

At the same time, we shall be disposed to allow ourselves to be enriched by the educational and Christian experience of the lay people who are following this same road together with us so that the Spirit of our Founder may vivify the new generation of Brothers, youth, and Christian educators.

To help us more towards this perspective, the Chapter has formulated the following proposition:

PROPOSITION 6

That Brother Superior General and his Council address our lay teachers and the Lasallian Family by means of a Declaration or Circular Letter, expressing all that they envision for the present and future of our Educational Ministry.

This Circular will develop at length the MESSAGE which the Chapter has directed toward the lay teachers and the Lasallian Family, and which will be found in these pages. By the publishing of the said Circular, we shall strive to strengthen our position through the promotion of the laity as a sign of vitality of the Church. We shall make the Lasallian charism more precise so that the groups which are coming to us and those wishing to integrate themselves into our Institute can become more clearly defined.

1.5. THE POST-CAPITULAR MISSION: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

The General Chapter has considered the post-Capitular period to be extremely important for the Institute.

The spiritual experience born of the interpretation and actualization of the charism of our Founder, John Baptist De La Salle, this experience which has taken form within the new Rule, the messages, the propositions and the directives, must be assimilated and lived by all the Brothers.

During the final phase of the Chapter, a study group worked, in an intensive manner, on the strategy for implementing the work of the Chapter. The Brothers Capitulants themselves have returned to their regions to set up concrete projects relative to transmitting the Chapter to their respective Regions.

While it is true that the Chapter has launched a very strong appeal for personal and institutional conversion, it is likewise true that writings alone are not enough to convert persons nor to change mentalities.

The Brothers capitulants are the bearers of the experiences lived during the Chapter, and so it is principally they who must transmit and propogate this experience by personal contact.

We know that all the Brothers throughout the Institute have been awaiting the results of the General Chapter and have been praying for the Chapter's success. We shall continue, without doubt, to remain confident of God's help and the action of the Holy Spirit, but now the effects of the Chapter no longer depend upon the Capitulants alone, but upon all of us. To open our hearts to the light on grace, to be interested in understanding the documents, and to work to put them into practice: these are the dispositions our Lord expects of us at this time.

Conversion and renewal are the work of grace and our efforts. The various levels of government and animation have, at this moment, a specific role and particular task to fulfill: certainly all the Brothers will have to second this

work. We are therefore invited, personally and also according to the different roles played in the Institute, to assume our responsibility during this post-capitular period.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL, working from the centre of the Institute, will orient and support all the work of implementation by means of a concrete plan which will be made public at the opportune time. During our visits to the Regions and in our on-going relations with the Districts, we shall closely pursue the implementation of the Chapter.

THE REGIONS, through their assemblies and their Visitors' Conference will coordinate joint District actions and cooperation among them.

In the DISTRICTS, the first Chapter held after the recent General Chapter, will play a very particular role. Further, each District will draw up a yearly plan to achieve an effective implementation of the Chapter. It will, of course, be interesting to use, during this first stage, the newness of the impact of the particular message directed towards the Brothers, to promote their conversion, as well as the main emphases of the Chapter and the first overall vision of the Rule. During a second period, the assimilation and the deepening of the Rule will have to be brought to conclusion, by regrouping the Chapters according to items of interest, and according to the schema which the General Council will present in due time.

THE COMMUNITIES AND THE BROTHERS have in their personal and community plans a privileged instrument for conducting their work in a climate of prayer, commitment, and dialogue.

All the same, we suggest that the REGIONAL CENTRES of formation direct all their attention and their reflection to the transmission of the spirit of the new Rule and the capitular decisions.

In this post-capitular planning, we cannot limit ourselves only to the Brothers' community. The theme of the LAY TEACHERS and the LASALLIAN FAMILY, about which the Chapter showed itself so concerned, merits particular attention in our expectations and programmes. How to deliver the MESSAGE to all for whom it was intended, how to set

the process of progressive and effective formation into motion: all that will demand an effort which will be an authentic challenge for the years to come.

We shall have to use all the means at our disposition to develop a good pedagogy for transmitting the implementation of the Chapter. You are aware that we also have at our disposal a VIDEO-CASSETTE, produced during the capitulary session and which could, without doubt, serve to motivate and to arouse awareness and interest.

PART TWO

2.1. THE TWO MESSAGE OF THE 41st GENERAL CHAPTER

Our solicitude in studying, revising, and approving the new Rule did not prevent us from paying much attention to priority questions facing our Institute today. We have already mentioned this at the beginning of this letter.

We think that there are two groups of persons who will feel themselves challenged and affected by these priorities:

- first of all, the Brothers;
- secondly, the Lasallians, both those who already work for us, and those who are seeking from us an inspiration for their life of faith and their professional life.

We have felt the very great need of addressing to them, to all of them, a word of encouragement and hope. That is how the two messages came to be.

A MESSAGE TO THE BROTHERS because it seems very important to us that they should enter into the very experience of the Chapter, which has felt the need of appealing for **CONVERSION**:

- through our personal and communitarian conversion;
- through the revision of our administrative policies, at the higher and local levels, in order to be more faithful to the original intuition of our Founder;
- through our openness to the new needs of the most impoverished and most needy sectors of our Institute;
- through attention given to various Lasallian groups and movements which are multiplying around us.

We recognize, in fact, that the groups which are springing up inspired by the spiritual and pedagogical experience of Saint John Baptist De La Salle are numerous. We address a MESSAGE also to ALL OF THESE, while awaiting the Circular which we shall publish in a few months and in which we shall seek to describe more clearly all that pertains to Lay Teachers and the Lasallian Family. For, while knowing full well that these groups are awaiting some word from the General Chapter, it has not been easy for us to decide upon the precise type of word which we should address to them:

— because the Lasallian Groups are numerous and very diverse;

— because they have not all followed the same Lasallian route, and have not the same point of reference with the Institute;

— because we are aware that we are participating in a new historical fact in the Institute and which is going to identify us as “the Body of the Society,” as “the Lasallian Family.”

This MESSAGE is not intended for all Lasallians. We have chosen certain persons who are recognized as belonging to some constitutive group or movement of the Lasallian Family. Still, it is our intention that it will become a message-invitation for many men and women of good will who work with us but who have not yet acquired the Lasallian spirit but who are on the verge of discovering and accepting it.

It is finally a MESSAGE which we hand over to you so that you may work with it as Brothers, as well as educational Communities.

2.2. MESSAGE OF THE CHAPTER TO THE BROTHERS

Brothers,

You delegated us to bring your concerns and expectations before the 41st General Chapter. We share those concerns and expectations. *We very much appreciate the value of your lives, and the extent of your hope in the future of the Institute.*

Now as our community is dispersing, our work of common discernment coming to an end, we wish to share with you the signs of new life and vigour which we have experienced.

Through our reflection and discernment we have been able to see the activity of the Holy Spirit in every part of the Institute. We have become aware of the amazing relevance of the charism of John Baptist De La Salle for our time: the crucial role of the school in the evangelisation of young people, the option to go, by preference, to the poor, the concern for the promotion of justice, and our responses to formation needs of all kind.

These signs of the Spirit's activity call us to a more demanding fidelity. As the Body of the Institute, *we your Brothers Capitulants, send out an urgent CALL TO CONVERSION* — a conversion which will come about through both personal spiritual renewal and through a re-founding of our mission.

* * *

OUR PERSONAL RENEWAL

“You must be holy, uncommonly so”

We know of the many communities who have embarked upon a renewal of their prayer life. We know also the good number of Brothers who are men of the Spirit and who radiate their faith to others. For some this has been achieved

by generously giving time to their own continuing formation. For others, their demanding commitments, or contacts with prayer groups, have brought about their renewal. There are also those Brothers who possess the grace and strength to live out their later years in the peace and serenity of those who have been faithful servants.

However, do we not have to admit the signs of a disturbing loss of spiritual vitality, as many of you have noted? Is there not a darker side to the picture? In many cases, do we not have to commit ourselves even further to our quest for God?

Now is the time, we believe, to state, loudly and clearly, *that the Lord calls us, as Brothers of the Christian Schools, to live a life in the Spirit which is genuine, profound and focussed on our mission. That call is addressed to every single one of us.*

To be spiritually alive is to believe that the invisible and "mysterious" God is close to us, that He loves us every day of our lives.

To be spiritually alive is, while recognising that we are sinners, to hope even beyond our greatest expectations that we are pardoned, reconciled, and that in the Easter experience we possess resurrection.

To be spiritually alive is to have, within the poverty of our human limitations, a loving relationship with Jesus Christ; it is to possess a personal interior life which under the influence of the Spirit brings us to place ourselves in God's hands.

In saying this we are not speaking of an impossible ideal but of the very foundation of our vocation as Brothers.

**"The spirit of this Institute is first
and foremost a spirit of faith"**

Brothers, we are called to be inspired by a very profound spirit of faith. We have to be *men of faith*, a mature faith which determines our attitude, assessments and reactions to the everyday events of our lives: "What is most important and

to which the greatest attention should be given in a Community is that all who comprise it should possess the spirit which is proper to it..." (The Rule of 1718).

We entered the Institute to give ourselves to Christ and to young people with our Brothers. Today we face the challenge of living out that gift amidst stormy and difficult conditions. For the older ones among us our life has been lived to good purpose: we are called to continue in apostolic commitments in line with the purpose of the Institute. For those of us who are younger there is every reason to commit ourselves with all of our creative drives. We urge every Brother to set out once again in the footsteps of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, and to take on the challenge of giving oneself to God for the service of education for young people. To this end we would suggest the following three means.

"You live with your Brothers under the same Rule"

We, your Delegates, have prepared a final text of our post-Conciliar Rule, basing ourselves on the excellent preparatory work that had been done. We worked prayerfully on the text together, as Brothers, asking the Spirit to accompany us. *We ask you to work generously at familiarising yourselves with this Rule when it reaches you.* Our desire was that it should be both steeped in the charism of the Holy Founder and meaningful for our international Institute today. May it gradually take on living form in our community life. We feel certain that the Rule will ground us in faith and bring us renewal in our vocation.

"Apply yourself in a special way to meditative prayer"

We encourage you to renew your practice of meditative prayer. Through this, the first and most important of our exercises, we enter into an enduring interior struggle. A closeness to God cannot be achieved without the experience of desert and the purifying heat of the crucible. Our life is

enriched by sharing God's presence with our Brothers, in this silent communion with Jesus Christ. "The more wholeheartedly you apply yourself to meditative prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more will God make it easier for you to touch their hearts" (Med. 148.2).

"Rules that I have imposed upon myself"

We suggest that the personal plan, as now indicated in the Rule, be used as a way of regularly taking stock, in God's presence. This in order to redirect our lives and to take whatever means may be necessary to achieve that.

* * *

OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSION

"He has chosen you to carry out his work"

Brothers, the apostolate you are carrying out in the 1200 works of the Institute throughout the world is notable. In the schools you are devoting your energies to teaching and pedagogy. Beyond the school, you invest yourselves in numerous educational activities: literacy programmes, "popular education" (as in South America), educational media, centres for young drug addicts, and other such works. Amid many difficulties you are trying to fulfil your ministry of Christian education.

Wherever you are present, you are concerned for those young people suffering from poverty in its various forms. A certain number of you have directed your energies to the most deprived. Others have left your homeland in order to be at the service of the Young Churches or those areas where Christians are a minority of the local population. *Your dedication and love for young people, shown in numerous everyday signs, is of shining worth.*

But we are called to go even further, to be more than merely good professionals, and *to re-commit ourselves with determination to our mission.*

“The purpose of this Institute is to provide a Christian upbringing for children, and it is for this purpose that we direct schools”

Today, more than ever, our Institute is “greatly needed.”

In his day, John Baptist De La Salle, being a man of God, had seen the urgent need of an educational service to the young and established free schools to answer that need.

Today the Church affirms the importance of the school as a place of evangelisation. The Catholic school “must do everything that is necessary in order that Christ’s Gospel be a source of enlightenment and discernment which will be of help to young people...” (Address of John Paul II to the Capitulants, 16.05.1986).

Equally the Church expresses clearly her preferential love for the poor. For this purpose She calls forth apostles from well-established Church communities and the Young Churches alike. Among these apostles, Christian teachers must offer the human family the model of a community governed by love.

Political, economic and social forces continue to deny the poor, in addition to the Message of Salvation, access to education and the respect for their dignity to which they are entitled. Education is the necessary means by which the underprivileged, and those who suffer rejection of whatever kind, have access to the justice and freedom which Christ brings.

The difficulties which our Institute is experiencing at the present time will only be resolved by a genuine return to our origins. We were founded in response to precise needs, and we will continue to exist and develop only if we respond to the present-day forms of educational deficiencies. This calls for a transformation and conversion of our works. We as a Chapter recognise this. In a prophetic yet realistic way, we

must draw the necessary conclusions. The challenge before us is a critical one. May each Brother, and the entire Institute, find in it a call to faith and action.

Faced with the many needs of countless young people, a greater effort for the fostering of vocations to our Institute is vital. All of us must make greater efforts in the encouraging and accompanying of those young people who wish to commit themselves to follow Christ.

“Devote the whole of your life to giving them a Christian upbringing”

The Chapter asks each Brother, whatever his age, to choose one of the following commitments in order to further the conversion of the Institute, in his own local situation. Such a choice will be made in agreement with the District and with those who have charge of the District:

— to assist in bringing our schools and other educational commitments more in line with this Message;

— to take part in the foundation of new educational works, especially of new types of school for the most deprived;

— to make oneself available for a Region of the Institute that needs help, in particular within the Young Churches;

— to be available for formation work with Brothers or with lay people;

— to make oneself available for educational tasks of the Church for the promotion of justice and the educational service of the poor.

The Chapter asks the entire Institute to express its conversion in a three-fold manner.

“Love them tenderly”

Our conversion will be genuine only if it bring us to a further commitment to the poor. In this regard, we cannot be content merely to direct works where the marginalised and delinquent are welcomed. In addition to the serious need to multiply such works to the limit of our possibilities, the Institute has the primary duty to invent a new type of school for those young people, increasingly numerous, who are wounded and disregarded. This need will lead us to make choices as to the institutions we will direct, to adapt our pedagogy, and to retain the necessary autonomy with regard to certain official educational systems which could be restrictive. Those of us who exercise their ministry in more favourable social conditions must also preserve within themselves a zeal and prophetic awareness as regards the promotion of justice: our service to the poor consists in building a world where the promises of the Gospel take on real form.

“Union in a community is a precious jewel”

We must broaden our field of vision, beyond our communities or Districts, to take in the dimension of the whole Institute. This is the precise purpose of what we refer to as *interdependence*. This interdependence should be seen as a new dimension in our living as Brothers, in addition to its administrative and juridical aspects. Members of one single Body, we are invited to place in common our resources, skills, our apostolic and spiritual wealth.

This invitation would be of primary benefit to the *Young Churches* in the Third World. Beyond the deficiencies we all feel, some sectors are seriously handicapped because of isolation, lack of financial means, the need for formation personnel or because of challenges posed by growth. Commitment to the missions is an essential element of our vocation as Brothers.

We must also show solidarity with our ageing Districts, and give Central Government the means to provide inspiring

leadership for the Institute. This will demand of us an emphasis on generosity, a spirit of sharing, receptivity and availability. *We will find joy in these qualities and an expression of our present-day reality of the Exodus: Go and leave your land...*

“Co-workers in the salvation of souls”

A further, insistent call comes to us from the Lasallian family. We are not indifferent to those many men and women who, in one way or another, claim a share in the spirit of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, and who wish to be more intimately involved in our ministry and heritage. There are also young people who are fired by the Lasallian ideal which channels their energies into accomplishing amazing things. We recognise a sign of the Spirit in this new and powerful movement. We wish to play a part in the formation of these new disciples. We want to work together with them so that, through our works, there may be a greater participation of the laity in the mission of the Church.

Brothers, this Message is addressed to the Institute as a whole and to each one of us in particular.

We are united to the unceasing efforts of those Brothers who, in their commitment to young people, are working in schools and trying to make them places where the Gospel is revealed.

We understand the difficult struggle of our Brothers who are sent to the very poorest.

We share the enthusiasm of our missionary Brothers who wish to see the Church extend and grow.

We share in the sufferings and distress of our Brothers who are sick, undergoing trials or living in isolation.

We thank our aged Brothers for the gift of their lives to young people. We look to their wisdom and faith as an inspiration to those who continue their work.

Brothers, in this personal renewal and re-dedication to our mission, we put our trust in the Holy Spirit. May it

please God "to give increase to our Institute and make it produce good from day to day..." (Med. 207.3).

The General Chapter commemorates the 300th anniversary of the first Assembly of the Brothers in 1686. With the deep conviction that Saint John Baptist De La Salle remains a prophet for today and the future we are relying on you Brothers, so that the Institute may all the better be able to carry the Gospel to the humblest and poorest.

2.3. MESSAGE FROM THE 41st GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "LASALLIAN FAMILY"

Dear Friends,

Blessed be God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who sends us His Spirit to unite us and to help us bear witness to the Hope that is within us!

We are the Chapter Delegates who, since the 7th of April, have met in Rome for our 41st General Chapter of the Institute.

During these weeks we have been reflecting much on what has been already achieved, our plans, our difficulties and our creative solutions, our fears and our hopes. We have placed value, in a special way, on the efforts of so many men and women who work in our centers through the contribution of their educational commitment, their faithful support in the mission of the Institute, their creativity, their constancy.

Now, as the Assembly draws to a close, we wish to send you this friendly word, of greeting and support, of gratitude and hope.

The Lasallian Family

We have especially thought about the LASALLIAN FAMILY. This is a new phenomenon that over these past decades has been developing in the Institute with ever increasing strength and creativity.

When we speak of the LASALLIAN FAMILY we refer to that body of persons who make up those movements and groups all of which have been forming according to the spiritual and pedagogical experience of St. John Baptist De La Salle.

The Brothers' communities constitute the "heart", as it were, of this Lasallian experience, like a "faithful memory" of the Lasallian Spirit.

We deem it important to single out several of the constant elements that are all part of the Lasallian experience:

- Its inspiration in the Gospel.
- Its spirit of faith and zeal.
- Its work in the field of Christian education.
- Its love and its preferential option for the young and the poor.
- Its communion with the Church, especially with the parish and the diocese.
- Its basis in Lasallian spirituality.
- Its relationship with a Lasallian community.

The Lasallian experience was born and nourished in the midst of a strong Catholic spiritual atmosphere. Urged forward by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, St. John Baptist De La Salle first, and the communities of the Brothers afterwards, tried to live the “spirit of Christianity” organizing their schools as “Christian Schools”.

Today we recognize that in several parts of the Institute there are numerous non-Christian educators who are inspired by the experience of De La Salle to grow in an interior spirit, to be faithful to their own spiritual pathway and to open themselves to the calls of the universal movements of the Spirit of God.

We encourage these men and women in their religious quest. We open our own educational communities to them as spaces where they may grow spiritually.

A diversity of groups

Today, there are several groups that constitute the Lasallian Family and complement each other mutually.

There are those LAY CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS who work in our schools and who are aware of their participation in the mission and spirituality of the Institute. We refer, in particular, to those who form part of some Association and who strive to live their teaching as a Christian commitment.

There are **THE FAMILIES** who confide their children to us in order to assure for them a really Christian education. In addition, they are concerned to find in our schools a contact with the Church and the possibility of forming Christian communities.

There are the different movements of **LASALLIAN YOUTH** which in their encounters and groups are experiencing, together with the Brothers, the meaning of Faith, Brotherhood and Service.

They offer to us a surprising identification with those that seek to be part of the Lasallian Family. They are marked by a strong spirit of prayer, a serious reflection on the Founder whose mystique attracts and convinces them and calls them to aid those who are most needy.

There are the **LASALLIAN VOLUNTEERS** who pledge themselves for a definite period of time to a Lasallian educational service among the poor, or in the Third World.

We have the members of the **SIGNUM FIDEI** Brotherhood who, inspired by Lasallian spirituality, accept a life style and live a consecration to grow as men and women of Faith, radiating Christian life in the local Church and the world of today through their own educational plan.

We remember the **AFFILIATED MEMBERS** and **BENEFACTORS** who devotedly support the work of the Brothers.

We have the members of the **UNION OF CATECHISTS OF JESUS CRUCIFIED AND OF MARY IMMACULATE**. This is a lay institute founded in Turin in 1917 by Brother Teodoro in order to exercise a specific apostolate with the poor by means of catechetics and professional formation.

There are the **LASALLIAN ASSOCIATIONS**, part of the International Lasallian Confederation, who support the evangelizing and educational work of the Brothers and who find in de La Salle the inspiration and encouragement they need for their own life of Faith and for their commitment to the Church and the world.

There are the **ALUMNI** and **OLD BOYS** groups, who may or may not be integrated into the Lasallian Associations, and who are the product of our educational mission. These deserve our attention because in their personal course and

life of faith they need our accompaniment and encouragement. Also, the good soil they received in the Lasallian school must be turned over and enriched by means of their apostolate in the local Church and their own commitment to a more just society.

The PARENTS and FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE BROTHERS who have partaken joyfully in the Lasallian spirit and who support us with their prayers. They also, at times, will join some Lasallian Association.

We thank God for the wonders that have been wrought in our midst. We are happy to discover this vitality. We know that the Lasallian inspiration is not completely spent in the groups that we have mentioned. We are attentively observing the birth of other experiences:

— The girl students, women teachers and friends who feel themselves called to live a religious life having been touched by the inspiration of De La Salle.

— The groups of priests who look to join together or with some community of the Brothers in order to live their ministry with direct reference to the spirituality of St. John Baptist De La Salle.

— The quickening of a “Third Order” composed of a small group of Lasallians attentive to the Spirit that is manifesting Himself to them, and in profound communion with the Brother Visitor of the place.

Our message

We salute all these groups and wish to address a cordial word to you.

We say to you that we value the efforts that you are making to live your life of Faith, finding inspiration in the Lasallian spirit and open to the local Church.

At this time, we want to urge you to:

— continue to go forward along the pathways you have traced out, enlightened and encouraged by St. John Baptist De La Salle and guided by his Brothers;

— strengthen your relationships with the communities of the Brothers;

— support the educational and evangelical mission of the Institute;

— help us to be creative and faithful to open ourselves to the new demands that Society and the Church are putting to us;

— ask God to bless our Institute with an increase of many good vocations to the Brothers and Lay Christian Educators.

And for now

We know that there is so much to be done. At times we have the feeling that all must begin again, so numerous and pressing and new are the needs of our world and our Churches. However, we are convinced that, together, we can respond with courage to the demands of our time:

- the needs of the generation to come;
- the calls for a new evangelization;
- the ever-present cry of the poor;
- the renewal of the Christian School;
- the fostering of Christian Educators, both lay and religious;
- the evangelization of culture.

The challenge of this program requires us to work together, now more than ever — Brothers and lay persons.

We attach particular importance to the “animators”, men and women, Brothers and seculars, who are capable of accompanying and sustaining, of stimulating and making genuine. They are capable, above all, of discerning in the Spirit of Jesus that which is the Will of God for us.

Our CREDO

The challenge of this program fortifies our common CREDO:

— We believe in our mission: to educate young people in a Christian way. For this reason we invite you to work mightily so that the Lasallian schools be marked, besides a family spirit and the quality of the instruction, by their evangelizing character. This would mean the explicit announcement of the Good News of Jesus Christ, an education for Peace and the Promotion of Justice.

— We believe in our lay vocation. We, with our religious consecration, and you, with your Baptismal consecration.

— The Second Vatican Council intuitively knew of the importance of a knowledgeable and responsible laity in the Church to bring about “the consecration of the world.” For this reason, the Lasallian School, transformed in a Christian Educational Community, is called upon to be a place of on-going formation in the lay vocation that we share.

— We believe in our common heritage :the Lasallian spirituality. We are the heirs to a rich spiritual patrimony left to us by St. John Baptist De La Salle which we must preserve and cause to grow each new day. In this patrimony many of you have found the ordinary way to unify your life of Faith and your professional activity. In it many more Christian Educators can discover a new meaning to their personal existence and a new dimension for their moral constitution and life in the Church.

Dear Friends:

— Please accept these words that we put to you, possibly with too much haste. They are somewhat like a prologue to the message that our Brother Superior General, John Johnston, and his council — newly elected in this Chapter — will direct to you in greater depth by means of a Circular Letter at a later date.

— Meanwhile, we repeat our salutations to you and want to tell you that we see in you the action of the Spirit and His influence over our Institute.

— For this we are profoundly joyful: The Lord continues to call us through the intuitions of St. John Baptist De La Salle.

Together, let us bless God Our Father for the hope that He has deigned to raise up amongst us.

Rome, June 3rd, 1986.

THE CLOSING ADDRESS

FINALITY AND SPIRIT

41st GENERAL CHAPTER: CONCLUDING REMARKS

BROTHER JOHN JOHNSTON, S.G.

Seven or eight years ago I participated in a three week renewal program for Brothers of our Asia and Australia Region. One afternoon during the coffee break, a Brother from Australia made a remark that I have treasured since that moment. He said, "You know it's really quite extraordinary. Here I am in Singapore, my first trip out of my District. I'm associated with Brothers from many different countries of Asia, Brothers whose cultures are quite different from mine. And yet, from the very beginning of this program, I have felt completely at home."

The experience of this Australian Brother is an experience I have had many times, particularly during the past ten years.

This experience many of you have had at this Chapter. You have mentioned it at prayer and liturgy.

What is it that makes possible such profound unity, despite the significant differences of language, culture, styles of expression, styles of life.

The answer is as obvious as it is profound. What makes us one is that we are sons of the same father: John Baptist De La Salle. We are Brothers because we have his life, his spirit flowing through our bloodstreams.

A family celebration

Brothers, a General Chapter is of its very nature a family celebration. It is a time when we experience and celebrate our brotherhood. This experience of solidarity these past two months has helped us to become more aware of our Brothers throughout the world — Brothers, like us, called by God in his Providence, that is to say, in his love and concern for youth, poor youth particularly, called to make his loving and saving presence a visible and effective reality among young people.

The Chapter is a time for praising and thanking God for this great gift of vocation. It's a time for taking cognizance, not, in the first place, of our shortcomings, but, on the contrary, of the innumerable positive things that the Lord is doing through the Brothers in more than eighty countries. Brothers, as the Lord's instruments, we are having an impact far greater than we give ourselves credit for. Let us never be afraid to acknowledge the Good that the Lord does through us. Let us praise him and thank him that we are able to bring his love to those he has confided to our care.

Brothers, as this Chapter comes to a close, let us bring into our awareness all of our Brothers throughout the world: young, middle-aged, old, active, retired, in Good health, in poor health; our Brothers living and working in countries where political, economic, and social conditions and structures favor the exercise of our ministry; as well as our Brothers living and working in countries where poverty, political oppression, violence, and civil strife render our service extremely difficult and even impossible.

Let us recall our Brothers in countries where the Institute has been officially suppressed and the Brothers strictly forbidden to live as Brothers; as well as our Brothers in areas where we exist but are forbidden to exercise our ordinary apostolate and are isolated from the rest of the Institute. Let us recall them today. Let us keep them in our minds and hearts always. Their example of fidelity and courage is an inspiration to us all.

Let us recall our Brothers in areas that are this very

day torn by violence or war. Is it possible for us to imagine even what our Brothers in Lebanon have lived these past twelve years? And what of our Brothers in several countries of Central America, in Sri Lanka, in Northern Ireland, in South Africa?

A General Chapter — and this General Chapter particularly — calls to mind not only our Brothers but all those associated with us in our international family: our colleagues, the parents of our youngsters, our former students, the members of our boards, our Benefactors and Friends, our students themselves.

The leadership of Bro. José Pablo

It is in this context of international brotherhood and sisterhood; in this context of praise and thanksgiving to God for his unspeakable goodness, that I want to reflect on the great gift of leadership that has been ours these past ten years.

I am speaking of course of the leadership of Brother José Pablo and his General Council. Brother Pablo's 1985 Christmas Letter, as well as the General Chapter report, enables any reader to perceive his vision, his goals and objectives, his priorities. His concern that service of the poor and the promotion of justice become in fact dominant characteristics of the identity of the Brothers is clear. This concern led him to give high priority to the missionary role of the Institute. He took a strong stand on the schools as the privileged, but not exclusive, instrument of the Brothers' apostolate, always insisting, however, that De La Salle wanted his schools to be far more than Good academic institutions; he wanted them to be Christian communities of faith and love, creatively adapted to the needs of the students, and effectively available to the poor. He urged the Brothers to accept wholeheartedly their role as animators and to give the religious education and pastoral care of young people their highest priority. At the same time he fostered the growth of the Lasallian Family in all its dimensions.

He addressed consistently, clearly, and emphatically the

question of our identity and mission in this rapidly evolving world. He challenged the Brothers to be men of faith and zeal, and to live this spirit "together and by association." His Christmas Letter of 1984 on prayer was extremely well received by the Brothers and has contributed significantly to the ongoing process of strengthening our prayer life.

In my brief remarks on the day of my election, I commented on another characteristic of Brother Pablo's Leadership. It is a characteristic that a leader cannot strive for directly. It is rather a judgment that is made on his leadership. This characteristic is credibility. It is a compliment of the highest order to say to Brother Pablo and to the members of the General Council that their leadership enjoyed the credibility of the Brothers. They held him and his Council in high esteem, finding in them a sense of direction and hope, and a source of unity and strength.

To Brother José Pablo, to Brother Patrice Marey, to Brother Pedro Ruedell, to Brother José Cervantes, to Brother Vincent Rabemahafaly, to Brother Benildo Feliciano, and, I must include my own name, the Institute is grateful. I am not going to say anything specific about each member of the General Council — with one exception. I want to pay special tribute to the man who for the past twenty years has given himself and his extraordinary gifts of intelligence, leadership, organization, and profound love for the Founder and for the Institute unreservedly to the service of the Lord and of the Institute and its mission. I am referring, of course, to Bro. Patrice.

Brother José Pablo and members of the General Council, you have provided bold and creative leadership; the Brothers have respected that leadership; they have responded to it; and the Institute is better as a result. In the name of the Capitulants, in the name of all our Brothers throughout the world, I want to say, thank you.

The new rule

Brothers, what we have accomplished at this Chapter is quite remarkable. We have brought to a successful con-

clusion a long process of discerning who it is God wants us to be, what it is he wants us to do, and how he wants us to do it. We have arrived at a marvelous consensus on all the vital issues and have accepted overwhelmingly a new expression of the fruit of our discernment. Our new rule will now be presented to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for approval. In the meantime the text of our Rules and Constitutions and Book of Government adopted by the 40th General Chapter in 1976 remains our official normative text. Nevertheless it is our intention to circulate, as soon as possible, copies of the new text, so that the Brothers can begin even now to study the Constitutions and Statutes, to meditate on them personally and communally, and thus begin the process of internalizing them, of making them their own.

Specific themes

But, in addition to our study of the Brothers' vocation comprehensively, we have given special attention to certain topics and themes. We have expressed our positions in messages, propositions, and recommendations. Let me reflect briefly on a few of these themes, themes that will determine to a large extent our priorities, goals, objectives, and programs during the next seven years.

1. Association and interdependence

Brothers, we are one. We are an International Religious Institute at the service of the Church. While it is perfectly normal and necessary that we function as Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations, this Chapter has consistently reminded us that we are one, calling us to association and interdependence, calling us to fight against "provincialism." Brothers, we have to help our Brothers appreciate the power for God that we possess if we really live and work together and by associations as an International Religious Family. This

commitment will require us to know one another better and to be disposed to share our personnel, our finances, and even to make ourselves available personally for service in areas with special needs.

2. Our role as evangelizers, catechists, youth ministers

I am not going to attempt a precise definition of those terms. The fundamental orientation the Chapter has demanded is, I think, perfectly clear. We must take at face value our founder's consistent exhortations to help young people grow in the spirit of christianity. Our service is not limited to the young, but they are our principal focus. God has confided them to our care. And I am thinking here of youth in other countries, as well as in our own.

Brothers, we are called to be experts on youth. We have to know how to respond to them in their search for meaning. We must be able to stand with them as loving Brothers as they wrestle with doubt, fear, and frustration. We must know how to help them to find structures which will enable them to pursue their ideals and channel their energies.

Helping the young today to become aware of God in their life and to commit themselves to him and to his service is not easy. But it is precisely to that mission that the Lord, in his providential love for young people today, calls us.

In recent years considerable progress has been made in strengthening our catechetical and pastoral activities, at least in certain parts of the Institute. But much remains to be done. Assisting our Brothers to become more effective youth evangelizers will surely be a major thrust of the next seven years.

3. Solidarity with the poor

Once again a General Chapter has called the Institute to greater solidarity with the poor. Whatever our particular function or assignment, we are to be in solidarity with the

poor, the Declaration (32) tells us. Solidarity means we have to “SEE” the poverty that exists, seek to understand it, “FEEL” it and its consequences. Solidarity means we have to become more aware of our own attitudes, feelings, prejudices and be disposed to confront them and to change when necessary. It means we have to live as persons of modest condition; otherwise, as St. De La Salle says, we “shall acquire rich tastes and shall no longer be able to refrain from applauding the language of the rich, however pernicious it may be.” (Last will and Testament).

Solidarity with the poor means that we have to educate for justice, that is to say, help our young people to “SEE” the poverty and injustice that exist, to learn the social orientations of the Church, and to have structured opportunities to serve those in need.

Finally, Brothers, solidarity with the poor requires the Institute to move more decisively towards the direct service of the poor, both in our own countries and in other countries with urgent needs. If we do not see such service as feasible for us personally at this particular time, we can contribute by supporting wholeheartedly the efforts of our Districts to render our educational service of the poor more significant.

4. The Lasallian Family movement

Brothers, so much has been said already about this essential theme the last few days, that I need do little more than declare my firm belief that the invitation to share our Lasallian heritage is a call from the Spirit in our day. This call requires us to rethink not only the role of those who collaborate with us, but our own role as well. Following this movement and giving guidance to it will certainly be a major priority of the General Council during the next seven years.

Brothers, these four themes (my list is neither exhaustive nor definitive) spring from our reflections on the finality of the Institute and from our reading of the signs of the times. The challenge for each of us is clear, major, and exciting.

Finality and the spirit of the Institute

Brothers, we can see immediately the link between finality and spirit. Our Founder realized very early that if the schools he was helping to create were to be effective centers of Christian education, the teachers had to be "certain kinds of persons." That is why he began the process of forming them, a process which led, imperceptibly but surely, to the foundation of our Institute.

This dynamic link between finality and spirit, De La Salle captured in the early Rule. After the Chapter on the finality of the Institute, we find the Chapter on spirit. If the Institute is to achieve its end, its members have to be certain kinds of persons, men with a special spirit. This spirit, according to De La Salle, is indispensable. Nothing is more important than possessing it. The Brothers must do everything possible to grow in this spirit. The novices must be initiated into it. Possessing this spirit is so indispensable that the Brother who lacks it is a dead member. De La Salle is simply describing what he has seen with his own eyes over the years. There are Brothers who are really alive and there are Brothers who are not: they lack life, enthusiasm, commitment; they lack spirit. They lack the spirit of the Institute.

What is this spirit? The Founder tells us that it is first, faith, and secondly, zeal. He does not say, secondarily, zeal, but secondly. Both faith and zeal are essential elements of our spirit. What he means by the two expressions is crystal clear. The man of faith is a man with a sense of God about him; he is sensitive to the presence of that Lord to whom he is totally consecrated. He sees things as God sees them, judges in the light of the gospel, knows that God is guiding him by his loving presence. He is an interior man, a recollected man, a man of prayer.

He is a zealous man. Zeal is of the essence of the Brothers' spirit, that spirit which is indispensable. In the sixteen meditations for the time of retreat, the Founder mentions zeal an astounding forty-six times. What he means by zeal is unambiguously clear: it is an "impassioned eagerness" for the growth of the young in the christian spirit, an eagerness

that is expressed in concrete and efficacious action on behalf of the young. It is a total commitment to announcing the gospel to the young, especially the young who are poor, helping them to find meaning and significance in their faith and to commit themselves to the Lord as christians. This zeal is to be so intense that the Brothers are to be ready to lay down their life, "so dear to you are the children confided to your care."

The Brother of the Christian Schools is a certain kind of person: a person with a particular spirit: a spirit of faith and zeal, a spirit which he lives in association with others who have experienced a similar call from God.

Means for growth in the spirit

Brothers, our Founder does not limit himself to describing the spirit. He provides the means the Brothers should take to grow in that spirit. Our new Rule has been faithful to this original inspiration. We have linked finality and spirit in the first Chapter. Then, we have, throughout the Rule, specified means that we must make our own if we want to acquire the spirit of our vocation. This is as it should be. A Religious Institute must not only propose certain goals to its members and describe its spirit, it must also incorporate in its life style the ordinary means for growing in that spirit. Our Declaration says clearly: "When the Brother enters religion to seek God and serve his kingdom, he expects that the Congregation will help him in this search and service. This it does by using every effort to help each Brother in his personal way to God. Thus Rules and structures are not established simply that they be kept, but their purpose is the service of persons... The Brother in turn respects these Rules and structures in his concern for the common good and recognizes that they are an integral part of Religious Life." (Declaration 19)

For this reason, Brothers, I rejoice that the Chapter has said clearly that the life style of the Brothers of the Christian Schools includes at least two hours of daily prayer and other

spiritual activities. Let us be clear. Without fidelity to the means we cannot grow in the spirit; without the spirit we cannot accomplish our finality.

A Brother with the spirit

Brothers, let me conclude by sharing with you a story of the spirit of faith and zeal in association. Seven years ago I had the unforgettable experience of visiting our Brothers in one of the countries of Eastern Europe, a country in which our Institute has been suppressed. The eight Brothers who were living at that time were scattered throughout the country. When I arrived at the dwelling of an eighty-five year old Brother, since deceased, I found him seated at a table praying the office of the Church. On the otherwise bare table was a copy of the French edition of the 1976 Rule, published in late 1976 and taken into the country in 1977 or 1978. It is likely therefore that that particular copy was less than two years old. I picked up the Rule and noticed that it was very worn, obviously from constant use. "Brother," I said, "It is evident that you read your Rule frequently." "Every day," he said, "This Rule is my contact with the Institute."

But that's not the end of the story. This eighty-five year old Brother took me next door to the parish Church for mass. He left me in the front pew, then climbed up to the organ loft where he played the organ and conducted a choir of twenty or so children.

He didn't play the organ like Brother Georges Ley. And the children didn't sing like the Vienna Boys choir. But they were magnificent!

A I left this Brother late that evening, profoundly moved by this experience of extraordinary fidelity, I thought to myself: this old man of eighty-five years, cut off from the mainstream of the Institute for forty years, is truly alive; he is a man with spirit, that spirit described by St. De La Salle: a spirit of faith and zeal, lived in profound association.

Thank God for the grace...

Brothers, may this General Chapter and its decisions and orientations help all of us to treasure our vocation more profoundly than ever and to remember always that it is God in his providence, that is to say, in his loving care for young people today, especially those who are poor, who calls us to be his ministers and ambassadors, to be his presence today. Let us take to heart our founder's exhortation: "Thank God for the grace he has given you of Sharing in the ministry of the Apostles... Take pride in your ministry by making yourselves, as St. Paul says, qualified ministers of the New Covenant" (MTR 7.3).

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