

They will call themselves **BROTHERS**



Circular 466
BROTHERS OF THE
CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
General Council

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CIRCULAR 466

January 1st, 2013

**They will call themselves
Brothers**

General Council

Via Aurelia – Rome, Italy

January 2013

Brothers of the Christian Schools

Generalate

Via Aurelia 476

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Lay-out:

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Index

Preface	5
Introduction: Being Brother in an Evolving World	9
Ch. 1. Being a Brother: A Life Centred on the Gospel	23
Ch. 2. Being a Brother: An Integrated Spirituality	43
Ch. 3. Being a Brother: Offering Others a Way of Life	59
Conclusion	75

Preface

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers unceasingly, calling to mind your work of faith and labour of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers loved by God, how you were chosen. For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the holy Spirit and with much conviction (1Thessalonians 1: 2-5).

Dear Brothers,

1. We wanted to begin this Circular with a Pauline greeting aimed at all the Brothers of our Institute because, like Paul, we give thanks to God for the gift of each Brother and we pray for each of you because, in spite of our limits and weaknesses, our lives and the mission of our Institute are nourished and driven by faith made manifest in works, love expressed in thousands of ways and hope in Jesus Christ our Lord.
2. It is very significant that, after this greeting, like the majority of Pauline greetings written to the Christian communities at the beginning of his letters, the central theme is the Good News, the Gospel of Christ. We invite you to read and reflect on this Circular as a logical continuation of Circular 461 which was entitled **Associated for the Lasallian Mission...An Act of Hope**. As we thank the Lord for this providential time in which we live, together with our associates in carrying out the mission of human and Christian education that has been entrusted to us, it seems like an opportune time for us to reflect now on the Brother's life and mission in this new context, con-

vinced of the current need of our vocation. And, at the same time, we are deeply motivated by the Founder who made his own the call of the Gospel: *You are all Brothers*¹ and by the Rule of 1718 that says: *They will be called Brothers*². This is also the central theme of our Circular and the reason why we chose this name.

3. Indeed, we want to share with you the reflection we have done at the General Council level during recent months on our vocation as Brothers, with the knowledge that in our leadership ministry and governance we have seen the reality of our Institute from the three priorities that were already present in our last General Chapter:

- The centrality of the Gospel in our lives and in our mission.
- Lasallian spirituality that unifies our being and our doing.
- The pastoral ministry of vocations, as the result of a fully realized life based on the Gospel.

4. That the Gospel should be the focus and center of our lives is a teaching we received from the Founder and which Vatican II strongly reminded members of consecrated life institutes. For our Founder it was clear that both for our personal sanctification as well as for the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us the Gospel should be the first inspiration, motivation, and sustenance. *How fortunate you are to carry the holy Gospel with you at all times, for in it is found all the treasures of the knowledge and wisdom of Jesus Christ.*³ *Be faithful to this practice. It is from this holy book that you must draw the truths which you must teach your disciples every day, in order to give them by this means the true spirit of Christianity. For the same reason, nourish your soul daily with the holy maxims contained in this wonderful book, and make them familiar to you by often meditating on them.*⁴ But the Gospel is also the guarantee of an authentic community life, a place of mutual evangelization for the Brothers: *It is mainly in community that good example is most notable and has the most power and efficacy. All those who live there together encourage one another to practice what is most holy and most perfect in the Gospel maxims, because when someone does something*

¹ Matthew 23: 8

² *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1718, 1.1

³ Reference by De La Salle to Col 2 :3

⁴ Meditation 159.1

good, others feel ashamed not to do it. Moreover, according to an axiom of the philosophers, both the practice and the love of what is right are easily communicated in community to those who have a little good will to do what is right.⁵

5. We are also convinced that our spirituality not only has had but continues to have an extraordinary transforming force and dynamism. As we well know it has to do with a unifying spirituality whose Christological center of attention is not so much perfection itself but service to one's neighbor, solidarity with those who suffer, dedication to the young people who need us. Therefore it is a spirituality that keeps us open to reality and to the needs of others. We know also that the spirit of faith and zeal plays a unifying role that helps us to see reality, not as something profane or sacred, but as something sacramental. Everything is revealed to us in God: "the rags of the children" make Jesus present to us⁶, the school, "God's work", becomes a God-enlightened space where the Brother, by his concrete and effective love towards the young, makes visible the face of God, discovered every morning in prayer face-to-face.⁷
6. For its part, we believe that Vocation Ministry should be the mature fruit of a Brother's life lived with Gospel authenticity. The first motivation and condition for effective vocation ministry is to believe in ourselves. We believe that our life as Brothers continues to have, today more than ever, irreplaceable value. Young people want to encounter authentic consecrated persons, faithful to the commitments they have made. They are not looking for perfection in us but yes, they do seek honesty and coherence in people who are aware of their own vulnerability. We should offer a living witness of our five vows as an option for freedom, in view of a full and happy life, as a journey towards wisdom that helps us to control our inner drives, makes us free, and associates us with the educational service of the poor. At the same time, we need to be aware, as our last General Chapter reminded us, that the Lasallian vocation is lived in different ways

⁵ Meditation 180.1

⁶ cf. Meditation 96.3

⁷ cf. Meditation 115.3



and that, as Brothers, we are called to work side by side with and to be the spiritual companions of all those people with whom we share our charism and who, along with us, are disciples of Jesus and continuators of his apostolic mission.

7. Naturally, we do not mean this to be a normative circular. We do hope, however, that it will be an inspirational one and that in the two years before the next General Chapter, it may serve as an instrument for personal and community reflection. It is an invitation to continue this reflection on the local level; to reformulate these realities in accord with your own situation; to decidedly commit yourself to vocation ministry.
8. We have begun the Year of Faith, proposed to us by the Pope, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, that wonderful gift of the Spirit to the Church. We believe that this Circular will help us also to go more deeply into this topic not only on a theoretical level but on a level of witness and lived experience. This is what the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization has reminded us: *to be able to pass on the faith, it needs to be "professed, celebrated, lived, and prayed."*⁸

⁸ *Instrumentum Laboris*, Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, 100

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Introduction: Being Brother in an Evolving World

The context

The world, the Church and the Institute at the crossroads

- I.1.** Living as a Brother of the Christian Schools at the beginning of the 21st century means being immersed in a universe - material, cultural, moral and religious - that changed profoundly during the second half of the preceding century and that continues evolving at more or less the same pace depending on the culture. This situation can be defined in one word – crisis. We speak of crisis – economic, educational, moral and religious.
- I.2.** Within the framework of this circular we have no intention of presenting a complete panorama of the changes that have happened in various societies, in the Church and in the Institute. All the same it is good to keep in mind several elements of the background upon which our reflection is set which we think have a particularly discernible influence on our life as a Brother.
- I.3.** It is important for us to recall that during times of crisis religious have always looked towards the future. St J. B. De La Salle who lived in a period that one historian has called “The European awareness crisis”⁹, and the founders of other religious congregations were not nostalgic for the past, nor did they



Anton Balazh

⁹ Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (1680-1715), Livre de Poche collection, Références, 1994

seek the easy way out, yielding to the temptation to be like everybody else. Attentive to the “signs of their times” they were led to elaborate little by little the new structures we have inherited.

- I.4.** We Brothers of the 21st century cannot rest on past successes. Faithful to the creative spirit of our Founder we should live permanently as “those called” so as to respond with *open eyes and a burning heart*¹⁰ to the solicitations of the Spirit. We should try to get to the essential of what constitutes our vocation and to help the young to better perceive it.

World and society

- I.5.** We live in a constantly changing and crises-filled world. The word crisis has reference to both a feeling of loss of reassuring points of reference from the past, of incertitude as to the future but also of the chance of grasping the “favourable time” for living. In what concerns our type of life, here are some aspects of the present crisis in the world and society which impact the way in which the manner of being Brother can be perceived and envisaged.

A Christian culture that poses questions and disturbs

- I.6.** It is difficult to talk generally about the place of Christian culture in societies as diverse as those where we Brothers are found.

Where Christians are in a minority they are aware of what constitutes their identity while being at the same time in permanent contact with other cultures, other rituals, and other ways of understanding the world. In certain countries their liberty is limited and their witness can only be rendered in silence or by martyrdom. For Christian life to be possible and relevant in the eyes of the world around them, and even in the eyes of believers, Christians – religious, in particular – need to be aware of this situation and adapt rules, rituals and practices, initially forged and formulated in Europe, while maintaining the essentials of the Christian faith and the founding intuition.

- I.7.** Other countries that have been Catholic for several centuries have retained a basis of Christian culture (calendars, liturgical feasts, popular piety, catechising of children, and respect for the ecclesiastical hierarchy) but the media,

¹⁰ Circular 455, Documents of the 44th General Chapter, Rome, 15 September 2007

the promise of a better life, phenomena linked to globalisation such as the rise of new religious currents and new value systems cause members of some families to be tempted to behave like “the rich” or the “heroes” of TV series. Extremist groups and sects can take advantage of this by exploiting poverty and the desire of people to have a better life and offer them what appears to be a welcoming environment.



jackx

- I.8.** In countries that have been Christianised for centuries elements of Christian culture remain but these make little impact on most families and the world of youth. Moreover in certain countries that are particularly secularised the life of a believer is often relegated to the sphere of private life while the possibility of publicly manifesting one's faith and of acting in its name in social issues is sometimes even denied.¹¹
- I.9.** Finally there are intermediate situations between these models that are brought to mind here in outline form.

All these situations affect in one way or another our life as a Brother, whether within the dimension of religious consecration or in the way of considering the mission today or in the way in which the vocation of Brother can be envisaged as relevant and desirable. By his consecration and his mission of human and religious formation, by his engagement in social action and church life, by his concern for the advancement of young people in difficulty, the Brother sets himself at the frontier between Church and society, between the religious and social spheres. The model of society in which he lives has repercussions necessarily on the way of being present both to the life of the church and that of society, of expressing his consecration to God and accomplishing his evangelising mission. It requires at all times his personal commitment to live and witness to his faith.

¹¹ Cf. Standing Council of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Canada, *Pastoral Letter on Freedom of Conscience and of Religion*, April 2012, 12

A “net” culture and social networks

I.10. The cultural and societal world of school, family, political and economic life are confronted by mass media and the new techniques of communication which offer an immediacy, an abundance and a universality hitherto unknown in the dissemination of information, for the better but also for the worse. In addition the emergence of “social networks” brings about new types of relationships.

Dioceses, movements and religious institutes are affected by this phenomenon. Knowing how to use these new tools of communication and setting these up within social networks constitutes a challenge for the Church and religious Institutes since in this domain human and financial resources are often lacking for them.

I.11. A new mission field is opening for us in which we have to get involved as much as we can. We appreciate the exemplary work of Brothers and Sisters and of lay partners for whom communication in all forms is their field of the apostolate.

Moreover it is a challenge for all Institutes to make their particular vocation present and visible within the “big picture”, to draw from it material that will contribute to the “culture of vocations” to be considered later on. It is also a challenge to formators to initiate to the religious life candidates familiar with this type of communication which they can scarcely do without.

A “youth planet” on the move

I.12. It is true we have to be careful of generalising when we talk of youth. They are affected by their cultural context, their life situation and the means of communication they employ. Moreover each person is unique. However certain traits appear common, if not to all, at least to the majority.

The first is a difficult – sometimes



chaotic – arriving at psychological and affective maturity above all in economically developed countries. The symptoms of this trait are a later insertion into the professional world because of the prolongation of the length of studies and the vagaries of the labour market, as also a prolonged dependence upon the family, peer group influence, and the difficulty of committing to long term employment and even more so to life.

I.13. The second is the importance of deeds and witnesses more than talk. Already Paul VI noted this in the Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “A person of our times listens more readily to witnesses than to teachers ... or if they listen to teachers it is because these are witnesses”¹². It is crucial for us to realize this in our education work.

I.14. The third is a capacity for generosity expressing itself in service. Despite the individualism found everywhere, many young people who encounter committed and convincing adults are often likely to commit themselves to the service of the most impoverished and to humanitarian causes. The length of such commitments can vary. Often however, these offer the point of departure for reflection and even the discernment of the meaning of life and the orientation to give it. From this flows the importance of volunteer programs, of belonging to movements, to associations that offer opportunities for commitment, of this sensitivity to human solidarity. They also constitute opportunities for human and spiritual maturation.

A search for the spiritual

I.15. In all societies, even those most secularised, a



¹² *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41

search for the spiritual can be perceived. It may take the form of a religious adherence. It may also take forms outside of traditional religions. Some of these forms may appear odd, for example belonging to certain sects. Today some thinkers are even proposing “secular” spiritualities disconnected from every religious dimension. Among a certain number of young people such a spiritual search can be observed. Some await a message of hope, a hope that will not deceive them.

- I.16.** There are those – less numerous than previously for sure – who come from Christian families and attend our establishments in which they expect to be able to find nourishment for their faith by catechesis and expressions of strong Christian experience such as prayer and service. Others come to us without Christian culture, belonging to other religious traditions or not adhering to any religion but manifesting a curiosity, and these may be touched by the witness of Christians in the school, by Religious Education courses and by commitments of solidarity. There are young Christians who attend gatherings or pilgrimages where they find other young people celebrating their faith. We are aware of the renewed interest that astonishes us sometimes that youth and young adults have for large international gatherings such as World Youth Days. These are for some “starting points” fostering Christian commitment and openness to the call of particular vocations.
- I.17.** At the same time this spiritual search is affected by a characteristic of contemporary culture that one philosopher, Jacques Derrida, has defined by the term “dissemination”. It is a question of the fragmentation of life into separate domains. Such fragmentation affects the person within him/herself – it sets up impervious barriers between private and public life, between the life of faith and that of moral, social and professional life. It assumes a concept of life in society viewed as a sum of individuals, as a “lonely crowd”¹³. Finally it influences also the perception of time conceived as successive segments rather than as a continuum. Fidelity disappears when faced with sincerity valued as the virtue of the present moment.
- I.18.** In consequence whereas formerly the collective mentality favoured the unity and the vision of the whole - both in personal life as also in social or religious life - today such unity is dependent on the will of each individual and this carries over into religious undertakings and the manner of envisaging a

¹³ David Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, Paris, Arthaud, 1964

commitment: "Today there is more interest in new religious experiences than in a deepening of Christian faith by following Christ and love for the poor. Today religious experiences are lived without continuity, without commitment. As a consequence there are all these entries and exits in current religious life. The desire for a variety of religious experiences makes for difficulty as much in the launching of a charism in a stable manner as that of a demanding and committed spiritual life in the service of the common good"¹⁴.

I.19. Indeed the culture of our societies and the culture of today's young people – their ways of communicating, the people who influence them (artists, sportspersons, thinkers, possibly political or religious people) cannot fail to affect our ways of educating, of facing with them the question of the meaning of life, of welcoming, accompanying and forming them. At the same time they invite us to develop greater awareness of the riches of our spiritual tradition that offers a path towards unifying life so that it can be a deepening of relationship with oneself, with others and with the Wholly-Other. This will be the object of the second chapter of this circular.

The Church

I.20. The Catholic Church, as its name indicates, is universal. As such it is implanted in a multitude of countries. In each country the Church has its history (initial evangelisation, possibly conflicts and wars - past and present) a status within the society where it is situated (juridical status, public acknowledgement, concordat...). In each country the Church also has its particular characteristics together with strong cultural elements which translate into pastoral directives of episcopal conferences and dioceses, in liturgical expression, in theological currents that are evidently expressed in a specific language with concepts utilised and "understood" in one culture more than in another.



¹⁴ J.B Libaino SJ, *Globalisation et fragmentation. Impact sur la Vie religieuse*, Sao Paulo – July 2002

I.21. Certain important phenomena affect the life of this Church with more or less strength depending on continents and countries. We do not propose analysing these but they should be kept in mind because they are not without influence on our lives as Brothers. We shall thus mention them rapidly.

The first is the “swing” taking place in the distribution of Catholics across the world. Today the majority of Catholics are in countries of the southern hemisphere... a hemisphere that is poor or emerging where population is increasing with great rapidity and where Christianity is experiencing an expansion. The same is to be seen equally in the demography of the Institute. For the Church, the question is posed of the predominance of the western model contrasted with the expression of the faith in other cultural and religious worlds. For the Institute the question is posed – in some western countries – of the presence of the Brothers and also the Lasallian mission, and - for the general government - the manner of reconciling unity with diversity.

I.22. The second phenomenon is the current tension between a model of the Church whose functioning bases itself on clerics while another - advocated by Vatican Council II – where the Church is seen as a people and a body where the faithful enjoy an equal dignity, who are all called to holiness and participate according to the vocation proper to them in the common mission of announcing and contributing to bringing about the Reign of God. It is clear that according to the predominant model the vocation of Brother is not perceived and evaluated in the same way. The experience and the evolution of present religious orders are showing that religious consecration tends to be understood more as a “complement” to the priestly vocation rather than as a path having value in itself. Nevertheless Vatican II is clear on this point.¹⁵

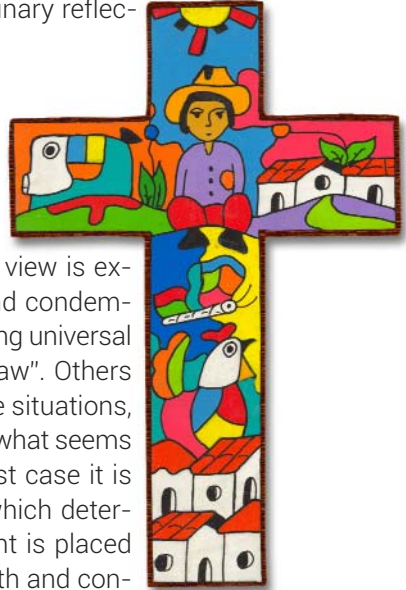
I.23. The third phenomenon is that of the coming to the realisation of the need for a “new evangelisation” of the world. This concept seemed to concern essentially those countries said to be becoming dechristianised – essentially the countries of the west. Today this “new evangelisation” concerns all continents. That is why it was the object of the last synod. It is clear that we Brothers presented by J. B. De La Salle as “*the ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ*”¹⁶ should be involved in this new evangelisation. Several

¹⁵ J.B Libaino SJ, *Globalisation et fragmentation. Impact sur la Vie religieuse*, Sao Paulo – July 2002

¹⁶ Meditation 195, 2

chapters or paragraphs of the Lineamenta envisage consecrated persons directly, and chapters 20 and 21 do so for Christian educators. This is why the General Council, signatory of this circular, addressed a note to the Synod Secretariat wishing to participate in the preliminary reflection.

I.24. This reflection on the “new evangelisation” concerns the relation of the Church to the world. Some envisage the Church mainly as a rampart against the “forces of death” which manifest themselves under different forms in domains such as ethics, the economy and politics. This view is expressed by having recourse to denunciation and condemnation in the name of principles presented as being universal and supported by Tradition and the “Natural Law”. Others advocate instead a Church attentive to concrete situations, careful to listen to people and to seek with them what seems to be the best, the most humanising. In the first case it is the authority recognised as the Magisterium which determines decisions, while in the second the accent is placed on seeking a human wisdom enlightened by faith and conscience.



I.25. As with every Christian educator, the Brother is confronted with this issue. In relation to young people and adults he shows himself in solidarity with the institutional Church and its stances, while at the same time he is confronted with concrete situations where he can be led to accompany the young in difficult situations. This is both the difficulty and the grandeur of his vocation.

I.26. At the same time as with all the rest of the baptised, religious men and women have differing points of view depending on place where they live, their theological or catechetical formation, the convictions they have drawn from their own experiences and the groups of which they are members. Certain ones are very critical concerning the centralisation of the Church and of Roman authority. They are calling for major reforms in the government of the Church, its sacramental practice, its magisterial discourse and its organisation. Others concentrate rather on their own local mission and don't enter into theological debates which they find complex, long or too partisan.



Still others – often among the youngest who are entering movements or congregations and whom older members qualify as “traditionalists” – do not question either the doctrine, or the moral teaching or the structure of the Church. Some are said to over express their identity.

Meanwhile there are all those who borrow certain elements from each of these categories in order to construct their own way of understanding the Church and to live their commitment therein.

I.27. As Brothers, we do not escape from these tensions and currents. In the recent past they could create conflicts, break-ups and tensions in certain Districts or among the Brothers. It should be noted that at the present time diversity of opinions can in general be expressed within a more peaceable climate.

The Lasallian world

I.28. The Lasallian world too has experienced considerable evolution these last years. We Brothers have been and continue to be its protagonists. It is not necessary then to present this evolution in detail. All the same it is good to underline one characteristic of this metamorphosis in the Lasallian world – its paradoxical character. A few examples follow.

I.29. The first is that the number of Brothers has appreciably diminished and yet the Lasallian mission has never reached so many young people. In 1966 the Institute numbered 16,824 Brothers while Lasallian works welcomed 737,112 pupils and students. In 2011 the Brothers were 4,782, Lay partners 83,089 and 858,669 young people were present in Lasallian works.¹⁷ Shared mission and Association are today considered as irreversible in almost all Districts. All the same however in certain sectors of the Institute the physical presence of the Brothers is disappearing. So what form will Shared Mission and Association among Brothers and Laypeople henceforth be able to take?

I.30. For some 50 years Lasallian studies have led us to a better understanding of the Lasallian charism and yet questions arise or persist about the relevance of the Brother’s vocation today or about the manner of formulating it in words adapted to our times.

¹⁷ Cf. Memento 2012

I.31. The paradoxical character of these changes has as a consequence created differences in appreciation or interpretation about them among Lasallians - Brothers and laypeople. Some feel it as a decline while others see in it a chance to create something new out of the old in the manner of the Gospel scribe "who brings out from his storeroom both new and old."¹⁸ However no matter what we make of these interpretations or judgements it is the question of the specificity of the vocation of Brother that is posed. The 44th General Chapter stated it clearly: *"Since the General Chapter of 1966-67 until the present day, the ecclesial and Lasallian context in which the Brothers are situated has changed substantially, thereby challenging us to adopt a new kind of presence: to live out and develop association for the educational service of the poor with men and women who participate in the Lasallian charism, spirituality and mission. This new ecclesial and Lasallian context challenges us, as Brothers, to live association for the educational service of the poor in a way that is open and integrated with our Lasallian partners, especially with those who wish to associate themselves with us, and to ask ourselves about the specific role that we, as consecrated persons, should accomplish to support the work of everyone in the Lasallian mission."*¹⁹

I.32. This conviction of the delegates to the 44th General Chapter underlines three realities of the Institute today: the rapidly changing world in which we are living, the primacy of the education of the poor in Lasallian mission, a mission which is shared with thousands of laypeople, men and women. This new context causes new questions to arise for all members of the Church today, laypeople, religious and priests. For us Brothers



¹⁸ Matthew 13: 52

¹⁹ Circular 455 – p. 26

a question frequently heard is the following: now that so many partners are teaching and administering in our schools and our educational centres, what is our role in the mission today?

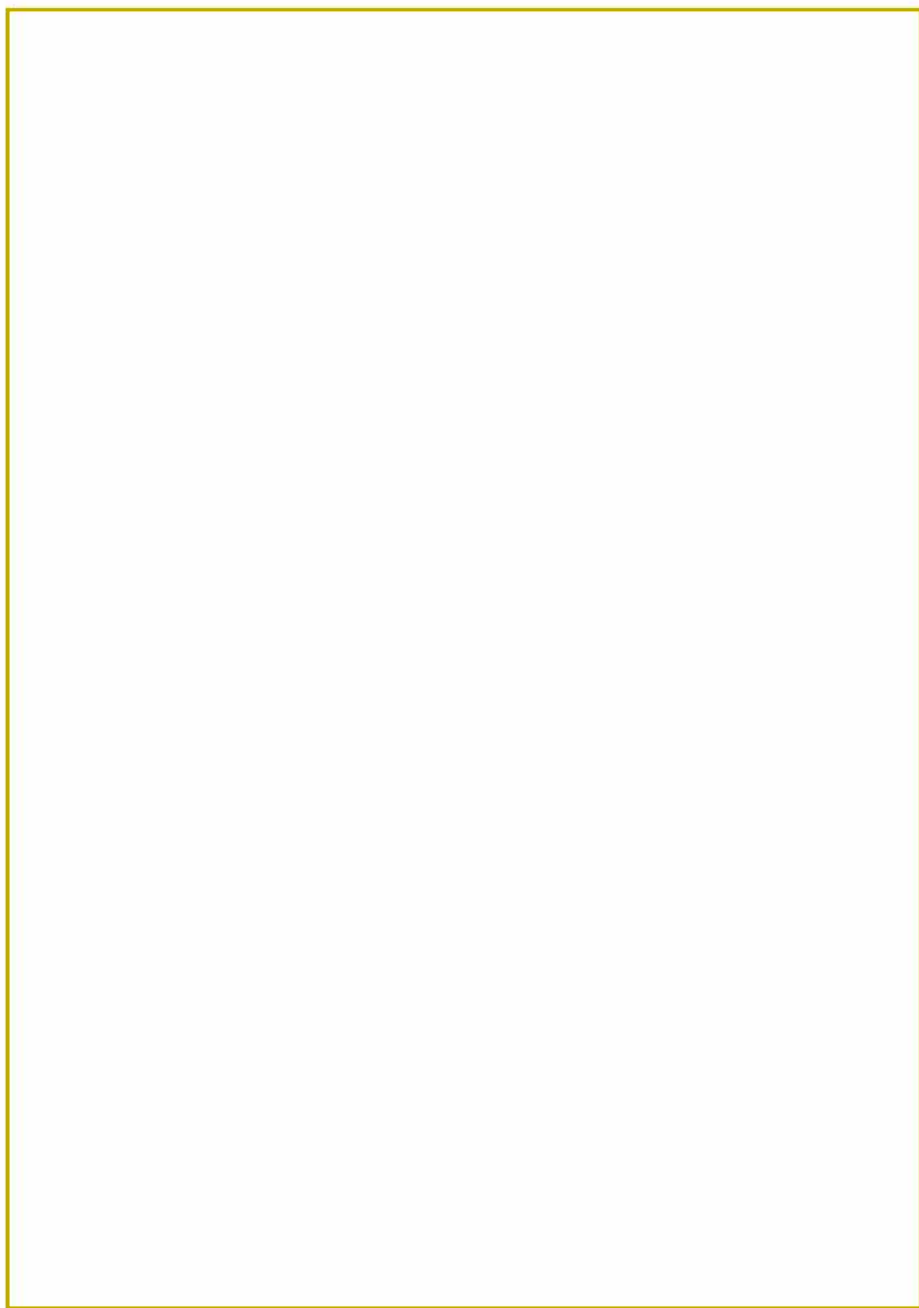
I.33. However our role in Lasallian works is just one aspect of our vocation and identity. "The identity of the Brother is distinct from the functions that he exercises and the tasks he accomplishes though it is expressed through them" affirms the *Guide for Formation*.²⁰ Questioning ourselves about our role in mission as consecrated persons requires a deeper reflection on the meaning of our consecration based on the evangelical dimension of our vocation as Brothers. That is why after having attempted to make precise the context in which the question of the Brother's vocation is posed, we wish to present it in the light of its link to the Gospel as a way of putting the Word of God at the centre of his existence and his plan of life.

²⁰ General Council, *Guide for Formation*, Rome 1991, 271

- A. Do you agree with the picture of our world portrayed in this section? What observations would you add? What observations do you disagree with?
- B. There is much criticism of secularization in Church circles today. Aside from lessening the practice of and adherence to traditional religious practices, could there actually be positive aspects of secularization that provide us a new and different opportunity for our own life and for our mission of evangelization?
- C. What are some new ways that we Brothers, individually, as a community, an educational center, District and Institute might find new ways to witness to Gospel values in this current post-modern, fragmented and secular climate?
- D. Many of our Lasallian education centers have students and families from other religious traditions. How do we hold the healthy tension between our own Catholic faith and the belief and traditions of other religious groups?

Personal Notes



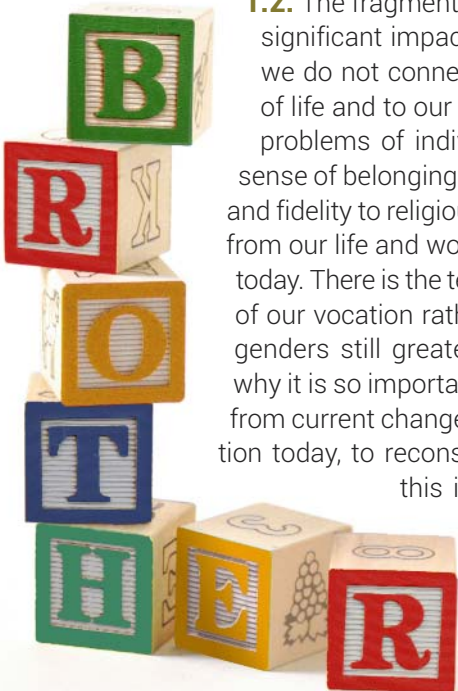


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Being a Brother: A life centered on the Gospel

1.1. The Gospel is the fundamental reference for the life of the Brother. Each one of us must constantly ask himself in what ways he tries to integrate the gospel message into his daily life, and how far he succeeds in unifying the constitutive elements of his vocation: his consecration to God as a lay religious, his mission to the apostolate of education and evangelization, especially to the poor, and his life as a Brother living in Community. Shouldn't we ask ourselves does the disenchantment that some experience regarding our religious life today not stem perhaps from a breakdown in the fundamental unity of these three elements? If we do not maintain a living unity of our mission, our life and our experience of God, then our religious life as Brothers will appear fragmented and made up of 'erratic' blocks, carved out of an ensemble that no longer inspires or encourages.

1.2. The fragmentation that comes with post-modernity has a significant impact on the identity of consecrated religious. If we do not connect our spiritual experience to a gospel style of life and to our mission, we will inevitably be faced with the problems of individualism, consumerism and a lack of any sense of belonging, and with questions about our perseverance and fidelity to religious practices that have become disconnected from our life and work that are directly plugged into the world of today. There is the temptation to pick and choose certain aspects of our vocation rather than the whole of it, and this in turn engenders still greater frustration and disenchantment. That is why it is so important for us, when facing the dangers that stem from current changes and questioning the meaning of our vocation today, to reconstruct its fundamental unity. In our opinion, this is rooted in the link between the life of the Brother and the gospel. We will now try to set this out in greater detail.



1.3. The personal experience of John Baptist de La Salle at the time of the beginnings of the Institute shows that he allowed himself to be guided by the Spirit mediated by Holy Scripture, in order to found his Institute and develop a style of life for the Brothers. The image of the Brother that arises from this is that of a '**disciple**'. However, at the same time, another image, the image of '**apostle**', comes and superimposes itself on the previous image.

In effect, the Brother lives out his consecration to God in the footsteps of Jesus through a vow of association for the education and evangelisation²¹ of the poor, by being close to those who are the margins of society, on the outskirts of society. This is the inheritance left us by De La Salle and the first Brothers: the gospel is at the heart of our mission to make manifest and proclaim salvation and the Kingdom of God to the poor and to the young people confided to our care, and to enable them to experience it.

The Brother is a Disciple

1.4. *"My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the word of God and put it into practice"*²²

The word of God speaks to all whose hearts are ready to listen. It calls and inspires all of Christ's disciples. It is not something intended just for religious. Neither can religious base their way of living the Christian life on certain special gospel passages addressed only to them. Nonetheless, it is true that a relationship with Scripture is the foundation of the religious life. From an existential point of view, a religious is one who takes the word of God, especially the gospel, as the essential reference point for his life (his choices, his behaviour, his values...). That is something quite evident in the vocation of the Brother of the Christian Schools right from the beginning: the Brother is one who constantly consults the word of God as the guiding compass of his life and puts it into practice in his daily activities after the manner of the Founder. It is his "first and principal Rule"²³

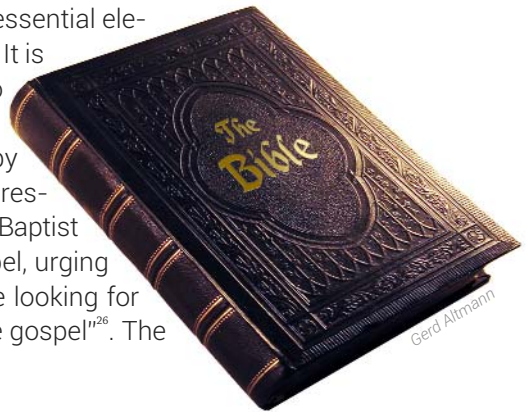
²¹ We use this term in sense given to it by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19: "For the Church it is not just a question of preaching the Gospel in ever broader geographic areas or to ever greater populations, but it also means taking on and overthrowing by the force of the Gospel the criteria, the key values, the focal points of interest, lines of thought, inspirational sources and models of human life that clash with the word of God and His plan of salvation."

²² Luke 8: 21

²³ *Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1718, chap 2, Art. 3

At the Start of the Institute: the Experience of the Founder and the first Brothers

- 1.5.** Throughout his life, John Baptist de La Salle derived nourishment from the Word of God which he absorbed particularly during his time in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. Through the ceaseless confrontation between this Word and the events and the social situation of his times, he learned that his whole life was a response to a call from God, as will the Institute that he is led to found.
- 1.6.** According to his biographers, he lived his life with constant reference to the word of God. "In the gospel, he studied the life, the thoughts and the virtues of Jesus Christ, and he made the practice of it the single rule for all his actions"²⁴ In his personal 'Exodus', the Founder learned that this word of God calls everyone to move from one world to another; to leave the world of hate, of oppression of the weak and the poor, of indifference towards those who are suffering and the glorification of power, and to enter the world that Jesus designates by the term the *Kingdom of God*, which is characterised essentially by compassion towards the poor and the affirmation of their dignity as sons and daughters of God. This transition comes about by an inner conversion which changes one's way of looking at things and by actions which change one's life. The present Rule invites the Brothers to undertake this process of listening to the successive calls from God in their lives, with a view to a conversion of their minds and hearts.²⁵
- 1.7.** Reference to the gospel is also an essential element during the birth of the Institute. It is particularly apparent during two founding events. The first event was a challenge made to the Founder by his Masters. In response to their expression of anxiety about the future, John Baptist de La Salle has recourse to the gospel, urging them to rely on Providence: "You are looking for reassurance. Do you not find it in the gospel"²⁶. The



²⁴ Blain, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8 p.229

²⁵ The Rule, 32, 40b, 58b, 74, 144

²⁶ Blain, *Cahiers Lasalliens* 7 p. 187



reaction of the Masters shows that the reference to the gospel is hardly convincing for them insofar as it appears to them to be an external rule, if not a “pious” expression trying to justify things. It makes J.B. de La Salle realise that it is not enough to know and to repeat the word of God for it to become a word of life. Those who make use of it and want to share it convincingly with others must live in a way that is consistent with what they proclaim. If John Baptist de La Salle wishes to open up for his Masters a new pathway in gospel living, he must first of all commit himself to taking that path.

- 1.8.** The second event came with the process of discernment he undertook regarding the use he should make of his inheritance. Should he use it to finance the nascent work? Or should he renounce it, so that the work might be founded on trust in God?²⁷

This discernment centres on two statements of Jesus. The first is “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor”.²⁸ The second is “The foxes have their holes, the birds of the air have nests and places to hide, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head”.²⁹ The Founder is reminded of these words by Père Barré.

- 1.9.** Thus, the reference to the gospel is seen as the guide to discernment. In the course of their undertaking, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Masters learn that their life and mission find their meaning when they are rooted in the gospel, which calls them to continuous conversion to new values and ways of life linked to their commitment to providing education to the poor. That is why the Founder, having become one of them, constantly refers the Brothers to the life-style of the gospels. Let’s see one example among many others. A Brother Director asks for a Community to be closed because it is financially unsustainable. “M. de La Salle is astonished at his words and says: Do you believe in the gospel? When the Director replies ‘Yes’, the holy priest refers him to the words of Jesus Christ: ‘Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice, and all the rest will be given to you. The Brother soon

²⁷ Blain, *CahiersLasalliens* 7 p. 188-189

²⁸ Matthew 19:21

²⁹ Matthew 8: 20

experiences the truth of this".³⁰

1.10. Thus from the very outset, the life of the Brother was seen as being guided by the word of God that was known, listened to, put into practice and considered to be an essential reference for discernment.

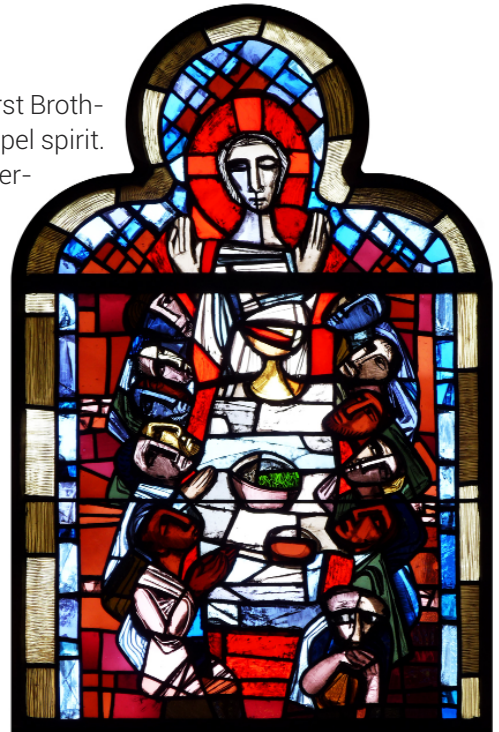
When we look again at the origins of the Institute, one thing stands out. For the first Brothers, the gospel is closely linked to poverty in imitation of Jesus. This way of life includes the sharing of possessions as a characteristic feature of brotherly living. Moreover, it makes the Brothers one with and closer to the parents and to the children to whom they have been sent and with whom they are called to bind themselves in a relationship of fraternal education.

A gospel style of life

1.11. It is clear that the style of life of the first Brothers was characterized by its radical gospel spirit. Blain speaks of "the project of gospel perfection"³¹. What did this radicalness consist in?

From the beginning right up to today, the Brother's vocation is a life-long project which consists in taking seriously the demands that resound in the gospel in the words and actions of Jesus, and in trying to live one's life accordingly. In the last analysis, it is a question of arriving at the fulfilment of the words of Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"³².

What are these demands that the Brother undertakes to place at the



Dieter Schütz

³⁰ Blain, Cahiers Lasalliens 8 p. 256

³¹ Blain, Cahiers Lasalliens 7 p. 191

³² Galatians 2, 20

centre of his life in order to conform to the life of Christ?

To present these elements more clearly, we need to single out what is most intimately bound up in the daily life of the Brother.

The call to fraternal love is at the heart of the gospel. It is especially so for those who use the word 'Brother' to refer to themselves.

1.12. The decision to adopt a new title, as reported by Blain³³ indicates a realisation by the first Brothers that a close relationship exists among themselves and with their pupils, a relationship which is part of their identity. This ideal of brotherhood which they intend putting into practice is an echo of Jesus' words: "Let nobody call you Master (rabbi) for there is only one Master, and you are all brothers"³⁴. This fraternity, at the heart of a Brother's life, gives a gospel flavour to the vow of association for the educational service of the poor. It is not just a matter of educating but of doing so in such a way that the brotherly relationship existing between adults and children creates an educational atmosphere which is favourable to the proclamation of the gospel and which also gives credibility to that proclamation.

1.13. This ideal of brotherhood does not fail to touch young people of today. At the same time, it is not just a question of living together. During a colloquium organised by the Union of Superiors General, one young religious said "We are fed up with the common life; what we want is real community living." We hope that this desire is shared by all the Brothers. It is attainable only at the cost of a struggle with oneself and a conversion in one's way of seeing things. It involves seeing the other person, young or old, in the way God sees them, "He who causes his sun to rise on the wicked and on the good, and his rain to fall on the just and on the unjust",³⁵ and who invites us not to judge so that we will not be judged.³⁶

Gratuity is another fundamental gospel message.

1.14. Jesus announces the gracious gifts that God bestows on people: his pardon, the revelation of his Fatherhood, the coming of his Kingdom, the victory over death. We know how much John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers

³³ Blain, Cahiers Lasalliens 7 p.241

³⁴ Matthew 23: 8

³⁵ Matthew 5: 45

³⁶ Matthew 7: 1

fought to ensure that instruction and knowledge of the Christian faith could be offered gratuitously, even to those who were able to pay for it. Quite apart from the practical consideration of giving everyone access to knowledge and providing education for the poorest, we can see in this determination the awareness that the proclamation of the gospel seeks to give people a way of thinking that is different from the commercial attitude of giving and taking in exchange. Jesus expressed this new way of thinking as follows. "Freely you have received; freely give".³⁷

1.15. Giving the poor access to the benefits of a quality, human and spiritual education is still a struggle today, particularly in a world where the obsession with financial returns leads to a widening gap between rich and poor. To become a Brother means to commit oneself to this struggle in a variety of different situations, such as whether or not the State gives financial support to the education of the children in our schools. It is not possible to give up this ideal of gratuity, which is not just financial, without taking away the gospel base of the life of a Brother.

The call to live a life of poverty is also at the heart of the gospel message.

1.16. A life of evangelical poverty is even presented as a way to happiness: "Blessed are the poor".³⁸ We have also seen how it appears from the beginning as part of the Founder's itinerary and in the material conditions of the first Brothers for whom it was an integral part of their way of life. In fact it nourished their fraternity and served to unite them with those who have no choice about their poverty, with a view to helping them escape from it. "You should love poverty because you are charged with instructing the poor"³⁹

Poverty is linked to their fraternal life, their mission, and their following of Jesus who "being rich became poor to enrich us with his poverty"⁴⁰.



³⁷ Matthew 10: 8

³⁸ Cf. Matthew 5, 3; Luke 6, 20

³⁹ Meditations 96.3

⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 8: 9

In the gospel, following Christ also involves abandonment to God's will

1.17. Jesus presents himself as the one who accomplishes the will of the Father. "I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."⁴¹

Similarly, seeking the will of God and being ready to accomplish it are central elements in the Brother's vocation. They constitute the spiritual testament of the Founder, whose last words were: "I adore in all things the will of God in my regard".

The formula of vows pronounced by the Brothers echoes this. They all commit themselves to procuring the glory of God "as far as I am able and as you will require of me". It is from this perspective that we must understand the vow of obedience, one of the three vows pronounced by the first Brothers. The Brothers commit themselves to discerning the will of God through fraternal dialogue in Community and with those who are entrusted with the government of the Institute.

1.18. In this way they live out the spirit of their Institute which is "the spirit of faith". This is not first and foremost an intellectual adherence to dogmas. It means total trust in the loving mercy and kindness of God. John Baptist de La Salle expresses this trust very vividly in one of his meditations. "One can scarcely believe how much good someone who is really detached can do in the Church. The reason for this is that detachment involves a great deal of faith, because one thereby abandons oneself to the Providence of God, like someone who puts out to sea without sails or oars."⁴²

1.19. This abandonment indicates on the part of each Brother an openness to the action of the Holy Spirit and an attentiveness to His presence in the people he meets and the world in which he lives. In this way, the Brother is called to live according to a "deeply unifying spirituality which tends to raise up people who live by the Spirit, people won over by God, full of zeal, poor people who rely on the gift of God and proclaim his saving love to the poor".⁴³

1.20. This understanding of the life of the Brother as a way of living the gospel undoubtedly gives it greater depth, and it also allows us to give full meaning

⁴¹ Luke 6: 20

⁴² Meditation 134. 1

⁴³ Michel Sauvage and MiguelCampos, *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, Christian Brothers Conference, 1977 p.372

to his religious consecration expressed in the vows. These vows are not made on legalistic grounds to allow the Brothers to classify themselves as religious. The vows, and the way in which they are lived out by the Brothers, concretise the gospel character of their life, because they show that the gospel is for the Brothers a living word, which they welcome and place at the centre of their existence.⁴⁴ By this fundamental link between the word of God and their way of life, the Brothers participate in that form of Christian living known as the "consecrated life".



1.21. The Synod on the Word of God recalled first and foremost that the consecrated life comes to birth through listening to the word of God and accepting the gospel as one's rule of life. Following Christ in a life that is chaste, poor and obedient is, therefore, a living exegesis of the word of God⁴⁵.

Moreover, this reference to the gospel leads each Brother along a "way of conversion" that he will never finish, because the goal of this journey is the identification of one's life with that of Christ, so that He can be encountered in the Brother by other human beings. For that reason, becoming a Brother means starting out on an adventure which will never end.

The Brother is an Apostle

1.22. The Founder establishes a clear connection between the call to the life of the Brother and the proclamation of the gospel. In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, he invites the Brothers to deepen their understanding, through contemplation and prayer, of the purpose of their being Brothers, not really what they are living **for** but **for whom** they exist as Brothers. The Founder is helping them to study the substance of their daily experience in the educational service they provide and to see the Gospel dimensions of this service in all of its demands.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The Rule n°22

⁴⁵ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* n° 83

⁴⁶ Miguel Campos, in his introduction to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, St. Mary's Press-1975, p. 19

The gospel dimension of consecration

1.23. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI says "In their consecrated life, religious have a privileged means of effective evangelization".⁴⁷

The Brother's consecration to God calls him to proclaim the gospel in those places where it has the least chance of being known and heard: in the desert, on the fringes, and at the boundaries⁴⁸.

• In the desert

1.24. As a metaphor for human existence, the desert can be an expression of absence, silence, aridity, extremes, difficulties and urgent needs.

To follow Jesus into the desert as a religious is to go where human life and dignity are most threatened, where exploitation and exclusion take on forms which show their most destructive aspect, where the State and the Churches are virtually absent.

The Founder and the first Brothers clearly wanted to locate their new Institute in the desert where "the sons of the artisans and the poor" were to be found "far removed from salvation".

1.25. To live the gospel dimension of our vocation as Brothers means placing ourselves in the desert of today. When we analyse the world of the poor today, we can see that the face of God is to be found in the faces of children

and young people who are suffering from extreme poverty, having to work from a very early age, suffering all kinds of exploitation and social exclusion. In many places, their internationally recognised fundamental rights to education and health are ignored.

That is where we should be present. That is why the defense of the rights of the child is a fundamental axis of our mission.



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⁴⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69

⁴⁸ Jon Sobrino, *La Resurrección de la Verdadera Iglesia*, Sal terrae, Madrid 1994. p. 329

• On the periphery

1.26. Developments on the outskirts of towns grew up most noticeably during the 19th century with the change in the relationship between town and country, which produced zones where wealth and poverty met. Effectively, the poor areas could be found within rich areas and rich areas could be found within poor ones. These fringe developments were characterised by tension and conflict, with an imbalance in power, knowledge, resources and access to basic services.

The Founder and the first Brothers located their new Institute on the margins of society. At the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, "the sons of the artisans and the poor" were excluded from the world of culture and the Church. That explains the importance of an educational plan which would include human, professional and Christian education.

1.27. Faithful to the gospel dimension of our vocation, we are called in today's context to place ourselves once again 'on the fringe'. This has implications for our mode of presence in the Lasallian Family, in the Church and in society.

The 44th General Chapter stated that the Brothers are called to be for and with lay people as "heart, memory and guarantors of the Lasallian charism".⁴⁹ What does that mean in terms of placing ourselves on the fringe? No doubt there is a temptation to produce pyramidal structures within our Lasallian Family, structures copied from society or religions. Whatever the role that he carries, the Brother should stand out only by virtue of the gospel nature of his life. It is important that the Brother be recognised in the Lasallian Family by the depth of his interior life, by the fraternal nature of his relationships, by his professional competence and dedication, by his readiness to work for those who do not have access to the secret worlds of knowledge and employment, by his care for those who do not belong to the Church or have become alienated from it.

• At the boundaries

1.28. Boundaries can be areas of conflicts, tensions and risks, areas where one must try new things and offer new possibilities. They are places for

⁴⁹ Circular 455, 44th General Chapter, Rome 2007 p. 24



prophets. Many men and women in the history of the Church have dedicated their lives to living the gospel authentically at the frontier.

John Baptist de la Salle's conversion in favour of the poor can be seen as an Exodus from a place of cultural, financial and religious privilege to the boundaries of Rheims society in order to serve the artisans and the poor. With his Masters, he created a new religious family in society and in the Church, a religious family characterized by a consecration, a mission and an organization that were special and different because they were adapted to the requirements of living on the boundary. To achieve this, the Founder had to overcome all sorts of difficulties for his Institute in relation to the Church and to society. To take up the gospel boldly involves conflicts, and facing them calls for fidelity to and trust in God "who guides

everything with gentleness and wisdom".

1.29. The world of the poor is still boundary territory today. In it you will find migrant people, cultural and religious pluralism, ecumenism, financial and social fragility and other problems which present us with so many challenges and calls to devote our lives and our activity.

Over and above all that, we are an international Institute made up of Brothers from a wide variety of cultures, races, traditions and ethnic groups. This fact also reminds us that boundaries exist within the Institute itself. The cultural diversity of people is essentially an enrichment. But we need to ask ourselves how well we are succeeding in integrating this great richness into the everyday life of our Communities, Districts and Regions of the Institute.

Proclaiming the gospel is the heart of the Brother's life and mission

1.30. "Proclamation is done firstly through the witness of one's life". According to Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, religious men and women "are supremely willing and free to leave all to go and proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising, and their work is often noted for its originality

and ingeniousness which command admiration. They are generous, and they can often be found in the outposts of activity where they take great risks for their health and even for their lives".⁵⁰ For us Brothers, this desire to proclaim the gospel manifests itself in our lives in different ways.

- 1.31.** First of all, it is rooted in a faith-inspired reading of the situation. Like the Founder and the first Brothers, we are called to seek out those forms of poverty that affect the world of children and young people, to be moved by them and inspired to look for ways to remedy the situation. If we want to find the mystical and prophetic meaning of our calling, we need clarity in our analysis, an eye to the future and boldness in taking those decisions that are the most appropriate.
- 1.32.** At the same time, as Paul VI says, devoting one's life to proclaiming the gospel presupposes availability and physical closeness. Availability is at the heart of our formula of vows: "wherever I may be sent and to do whatever is required of me". This availability is based first of all on a spiritual attitude of trust and detachment expressed in the vow of obedience. Choosing the Brother's life is to renounce the idea of 'a career' which gives priority to professional development to the detriment of the consecration of one's life. As Brothers, we assume the mind of One who has come to serve rather than to be served.⁵¹ Our availability is all the greater because we have left our original family but have not chosen to found a family of our own.
- 1.33.** Physical closeness to the poor is a matter of our style of life which should be that of "people of modest means",⁵² and we commit ourselves to this by our vow of poverty, in line with the social scope of our mission which brings us into contact with people of various backgrounds and origins. It is also linked to our status as lay religious which excludes us from the hierarchical structures of the Church and gives us solidarity with Christian laypeople. No doubt we have become more aware of this in recent decades than we were during the preceding centuries.
- 1.34.** Proclamation of the gospel is linked to our fraternal way of living. We have received the charism of brotherliness, which is a truly prophetic gift in a fragmented world that is divided by conflicts that are often violent. As we

⁵⁰ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 69

⁵¹ Mark 10: 45

⁵² The Rule, 32

have seen, brotherhood is one of the fundamental gospel dimensions of our lives. A truly fraternal life shared with those to whom we are sent is something that can give credibility to our proclaiming of the gospel, as was the case with the first Christian communities of whom the pagans said "See how they love one another".

1.35. For us Brothers, it is also linked to our vow of association. The 44th General Chapter speaks of the centrality of the vow of Association for the educational service of the poor as a fundamental element in the identity of the Brother. It involves our living according to the gospel, proclaiming the Good News and giving the word 'Association' its full meaning according to its original inspiration and motivation: "the Good News is preached to the poor"⁵³ through the service of education that we give them. Today, the centrality of the vow of association gives us the chance to return to the gospel sources of our consecration and so to integrate the constitutive elements of our life as Brothers.

The proclamation requires explanation

1.36. It is true that in our lives we can become "a living exegesis of the word of God", and that sometimes evangelisation is only possible through the witness of our consecration, our Brotherhood and our educational service. Nonetheless, it is also true that the explicit preaching of the gospel has been, from the first, an essential element in the mission of the Brother. "Every Brother is a 'pastor' in the sense that he does not just teach the ordinary, basic subjects but is also a 'catechist', a minister of the word of God, as John Baptist de La Salle frequently reminds us."⁵⁴

In 1907 Saint Pius X gave the Brothers the title of "Apostles of the catechism". This catechetical activity is fundamental and includes every aspect of the life of the Brother with young people. It is fundamental because it takes priority in terms of the goals of the mission. It includes every aspect of the life of the Brother with young people because it is not just a question of conveying knowledge, even religious knowledge; it also involves helping them to be open to Christian values and "introducing them to the spirit of Christianity"⁵⁵

⁵³ Luke 7: 22

⁵⁴ M. Sauvage, "Toward a Better Understanding of Lasallian Association", *John Baptist de La Salle and the Foundation of his Institute, Cahiers Lasalliens* 55,p. 329

⁵⁵ *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1705, 31

and "teaching them to live well".⁵⁶

1.37. For centuries, teaching catechism was a priority in the Institute, and it produced many experts whose influence spread well beyond the boundaries of the Institute and contributed in a significant way to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Nowadays, the Church has become more keenly aware of the need to present the gospel in new ways, and the Synod on New Evangelisation is an indication of this. It is also up to us Brothers to play our part in this new impetus in evangelisation, which has become indispensable in the face of "the exclusion of God from people's lives and the general indifference towards Christian living"⁵⁷.

1.38. When considering the deserts, the fringe areas and the boundaries of today, we can ask ourselves what the catechetical activity of the Brother should be in such a context. No doubt, the explicit proclamation of the gospel makes up a large part of the challenge. In the face of a growing secularisation, the emergence of old and new religious feelings, the increasing numbers of people who exclude any religious reference from their understanding of life, what can constitute the proclamation of the gospel good news? That is a question which requires long, detailed and profound reflection and discussion, which we cannot undertake here. However, here are some of the elements in the discussion that we consider important.

1.39. The new deserts, fringes and boundaries call for Brothers who are well prepared humanly, professionally and theologically.

The first requirement is to understand today's cultural and religious developments which are marked by a great diversity. The preparation for the work must also give people the capacity to distinguish the essential from the non-essential in the contents of the faith, so as to be able to enter into dialogue with other



⁵⁶ *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1705, 3

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI - Address to members of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization. May, 30th 2011



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cultures and other religions. Likewise, it must enable people to express their Christian faith in a language that is comprehensible to our contemporaries.

1.40. This kind of formation is never finished: the distinction between initial and continuing formation is no longer relevant when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel or the search for God and the knowledge of His mystery. What is at stake in the care given to formation is the ability of the Brothers to become animators, advisors, people responsible for

the educational communities they are part of, communities that must have a concern for evangelization if they want to remain true to their Lasallian tradition.

1.41. Wherever it is possible, an educational community proclaims the gospel through the participation of as many members as possible in the work of religious education in all its forms: catechesis, preparation for the sacraments, prayer life, actions of solidarity. It is a place where activities can be analysed, new ways of evangelisation can be studied, experiences can be shared, innovations made. Where explicit proclamation of the gospel is not possible, the community can give witness by its life according to gospel values. It can introduce into and maintain in its school a relational climate of education that gives credibility to its proclaimed Christian character and makes it attractive.

In the years to come, as we reflect on and discuss the New Evangelisation and our own tradition, we Brothers throughout the Institute and in concert with our Lay Lasallians, need to intensify or even renew our commitment to searching for and implementing action plans that open up new ways for proclaiming the gospel.

1.42. Living the gospel and incarnating it as we proclaim it, such is the basis of our vocation; this is its value and "necessity" in the world of today.

Very often it is other people who comment on our way of life with wisdom and insight. So we shall conclude this reflection on the links between the

Brother's vocation and the gospel by quoting what a woman Lasallian Associate said. "Yes, Brothers, we can do some of the things you do, and at times, even do them better. But we cannot be who you are. As much as we admire St. La Salle and find much to imitate in his educational and spiritual writings, God has graced us with a different vocation. We need religious to be the people you say you are. We need your witness of a life of prayer and a healthy celibate life lived in community. We laity need to see men and women living in communities who can forgive one another and be reconciled with each other. Please be this for us. The world, the Church and the young need your example".

1.43. Therefore, Brothers "It is essential to be evangelically significant and not just professionally effective. We are called to live the gospel radically, without looking around for explanations to weaken its message".⁵⁸

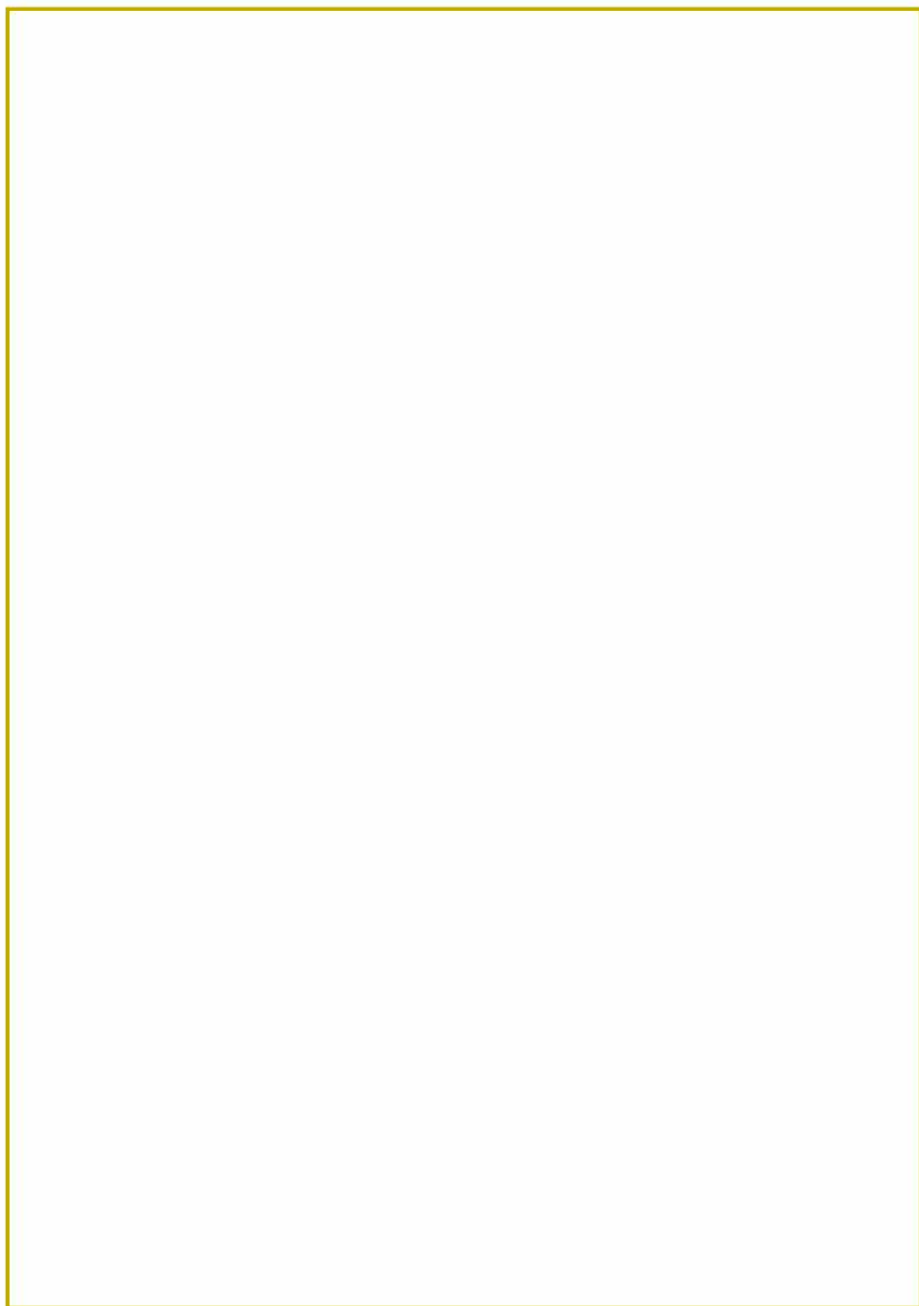
⁵⁸ Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, "Message to the Young Brothers of USA", 6 November 2011

- A. How does the Gospel affect our style of life, our global and ecclesial vision and our community life? Can I name ways that it would be evident to others that my life as a Brother is based on Gospel values?
- B. Do I agree that frequently questions of management, organization, and completing various tasks are the first place in our preoccupations? Is my professional career, even a "career as a religious," the centerpiece of my life as opposed to living Gospel values? In response to the circular, as a senior Brother, how do you live out the Lasallian Mission?
- C. Do I find myself and my community on the periphery of society in terms of not only the "children of the artisans and the poor" but also being witness to an evangelical lifestyle of abandonment to God, simple living and association? Or are we in the center of our society absorbing many of the society's values and lifestyle?
- D. How can my actual life and our life as a community be apostolic and evangelical? Do we bring the concerns of ministry, the children, students, our Brothers, the world around us to prayer to ask for guidance? In what ways can we be better witnesses of Christ beyond being a fully effective professional or a retired man looking back with satisfaction on his life?

Personal Notes







2

Being a Brother: An Integrated Spirituality

"...The essential source of Lasallian Spirituality is actual experience and sacred Scripture as unity. More accurately, the source is faith-inspired awareness that the history of salvation is unfolding here and now."⁵⁹

2.1. Centering one's existence on the gospel originates in an encounter with God, an intimate, loving union with the Lord. "Lord, I have let myself be seduced", said some of the prophets in the Bible in accounting for their vocation. But this kind of seduction isn't like any other human seduction, it stands the test of time only if love is deepened and strengthened by constant dialogue. This is what we call interior life: a constant dialogue between God and the human person, a dialogue in which the human person receives a clear awareness of who he is. Further it is from such a dialogue that he hears the call to come and to serve.

The message of the 44th General Chapter

2.2. One of the principal messages of the 44th General Chapter was the call to develop a deeper interior life.⁶⁰ It urgently called on all the Brothers to be men of interior lives in gospel simplicity. The report of the Chapter tells us to undertake in earnest a process of spiritual renewal, which will show itself in a spirituality that is visible, credible and prophetic, and which will underpin the contemplative dimension of our lives and lead us to revise our way of

⁵⁹ *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, p.18

⁶⁰ For De La Salle the expressions *interior life* and *spiritual life* are synonyms. He uses the first 211 times and the second 218 times.



life so as to become once again “poor Brothers whom the poor people seek out”.⁶¹ In this way our communities will be recognized by their spirituality.

2.3. The Chapter invites us to develop a personal relationship with God based on dialogue and manifested in our love for others. It is a question of a dialogue with God, which must be the root of all apostolic activity, and from which such activity draws its nourishment. We all know that interior life and mission either nourish each other or die together through starvation. In the final paragraph of the Introduction, the capitulants assert with a force similar to that of Chapter 2 of the primitive Rule: “The essential thing is to keep alive the spirit which is proper to us, the spirit of faith and of zeal. We are called on to examine whether we are really living in this spirit and if we are effectively inspired by both the passion for the God of salvation and a passion for those to whom he sends us. The most important thing of all is that we be men of interior lives.”⁶²

2.4. The final message of the Intercapitular Assembly of 2011 points out an essential feature of the spiritual life handed down to us from the Founder: “In these important texts of our Founder we see his call to us to develop a spiritual life that is unified and unifying, or as some would prefer to say “integrating”.

St John Baptist de La Salle had no intention of founding a new school of spirituality. He was concerned that the schools should function well, “that the schools run well”, and that the Brothers should receive an excellent professional training. But he was conscious of the fact that all that would not be enough to ensure that they would live their mission in accordance with the summons they had received from God. Hence his constant encouragement to them, expressed in his writings, his letters and regular retreats, that they should cultivate a deep interior life.

2.5. We believe that it is worthwhile to re-read these passages containing the basic spirituality the Founder bequeathed to us. They were produced in a cultural context very different from our own, but we can see how they map out a journey towards God, a journey towards others, and a journey towards ourselves; a message which retains all its relevance for us Brothers of the 21st century.

⁶¹ Meditation 86. 2

⁶² Circular 455, p. 9

A Unified Model of Spirituality

2.6. In an era that often championed the notion of division between the secular and the sacred, material and spiritual, profane and sacred, John Baptist discovered in the writings of a contemporary author, Julien Hayneufve,⁶³ a principle of integration which he was to explore and then offer to the members of his community of teachers.

In Blain⁶⁴, we read the retreat resolutions which John Baptist recorded at the end of one of his retreats. In resolution number three he enunciates this principle of integration:

"It is a good rule of life to make no distinction at all between the work of our vocation in life and the work of our salvation and perfection. We can be sure that we cannot work out our salvation better or achieve perfection more surely than by discharging our responsibilities, provided that we accomplish them in view of God's design. We must try to keep this precept ever in mind."

2.7. In the Collection, in the section entitled *Reflections on Their State and Employment that the Brothers Should Make from Time to Time, Especially During Retreat*⁶⁵ we read this same insight but now addressed to the members of the community.

"Do not distinguish between duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection. Rest assured that you will never effect your salvation more certainly and that you will never acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, provided you do so with a view of accomplishing God's design."

2.8. These mirror statements in his personal resolutions and in the reflection re-



⁶³ Cahiers Lasalliens, 16 p. 55 1

⁶⁴ Cahiers Lasalliens, 8 p.318-319

⁶⁵ Cahiers Lasalliens, 15 p.95

quired by the *Collection* point to the groundedness of John Baptist's view of God's work and our cooperation with it: "**make no distinction**". God is found in doing the work that is the expression of our mission, our being sent. There is no compartmentalizing in John Baptist's life. His work with founding schools, creating and sustaining communities, forming his teachers, responding to the calls of cities, pastors and bishops to establish and sustain foundations – all of this is part of God's great design for him and for his community of teachers. He finds it important to keep this before himself and his teachers.

- 2.9.** It is the first understanding of what will come to be understood in our time as the integration of the constitutive elements of our vocation: community and consecration. We are a community consecrated and called to mission: the educational mission for the salvation of our students. It is a salvation which is of this world and beyond. Not one *or* the other, nor one *above* the other. It is an integration that utters what would become in our time a call to wholeness.⁶⁶ In a world afflicted by fragmentation and the breakdown of life into a series of discreet moments and ephemeral relations, this unifying vision of life confers on apostolic religious life its importance, its necessity and its value.
- 2.10.** The Lasallian insight "not to make any difference ...etc." is a means of overcoming the crises provoked by a fragmented life which lacks an ultimate point of reference that can unite our being with our activity. To the extent that we, as Brothers, are able to live a unified life, we can be a valuable point of reference for a world which has strayed from that same path to unity. Our life has value, not because we are experts in education or catechesis (although we are supposed to be that), but because we manifest the presence of God in our words and actions.
- 2.11.** The search for unity is something that concerns every stage of life, including old age or when sickness obliges Brothers to stop all direct apostolic activity. Their apostolic activity continues all the same when they keep in their prayers all their former students and colleagues, the schools in which they worked and which continue to operate, and the life of the Institute. In some Districts, the communities of elderly Brothers are "twinned" with teaching communities and their staffs, who keep them informed as to their projects

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Calligan , SIEL 2012 – Document

and the life of the school, asking for the support of their prayers. These Brothers in turn can think back over their teaching and evangelising experience, and this can help them to be more aware of the presence and action of God in their lives and the lives of their pupils, which they can then share with others. In some cases, they offer spiritual guidance to former pupils and other people. We are grateful to them for all of this.

Some key elements of Lasallian Spirituality

2.12. Lasallian spirituality has certain points of emphasis which make it a distinct spiritual way. Certainly, these same elements are found in other forms of spirituality, but the Founder uniquely integrated them in the light of his experience, in order to help his Brothers live their vocation which was something new in the Church.

A. "Most Holy Trinity...I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory...."

2.13. If we want to look for the one unifying element in the life of a Brother, it would be hard to find a better one than his act of consecration. It was the expressed wish of the Founder and the first Brothers to place their lives totally in the hands of a God who is Father, Son and Spirit. Ever since then, the Holy Trinity is for the Brother the model and perfect icon of unity inspiring his whole life. The Founder regarded consecration to the Trinity as so important that, in "The rules that I impose on myself" he writes: "Every day I will set aside a quarter of an hour, which I will use in order to renew my personal consecration to the Holy Trinity".⁶⁷

2.14. The Brother consecrates himself "to the Father who chooses and calls because of his love for abandoned children; to the



⁶⁷ *Rules that Impose on Myself* – p. 61

Son who asks us to make his loving presence a reality in the world of youth; and to the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and enables us to touch the hearts of the children that God confides to our care".⁶⁸

2.15. Through our consecration to the Trinity we offer to God a total gift of ourselves. It is a radical decision to give one's life "entirely to you", the Triune God, as the vow formula states; all that we are physically, and spiritually, our past with its failures and successes, and our dreams for the future.

2.16. We have committed ourselves to live for God alone in a personal friendship with Jesus Christ and in an inseparable fellowship with our Brothers for the educational service of the poor. "We are Brothers in a relationship with the Father whose loving presence is real and is the dominant influence in our life. We are Brothers in a relationship with Christ, who is for us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We are Brothers in a relationship with the Spirit, upon whom we depend for guidance and for the power we need to touch hearts".⁶⁹ The vow of association for the educational service of the poor strengthens this sense of unity in the Brother's life. The vow "gives concrete meaning to the commitments it inspires, and it unifies all the moments of the life of the Brothers (44th GC). The Holy Trinity is therefore a model for the Brother and a perfect icon of the unity that inspires all his life.

B. "Seeing the way in which the children of artisans and the poor are abandoned"

2.17. Saint John Baptist de La Salle was moved by the situation of the abandoned "sons of artisans and the poor". He set out to commit himself to remedying the state of poverty and exclusion in which they were living.

The experience of our Founder is an invitation to every Brother to live in a relationship with God, seeking his will in the saving events that occur in his mission. Lasallian spirituality is a spirituality of the Incarnation which gives us a way of looking at reality and seeing it with eyes of faith that lead us to act in the way Jesus would.

2.18. The Brother is called to be the human face of God, to continue the work of Jesus by giving an unconditional 'yes' to God's will and making a commitment of himself to the most disadvantaged. In the words of Brother

⁶⁸ Brother John Johnston, *Live Today Our Founding Story*, Pastoral Letter, 2000, p.16.

⁶⁹ Brother John Johnston, *Our Community Life*, Pastoral Letter, 1992 p. 23

Michel Sauvage, "This is Lasallian mystical realism"⁷⁰, the spirit in which so many of our Brothers have lived. It is a spirituality which is incarnated in all our different countries in the present day. It is a way of feeling and seeing reality with the eyes of a believer so that we are impelled to act, together with our Brothers and other educators or pastoral workers, and to act in the way we believe to be most pleasing to God who is present and active in history".⁷¹

C. "The most important thing, over which we must take the greatest care..."

2.19. John Baptist de La Salle understood from the beginning that the mission of the new Institute was the work of God and that it could only exist if it was founded on the solid pillars of faith and zeal. His own words express this conviction in a definitive manner.

"The spirit of this Institute is firstly a spirit of faith which commits those who belong to it to view nothing except with the eyes of faith, to do nothing except in the sight of God and to attribute all to God...

Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent zeal to teach children and to bring them up in reverence for God..."⁷² For the Founder, faith and zeal are inseparable: they come from one and the same spirit.



2.20. The spirit of the Institute, the spirit of faith and zeal lived integrally is fundamentally an attitude, a contemplative gaze upon reality viewed with the eyes of faith. Such an attitude energizes and fills the Brother with zeal for announcing the gospel of salvation to youth. Faith and zeal: with eyes open and hearts burning we desire "to make the presence of Jesus Christ a reality in our lives and in this world".⁷³

D.They will pay as much attention as they can to the holy presence of God"⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Cahiers lasalliens* 55, p. 105-125

⁷¹ 44th General Chapter – Circular 455 p. 11

⁷² *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1705 – Chap. 2 , 9

⁷³ 44th General Chapter – Circular 455, p. 7

2.21. From the beginning of the Institute, one of the most remarkable spiritual insights was the frequent recollection of the presence of God and the offering of all one's action to God, whether in the setting of community life or in the classroom with the pupils. Remembering God is not just a routine action but rather a means of permanently turning towards Him. Sister Joye Gros in one of her books tells how, when the family was gathering for a meal, her father, who was a former pupil of the Brothers, always said: "Let us remember that we are in the presence of God". She goes on to say: "It is true. We are always in the presence of God, and sometimes we realise it".⁷⁵

2.22. For John Baptist de La Salle the practice of remembering the presence of God is the "soul that sustains one's interior life"⁷⁶ and cannot be reduced to a more or less marginal devotion. It relates to the very heart of the spirituality he bequeathed to us: the spirit of faith.⁷⁷

Recalling God's presence should lead us to unite ourselves with him and feel ourselves being sent by him to others. As one Brother wrote very felicitously: "I always need to live in the sacred space of the presence of God. Awareness of his presence makes me turn towards others. Without this inner prayer, I am rudderless".

2.23. Following the French school of spirituality, the expression "Live Jesus in our hearts" expresses the Christocentric nature of Lasallian spirituality. This short, simple prayer, used today throughout the Lasallian world, expresses a deep sense of faith and an existential relationship with the person of Christ. John Baptist de La Salle understood that it is only in total union and personal identification with Jesus that the Brothers can be faithful to their vocation to proclaim the gospel. Recalling the words of the Apostle Paul⁷⁸ he urges them: "Be ready today to receive Him fully and to abandon yourself completely to His guidance, allowing Him to rule over all your innermost impulses, so that He is in absolute control and you are so completely dependent that you are able to say that it is no longer you who live but Jesus Christ who lives in you".⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1705, Chap.2, Art. 7

⁷⁵ Joye Gros, *Theological Reflection* p. 5

⁷⁶ *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, Christian Brothers Conference, p.62

⁷⁷ Jacques Goussin – *A Lasallian Practice : The Presence of God* – MEL Bulletin 21

⁷⁸ Galatians 2: 20

2.24. By acting in this way, the Brother will be capable of “touching the hearts” of his pupils so that they in turn will feel a love for Christ: “If you really love Jesus Christ, you will take all possible care to impress a love for Him in the hearts of the children you are educating to be His disciples.”⁸⁰

E. You should have recourse to prayer”⁸¹

2.25. The interior life is nourished by prayer. Jesus shows us this by example in the gospel. For John Baptist de La Salle, it is essential that a Brother should learn how to pray well. “The first thing one must do when one joins a community to be one of God’s elect is to learn how to make mental prayer and to apply oneself to the practice of it.”⁸²

2.26. From this recommendation, we see that the form of prayer which he puts forward is mental prayer, which the primitive Rule describes as the “the first and principal exercise of the day”.⁸³ The Founder drew up a method of mental prayer to help the Brothers practice it with profit. This “heart to heart talk” with God is still essentially the same today, even if it cannot easily be done every day. It is a time for turning in on oneself, a time of attentive, loving listening to the word,⁸⁴ a time to look over the experience of the work offered to God, a time for contemplating God’s love manifest in our lives and in the lives of our pupils, a time to ask for the ability to “touch hearts” in order to open the pupils’ minds to human knowledge and to the mystery of God. It is a privileged time for becoming aware once more of the unity of one’s life in the eyes of God.

2.27. The celebration of the Eucharist is another high point in the spiritual life of the Brother. In the Eucharist “the Brothers are a community united in mind and heart in the same Spirit for the same



⁷⁹ Meditation 22, 2

⁸⁰ Meditation 102, 2

⁸¹ Meditation 36, 1

⁸² Meditation 72, 1

⁸³ *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1705 Ch. 4, Art. 1

⁸⁴ *Verbum Domini*, 86



mission".⁸⁵ At a time when the rigours of Jansenism were dominant, keeping people away from frequent communion, John Baptist de La Salle was not afraid to say of his Brothers that: "They will have a special love for holy communion".⁸⁶

2.28. In certain countries today, the scarcity of priests makes participation in daily mass a practical impossibility. In such circumstances, the Brothers are in the same position as religious Sisters and lay people. This situation represents an increasingly difficult challenge for a Church which asserts that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. In such situations, the Brothers' community projects should indicate how they will arrange to maintain a Eucharistic dimension to their spiritual life.

F. Union in a Community is a precious jewel"⁸⁷

2.29. Lasallian spirituality views the spirit of community as one of the cornerstones of our religious family. In the Rule we read: "In this Institute, they will manifest and always maintain a true spirit of community"⁸⁸. In the Meditation for the Vigil of the Ascension, de La Salle writes: "Since God has shown you the grace of calling you to live in community, there is nothing that you should ask for more insistently than this union of mind and heart with your Brothers, since it is only by such union that you will attain the peace which should be your happiness in life".⁸⁹

2.30. "The Community should be for the Brother the theological place of encounter with God, and, therefore, the Founder states clearly: Since we should not be here except to bring one another to God, we should especially strive to be united in God, and to have but one and the same heart, and one and the same mind"⁹⁰ Sharing our experience of God during moments of prayer and community meetings is a fundamental way to bring one another to God.

⁸⁵ The Rule Art. 70

⁸⁶ Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1705 Ch. 4, Art. 4

⁸⁷ Meditation 91. 2

⁸⁸ Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1705, Ch. 3, Art. 1

⁸⁹ Meditation 39. 3

⁹⁰ Meditation 113.2; quoted in PL 2007, p. 13

But we know we do not do this as often as we should. Brothers, we must be more serious in our intent to share our faith with one another. Is it not ironic that some of our partners are more comfortable sharing their faith than we who have consecrated our life to the following of Jesus?

2.31. De La Salle never tired of reminding his first Brothers of the importance of their being together in prayer. In the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer he even goes so far as to say that prayer in common is the second form of placing oneself in the presence of God: "Is it not a great happiness to be assured that, when you are gathered together with your Brothers either for praying or for any other exercise, you are in the company of Our Lord who is in the midst of the Brothers".⁹¹

2.32. To share our experience of God with others, we need trust. A fraternal life presupposes relationships that are full of respect, understanding and mutual affection. The lack of these things is a source of suffering. John Baptist de La Salle warns us that "a community without charity and union is a kind of hell".⁹²

2.33. In our relationship with our Brothers the spirit that should prevail in community is that of St. Paul's desire for the church at Thessalonica: "Remain at peace with one another. We exhort you to admonish the unruly, cheer the fainthearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all. Rejoice always, never cease praying, give constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus".⁹³

2.34. Frequently, the attraction to the Brother's life or the loss of it is governed by the quality of fraternal life in the community. Clearly, that quality is linked to



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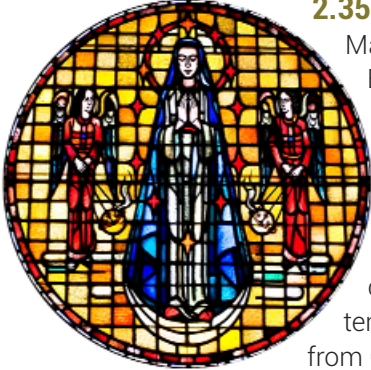
⁹¹ *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, Christian Brothers Conference. P.42

⁹² Meditation 65. 1

⁹³ 1Thess. 5 13b-18

the quality of the spiritual life of every Brother in the Community. So prayer life is closely linked to brotherly community life. To bear the name of Brother and to call one another 'Brother' is a plan of life and a responsibility which embodies very well the motto of the Institute: "Indivisa manent".

G. Mary will enlighten you and will help you to know God's will for you"⁹⁴



2.35. De La Salle shows admiration and a special love for Mary as a model for life. He often suggested to his Brothers pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries to ask for her protection. In the nine meditations which he devotes to her, he underlines the importance of the presence of Mary (Jesus' teacher) in the spirituality of the Brother. Mary is the best model for the Brother of union with God, of consecration and of apostolic commitment.⁹⁵ She is called 'blessed' because she listened to, believed and put in practice the word that came from God.

H. A spirituality "for all those employed in the education of youth"⁹⁶

2.36. Nowadays, sharing the mission between Brothers and associates or colleagues (whether lay or other religious) is an accepted fact. However, this sharing would not be viable, if it stayed at the functional level and had no spiritual dimension, that is to say, no sharing in the spirituality inherited from John Baptist de La Salle. This spirituality is a blessing for us Brothers, and for all those who view their work as a ministry and a way to realize their human and spiritual potential. Indeed it can lead all Lasallians towards a deeper relationship with God, with others and with ourselves through our everyday work of teaching. Brother John Johnston used to say that spirituality was the heart of association for the Lasallian mission. It can help us to strengthen our faith in our way of life and our mission and it contributes to the building up of living educational communities which shine by their witness and their actions.

⁹⁴ Meditation 164. 1

⁹⁵ Meditation 191. 1, 2

⁹⁶ Cf. Title of Meditations for the time of retreat.

2.37. This sharing is all that more indispensable because in some parts of the Institute the physical presence of the Brothers is disappearing from the schools. Lay people are now carrying out the main part of the Lasallian mission to young people, including the transmission of the charism of the Founder. How can they do this if their hearts and minds are not touched by and nourished by the spiritual message derived from the reading of Scripture as recommended by John Baptist de La Salle? He has been called the Patron Saint of all Christian educators, and this was not only on account of his teaching and evangelizing activity. It was also because he turned the latter into a way of sanctification and encounter with God. Now it is for us Brothers to share the treasure we bear in the earthen vessels⁹⁷ that we are.



⁹⁷ 2 Corinthians 4, 7

- A. What do the words of de La Salle: "Make no distinction between the duties of your profession and those that refer to your salvation and perfection" mean to me/us today? What link does this notion have to do with my personal annual program?
- B. Can I name a time or place when I felt I was living the constitutive elements of our vocation in an integrated manner? If so, what was the ministry? How might I describe the community life and prayer? How did each energize the other?
- C. The theologian Jan Walgrave has said that "our age is one that constitutes a virtual conspiracy against an interior life, an awareness of the presence of God where we can have some interior depth". We live in a time of excesses: excessive work, achievement, practical concerns, communication, a basic restlessness and dissatisfaction. Do I agree? Is it true in my life?
- D. Is there a difference between "balance" (having a time for each aspect of our lives) and integration (a profound unity among all the elements of our lives as Brothers)? Do I ever really recall that I am in God's presence? Do I or we "say our prayers" or do we pray? Do our community prayers and liturgy nourish us or are they simply rituals? Are there other aspects of Lasallian spirituality I live and would add to this description in the circular?
- E. What can we do if our spiritual life is weak or dissatisfying? We have to ask at this point: What are we going to do? How do we deepen and integrate our spiritual lives individually and as a community?

Personal Notes





3

Being a Brother: Offering others a Way of Life

- 3.1.** Vatican II gave renewed importance to the baptismal vocation by saying that holiness and participation in the mission of the Church are things that concern all Christians. All the same, vocations to the priesthood and the religious life continue to loom large in peoples' minds.
- 3.2.** Societal changes affect attitudes, religion and in fact all aspects of our lives. Over the years, we have seen serious drops in vocations to religious life, and in countries that still have reasonably good numbers of men in formation we see some decline. A vocation is a call from God. It is mysterious, sometimes unexplainable, and cannot be reduced to marketing schemes. However, how we Brothers live our lives as visible, credible and prophetic religious can be an example to anyone entertaining thoughts about religious life. Along this line there are two brief comments from young people we would like to share.
- 3.3.** There are two young men who have been aspirants for a couple of years and visited communities and ministries. They are the kind of young men all of us would love to call Brother. The two of them say they talk frequently to one another about their experience as aspirants and a question they have is: "will we find the depth of spiritual life we are seeking in a life with the Brothers"?
- 3.4.** The second is from a Volunteer who is living with the Brothers: "This presence of God in the Lasallian charism is one of the central focuses of the daily prayer of



Bjorn/photocase

the Brothers. It distinguishes us, and in my opinion, is one of the most important things that makes each individual a Lasallian. Our work is a manifestation of our love for God in each other, in those we have met before and those we have yet to meet. We leap into the darkness, not sure what exactly we have accepted, but knowing in our own unique ways that it is important, that we are making a change – stemming from our inner compassion. I can't pretend that I have attained a final and internal peace that allows me to share infinite peace and joy with others – in fact, I would claim the opposite. I have such passion from being imperfect and seeing a necessary change in myself, that I can do nothing else but give my life in order to save it."

3.5. These two contrasting comments reflect in a real way the perceptions that young people may have of us. This is not to deny that rapid and drastic societal changes have much to do with the vocations situation; but we must accept that our life in community, our evangelizing in an educational setting and our personal spiritual life can give flesh to the call of God experienced by some young people. This is something we will explore in the next section.

Why should we question the appeal of the Brother's vocation?

3.6. The question is often asked: "Do we want new Brothers?" and we usually answer "Yes". However, we need to look carefully at the implications of this response. What is the basis for it, and what does it commit us to doing?

The question of the two aspirants is a serious one. What costs are we willing to pay in our present community lifestyle and prayer life to attract these kinds of young men? They are young men like so many of their peers who engage in service activities for the poor and disadvantaged and are convinced about the value of our mission. They wish to be convinced by the depth of our spiritual and consecrated life as followers of Jesus.

3.7. An Institute-wide enquiry carried out by the General Council involving Brothers and Lay Lasallians showed clearly the importance of the Brother's role in the Church and in the Lasallian mission. It encouraged the Brother Superior General and his Council to promote this as a priority throughout Institute.

3.8. This focus on the Brother's vocation is undertaken not simply out of a desire to "increase the numbers" but because we value the gift of our brotherhood and want to share it with others. We also value it because we bear a responsibility to the young men entrusted to our care to nurture their dis-

cernment to a call to religious life. Furthermore what would association and the shared mission mean, if there was only one partner, our lay colleagues and no Brothers?

3.9. Our Rule is quite categorical: all of us have a responsibility vis-à-vis the promotion of vocations: "They (the Brothers) are happy to promote vocations for their Institute".⁹⁸ This is a challenge for every Brother in the Institute, whatever his age, to reply in the affirmative to the following question: "Am I happy to promote vocations to the Institute? And how can I involve myself in it in practice?"

3.10. The Rule also is very clear about the way in which the promotion of vocations can be effective: "For the pastoral ministry of vocations to become an effective invitation to share in the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, it is necessary:

- that by their very lives the Brothers give testimony to the presence of God among people, to the liberating force of his Spirit, and to the tenderness of his love;
- that in a fraternal and apostolic spirit, the Brothers' communities live the gospel saying, "Come and see". They do this by the sincerity of the welcome they extend;
- that the Institute work effectively for its own renewal by responding to the most urgent needs of young people who are waiting to hear the word of the gospel".⁹⁹

3.11. To understand this is to develop a "culture of vocations" in the Institute. We should know that, as Brothers of the Christian Schools, the promotion of vocations for the Church and for our Institute is part of our "culture".

Obviously, this "culture of vocations" does not exist apart from the milieu in



⁹⁸ Rule, 82

⁹⁹ Rule, 85



Chandravarkar Arunan

which it is developed, and where it works out its strategies and tries them out so as to produce good results. In order to approach the question of the pastoral ministry of vocations in a realistic way, we must keep in mind the features of the world of today as indicated above in the first part of this Circular. We must also hear what is being said to us by the men and women who are concerned for our vocation. This was the object of the study, the results of which we shall now present to you.

Our Enquiry

- 3.12.** Five brothers and five Lasallian partners from each Region participated in the survey. They represented the diversity of the Institute. In addition to their responses we include our own reflections based on our experience of the Regions these past five years.
- 3.13.** We do not claim to say radically new things or cannot fully address each of the topics below. The interest of an inquiry is that the answers reflect what comes first to mind, the most visible characteristics or gaps. Questioning Brothers and friends requires paying attention to what they have to say. Let us accept to read everything, to take time to understand their arguments, to be questioned again by what we do not like to hear or what we consider as settled, outdated or impossible to realize, by what could sometimes disturb our routines, our opinions and our comfort.
- 3.14.** We will start by mentioning the positive aspects, the richness and assets of our vocation, as they are recognized by the Brothers and our lay friends who were questioned. The second part will indicate our weaknesses, or what can be regarded as obstacles to choosing the vocation of Brother. Let us listen carefully.

What can be perceived by others as essential elements of our vocation?

Here are the positive aspects reported by the questioned persons.

3.15. They consider us as educators of the young and of the poor and they recognize that we have certain qualities:

- educators who love the young, who are with them, at their service, with a close and fraternal attitude;
- educators who have a preference for the poor;
- educators who are present in educational ministries and centers where people need them more and where their testimony may be seen and recognized;
- good educators and teachers with a sense of responsibility;
- educators who speak frankly to young people, who accept to help them build themselves, including emotionally, by inviting them to acquire more self-discipline.

A number of the questioned persons concluded that, because of our availability for the mission, we can or should be pioneers in education and speak publicly on topics of education, especially of the poor.

3.16. They also consider us as educators of faith, as catechists, but especially as accompanying adults for the young in their faith, their lives and their vocational path.

3.17. Regarding the community dimension of our life, qualities recognized in us or expected from us are reflected in the following statements:

- The community is a place that challenges;
- Living in community can be attractive, but at the same time it can be challenging;
- The community is a place of opportunities and challenges;
- The community may be inviting. It should especially support and accompany its members, be a place for sharing in the brotherhood;
- A community of consecrated persons who call themselves Brothers must be open, must invite to prayer, and engage in moments of sharing and conviviality;

- It invites youth to experience community life, through volunteering work for instance;
- The two attractions of a community are radiance and joy.

Here are some of the shortcomings reported by persons who were questioned and that may lead us to think about the testimony given by our lives.

3.18. Brothers and lay persons who were questioned mention:

- The work overload of certain Brothers, the multiplicity of the daily tasks that do not seem to be connected;
- The insufficient number of Brothers in large institutions, with the following consequence: the Brothers often devote themselves to administrative and managerial tasks, leaving aside their presence in the classrooms and in the other educational and pastoral settings of the institutions.

3.19. Shortcomings have been observed in our apostolic zeal

- Out of discouragement or laziness, or under lame excuses (youngsters are no longer interested), Brothers sometimes leave out catechesis and education of the faith.
- Some among us are sometimes at risk of becoming addicted to routine, of lacking zeal for pastoral work.

3.20. Some aspects of our community life and of our consecration are problematic.

- Tensions, divisions, individualism, a certain authoritarianism or its opposite, laxity, make life difficult for the Brothers and are quickly noted by lay people;
- Lack of consideration for liturgical requirements, repetitive and shallow prayer;
- Excessive material comfort;
- In secularized societies, long-term commitments are often difficult to keep or are broken - this is true for all styles of life;
- In societies where the family has a great importance, celibacy and the loneliness that seems associated with it are rejected, and seem an impossible, even unthinkable and abnormal way of life.

3.21. The study has collected some comments about the unity of our life that draws our attention to some concerns:

- The Mission is important but is not essential.
- Faith, the educational mission and the life of prayer do not nurture each other.
- Brothers do not seem united in the mission.
- Some Brothers are seen only as teachers; they are never seen in the chapel nor attending the prayers organized in the institution.
- It is necessary to clarify our vocation when we want to share the charism and the mission.

3.22. These remarks make us more aware that the artificial separation that we establish between mission, community and consecration is one cause of the problem of the meaning and relevance of our vocation.

The mission is essential to the Brothers' vocation, but since it is carried out by so many lay persons who share our charism, the specific role of the Brother is unclear to many. There is also a lack of clarity as to what the vocation of the Brother means in the Church. For example, in some cultures the vocation of the Brother is not valued as is the Priesthood.

An easily recognizable vocation?

3.23. Various answers to the survey highlighted factors or reasons why young people do not consider the Brother's vocation. A layman says bluntly: "It is the lack of clarity and visibility of the specific mission of the Brother. A young man will not give his life for something that is vague or diffuse. The Brothers should be identified for what they are and not for what they are not."

Even if we manage to have a clear awareness of our mission and our identity the question of our visibility remains. While the educational work is inherently a public function, it makes us highly visible in an institutional sense. However it is not enough to be simply visible in the world of education. The visibility of our educational centers must be accompanied by the visibility of the religious community and each of its members.



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3.24. The challenge of visibility is even greater in the larger world and in the Church, where the Brothers are even less known.

Identity and visibility have been a question from the beginning. That led John Baptist de La Salle to write the *Memorandum on the Habit*,¹⁰⁰ the purpose of which is, through the justification of the habit worn by the Brothers, to say "what this community is and who compose it".¹⁰¹ We know, the memorandum concludes that the habit which intrigued

both the ecclesiastical authorities and the social environment had to be maintained. In a society where trades formed recognized corporations, the original vocation of the Brother required a particular outfit. It allowed showing publicly what it meant for the Brothers "to be in the world without belonging to the world"¹⁰².

3.25. Wearing the habit is still a clear way to be visible. However "being visible" goes beyond appearances. For the Brothers, the first way to be visible is always to live the values of the Gospel in the exercise of their mission. Being visible is also to say with a healthy pride "I am a Brother". Being visible is to directly invite the young to consider the vocation of Brother as a valid option for life. Being visible is encouraging parents to consider the consecrated life as a path of personal achievement for their children. Being visible is demonstrating concretely by our commitment to be consistent with our promises to live together our religious consecration, in the search for the will of God, as single and poor men.

3.26. Being visible is, above all, demonstrating to the world that we understand in depth the real and concrete meaning of the word that defines us: 'Brothers'. Living in a community authenticates the meaning of this name. Being visible

¹⁰⁰ Œuvres complètes pp. 51- 58

¹⁰¹ *Mémoire sur l'habit (Memorandum on the Habit)* – Œuvres complètes p. 53 . For a good presentation, see F. Henri Bedel - *Études lasalliennes* 5 p. 71-76

¹⁰² John 17: 15

is bringing our communities to places located near the realities lived by young people to turn them into places where they can express themselves without fear of being judged. Being visible is turning the house of the Brothers into a space where young people distant from the faith, faced with family or social problems, break-ups of deep affective links, can find answers for their life, including their life of faith. We are not Brothers separately; it is only our communities that can tell the world, in a clear and true language, the good news of the Kingdom, which is already in this world.

A culture of vocations

3.27. The religious vocation is a gift. It is not the result of human efforts. It is a gift of God. John Baptist de La Salle was aware of that and recommended to the Brothers: "Ask Him (God) fervently, too, that he will be pleased to make your Institute grow and produce good day by day".¹⁰³ However "to bet on hope", to be patient despite the lack of immediate results, to act without caring about statistics, means "do our share" in working courageously, confident in a God who is good and "does his share".

3.28. In the Old Testament, Samuel needs Elijah to understand that God calls him¹⁰⁴; in the New Testament, Paul needs Ananias to understand the significance of his unexpected meeting with the risen Lord¹⁰⁵. These two references and many others in Scripture remind us that human interventions in vocational journeys can take diverse forms. In this way, we wish to emphasize the need to "foster a mentality in which life itself is looked upon as a vocation"¹⁰⁶ in our Districts, communities and educational institutions based on local realities.

3.29. For us a "culture of vocations" includes sharing the mission of vocation ministry among the Brothers, other Lasallians and students in our educational Centers. While each District, Delegation and sector should



Mike Wade

¹⁰³ Meditation 207. 3

¹⁰⁴ 1 Samuel 3

¹⁰⁵ Acts 9

¹⁰⁶ *Instrumentum Laboris*, Synod of Bishops for the New Evangelization , 160

have someone in charge of vocations who coordinates this work, vocation ministry is a responsibility of all the Brothers.

3.30. Vocation ministry, the invitation to consider our vocation as an option of life, should be included appropriately in the pastoral ministry to young people. Inviting young people to consider Brotherhood and religious vocations has to be a central component of a Lasallian Educational Center. Yes, vocation ministry is a key element of a Lasallian educational institution.

3.31. A culture of vocations would free Brothers and other Lasallians to invite, at “the right moment”, a young man to consider our vocation . The “right moment” cannot happen unless the Brother or person asking has a positive relationship with the individual. Most of all a positive, Gospel-based witness of the Brothers is essential to form a culture of vocations.

3.32. We can be present with the young people who associate with us for a time: Lasallian volunteers, youth groups and young teachers committed in service to the mission. Volunteer trips, catechizing missions, service opportunities and other programs are places where the Brothers should be and where young people can get to know us. Often it is in these experiences that the “right moment” can occur. Additionally, at parent and family gatherings, vocations can be stressed and encouraged.

In some centers, where students are very young, a culture of vocations would involve making the Brothers' vocation known to them.

3.33. We communicate in all kinds of ways. Dialogue, two-way communication, is always essential for a culture of vocations. Of course, vocation teams need to use social media and other modern forms of communication, but nothing can replace face to face human dialog. Young people like to talk about their future. By listening to them, we can learn of their best hopes and



desires and, perhaps, find the “right moment” to invite them to consider our life. We do this not for our sake but for the sake of the young person who may be called to our life.

- 3.34.** In each area of the world, the means to achieve a “culture of vocations” is, of course, dependent on local customs and realities. The best practices to build a culture of vocations needs to be discerned on a local level, but the witness of the Brothers is universal and needed everywhere to accomplish this work.



Phil Edon

How to move from fear to hope?

- 3.35.** There are some Brothers who are afraid to talk about vocations. The fear is not so much of inviting but the fear of the response that might be negative. It is the fear of a rejection of our own life's meaning; this can be perceived as dying. Taking the risk is overcoming fear. We have to remember that it is God who creates vocations. Let us move then from fear to hope.
- 3.36.** How many times will we have to hear the words of Jesus: 'Do not be afraid', to be able to transform our fear to hope? As Jesus knows that we are struggling to hear what is incredible and that hearing it once is not enough, he continues to say it in various ways and continually invites us to move from fear to hope: "Learn from the parable of the fig tree. As soon as its branches become flexible and its foliage grows, you realize that summer is near"¹⁰⁷. The fear of the cold and of the darkness of a long winter is overcome only by the promise of the coming of a new crop, when spring begins to fill everything with life.
- 3.37.** We often fear for the future because we look back remembering past harvests and see that the current resources are not sufficient in number. Instead, why not look ahead learning from the fig tree to see the spring already present in the merciful actions of God. Here are some examples of these signs that God gives us.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 24:32

A better understanding of the value of our fraternity

3.38. Many people do not know or even understand what it means to be a Brother. However many do experience fraternity in other activities in which they are engaged, for example, the Young Lasallian movement. It is a challenge for us Brothers to invite young people to our communities where they will see for themselves the spirit of fraternal life.

3.39. Young people and colleagues are touched by the fraternity they see among us. They may be inspired to consider the vocation of the Brother as a possibility for themselves. Do we have such communities where we are open to inviting young people to share in the depth of experience they expect?

A stronger will to join prayer and action in the pastoral ministry of vocations

3.40. In our novenas and other prayers of intercession for vocations, we refer to the explicit invitation of Jesus to his disciples: "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest"¹⁰⁸. We must not forget to place this phrase in its context. The invitation is indeed the fruit of the compassion of Jesus for the poor and abandoned multitude who wander "like sheep without a shepherd"¹⁰⁹.

The vocation of many of our young brothers arose from the deep experience of compassion, an attitude of listening to the clamor, often silenced, of the poor. Working for vocations is to place the vocational proposal in the light of this sympathetic look in the context of the service.

An effective physical solidarity between Sectors, Districts and Regions of the Institute

3.41. Working for vocations is to be-



Hernando Piedra

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 9: 37-38

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 9: 35



Sergio Castelli

come aware that we are Brothers for the Institute, for the Church and for the world. The awareness of being 'Brothers without borders' is at the root of the decision of a growing number of Brothers who offer themselves to live their consecration in the most fragile sectors of the Institute in terms of vocations in order to carry out vocation ministry.

A responsibility shared with generous and enthusiastic lay persons.

3.42. Today, it is common to meet novices and young Brothers who were invited to enter the Institute by partners convinced of the value of the Brothers' vocation. Working for vocations is to share with others the joy experienced in the promotion of vocations to the Institute¹¹⁰.

A clearer awareness of the particular contribution that the vocation of Brothers brings in the context of the Lasallian family

3.43. The same call to live according to the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values binds us to all Lasallians, but "The Brothers' vocation is specific and unique in the Church. It is needed today in our world, perhaps more than ever before. If there is to be a co-responsibility in the mission, then both parts (Brothers and lay Lasallians) are essential"¹¹¹. We work for all vocations in living the association with everybody within the Lasallian family,

¹¹⁰ Cf. Rule n° 82

¹¹¹ Circular 461 : Associated for the Lasallian Mission... An Act of Hope Chapter 5, 5.19, Rome, September 2010

actively sharing the hope that more young people will embrace the vocation of Brothers, which does not mean in any way that the various Lasallian vocations or other vocations are forgotten.

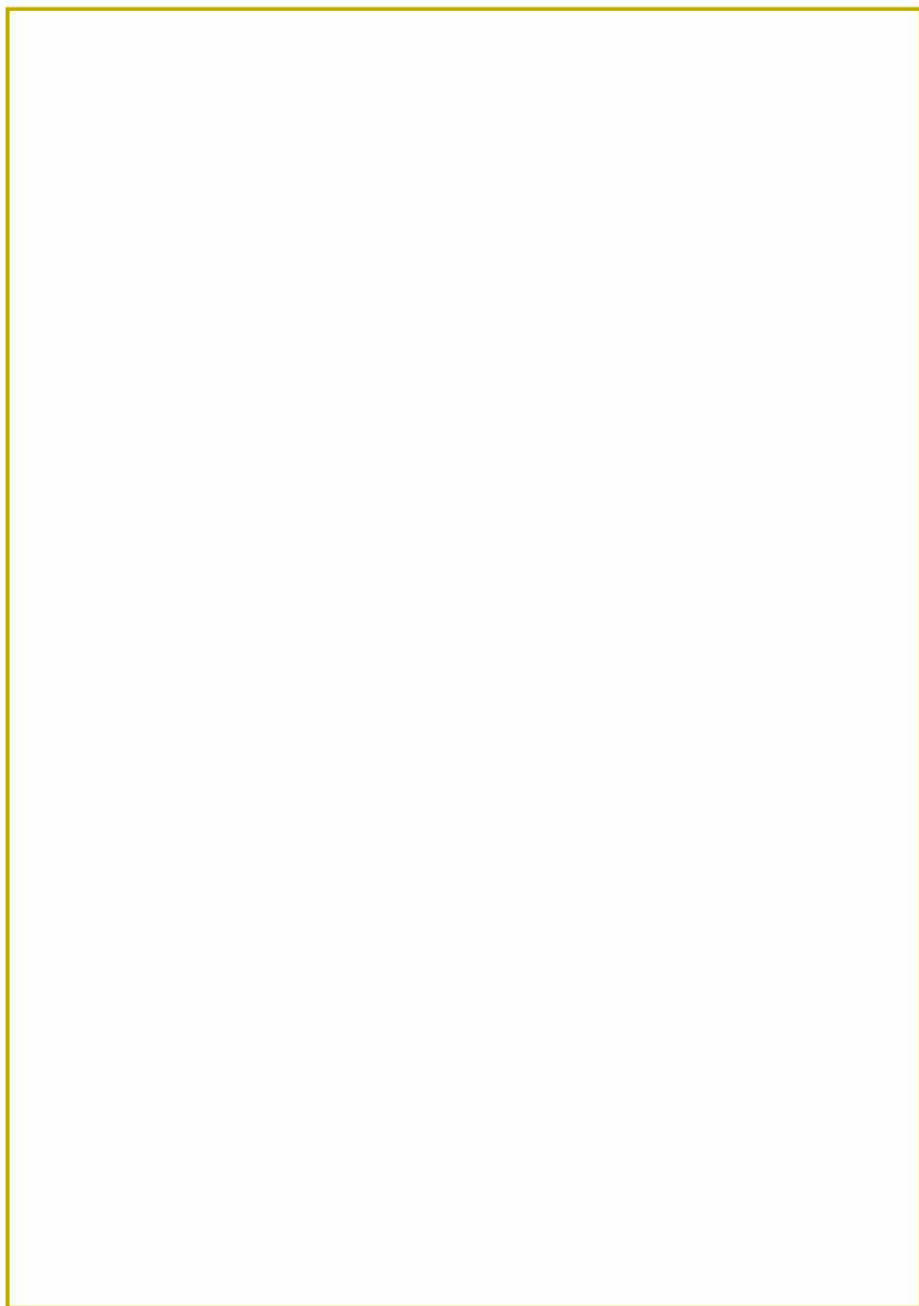
3.44. These actual signs of God's mercy and many more confirm the intuition that Jesus presents to us in the parable of the fig tree. We know that spring is near because what was dead seems to give signs of life. In spite of the winter apparent in certain regions, we cannot help but to see the signs of life that God awakens in the entire Institute. We are called to be "sentinels of dawn", active signs who cause the light to "come out like dawn."¹¹²

¹¹² Isaiah 58:8

- A. Do you believe that the Spirit of God who was so alive and active in our Founder's time longs to live and breathe in us today?"
- B. How would you answer the two young men who were wondering if they will find the depth of spiritual life with the Brothers? How did you feel when you read the statement of the volunteer that the Presence of God is one of the center focuses of the daily prayer of the Brother? Do you agree that some of us are afraid to invite young men to join our life? If so, what is the basis of that fear?
- C. Do you share the points of view presented in the survey as challenges and do you know other difficulties that may hinder their thinking of our vocation? How might we deal with these other challenges?
- D. Name some concrete ways we can develop or strengthen the "culture of vocations" in our educational center and District? How do we overcome our fear of asking young men to consider our life?

Personal Notes





Conclusion

C.1. As we conclude this Circular we are left with the impression that words cannot adequately express what we wanted to say since this was more about living a personal experience than about making a speech. And that is our final invitation. Make the Gospel the center of our lives, live a unified spirituality and commit ourselves to vocation ministry. In the end, it is to identify our lives with that of Jesus and to allow him to continue his saving mission in us.



C.2. It is clear that our spirituality as it was lived and passed on by the Founder does not have, nor can it have, anything more original or basic than the person of Jesus and his concrete existence. It's about living in the spirit of Jesus, letting our entire life be filled with the values, attitudes, criteria and preferences of Jesus. It's about focusing our life on the person and practices of Jesus. It's about walking in his footsteps, trying to make our whole life an offering, as he did, putting it in service of the Father and our brothers and sisters.

C.3. As we have seen it is not enough to be disciples, we also need to be apostles. This is what our Founder told us: *It is not enough for you to be true servants of Jesus Christ; you are further obliged to make him known and adored by the children whom you instruct.*¹¹³ But to do this we need to be aware that we cannot give what we do not possess: *You are commissioned by God to clothe them with Jesus Christ himself and with his Spirit. Have you been careful, before undertaking such a holy ministry, to clothe yourselves*

¹¹³ Meditation 182.3

with him in order to communicate this grace to them?¹¹⁴

C.4. The Founder spoke of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as the best evangelical icon of our vocation as Brothers.¹¹⁵ In the Good Shepherd we see reflected the passion of Jesus for each human person with their proper name and unique story. It is a passion aimed especially at the very poor, the weak, and least considered, a passion that reflects the compassionate and merciful love of the Father, a passion that is carried out so that all have life and life in abundance,¹¹⁶ This is our vocation, to love the children and the young people the Lord has entrusted to us with tenderness, each one as someone who is unique and inimitable and to be witnesses for them of the Father's unconditional love.



C.5. The document *Vita Consecrata* presents Mary to us as the model and effective aid in our following of Jesus. We cannot forget how the French school of spirituality defined her: "an open empty vessel filled with Jesus." Let us ask the Virgin to communicate to us "that love which enables us to offer our lives every day for Christ and for the salvation of the world".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Meditation 189.1

¹¹⁵ cf. Meditation 33

¹¹⁶ cf. John 10: 10

¹¹⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 28