



08-B-40

## **SOME INITIATIVES FOR THE FORMATION OF OUR YOUNG BROTHERS IN AFRICA**

### **1 - A long way to go**

The RELAF (The Lasallian Region of Africa) has just taken some common measures in view of the basic formation of their young Brothers. They had to travel the relatively long route of about fifteen years to arrive at similar decisions which are in operation throughout the world. This was so, for these decisions were the results of long and difficult negotiations and agreements.

It was in 1972 that the first meeting of those responsible for the Institute in Africa was held, and this was done with the effective assistance of the Central government of the Institute. A certain number of problems which are common and specific to the Lasallian religious life in Africa were thus grappled with. After this, more frequent meetings have been held and more exchanges and contacts have been established, sessions of permanent formation were organized in a systematic and regular fashion. Thus the CLAF (The African Lasallian Center) meets every two years with some twenty Brothers or other interested educators coming together to renew their ministry, their community life, and to reflect upon the inculturation of the Lasallian charism in Africa...

All of this enabled many Brothers to rise to a Continental level, permitting them to meet and get to know one another. It has contributed to modeling and making more precise the image of the RELAF which is made up of districts, sub-districts, and delegations which are so far away from one another geographically as well as historically.

Thus initial formation had been for a long time subject, if not a victim, of this disparity.

### **2 - Sporadic and mutual assistance**

At the beginning of their history, the various Lasallian sectors of Africa relied very much on the founding districts of Europe and America for the initial formation of their Brothers. However, of late, for several reasons which can not be brought up here, because of the lack of time and of place, the African houses of formation had to appeal, no longer to people abroad, but to the Brothers in their own sectors. Thus was born a change of approach or an alliance among the neighboring African districts to solve the problem of the basic formation of their Brothers. The initiative for this mutual assistance first became a reality in 1977 in Upper Volta, which today is known as Burkina Faso.

The novitiate of Toussiana received the novices from Cameroon and Rwanda and received help from Madagascar to complete the staff. Next, it was the big island itself which opened its novitiate in Analabe to initiate Rwandese and Cameroons into the Lasallian religious life.

We must take note of a pragmatic characteristic of these initiatives. There are no available formateurs on the scene, and yet there are young men ready and waiting to begin their novitiate. Well then! They send the young men first to a fellow district which has a formation staff available and a novitiate which is too large for its own subjects.

### **3 - The Urgency of a common formation programme**

The first initiatives of cooperation are waiting, however, to be completed by better thought-out planning. If you put novices from different sectors together into the same formation program, it is first of all necessary that they all have similar formation and background, enabling them to follow the same instructions in a common novitiate.

Thus, concretely, beginning with the actual practice, it can be determined that the postulancy program of such or such a sector is at fault because it is too short, does not have enough postulants, because the religious formation is too rudimentary, etc.

From these critical considerations was born the idea establishing one common formation program; and this idea would be all the more urgent because the orientations and suggestions coming from the Center of the Institute recommended taking the initial formation of the Brothers very seriously. It is a priority and must be handled as such.

To take up this challenge, the conference of the Brothers Visitors of Africa called together all those responsible for formation in the various districts, at Yaoundé in 1982. This meeting drew up a document, the

biggest part of which dealt with «*Orientations for Initial Formation*». It is a document of reference intended for the councilors of districts, vocation committees, and for those responsible for houses of formation. These directives encompass successively the contents of the program of initial formation, their fundamental objectives, the means of realizing them, and the amount of time to be devoted to them. It is above all the formation of the novices which gave this group of formateurs the most to think about; they tried to determine the principal objectives of the novitiate and to suggest the best means of attaining them. To avoid a long and drawn out presentation, we shall point out only the main titles and their objectives:

- To follow Christ by living the spirit of the Beatitudes.
- To enter ourselves into the life of the Church.
- To form a Lasallian community.
- To form Brothers for today, capable of preparing the adults of tomorrow.
- To endorse the inculturation of our religious life into the people where it is present.

With regard to the pedagogy to be followed, the following was recommended:

- Take great care in beginning with life and finishing with life.
- See to it that each Novice takes a hand in his own formation.
- Discover the needs of today in order to undertake new modes of educational presence to the poor.

A summary of the programme is drawn up following these objectives in order to give the formateurs some concrete guidelines for implementing them.

#### **4 - The decision is taken for a regional novitiate**

The implementation of this common program could have been given to each district as its own responsibility. However, this would require sufficient personnel, which is not available in these Lasallian sectors of Africa. Thus, the idea came up of grouping the novitiates together and thus make use of the competence of the various formateurs available. This would also enable the Novitiate programme to be extended to two years, which had been the object of serious discussions and frequent dialogue between the Center of the Institute and the RELAF. Finally, during its annual meeting, held in 1983, the conference of African Visitors decided upon establishing a regional novitiate in Kinshasa. It would assure two years of initial religious formation for the young African Brothers belonging to the various districts of RELAF, following the formation plan established by the regional conference. At present, this decision is being implemented in the following way:

Some twenty novices, coming from five districts, sub-districts, or delegations, are following a common formation programme in Kinshasa. The direction is confided to a team of four Brothers of four different nationalities. Of these, two are Europeans and two are Africans.

This is a great accomplishment of the RELAF. It is hoped that it will last and that it will develop for the benefit of the initial formation of our young African Brothers.

We can point out, also, that the Visitors' Conference of the RELAF is already looking towards extending this cooperation even to a Post-novitiate. For the moment, the organization of this Post-novitiate is left up to each district, the professional or academic studies which the young Brothers should pursue during this time being the function of the official programme of each nation.

Still, the preparation time just prior to perpetual profession is again assumed by the Region. Thus, the decision has been made to create a Lasallian African Center (CELA) beginning in 1986. The CELA will be designed for all the Brothers who come to the year of their definitive commitment. It is proposed that they follow an entire year in order to deepen their sense of religious consecration, the meaning of the vows, the ministry of a Brother, to help them in inculturating the Lasallian charism within the African context. This decision still remains in the planning stage. But the young Brothers who are preparing for this definitive commitment are there. They are awaiting the opening of CELA. The problem is in providing the staff.

#### **Conclusion**

The RELAF is without doubt one of the most diverse and least homogeneous of the Regions in the Institute. In spite of this, it is always obliged to meet together and to do certain things together, not only to affirm its existence, but also to express its dynamism and its will to life. Thus, the CLAF (Lasallian African Center) has continued to function until the present. Still, it is for the benefit of the formation of the young, those Brothers who will carry on the work in the future, that the RELAF has centered all its attention during the past few years. Without doubt, there exists a willingness to listen and to implement the orientations coming from the Center of the Institute on the Apostolate of vocations and initial formation. (cf. Circ. 418). But, at the same time, it is felt that the Region is seeking to find itself further; it is exploring the need of reflecting together on the Lasallian religious life in Africa; it realizes the urgency of restating a programme of serious formation in order to take care of the young people who in sufficient numbers seem to be interested in our way of life. It is this above all which has justified these different decisions of the RELAF. However, not everything has been accomplished; very much remains to be done. Cooperation should be further developed and opened to the other Regions of the Institute.

**Brother Vincent Rabemahafaly**  
General Council