

THE A.C. SOCIAL ACTION MOVEMENT

The great City of Mexico, the capital in which the economic, industrial, artistic, and cultural development of the nation is centred, is not removed from the multiple problems of inadequate housing, unemployment, the lack of basic education, and in general, it cannot escape from the hundreds of thousands of persons who, in one form or another, fall within the ranks of those who are barely-subsisting.

As the centre of cultural development, Mexico City has large universities where the desire for scientific and liberal education reigns. These are educational centres which strive to educate people and to enable them to become useful to their society and to their country.

Among all these universities, we find our own La Salle University, whose objectives render it different, original, and unique, being that it is striving after the human and intellectual advancement of its members and to this end promotes its ideal of Christian formation; this is to look further and beyond itself; to come into contact with all the realities and, above all, to commit itself to the poor, to those most in need, to those who make up this "sub-society" of the barely subsisting.

In order to establish a concrete plan of social action, rooted in the knowledge of the realities of those most in need, there exists in La Salle University (ULSA), the movement for Social Action, A.C., known by the acronym MAS.

WHAT IS MAS?

MAS is a lay association whose fundamental object is to make the students of ULSA conscious of the social, economic, and cultural realities and thus to harmonize theory and practice.

Although MAS ought to fulfill its obligations as well as any other institution within the university, it considers its obligation to do so to be even more exacting because of the fact that ULSA is a Catholic university.

Education must not only bring about the development and spread of a sense of obligation which

teachers ought to fulfill in a Christian manner in the economic and social field, but also it must see to it that they learn the method which renders them capable of fulfilling this obligation.

The best education is one which is realized through continued activities, that is to say, putting into practice in the ordinary dealings of life the principles which have been learned. The formation of a definitive conscience in order to know and transform reality requires that the education be simultaneously an act of knowledge and an activity upon the reality in order to transform it.

The university zealously prepares professionals who are very much aware of their human quality, the obligations of their destiny, and the purpose of their knowledge and science. The ULSA, by means of the MAS, endeavours to have its students commit themselves to society and to face up to it, not in a shallow and fleeting manner, but in a way which will permanently transform it.

MAS endeavours to make the commitment of our young university youths surpass the simple and paternalistic "social work" in forms of projects, and urges intense, deliberate and strongly critical actions which can analyze and transform society. MAS seeks to combine an interaction of dialogue between the academic disciplines and research on one hand and the concrete practices of society on the other.

Educational institutions such as ours, orient the teaching of academic content towards the synthesis among science, life, and faith ordered toward the attainment of justice. To attain this, there is nothing so effective as to personally participate in the concrete situation of the deprived and barely-subsisting people in the urban ghettos and poor neighborhoods through demonstrations, campaigns, and by living among the people themselves, as does the MAS movement.

Love of our neighbor, charity, and justice are the essential elements of Christian thinking, but if these values are not carried over into practice, they will remain nothing but empty concepts. The programs of MAS develop along these lines and their inclusion in the training of the students to a certain extent succeeds in contributing to the purpose of the University of serving the community. This is done, not in a cold and formalistic manner, but rather in the sense in which this service becomes a permanent and heartfelt activity of social change, which cannot be accomplished without an understanding of the realities which make up living together.

THE BASES AND OBJECTIVES OF MAS

Social service ought to be formative and educational, and therefore must have the following bases and objectives:

1. An understanding of reality. That is to say, TO UNDERSTAND people, the community, the realities among which life devolves—their life, to know their history, etc... this knowledge should be objective and free of all prejudice.

2. A prioritization of necessities and human values. That is, to ACCEPT people as they are; to understand, even if you do not agree.

3. A knowledge of existing institutions, groups, and social works. That is, TO RESPECT A PERSON in his reality is to promote his growth, it is to progressively help persons take possession of their own decisions and responsibilities, it is to further initiative and creativity.

4. To inform and question those people affected by poverty and to make them think about their problems, courses of action, and possible solutions to them. In a word, to discover the needs in themselves, in others, in groups, institutions, and societies. To not only discover the obvious needs, but rather the deepseated needs.

WHAT MAS REALLY DOES

Since its foundation in 1969, MAS has been able to establish social action programs based on a formative model of analysis and research for concrete solutions to the principal problems of the present person; building his field of activities at the urban or rural level.

Among those which continue to work at the urban level, the most notable are those devoting themselves in the areas of assistance and rehabilitation. Among these are those working with the mentally deficient, with young drug addicts and those working for the integration of adolescents and adults suffering from infantile paralysis.

It would be proper to mention the S.O.S. Rescue Squad, which at present glories in the service of

young men who provide first aid services in times of disasters or catastrophes. This group received national and international recognition for its services rendered during the recent catastrophe brought about by the earthquake of September, 1985.

The infrastructure at the level of volunteer groups among the students of ULSA, organized by MAS, has given assistance since last September and continues to give assistance to more than 35,000 earthquake victims in Mexico City.

In the rural area, the Social Action Programs for the country people have gone on developing in a gradual manner for more than the past eleven years, in the Sierra De Xochicoatlán, in the State of Hidalgo, as well as in the Sierra de Ayahualulco, Veracruz, where Brother Enrique Pizarro and his community have succeeded in uplifting the lives of the country folk at all levels.

At present, MAS is cooperating in setting up a project for creating a "Town" for extremely poor children and youths in the Guadalupano Children's Boarding Department, under the direction of Brother Enrique Pizarro. This work gives our students a chance to become aware of the fact of hundreds of barely subsisting children and youths with whom some volunteer groups of young people periodically work.

By means of social action in which the students implement activities proposed by MAS, we try to fulfill our most necessary Christian commitment, in such a way that integral education will produce the agents for the most permanent and organized change so needed by our society, through civic and political formation inspired by the social teachings of the Church. (Puebla, No. 1033).

Bro. Lucio TAZZER De SCHRIJVER

*La Salle University,
Benjamin Franklin 47,
MEXICO 06140 D.F.*