

11-D-20

A LAY DIRECTOR OF A LASALLIAN SCHOOL

Engagement

In September 1973 we learned that the Brother Visitor would name a Brother as Director of De La Salle, Avignon for the last time, unless...

That same year, without being able to see any justification for the choice, I replied YES to the appeal to come to serve the youth, while continuing to teach, as the leader of around 400 students from 14 to 16 years of age. Being fond of a certain material, moral, and intellectual comfort, I did not know quite clearly what I had gotten myself into.

Sharing

However, I owed a great debt towards the Brothers' Institute, for, quite young, I had known and appreciated the dynamism of a Brothers' community, absorbed in this spirit, educated and impressed by the profundity of all that was Lasallian.

Little by little, over a period of four years, I benefited by a "direct" formation; during this time the changes were prepared regarding the Management Organization of the establishment, dealing with parents, teachers, pupils, and on various occasions, meeting with the Brothers' community. I had the chance of choosing my own assistant, who was already a member of the teaching staff, and very soon we had a real team of leaders who went into operation in July, 1977, when the Brothers gave up the Direction of the establishment.

Thanks to Brother Provincial who assured me of meaningful sharing and cooperation, I learned that the lay directors in France were seeking closer bonds, to work along with the Brothers and in elaborating upon the conditions of a real Brothers-Laymen Association. It was a question of seeing how, together, Lasallian Institutions, always so competent and up to date, could live. It was this approach which interested me so much.

At the same time, new Diocesan Committees for Catholic Education were being organized in the dioceses of France which would have for their particular mission to exercise a "Trusteeship" over scholastic establishments of Catholic Education. The Brothers' Institute and the lay directors were seeking ways of setting up a Lasallian trusteeship. This move also aroused in me a great interest. I thought that for myself personally and for the institution this idea should be spurred on. The word was spread around and then to the councillors of the school I announced my intention of starting off the process with Brother Visitor for membership in the Lasallian Association. This was an engagement desired and sought by the school who had worked along with the Brothers for some 40 years.

We wished to continue to call ourselves, The Saint John Baptist De La Salle School and College or just simply the Brothers' School. In fidelity to Lasallian values, we ought to try above all to live day by day, listening to, and caring for those who are most deprived, to try to lead all educators to diminish the distance between words and deeds. Fidelity to a patrimony, to a history, to values, all the while accepting necessary evolutions, this was the expression of our will.

Lasallian Association

I wrote to Brother Visitor asking him to present my application to the Lasallian Association which comprised other lay directors of Lasallian schools in the country. After an affirmative response, the ground was ready and a visit by the delegates of the Council of the association was scheduled in view of establishing a definite membership. As a result of this visit, an agreement was signed with the Diocesan Committee for Catholic Education. From then on, the school, with myself as intermediary, would belong to the Lasallian Association.

Concretely, how is this trusteeship of the Institute through the Lasallian Association to be lived? What can such a trusteeship do for the school? Will the teachers as a whole follow it? Such were the questions presented by our management team.

The school management body agreed to modify its statutes in order to introduce the fact of the trusteeship by the Lasallian Association. I had the chance to work with this team which is united, dynamic, effective, and very Lasallian.

Very quickly, the school asked for a second visit which would be developed within the framework of a day of pedagogical reflection. A Brother led us to rediscover the sense of giving and of how to receive the youth and their parents and how to integrate the "Morning Reflection" with daily life, which was not evident for the young teachers. Another question dealt with was Why maintain a boarding department for 350 students?

Despite the deliberate preparation and maturation, the Brothers' Community at the school still had a difficult time adjusting to the situation: frustration, the loss of authority, sometimes personal affairs. These perhaps were for me the saddest things I had to bear alone. Still, the regular contacts with the Brother Visitor allowed for an evolution of minds and hearts. I quickly discovered new horizons, new expanses of liberty, of action, and of fraternity on several levels.

New forms of the Association

Afterwards, I happened to be elected to the Administrative Council of the Lasallian Association. It is a group at whose centre adaptations and innovations are worked out. Thus, the ASSOCIATION which De La Salle wished for his first Brothers has taken on a new dimension more than three hundred years later. Concretely, the Lasallian Association has made itself felt by timely actions of formation under the form of weekend meetings on the national plan, then by regional meetings, each time with a precise theme which facilitated an exchange of ideas and mutual sharing.

In the Central Mediterranean District a regular series of meetings have been set up, for one or two days each year, in which the Brother Visitor brings the Brothers Directors and the Lay Directors together for meetings. In the seven years that this has been practiced, I can gauge the progress that has been made: from the courtesy of sharing a spiritual, pedagogical, and educational richness, strong ties have been established, and a type of brotherhood has come about in which each one is respected according to his personal status in life.

Paths for the future

Another appeal is now being addressed to us, Brothers and Laymen: what dimension are

we going to dare give to the Boards of Trustees which are installed in each District? There is much to be done, but we are not hemmed in by customs, routines, nor anything *a priori*. How can we together write a new page in Lasallian history?

It is urgent that as soon as possible and in a realistic and effective way, we set up a Formation Center specifically for the values, institutions, and projects of Saint John Baptist De La Salle. Those who will be in charge of the schools in the future ought to have access to such formation. This, I believe is one of the priorities of the Institute in France, not for following, but for understanding a true dynamism. So there is much yet to be done. The task which awaits us is urgent and necessary. Shall we know how to raise up from among our teaching staff persons who will be capable of carrying on the work and the responsibilities?

Looking back a bit, I can say that I am happy to belong to the Lasallian Association and to have experienced the joy of the all too little number of teachers who set it on its way.

Conclusion

As the head of a school, I am envied by others who do not find within the Diocesan Committee the same closeness, the same pedagogical sharing, and the same means of animation.

I should like to finish with the hope that the Brother Visitor, even though it is natural that he should dedicate himself to the Brothers' Community, would be able to devote some time also to look after the Lay Directors, to meet the teachers, the catechists, the administrators, the parents, the management organizations, and even the students in their classes. Conscious of my own limitations, and taken up by family cares, I should willingly accept all the help which the Brothers could afford me as well as to all who live this mission of service to youth.

The orientations and decisions of the Brothers' 41st General Chapter will, no doubt, promote this channel of effective collaboration for the exercise of the ministry of education.

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