

11-O-11

BROTHER JOHN JOHNSTON, SUPERIOR GENERAL, REPLIES TO OUR QUESTIONS (2)

Looking ahead, then, from what has been undertaken and achieved by the Chapter, what do you see as the principal lines of action for you and your Council during the next seven years?

Obviously it would be difficult and even presumptuous to wish to be specific about what is going to happen during the period mentioned. But, with due regard to the uncertainties of the future, I would hope that our efforts will bear particularly on three concerns:

- the Lasallian Family;
- the Christian dimension of our Lasallian schools;
- the educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice and peace through education.

★ *The Lasallian Family.*

For some three hundred years the Brothers themselves received, lived, and passed on the Lasallian ideal, aided for a number of those years by men and women collaborators in an important but secondary role.

This traditional model of FSC-lay collaboration has virtually collapsed everywhere. It neither can nor should continue to exist. It is not a question only of a diminished number of Brothers. It is more the call to full apostolic participation of all Christians, and the willingness of so many well-formed, highly motivated men and women to respond positively to the challenge.

As the percentage of lay teachers increased in recent decades, the Brothers began to share positions of responsibility, but not without deep feelings of frustration, and even discouragement, that the schools of the Brothers, as they had known them, were things of the past.

But a number of our dedicated lay teachers were also less than satisfied, because they believed, correctly, that they had responsibilities for Lasallian schools but lacked a profound knowledge of the traditions of the Brothers. For this reason, many of these dedicated teachers in a

number of countries began to express the desire to participate, not only in positions of authority, but also in the Lasallian spirit and FSC tradition. This desire was manifested also by a certain number of parents, former students, students themselves, and others associated with us.

The General Chapter of 1976 studied this development, calling it the Lasallian Family movement, and strongly encouraged it. Promoting the movement was a major priority for Brother José Pablo, Superior General, and his General Council, throughout the past ten years. What has happened in recent years is nothing short of remarkable. Numerous districts of the Institute have organized frequent and effective workshops and retreats for lay collaborators in Lasallian spirituality and ministry. The response has surpassed all expectations. There is a high degree of desire and readiness for identification with the Lasallian tradition.

The older model of FSC-lay collaboration — a triangular model, if you will — is yielding to a circular model. On points of the circumference of this circle are the Brothers, the administrators, the teachers, staff members, parents, former students, board members, friends, benefactors, students themselves.

In this circular model of Lasallian educational ministry, the FSC have a crucial role to play, but a different role from the past. This role is to animate, that is, to give spirit, support, vigor and zest, to move to action, to encourage. The Brothers exercise this role not only as individuals, but as Communities. The communities of the Brothers are called to share the richness of their Lasallian heritage.

I haven't the slightest doubt that this movement is going to grow significantly in the next seven years, because I am convinced that the movement is a fruit of the Spirit in our day. It is the Lord, in His Providence, that is to say, in His love and concern for young people today, who is calling our dedicated lay colleagues to respond to the needs of youth in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

★ *The Christian Dimension of our Schools:*

The second area in which I expect to see considerable development in the next seven years is the Christian dimension of our schools. I expect our schools to become more Christian and more Lasallian. Obviously, we are Brothers of the Christian Schools, not Brothers of the Lasallian Schools. Nevertheless, we can speak of Christian schools that manifest clearly discernible elements, enabling us to speak very legitimately of "Lasallian schools".

Some of these elements are attention to persons, special concern for the economically poor

and for all those who are disadvantaged in any way; the promotion of justice and peace through education; quality education, whatever the educational program and age level of the students; creative and adapted education; dynamic religious instruction and pastoral service; and, perhaps the most important element, competent teachers who are filled with faith and zeal and work "together and by association". The Christian school that is Lasallian in character is the school in which the composite of these elements is clearly evident.

Obviously I am describing the ideal and the goals towards which we have been striving and will be striving during the next seven years. I am not at all forgetting that we live and exercise our ministry today in a multiplicity of religions, cultures, and political systems, and that circumstances often require realistic adjustments. But the ideal is clear. In the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we do what we can, as well as we can.

While it is essential to say that the Brother exercises an apostolate whenever he truly educates, we give the central place to religious instruction and to the pastoral service of our young people. We are called to be experts on this, but whether we are specifically engaged in teaching religion or not, we can be actively involved, part-time or in out-of-school time, in leading youth groups of prayer and Christian service, in helping with youth retreats and gatherings, in counselling and the spiritual direction of young people. I think that in the immediate future we are going to see a marked increase in the number of Brothers directly involved in pastoral service of the young, and a marked improvement in our effectiveness.

★ *Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice:*

Finally, I think that during the next seven years our service of the poor and our commitment to promote justice and peace through education is going to become more significant. Past Chapters have called all of us to solidarity with the poor, whatever our particular function or service. I think our religious family has made

very significant strides in this solidarity with the poor during the past decade, and I expect this awareness to continue to deepen, and our activities on behalf of the Christian education of the poor to increase in number and effectiveness. This call to solidarity with the poor obliges us, as well as all other members of the Lasallian Family, to become more aware of the poverty and injustice that exists, to "feel" this poverty and injustice and be shaped by it, to know the social teachings of the Church today, to be sensitive to our own attitudes, feelings, prejudices, and be disposed to confront them and, when necessary, to change.

This solidarity with the poor obliges us to develop in our schools, at all levels, programs that effectively help to inform our young people of the realities of this world, that train them in the teaching of the Church, and that give them the opportunity to serve the poor directly. In some parts of the Institute such programs already exist. But much remains to be done in the years ahead.

This commitment to solidarity with the poor is a challenge to every region, district and individual Brother to make more significant our direct service to the poor. Our new Rule obliges us to plan in such a way that direct service of the poor will become, in fact, our evident priority. During the past decade a significant number of Brothers — including Brothers legally retired from teaching — have made themselves available for such service, in their own countries as well as in other countries. I expect this list of Brothers serving the poor at home and abroad to grow during the years ahead. For my expectation to become a reality, regions, districts and individual Brothers will have to respond to the challenge of the 41st General Chapter and make the sacrifices required. I believe my expectations will be realized, because I have great confidence in the Brothers.

Bro. John JOHNSTON
Superior General (Rome)

Thank you, Brother Superior, for your replies to our questions. LASALLIANA hopes, in its particular domain, to be able to make some contribution to the fulfillment of the far-reaching hopes and expectations you have expressed for the Lasallian family as a whole.