

## THE LASALLIAN FAMILY ENCOUNTERS

For the past several years all types of meetings with members of the Lasallian Family have been in vogue. I believe that in all this, the Holy Spirit has had an important role.

### Various Facts

— As I have said, it is a fact that there is truly an abundance of Encounters of this type these days. It is also certain, that one well-conducted meeting leads to another of the same kind. The meeting which has left a good savor in the mouth of the participants suggests another of the same quality, and so the chain continues on.

— Everywhere. A first Encounter, Parmenie, for example, led to another there and another in Canada. A meeting in Los Teques, Caracas, led to a movement in a chain of meetings in Latin America. The meeting in Borasart at the world level led to the resolution of repeating the experience every two years, leading to the meeting in 1987 in Toulouse.

— Still more. In addition to this, these "major" Encounters inspired a multitude of "minor" meetings, geographically speaking, at the national level, and numerous such meetings at the regional, local, and other levels.

### An encounter is a place for fostering:

\* *Brotherhood*: and this alone is a worthwhile product. One afternoon in Mexico in the World Congress of 1984 was enough for the spirit of the Lasallian Family to triumph in spreading the law of friendship among all the participants despite linguistic difficulties. This always happens. Lasallian Brotherhood is a stimulating fact which enormously facilitates the work of the Encounters.

\* *Prayer*: We must not fail to recall the example of Brother Athanase Emile in New York, when in front of a crowd of some two thousand former students, in order to call the attention of the crowd for the prayer before meals, simple said into the microphone: Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God". The group immediately fell silent. In the meetings, when the organizers want attention and preparadness, prayer quickly brings this about. It grows and even achieves high levels of concentration. This leads to extra hours of nocturnal adoration. And I think that this is not so mysterious. Someone has said: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them". And when the apostles, together with the mother of Jesus, were united in prayer, it was the favorable occasion for the Holy Spirit to descend upon all and to fill them with unction and courage. When our Lasallians are gathered together full of good will they attract the Spirit of Jesus. This might seem to be a mere theory. No, it is an experienced fact and sometimes amid great emotion.

\* *A meeting with the Founder*: This is a section which deserves an entire article, but we must go on. Still, if there is one fact upon which the Brothers should reflect deeply it is this: the Founder exercises a mysterious, irresistible and impassioned influence on Lasallians of every age and condition. Saint John Baptist de La Salle is for our seculars "our Father and Founder". And they say so. In Mexico a slogan which became popular with the young people (and they made up 40% of the congress) "We are La Salle today!" When people come into contact with La Salle, "it is like a virus" which enters you and stay with you. From this comes the frequent appeals from our secular friends: "Speak to us about De La Salle". In these meetings there should never be lacking a Brother who is informed enough and devoted enough to St. La Salle to be able to explain him to the groups. If he is well presented, everyone finds in the Founder a model for their convincing and enthusiastic "radicalism".

### Types of Encounters

Based upon what has happened up until now, I shall explain the different types of Encounters:

\* *Workshop for the leaders of a National Federation*. This takes place for three days in some kind of retreat house, for a group of about 40 persons and the purpose is to train group leaders.

\* *Beginners' Workshops*. When it was not possible to have a three day workshop as listed above, the solution was to meet on Friday evening, spend the entire day Saturday and end on Sunday with Holy Mass and closing exercises. Then the "team" reported to the Association which accepted this group. The number, as always is a maximum of 40 and an minimum of 20. This has to do with a workshop of "Lasallian awareness". These have been very numerous, around a hundred of them.

\* *Assemblies, National and International Congresses*. This is another very distinct type of encounter. They do not seem to be very deep but at the moment of truth, they generate enthusiasm and open new roads for their sectors.

\* *Youth Encounters*. These have been growing in numbers and density. Contrary to what might be expected, these meetings usually have good content, serious prayer which is at one and the same time alive and joyful and yet serious. In these meetings, the Founder exercises a great fascination. In fact, these Encounters of youths are giving a typical Lasallian meaning to those groups and even to those sectors which are also benefiting from them.

\* *Encounters with secular teachers*. These will increase because of the enormous interest the Institute has in offering to these "collaborators" the spirit of De La Salle which will guarantee the continuity of the "Christian School" where there is a lack of Brothers.

\* *Parents' Meetings*. These parents are very interested in the schools and they do not limit themselves in their meetings to disciplinary aspects and school needs. These meetings can be and some are, special moments of communion with the school and its Christian ideals.

\* *Meetings of Former Students*. These traditional annual meetings are today becoming ones of some more substance than just the traditional friendly get-together. These "parties" have taken on a progressive transformation more in keeping with the Lasallian spirit.

\* There are more, but it seems that this listing, though not exhaustive, is sufficient.

### **Week-end and three day encounters**

\* Time and place. Look for a strategic location which will allow for optimum use of the time available. The school or some other building chosen for the occasion but a change of atmosphere is always preferable.

\* The Number. This depends upon the type of encounter. For a workshop type of meeting the ideal would seem to be 25 to 35. For a Youth Encounter, depending upon the perspective, there can be 150 or 300 or even as many as 5,000. It seems that from the point of view of practicality, the number sought should be the number of those who can be personally reached by those running the encounter.

\* Selecting participants. This does not demand anything special beyond good will, common sense, willingness to serve, and some kind of assurance that the desired activity will be followed.

\* Encounter organizers. This is an important point. The Director should be someone well informed about what the Lasallian Family means today.

The team running the encounter should be well versed in group techniques. It is important that in the group there are some Brothers who can give a specific Lasallian tone and correct knowledge of the Founder to the group. The Brother will give the proper tone through his daily reflection.

\* Punctuality. No one should be admitted who cannot remain for the entire time. People who come late or leave early demoralize the group.

\* Materials for the encounter. The necessary thing is to have plenty of pens and paper. The sheet for preparation and explanation of them will be enriched as the meeting progresses with the summaries, talking matters over, results of work groups, and the like. The most practical item is that the meeting must be remembered.

\* Meeting Room. This should be properly ventilated and comfortable in temperature. Everyone should be able to see one another. There should be a place for notes and diagrams, a blackboard for the presentation of themes and walls where slogans, statistics, and messages can be put up as the meeting goes on.

### **Within the meeting itself**

\* We have always taken great care to have the proper atmosphere, that is, immediate friendship among the participants and seriousness in serious matters; reflection facilitates prayer which is properly prepared, and there are opportunities to be alone with oneself and with God.

\* We have had the knowhow of group dynamics leading to a deepening of experiences but without the appearance of being judges or of being stereotyped. We have been aware of the efficacy of breaking down into group meetings of six members each and into linguistic groups when such was necessary, or by age groups when this was called for.

\* We have given much importance to doing everything in common such as the theme, as well as giving sufficient variation in expositions, art panels, montages, etc..

\* We have encouraged extra hours of prayer especially during the night which the young people appreciate and benefit by. We have organized walks by groups where they can discuss things along the road and they

claim that they went to the very limit.

\* We have tried to make the Eucharist the center of the Encounters, if possible, each day and without any hurry, and with various interventions in the liturgy and in the Word which furthered understanding.

\* We have given much importance to singing. In the Spanish youth group encounter in Chiclana last November, a Brother worked wonders in directing the singing.

\* We have endeavored to get the groups to know one another as quickly as possible and to exchange experiences and impressions. Each individual group ought to appear as it really is, expressing its own ideas, activities, difficulties, and successes.

\* We have given time for both personal and group reflection. If some delegation has decided to sponsor some idea or another, it is given sufficient time at the end of the encounter to make an application of what the members had learned together.

\* Celebration. Each evening after supper, we have had a celebration organized each time by a different group coming from various places, if the entire group is made up a various delegations. It is important that the celebration be a success and that it originate from them. They sometimes last until late at night and are very joyful. There is no improvisation here. The groups have to present a plan of the schema which they are going to present. This is very important.

\* In the celebration as well as in other activities of the day we always put them under the charge of the organizers of the distinct groups. In international meetings these are by language groups. This avoids repetition of numbers and favors a certain wholesome competition. Each group wants to do its best.

### **The theme of the Encounter**

This is a point of major importance. The choice of a good theme ought to be one of the chief concerns of the Lasallian organizers who venture to have an Encounter at any level. The theme must be concrete, easy to understand, easily expressed, "with teeth". For example, for the Mexico Congress the theme was "Faith, Brotherhood, Service". It was so well received that it is still being used. For Toulouse '87, "John the Baptist the Precursor-John De La Salle, the new Precursor - Lasallian Youth, the precursor of today". It is important that each group which expounds a theme does so keeping to what it wants, even using the form of exposition which best suits it.

### **After the Encounter**

All the efforts put forth would be useless if there is no *follow-up* after the Encounter. If the participants are not the object of special attention, then there will be little result in spite of the apparent joy and enthusiasm of the departure. Following up the groups which have met is absolutely necessary if we wish to further the "Lasallian spirit" and succeed in having our Lasallian groups be something more, much more, than mere groups of good friends, who continue to write to one another after the meeting. Stay with them!!!

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