

**A PRESENTATION
OF SHARED MISSION (1/2)**

**Brother Robert Schieler
(Address to General Assembly - Baltimore)**

INTRODUCTION

Allow me to set the scene for you: It is morning and 35 English-language speakers are gathered in the English-speaking assembly room that doubles as a chapel for our daily 45 minutes of morning prayer. We are among the 20 lay consultants and 130 Brother delegates to the 42nd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools taking place at the motherhouse in Rome. In these days following Easter the readings are from the Acts of the Apostles, and some of what we hear include:

«Peter began to speak: I now realize it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to...»

«While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come down from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also...»

«...And God, who knows the thoughts of everyone, showed His approval of the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he gave it to us...»

These and similar passages enriched our reflections on the topic that would dominate the discussions and deliberations of this General Chapter: **Shared Mission**. As a group we studied, shared experiences, debated, and discussed our mission together as Christian educators. What are we being called to at this time in the Church's history? Are we being invited to bring a new perspective to our respective vocations? Are we on the verge of refounding and giving new direction and new life to the Institute? Or are we merely **spinning our wheels and grasping at straws**? I hope to be able to shed some light on these questions in my presentation this afternoon.

**SHARED MISSION AS PART
OF A LARGER CHURCH MOVEMENT**

To provide a context for our discussion on Shared Mission I'll begin with three statements from Church documents:

1) By Baptism and Confirmation all Christians are called to a life of holiness and an active participation in the mission of the Church. (1)

2) "The Second Vatican Council gives specific attention to the vocation of an educator, a vocation which is as proper to the laity as to those who follow other states of life in the Church". (2)

3) "From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics.... Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community". (3)

Sentiments such as these from the documents of Vatican II, as well as post-conciliar documents, plus the acknowledgement and recognition of the Actions of the Holy Spirit in the world of the 20th Century - or "the signs of the times", if you will - that bring us here today to speak and listen on the theme of shared mission. It is in this larger context of the Church's understanding of all its members that we speak of Shared Mission. The active participation of the laity and their own acknowledgement of their rightful place in the Church is the reality of our time. This reality we are, and must continue to embrace.

What we are about today is not unique. We are part of a process involving the entire Church, religious apostolic orders, and laity. We speak of promoting the Lasallian charism in our educational institutions. Other religious orders speak in a similar vein. For example, in a recent article we read: *«...today many of us face the task of creatively redefining "Jesuit education," and we must be clear about what we intend. Unless some perceptible structural and methodical changes are forthcoming, the dominant spirituality of the college campus will resemble ever more nearly the secular spirituality of the age, with its good and bad features. The revisionary task that the Society of Jesus and all involved colleagues have before them includes dialogue with Ignatian spirituality, with the traditions of Jesuit education...»* (4)

In that last sentence we could replace the name 'Jesuit' with that of any other apostolic teaching order.

A Grace and a Movement for Today

"In our lives, there are special powerful moments when the past takes on new meaning, the events of the present have a stronger impact, and the future is faced with renewed determination". (5) For the laity and Brothers participating in the Chapter, it was such a moment. A graced-moment in which we all believed the Holy Spirit was present and active in our discernment and decision-making. The words we heard each morning from the Acts of the Apostles leapt across the centuries and spoke to us as they did to the Jews and Gentiles. Unlike "Lasallian Family", a term introduced in the 1970's which we in the U.S. region - both Brothers and non-brothers - have never been comfortable with, **Shared mission** (introduced by the revised 1986 Rule), has met with a somewhat better reception. It expresses more clearly what we all - lay, clergy, and religious - do together as educators in Catholic schools and institutions. And it speaks more clearly to the signs of the times today.

The Signs of the Times and the Shared Mission

The signs of the times are obvious. Catholic education is, and has been for some time, in the hands of the laity. In schools and institutions around the world that the Brothers are associated with, there are some 7,000 Brothers but over 65,000 laity engaged in our apostolates. In our District the

number of Brothers actively involved in our schools and institutions is 127; whereas the number of colleagues is 1,000+_. Nationally, five out of six teachers in Catholic elementary and secondary schools across the country are lay. *"It happens more and more often that it is the lay staff and not the individual priests or religious that give to a particular school its stability and continuity in its tradition"*. (6) A second sign of the times has been *"the growing awareness on the part of lay teachers to view teaching as ministry and to assume some responsibility for the religious mission of the Catholic school is a reflection of a new appreciation of shared ministries with the Church"*. (7)

THE MISSION ASPECT

Let us look at this concept of shared mission more closely by dividing it into its two principal parts. For the present a Venn diagram - two intersecting circles - is being offered as a visual aid for better understanding of the Shared mission. One circle represents the Brothers vocation, the other, colleagues vocation. Where the circles intersect represent what we share in common, the mission of Christian education and hopefully an apostolic spirituality to sustain that mission. What remains distinct and respected is our particular vocations and states in life. Sharing our mission does not mean losing our identities. No, our respective states of life should only be enriched by the experience.

What is the Mission? Our mission is clearly delineated in our Rule, Church documents and our individual school mission statements. And within those documents we must continue to be attentive to the revitalization of our schools, ensuring those most in need have access to an education; to the promotion of justice; and to the fostering of the religious dimension and the faith development of the lives of our students. Catholic education in this country, beginning in the 19th century met real needs and made a difference. We must meet real needs and make a difference in the 21st century.

But let us personalize this reflection on our mission and suggest we recall our early years of teaching. What motivated us to become teachers? Recapture the enthusiasm and idealism of those first years of teaching. Therein you'll find the elements of the mission. The mission is the reason I do what I do! (8) It was to be involved in the lives of young people; to make a difference. Our availability, our presence to them in and out of the classroom. We wanted to become part of their lives as they made the transition into adulthood. The mission continues to be what it has been for the past 300 years, to touch hearts!

THE SHARED ASPECT

A few words on the shared aspect of shared mission. And I speak on this shared aspect from the perspective of a Brother, the only perspective I can speak from. I cannot and

will not speak from the perspective of the laity and other religious.

When some Brothers discuss this topic it is the sharing, they feel, that has been going on for some time now. In a sense, that is true. In another sense however, the sharing has hardly begun. Let me explain. For over half-a-century across this country, laity, religious, and clergy have worked together in Catholic education. And while initially lay teachers were tolerated, through the decades they have formed a more integral partnership and gradually assumed more and more leadership and administrative positions within Catholic institutions. Today within our own District colleagues and Brothers share administrative responsibilities and decision-making in individual institutions; Boards of Trustees whose membership are predominantly lay control the destiny of our University and private schools; and our District's Principal and Assistant Principals' Associations have had lay membership for many years now. So yes, sharing has been going on for some time. Also, as if through a process of osmosis, some lay faculty absorbed the particular charism of the religious order that conducted the schools where they taught. This was especially true in the early years when religious faculty were still the majority. It will not be true in the future.

However, for the sharing to be authentic and complete it must be mutual. And here is where the sharing has hardly begun. For some of our colleagues with us today, it may be the first time they're hearing some explanation of the concept of shared mission. And they're hearing it from the point of view of a religious, a Brother. Perhaps this is one reason it has been somewhat difficult to get a handle on such concepts as "Lasallian Family", "Association", and "Shared Mission". The struggle to articulate the meaning of shared mission has been one way. From the point of view of the Brothers. I'm not apologizing for that, simply stating a fact. Nothing wrong with taking an initiative. What is needed for the present moment are opportunities to enable our colleagues to speak and the Brothers to listen. We did that once at a GAD like this in 1988 when the theme was the Lasallian Family and we heard Mr. Gery Short from California and Mrs. Telly Castenada from the Philippines speak of their experiences. Today is another such an effort. More importantly, it is what must occur at the local level, the individual school and institution.

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1. Cf. "Lumen Gentium", The Documents of Vatican II, n. 31.
2. "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith", The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983, p. 13.
3. "The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal", The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, pp. 12-13
4. Pavor SJ, Claude N. "Jesuit Spirituality and Higher Education" Review for Religious, Vol. 52, N° 6, November-December, 1993, p. 876.
5. "Letter to the Lasallian Family" from the 42nd General Chapter.
6. "The Lasallian School and the Ministry of Education in the Church", Keynote address given by Brother Luke Salm in Haverstraw, New York, October 8-10, 1986. p. 5.
7. Convey, John J. Catholic Schools Make a Difference: 25 Years of Research, NCEA, 1992, p. 127.
8. From remarks made by Brother Robert Bimonte at a meeting of the Regional Education Board of the US/Toronto Region, January 22, 1994.