

## A PRESENTATION OF SHARED MISSION (2/2)

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### IMPLICATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

What are some implications of all of the above? First, we're still at the stage where there is the need to learn more about collaboration and sharing in the Church's mission today. Second, to provide occasions to hear the perspective of lay people on this topic of shared mission. What is the language the laity would employ in explaining and understanding the concept of shared mission? The Brothers have tried to employ terms such as: Lasallian Family, Association, and now Shared Mission. Given the opportunity I believe colleagues and Brothers in dialogue may very well evolve different concepts to explain what we do together. In what direction would our colleagues like to see shared mission evolve and develop? Third, the willingness - and the faith - to let go, to lose control, and to allow the Holy Spirit to enter our hearts and lead us to paths untrod. Are we ready to be bound like Peter in his old age and led where he did not wish to go? This last implication may be the most challenging for us Brothers. But *"if the Holy Spirit prompted the council fathers to advise us to recapture the spirit of our founders and foundresses, was it because that Spirit knew we would need the spiritual energy to deal with crises not unlike their own?"* (9) Like the Hebrews in exile and their lamentations of their losses so eloquently sung in the Book of Jeremiah, the knowledge of the spirit of our founders and foundresses give us the spiritual energy to say: *"Be not afraid. God's plan is occurring in all that is happening today"*.

#### Degrees of Commitment

When we speak of Shared Mission we can speak of degrees of commitment and levels of sharing. Concerning degrees of commitment I believe anyone who freely seeks employment in Catholic education should bring to his or her work an acceptance of and a commitment to the gospel values on which the school's mission and philosophy are based. For sure it is not the monetary rewards that bring a person to seek employment with the Catholic Church. This is the minimum commitment administrators of Catholic institutions have the right to expect. The commitment is deepened when we desire our professional life as teacher to be

viewed as a vocation to Christian education. This vocational ministry of Christian education can then be informed and nuanced by a particular charism - e.g. St. La Salle's or St. Ignatius - leading to a further deepening of the commitment. Each degree of commitment is authentic and must be respected.

#### Levels of Sharing

Our sharing can, and does occur at a variety of levels. We share in our acceptance and commitment to the school or institution's philosophy and mission. We share at a professional level. This professional level may be the ultimate level some of us may be interested in or willing to share. This too should be respected. We share at a personal and social level, often inviting one another to our homes and into our families. However, some may wish to take the sharing to another level and here, I believe, is the heart of the shared mission we are discussing today.

#### Some Practical Steps for Developing the Shared Mission

*"As part of its mission, an element proper to the school is solicitous care for the permanent professional and religious formation of its lay members"*. (10)

In the Church's 1983 document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, we read: *"The life of the Catholic teacher must be marked by the exercise of a personal vocation in the Church, and not simply by the exercise of a profession. It is, therefore, very desirable that every lay Catholic educator become fully aware of the responsibility of this vocation"*. (11) How are Catholic teachers to become aware of the elements of this vocational dimension of their profession? Is this a task for religious teaching orders in today's Church. Are we being asked to participate and *"contribute to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry"*? (12) How do we facilitate or foster this understanding of Shared Mission? Let me move towards a conclusion by offering a few suggestions.

#### **A. Networking and Professional Development Workshops:**

St. La Salle never spoke about Lasallian schools or Lasallian education. And the same can be said of other Founders and Foundresses of teaching orders. La Salle did speak of the teaching profession as a ministry and a vocation. He did develop a system for organizing a school and the school day. He did offer theories, programs, and practical steps for the training of teachers. He did create a network of schools and communities of educators across France. This group of educators were first identified as a community, later a society, and ultimately an Institute. All of his efforts were directed towards the creation of a quality educational program in a Christian environment under the direction of highly trained teachers, whose chief aim was the salvation of young people. Here, perhaps, is a model for sharing! As a group gathered here we represent educational institutions that cut across dioceses and states. Such a network of people and institutions can have a profound influence on one another's professional development and institutional enhancement, as well as a broader impact on educational issues affecting our society today. The District can, and should,

offer workshops not only on Lasallian topics but on curriculum development and educational innovations occurring today. An educational newspaper connecting our schools and institutions may be timely. Currently all our institute, regional and District publications are directed at the Brothers only. Creative ways of utilizing the resources of La Salle University can be envisioned, e.g. Institutes for the formation of Administrators and formation of new teachers. Annual educational convocations on a topic of national importance for colleagues and Brothers may be the GAD's of tomorrow. All of these, without any necessary reference to things Lasallian, can promote our shared mission of Christian education. This is one level of sharing the mission.

### B. Programs for Continuing Formation:

A second level of sharing would be the availability of in-service programs, workshops and faith sharing opportunities that foster the faith formation of our faculties and staffs.

Earlier in this presentation reference was made to Vatican II and post-conciliar Church documents. Many of us in this room had our professional and religious formation in the years prior to or immediately following this council. Consequently, we have not been sufficiently exposed to the theology that has been developing in the last 25 years. For example, what does it really mean to be "the people of God"? this theology of communion calls for "a considerable readjustment...in the mutual relations of the Christian faithful among lay people, religious, priest, etc. - which will make it necessary for theologians to take a new look at forms of life in the Church and to study them more deeply. We are living in a Church today that is very rich from the charismatic point of view, and that is why it is becoming very difficult to define precisely the various forms of life in the Church". (13) Religious and lay educators alike today stand in need of continuing formation in our faith as the Church is asking us to live it out in the present age.

NCEA studies and surveys, as well as our own experience, indicate many Catholic teachers choose to work in Catholic schools "primarily because of their commitment to the ideals of Catholic education, an understanding that it is God's choice for their life, they view teaching as a ministry, and it provides an opportunity to witness to their faith". (14) They too seek and desire the opportunities for retreats, recollections, and workshops on Church teachings and doctrine that are so readily available to religious faculty because of their state in life.

### C. Programs of Lasallian Formation:

It seems to me more appropriate that the above two levels of sharing be in place before offering programs of a Lasallian nature to those colleagues who wish it. And we would offer it not out of any sense of elitism but simply because the Holy Spirit gifted the Church, through a 17th Century French priest, a vision and a spirituality of Christian education. This is what Pius XII recognized in 1950 when declaring La Salle the patron of all teachers of both sexes, the charism of St. La

Salle belongs to the entire Church and it is not an exclusive property of the Brothers. We Brothers have been blest as the inheritors of La Salle's gifts to the Church. We are now being asked to be the heart, the memory, and the guarantors of this Lasallian heritage. We are obligated to share it!

These are some of my thoughts relative to the development of our shared mission. Hopefully you will surface some practical steps in the activity to follow. Structures and programs at the local level, I believe, is a direction for the present time. We have programs at the regional level (Huether Workshop) and District level (Lasallian Educator Workshop). What would you suggest is the route to go in your own institutions?

## CONCLUSION

*"From its origins, the Brothers made the vow of association to keep together and by association schools for the educational service of the working class and the poor. We continue to do so today".* What has changed is the laity assuming their rightful place in the Church's and the Institute's mission. Hence the expressions "collaborative ministries" and "shared mission". *"The Spirit of the Institute, which is the Spirit of Faith, invites us to see in these circumstances something more than the decrease in the number of Brothers. Rather we should see it as a call from God to maintain our place as consecrated lay persons in the religious life, along side of our colleagues in a common mission that is shared. The Lord sends workers for the harvest from various states of life."* (15)

Shared mission is more than a concept. It is an experience to be entered into. An experience of sharing mission but also sharing our ourselves as person with one another; as God's gifts to one another. An experience that when entered into with the eyes of faith we will see not religious orders drying up with ageing and declining membership but christian communities of laity, religious, and clergy exploding into new life for the benefit of the Kingdom. ●

9. Kennedy OSF, Francis Assisi. "Religious Life, a Continuum", Review for Religious Vol 53, N° 1, January-February 1994, p. 138.

10. "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith", The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983. p. 54.

11. Ibid. p. 30

12. The Rule. Brothers of the Christian Schools, p. 34.

13. Seba Lopez FSC, Hernando. "The Role of the Lay Person in the Lasallian Educational Mission (2/2)", Lasalliana, 25-16-D-67.

14. Convey, John J. Catholic Schools Make a Difference: 25 Years of Research NCEA, 1992, p. 126.

15. "Document on Shared Mission", 42nd General Chapter. Circular 435, June 24, 1993, pp. 41-42.