

**LIVING AS PART OF THE
LASALLIAN FAMILY**

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The last General Chapter placed very great stress on the Lasallian Family. Almost a quarter of the Circular is devoted to it, and proposition 4 states: "*The Institute, at all levels, will make the shared mission one of its priorities during the next seven years*".

Its position and its importance have been interpreted in a variety of ways: "Lay people will soon be taking over!"; "As our numbers are going down in many countries, isn't this a way of prolonging our existence, keeping our schools going, even of hanging onto power?"

The aim of this article is not to indulge in polemics or attempt to deal with superficial reactions, even if they contain some truth. It is rather to provoke thought, even if it tends to stress the differences that exist ("point out the differences so as to create greater union"). As the Chapter Circular says: "*It is important to recognise clearly the identity of each and to be aware of the demands of the many different vocations involved in the shared mission*" (Circular 435, p.32).

And so, if lay people "take part in the mission of the Institute", they do not constitute the Institute, and it would not be right to forget the specific mission of the Brothers' community. The statement on page 44 is somewhat brief: "*in association for the shared mission, the Brothers are the heart, the memory, the guarantors of the Lasallian charism...*" even if a few lines later a quotation from the Rule completes the description: "*As religious vowed to the ministry of Christian education, the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life*" (R. 24).

What does this mean?

If we analyse briefly the meaning of the word "mission" (missus), we can distinguish three elements:

1. Who sends?
2. To whom is one sent?
3. How is one sent?

The answers to these questions contain more than simply shades of meaning both for the Brothers and for lay people.

1. Who sends?

In both cases, of course, it is God: "*From the beginning of the Church, the mission of evangelisation was a mission for all Christians, founded on Baptism and the commission given by the risen Christ*" (Circ. p. 40). In his response to this commission, the lay person makes a personal choice, whereas the Brother's response is coloured by obedience to the Superior and to the Body of the Society, which transmits God's commission to him. Here the Brother's position is a clearly defined one, since his commission involves the community of the Institute. Article 16 of the Rule states: "*Each Brother exercises his apostolate as a member of a community by whom he knows he is accepted, supported and entrusted with his mission*".

2. To whom is one sent?

To young people, of course, and especially to the poor to provide them service through education. One is not sent to already existing works, even if in practice, these works provide the context in which lay people most often become involved in the Lasallian Family.

3. How is one sent?

The Brother is not sent alone: he is sent within a community and by a community to live and work in a Brothers' community. The lay person, who commits himself personally and as an individual cannot have this dimension of the mission. Of course *"the spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded"* (Rule 146, quoted in Circ. 435, p. 40) and the lay person can share Lasallian spirituality. It would be a serious error, however, not to distinguish between a community commitment and an individual commitment, by speaking, for example, almost exclusively of works, guidelines for works, the qualities they should have, etc. In doing so, do we not run the danger of forgetting to a great extent the specific character of the Institute?

The community-based work of the Brothers, based on faith, is expressed through apostolic zeal which promotes a specifically educational service, especially for the poor. The future of the Institute is in this community-based work, adapted to the needs of different countries, by creating new ways of doing things or new works. *"The Institute is concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor as they strive to become aware of their dignity and to live and be recognised as human beings and children of God. The Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the Kingdom of God requires"* (Rule 11, quoted in Circ. 435 on p. 41). The Brothers' community, because of its mission, must always stand apart if it is going to survive, *"making apparent in the lay vocation the radicalness of the Gospel and the transcendent dimension of the Kingdom"* (Circ. 435 p. 43). *"We witness by our community life and the vow of stability, our availability to take on urgent tasks when others are unable or unwilling to do so, and our unselfish dedication to the advancement of the laity...The Brothers' vow of association for the educational service of the poor is an indispensable sign for everyone of fidelity to a mission received from God"* (Circ. 435 p. 44). In every community-based work undertaken by the Brothers, there should always be some kind of "boundary-crossing" because of the love Brothers should witness to. It is perhaps because our community-based projects are not sufficiently visible and striking for their love of Jesus today that there are few vocations in certain parts of the Institute.

These thoughts about mission lead to a new requirement for us Brothers, not because our aims are different from those of Christian lay people, but because we must attain them by our own specific means. We must insist, within the Lasallian Family, even more on our community-based work which is necessarily distinct - and I would add, different, because it is prophetic - from that of our Lasallian partners. ●