

THE SYNOD FOR AMERICA
Occasion for Lasallian Solidarity
 (1/2)

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As part of the Holy Father's vision for preparing the great Jubilee celebration of the Incarnation in the year 2000, there will be a series of regional synods of bishops in Rome. Lasallians have already been quite involved in the African Synod, and the Synod for Europe has important implications for the newly forming Central European district. The over all program in preparation for the Millennium, with its emphasis on catechesis, social justice, ecumenism and an examination of conscience on the reception of Vatican II, provides another opportunity for the Lasallian charism of Service of the Poor through Education to make its contribution to the Church and its mission in the world. Already Lasallians have begun to write about the Jubilee theme and its program of implication in the United States, Chile and other parts of the world.

Another opportunity for intensification of Lasallian values among the Brothers and colleagues, and in service to the Church, is the Roman Synod for America, announced in August, under the theme **Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: the Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America**, an idea first broached by the Holy Father at the meeting of Latin American bishops in Santo Domingo in 1992. With the Institute emphasis on shared mission, the variety of catechetical, educational, social service and social justice resources of the Brothers and their colleagues, the challenge of this Synod is great. Through the Union of Superiors General, possibly through an auditor at the Synod and through education and publication, Lasallians will be able to make significant contributions to the Synod dialogue. Brother Pedro Azevedo, General Secretary of the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR), has already begun to provide leadership, in an interamerican meeting of the secretaries of the four religious conferences of the hemisphere, offering consultation to the Episcopal Conferences.

The Lasallian ministers are not only challenged to help their local bishops and Episcopal Conferences prepare for the event itself, but also to build communion and solidarity among themselves within the Western hemisphere. As the Superior General has pointed out in his discussions of conversion and solidarity, these values are central to the De La Salle Christian Brothers and those who take up our charism as partners in ministry. However, structures and occasions of Lasallian communion and solidarity in the Western hemisphere will need to be developed. This will call for conversion on the part of Lasallians and their leaders, seeing the priority for interamerican communion and solidarity, as integral to the Lasallian mission.

The Content and Context of Synod Preparation

The date of the Synod has not been fixed, but Cardinal Schotte notes in his introduction to the *Lineamenta* that formal responses from the Union of Major Superiors and Episcopal Conferences will be received by the Vatican by April, 1997 and a *Instrumentum Laboris* will be prepared. A set of sixteen questions and the *Lineamenta* are provided so that all sectors of the Church in the hemisphere, laity and religious as well as clergy, are encouraged to respond and to use the event as an occasion for continent wide dialogue and renewal.

The purpose laid out for the bishops could well be that for all leaders in the hemisphere, including educators: "To foster a **new evangelization** on the whole continent as an expression of episcopal **communion**; to increase **solidarity** among the various particular Churches in different fields of **pastoral activity**; and to shed light on the problems of **justice and the international economic relations** among the nations of America, considering the enormous imbalances among the North, Central and South of the continent." In fact, religious often have more connections, North and South in the hemisphere and internationally, than many of the bishops. It will be important to build this communion and solidarity where it is weak, and to make it a resource for the structures and strategy of the Church where it is strong.

The questions posed will be the key element if gathering the experience and hopes of the hemisphere for focusing the discussion. The opening and closing questions are quite open and comprehensive: How Christ is presented in the present era, and the ways of proclamation: liturgy, catechesis, apostolic and charitable activities and any suggestions on matters common to the whole American continent. There are two questions on conversion and society - signs of awakening and aspects needing conversion, and positive elements in society and those needing conversion. The two questions touching on communion ask for the divisions and elements which damage communion and an evaluation of the reception of

Vatican II. There are one question each on ecumenical progress, interreligious relations, and the problem of sects and syncretism.

The three questions on the evangelization of culture will draw Lasallians into dialogue in a particularly significant way. One is on evangelization of culture, education, another on cultural diversity and the third on popular piety. A question on the utilization or needs in the area of social communication is also linked to ministries in which Brothers and their colleagues have a stake in many areas of the region. There are three questions on social solidarity and witness, covering activities and collaboration in impacting society, incarnating the social teaching of the Church and the promotion of human life. These sixteen questions provide opportunities for discussion, reflection and outreach within Lasallian communities, their ministries and to the wider Lasallian family. They also provide an agenda for an interamerican dialogue among Lasallians, and others, on the full range of issues in which interdependence is essential.

The New Evangelization focuses on the renewal of Vatican II, including religious liberty and ecumenism, as we prepare for jubilee 2000. The challenge of the unchurched, the cultural Catholic, religious illiteracy, inculturation, the social teaching of the Gospel, the promotion of the laity to full participation in church leadership, collegiality and collaboration, and spiritual renewal are essential. These can not adequately be integrated into Catholic life without **conversion** to Christ's will for the unity of the Church, beginning to live out the real, if yet imperfect **communion** we share with all baptized into Christ, and **solidarity** in the mission of the Church with our ecumenical partner churches.

The *Lineamenta* are not to be taken as a text to be criticized, but rather as a set of stimuli for discussion,

with the questions being the important part of the Synod preparation at this time. However, it will be useful for Lasallians in various parts of the hemisphere to take the outline, and some of the content as the basis for discussion, education and prayer, and to find ways to engage other elements of their local Church and other geographical areas of the Lasallian community in dialogue and study.

The text includes four chapters, the first of which is a generalized theological essay which is sufficiently abstract to be the basis for any Catholic, and with the exception of a few Marian and sacramental references for any orthodox ecumenical Christian assembly. The three concrete chapters cover the themes of conversion, communion and solidarity. Each start with a definitional theological section: personal and social conversion; communion with Christ in the Church; and solidarity born of communion. The second section is an analysis of the *lights and shadows*, the positive and negative trends. Here the analyses of the various sectors of the region will need to be tested against these initial proposals. However, the suggestions here are designed to stimulate discussion and surface more scientific analyses.

A third section of each chapter lists those who work for the three dimensions of the evangelical process, including bishops, clergy, religious, laity, youth, families and emphasizing the positive roles of women. The importance of education and formation of professionals is singled out in these sections. It is here that the role of the Catholic school and the formation of the laity, so central among the Lasallian gifts, is able to be explicated and evaluated. The first sections of these three parts outline ways forward suggested, followed by a fourth section on challenges and prospects.

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