

**A Ministry which becomes a Mission
for Lasallian Educators.
Presentation for S.I.E.L. 1998 - 1999.**

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SIEL came into being through a proposal of the 41st General Chapter (1986): Circ.422, p.10, Proposition 4:

During the intercapitular period, Brother Superior and his Council will confide to those in charge of CIL, the organisation of two long sessions (7 to 9 months) on Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the Lasallian tradition.

The following objectives will be pursued:

a) To bring the Brothers to a good knowledge of the Founder and the History of the Institute, and readily able to place themselves at the service of the formation of Brothers and Lay people.

b) Pursue the work undertaken in Lasallian studies.

c) To increase the number of centres of dissemination of Lasallian thinking in the ministry of Christian education.

These general guidelines remain valid and continue to be presented in this SIEL.

The 42nd General Chapter (1993) made no recommendation or proposal about CIL and SIEL. However, one of them has been effectively launched by this Session.

The General Council will make proposals for the forming of those formators responsible for the programmes concerning shared mission. It will give some general guidelines which will be the common references for the Districts and Regions. (Recommendation 5.12 Circ. 435. p. 49).

Circular 437, Towards the year 2000, of 8th December, 1993, in which the General Council laid down the broad lines of its programme is more explicit.

Page 5, 3.1, **Commission of the Shared Mission**, To make proposals for the forming of formators responsible for the programmes about Shared Mission. Means: Organise three-week sessions at the centre of the Institute to help Brothers and colleagues to become formators themselves and leaders of other Brothers and colleagues. These sessions are aimed at participants who have already followed a Lasallian formation in their own District or Region.

Page 11, 3.3, **Commission of Formation**. 3.36 (p.14): From the Centre of the Institute, to answer the needs of permanent formation and the requests for programmes formulated by the General Chapter. Means: There will be a SIEL session during the intercapitular period.

These are the bases, with the support of the International Commission for Lasallian Studies, on which the present programme has been constructed. It is indebted to the first two sessions of SIEL, and also to the programme lived by CIL these latter years.

The SIEL Programme is aimed at Brothers and Nuns, Lay-people and Priests engaged in the Lasallian Mission of the Christian Education of youth. It seeks to give easy access, for those working in the Shared Mission in an international and multicultural framework, to the riches of Lasallian thinking. Likewise this programme is a contribution to the formation of Lasallian Formators qualified to spread the Lasallian Mission of Education. Finally, with the 43rd General Chapter (2000) in mind, this International Session of Lasallian Studies aims to face the future of Lasallians in the World today and is suggesting avenues by which to enter the 3rd Millennium. (SIEL booklet)

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I believe that at this end of century, the Lasallian Mission of Education is at a turning-point. It is important that **we who work in this Mission**, should be not simply onlookers but active participants. There is no value in regretting the past, and it is definitely more fruitful to take note of the signs and the calls which surface in the times we are living in. I will enumerate some which affect us more closely.

* **The Mission of evangelisation and education** of the young remains ever more present, ever more demanding. Today as in the time of the Founder, God wants all young people to be saved... And he is always calling people for this work.

* Globally, **the number of Brothers engaged** in this work is diminishing, even if there are contrasting situations in the Institute of the Brothers on this point.

* For various reasons, the final and most radical being the Spirit of Jesus, **the Lasallian Family has sprung up** among us, and is still spreading a little more.

* **The Church**, since Vatican II (and even before: cf Catéchèse et Laïcat) is discovering itself - or rediscovering itself - in spite of steps backward and a certain nervousness, as People of God. **A People of baptised persons, forming Communities** which need Communion in order to be signs... A People in whose midst charisms and ministries, created by the Spirit, are made manifest for the common good.

* In numerous areas of the world, in the Lasallian educational Communities, **the largest group devoted**

to the **Mission on the spot**, is no longer that of the Brothers but that of the Lasallians who work in Partnership (more than 93% of teachers in the Lasallian educational Centres are lay-people). Each of us can recognise that **the charism of John Baptist de La Salle is spread** far beyond the confines of such and such a religious Institute; neither Brothers, nor Nuns, nor lay Lasallians have the exclusive possession of it.

For my part, I sense that unimagined roads are opening up for the Lasallian Mission of education, the education service of the poor... opening for those who are following John Baptist de La Salle. I have no idea where it is going to lead us; even less can I describe the institutional or juridical forms which will rise from this situation, but it is clear that the Spirit is at work.

I believe that in the course of this SIEL, we have been called to experiment in a real situation, the Mission today **in the footsteps of John Baptist de La Salle, at an international level, by this living together and by association**. That, I hope, is one of the contributions which we will be able to bring to the fulfilment of the Lasallian Mission of the future.

The other aspect of my talk is linked to the preceding. The diversity, which is one of the characteristics of our Session, is a call to recognise that **John Baptist de La Salle is present in our cultures, our languages, our states of life**. We are called to live this enrichment of the Lasallian charism, to share it in the different communities to which we belong, among the people with whom we live.

What is the Feminine face, the Asian, African, Latin-American, North American, Australasian, European face... of John Baptist de La Salle, today? What does it mean for the salvation of young people, and for our own future, to live the Lasallian charism as a couple, in religious life or as a celibate person...? **What is the richness of all these steps?**

Here, too, if there are answers, they are far from definitive. Life goes beyond fear and questioning.

To reveal the face of John Baptist de La Salle, implies taking the Founder seriously, and also his context, his attitude, his personality. It implies seeking

to understand him where he is, in a world which has for the most part disappeared, with a mentality which is sometimes surprising, reflections which shock us or which we do not understand, a way of expressing himself which is somewhat severe. Today, thanks to the efforts of numerous researchers, whether Lasallian or not, thanks to certain scientific instruments of knowledge, we possibly have easier access to the personality, the milieu, the thinking and the world of John Baptist de La Salle. SIEL will be for you, the opportunity to experience this personally with all the necessary rigour. In the words of Brother Michel Sauvage, I invite you to **discover the man who became a saint**.

To reveal the face of John Baptist de La Salle, also implies taking our present-day as Lasallians seriously. That means the present-day which we live with the young, the families, colleagues, in the Mission in our societies, our churches, our cultures, with all the diversity of our sensitivities and our ways of grasping the situations... By questioning ourselves on the salvation we are building; by telling ourselves of the future we dream of...

To reveal the face of John Baptist de La Salle, causes us to reveal to ourselves and others **what attaches us to this priest** who lived so far from us in time and culture, and yet who draws close to us and makes us recognise ourselves as *Lasallians*.

The multiplicity of faces of John Baptist de La Salle may appear to be leading to a disintegration; or an impoverishment if one is united on the minimum. I think, on the contrary, that it will be an enrichment for the church and for the Mission of education of the young if we know how to make of John Baptist de La Salle and of the charism he has left us, what brings us together, if we learn to show all his riches, today, for the young people of our time, knowing that it is **the totality of the component parts which make the portrait a thing of beauty**.

I hope that SIEL will be the opportunity of recognising these multiple faces and of welcoming them, of hearing those voices which stem from the depths of experience of young people, of the Mission, and at the end of the day the experience of God which we live, of allowing them to infiltrate our being, to speak to our hearts. **All that, in fidelity to the call which makes us older Sisters and Brothers of the young people given to our care.** •