

## ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP IN THE INSTITUTE (3/4)

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### • The 42d General Chapter 1993

As soon as the Preparatory Commission had decided that the theme of the 42d Chapter would be the Lasallian mission, it became evident that it would be impossible to do justice to such a theme without the participation of the colleagues who share the mission with the Brothers.

Accordingly, a representative group of 20 «consultants» as they were called, men and women from all over the world, were invited to share in the deliberations, the community and prayer life of the capitulants, during the two weeks that the mission of the Institute was at the center of the agenda. This was a vivid experience of how far the Institute had come in its recognition of its own dependence on lay associates, as well as a chance to see first hand the genuine commitment to association in mission and to Lasallian spirituality on the part of the «partners» represented by this group. One of them described the movement to closer association as «irresistible and irreversible.» The consultants made clear that they understood that sharing the mission would involve more than an auxiliary involvement or token presence in the mission. Sharing the mission would have to involve sharing in all the stages that make mission effective: planning, decision making, implementation, and evaluation.

After the departure of the consultants a special commission of Brother capitulants was established to draw up a report to the Chapter on shared mission and a message on shared mission addressed to the entire Lasallian family. It soon became clear that there were unresolved problems in the all-inclusive concept of a Lasallian family that could embrace diverse groups all the way from student organizations to the communities of Signum Fidei. Besides, the Lasallian family was defined differently in different sectors of the Institute. Shared mission, by contrast, was easier to define and a fairly uniform experience everywhere in the Institute. Seeing this development as a «time of grace for us all,» «in the light of the experience of the last twenty years,» the Chapter re-affirmed «the irreplaceable role of those men and women (lay persons, priests and religious) who carry out this mission. The Institute brings them together to work in association to procure a human and Christian education for young people and especially the poor» (Institute Circular 435, italics in the original).

In its report, the Chapter urged that for the future, that all Lasallians together; «consider St. La Salle to be their common Father and point of reference; consider the District to be the ambit or framework of the Lasallian Family; organize Lasallian formation in its educational, spiritual and

community aspects; strengthen the close relationship between 'Lasallian Family' and 'Mission of the Institute'» (Ibid.). The Chapter adopted the word «partners» to designate those who share the mission with the Brothers.

### III. THE PRESENT REALITY IN THE USA

Among the Brothers in the USA, despite a certain reluctance at many levels, high and low, to embrace Lasallian family movements and the more radical implications of shared mission, there is discernible a growing recognition of the extent to which the future of the Lasallian mission in this country depends on the lay partners. It is possible to identify several significant experiences of what association in the Lasallian enterprise entails concretely;

1) In the schools and other apostolic enterprises where the Brothers were once a majority, they are now a minority and in many places likely to disappear altogether. In some still rare situations Brothers no longer hold the major administrative posts. Often lay partners are the most articulate and effective in their concern to preserve the Lasallian character of an educational enterprise.

2) Brothers are beginning to feel increasingly comfortable and even enthusiastic as they share mission and community in a mixed environment comprising religious, clerical and lay persons; men and women; personnel both permanent and temporary (including the Brothers); variously committed Catholics and those of other faiths or no faiths at all; dedicated Lasallians and those for whom the term Lasallian constitutes a threat.

3) The Brothers' communities have become more open to other Lasallians in varying degrees and with varying frequency for social visits, meals, prayer, and even residence. Where there are volunteers involved in the mission the community sharing is total.

4) In recent years lay persons and Brothers have been associated in programs of ongoing Lasallian formation, notably on the regional level in the Buttimer and Leadership Institutes; and locally in workshops, retreats, faculty days and the like where the integration of the Lasallian elements of prayer, mission, and experience of community are an essential part of the experience.

5) Many Districts have involved lay partners in planning for mission either in permanent staff positions or by participation in committees, including chapter committees, and some role in the District Chapter itself.

6) Out of these situations, it is becoming increasingly common to hear expressed the desire of the partners to have a place in the structure of the Institute itself, a formal relationship with the well-defined privileges and responsibilities that prevail in any organizational structure. This raises the possibility of some form of membership for those who are not vowed Brothers.

### IV. THE QUESTION OF MEMBERSHIP

In strict canonical terms the membership in the Institute, that is, the number of vowed Brothers, has been declining, as have the numbers of young men seeking admission to the Institute. The average age of the Brothers is mounting and a significant percentage are no longer active in the mission. At

the same time the numbers of dedicated Lasallians who are not members is increasing, and a significant percentage of these persons are beginning to ask for a more committed, more permanent, more intimate association not only with mission but with the all that the Institute can offer to those who are not vowed members. To meet this need, perhaps the time has come for the Institute to establish a new category of associates that would be different and closer to actual membership than is possible in the existing organizations that come under the umbrella of the Lasallian Family.

#### • The experience of Other Religious Institutes

The most successful programs of lay associates in the United States seem to be those instituted by the Maryknoll Fathers and the Jesuits. For many years the Maryknollers have had an intensive formation program for lay persons and married couples wishing to join the Maryknollers in the mission fields. The Jesuit associates likewise are recruited, screened, formed over a two year period, committed by serious but temporary «promises,» and assigned to what could be called missionary situations, many of them in the inner cities. Among the Dominicans, the traditional «third order approach» has been supplanted by the concept of the «Dominican Family,» which includes a group of dedicated men spoken of as the donati, who identify with the Friars who are willing to live the life, donate their talents, and eventually consider incorporation. Much publicity has been given in the Catholic press recently to the widespread development of associates in congregations of religious women where, it seems the distinction between vowed members and associates all but disappears in terms of spirituality, community life and mission.

In 1989 there was meeting of more than a hundred directors of religious associate memberships that was recounted in an article that eventually appeared in the Review for Religious entitled «The Associate Movement in Religious Life.» In this article associate members are described as women and men, single and married, people of differing faiths, some clergy and members of other religious congregations. They are motivated to seek associate membership by a need to develop a sense of community, deepen prayer life, play a significant role in the community, and to participate in decision-making, committee functions and chapter meetings. A healthy associate program is seen as dependent less on formation and monitoring than upon the quality of the relationship between the individual lay person and the religious. The authors conclude that the more a religious congregation includes its associates in governance and community structures, the greater the commitment of the associates to the religious group. (see D. Hynous OP, «Associate Membership in Religious Institutes,» originally in Bulletin on Issues of Religious Law 6 [1990].)

A survey of the many articles that have appeared describing or analyzing associate programs reveals two areas of caution that seem to emerge of the experience of the congregations. The most important one seems to be how to define the boundaries between the vowed members and the associates; how in the experience of sharing to preserve the lifestyle of each group, e.g total and permanent commitment in a celibate community vs. intermittent involvement, open options, and personal responsibilities outside the congregation; how to prevent the boundaries from becoming barriers. The other area of conflict that seems to have arisen is structural and mostly financial in terms of insurance, liability, medical benefits, and the use of physical resources, e.g. automobiles. These concerns point to the need for a

clear understanding of what association entails and what it does not.

#### • Legal Constraints

The 1983 Code of Canon Law provides for two forms of consecrated life: religious institutes and secular institutes. The code also provides for «comparable» institutes of apostolic life. The terminology is unfortunate and often misunderstood. All three types are characterized by religious living. Secular institutes in particular demand a strong religious commitment expressed by vows or their equivalent, and all three categories could appropriately be called societies of apostolic life in one way or another. The Code devotes 102 canons to religious institutes, 20 to secular institutes, and 15 to institutes of apostolic life.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools were not a religious institute in the canonical sense until the Code of 1917 created the category of religious congregation, so defined by simple vows as distinct from religious orders with solemn vows. Prior to that the Institute of the Brothers was (and remains) an institute of pontifical right with simple and public vows. After 1983 the Institute had the option to redefine itself in terms of the available categories, but anything less than status as a religious institute was not seriously considered. A secular institute would be out of the question, not because the FSC would become «secularized» and less religious, but because the tradition of community and mission in association would be sacrificed. Although a case might have been made for the FSC becoming an institute of apostolic life, the Brothers had become traditionally accustomed to thinking of themselves as canonical religious, often even and erroneously as a religious «order,» and the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience had become central to the self understanding of the Brother's vocation, even though these vows did not form part of the Founder's original structure. For the present, then, any question of extending membership would have to be regulated by the provisions of the relevant 102 canons on religious institutes in the 1983 Code.

David F. O'Connor, in an oft-cited article in the Review for Religious (March-April 1985) entitled «Lay Associate Programs: Some Canonical and Practical Considerations,» stresses the need to be clear and unambiguous in determining who is and who is not a member of an institute, especially regarding important rights and obligations. Canon Law and the rules of each religious institute determine that membership is constituted by the profession of the traditional vows; thus only the professed are incorporated and are truly members. O'Connor's first conclusion in this lengthy article is that with regard to lay associates, lay missionaries, and lay affiliates it is more accurate not to refer to them as members. «They are not members of the institute and do not have the rights and obligations of members.» He does, however, argue that «some adaptation and accommodations can be prudently made in community life so as to foster the work of evangelization with the added cooperation of laymen and women who are prepared to live and serve with them on a temporary basis.» He agrees that associates should participate in some way in decisions at the local level «that will affect their lives and their apostolate.» He adds that in «some real way, the associates are 'members' at the local level even though they are not members of the Institute.»

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