

**Brothers among themselves.
Materials for beginning formation
in community life.**

Brother Josep Canal

**4. Religious community:
the subject of a mission.**

**TO CARRY OUT THE JOB
TO WHICH YOU ARE ASSIGNED**

But what is the purpose of all religious communities? Is community just a space for sharing life and the experience of faith?

In the Acts of the Apostles, referring to the first communities, we read: “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33). This is the mission of the entire Church, to be witnesses of the Risen Jesus and builders of the Kingdom of God. And each religious community, as a small Christian community of consecrated persons, will also carry out this mission by means of a great variety of ministries.

By ministry I mean a service (diaconia) which is specific to the Church. Thus contemplative communities (representing Christ praying on the mountain) serve the Church by their prayer, intercessions, liturgy; communities of apostolic life (representing Christ in the midst of the multitudes) are witnesses of the risen Jesus and of his Kingdom, within a great variety of ministries: evangelization, catechesis, teaching, health care...

Each religious community does this with its particular lifestyle, its own spirituality, its own traditions...which find their origin in the person of the Founder. That is to say, with his own charism. This is the element that characterizes different communities within the same ministry.

In summary, all religious communities are active agents of the mission of the Church based on their

specific ministry and animated by their own foundational or institutional charism.

But returning to the topic of fraternal life, does it in and of itself have a role to play? Being on the fringe of the ministry and charism particular to a religious congregation (contemplative, educational, hospital...), the fact that its members live in community is not only for sharing a mission, a life of faith and life in general. Fraternal life in itself is a prophetic sign, a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God among us.

Defining the religious consecrated person we can say that he is one who is called (consecration), gathered together (fraternal life in community) and sent (mission) by God. We should not forget that communion and mission are two basic dimensions of our Christian life (ChL. 32.4).

So what is the mission of the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools? As we pointed out in the second installment the ministry of the Brother and of the community of Brothers have not changed in essence from the origins, but they have changed in their forms.

“The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor” (Rule 3). From the time of John Baptist de La Salle this has been the objective of our Institute. But how has the form changed?

From the very first schools in Reims until well into the twentieth century the Brothers were, for the most part, the only ones in charge of and responsible for the Christian Schools. With time and with changes in society and the Church, the role of the community of Brothers has been changing and today we can find communities:

- * that animate and administer educational centers in collaboration with lay people;
- * that participate in the animation of Lasallian educational centers which are administered by lay people;
- * where each Brother carries out a different mission in various places.

In order that the community is a “witness to the Gospel” (Rule 51b), one should consider the following points:

- * In educational activities working side-by-side with lay people, the religious community should be a focal point for the spread of spirituality, a source of relationships, of welcoming all the members of the educational community, or even more, an integrating element of different bodies which come to form an authentic Christian community.
- * But, this openness to the educational community, involving as it does all the relational elements that might come up need not be an obstacle for the

Brothers to live an authentic fraternal life among themselves, with their own particular signs of identity and life rites. There should exist a life balance which is clear and well-defined between the community life of the Brothers and their apostolic life and relationships with other bodies. There must always be respect for the style and vocation of each group (religious and lay).

* In communities where Brothers have different jobs in various institutions, within the heart of the community there should exist an authentic sense of co-responsibility and interdependence. The Brothers should find within their community a certain amount of space for dialogue, where they share their experiences, successes and failures, dreams and fears and, at the same time, they should be take an interest in the work of the other Brothers. They should see each other as being accepted and firmly supported.

* The religious community should periodically review its ministry. Is the community's mission responding to established needs? What place do the poor have in its ministry? What can we do so that our efforts can be a ministry and not merely a job? What place does ministry have in our prayer? Does the community create links among the different bodies of the

educational community?

* Each Brother, no matter his age should be aware of the mission. The young Brother and those in formation who are studying and forming themselves as they make first contact with the mission proper to the Institute; the adult Brother, fully dedicated to the mission which has been entrusted to us; the senior Brother or a Brother who is ill, joyfully living out an entire lifetime dedicated to the service of society, the Church and the Institute, praying for it and offering to the Lord any sorrow and suffering. But the entire community must be mutually responsible for the particular state of each member of the community.

* The Brother, in whatever the context in which he carries out his mission, should show outwardly that he belongs to a religious community.

* Finally, the Brother should not forget that the work he does is carried out in response to a call while belonging to a community. That is to say, he should avoid being ONLY a "professional". He should always be aware that his "job" is to fulfill the mission, assigned by the Church, according to the Lasallian charism and with a view to building up the Kingdom of God. •