



05-C-17

LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY (2) THE BROTHER IN ASSOCIATION

So far, Brothers, our focus has been the image of the FSC as an individual. Let's adjust that focus: the first Brothers experienced themselves called to live their consecration in association with men united by a conscious sharing of the same ideal, expressed in and through a strikingly original manner of living the Gospel. They vowed association for the purpose of teaching the poor gratuitously. This vow of association was in a sense a vow of identity: it answered the question: who were these men living this new life style?

This association had teeth in it. The men committed themselves to one another for the service of the poor. They vowed obedience to the group and to its representatives. They promised to go wherever they were sent and to do whatever they were assigned. They vowed stability, even if obliged to beg alms and live on bread alone.

To Live in Society with...

Association is a precious tradition among us. We live it on the international, regional, district, and community levels. We hold that it is a constitutive element of our vocation. Our commitment to association has no less teeth than that of our early Brothers. We also have committed ourselves to one another: "to live in society with!" We have promised to go wherever we may be sent and to do whatever we may be assigned by the body of the Institute or by its superiors.

Perhaps what I have just said sounds naive. But it is in fact the way we describe ourselves every time we renew our consecration. There have been changes in our process of assigning and being assigned, but the bottom line is still the same: availability: "Here I am, Lord; send me".

In the last twenty years we have become increasingly aware of our responsibility to participate more actively and directly in determining how our gifts and talents should be used in the service of others. Institutional needs have gradually yielded to the personal needs of the Brothers as priority criteria. Inevitably, tensions have developed around district commitments and personal preferences.

Nevertheless, there are considerable differences in assignment policies within the region. A number of districts have worked creatively and with success to reconcile district commitments and personal preference. Some others, in practice if not in theory, grant individual choice. In some districts Brothers are challenged to consider specific needs before they choose their apostolate; in other districts this practice is less common. A considerable number of Brothers choose to stay where they are. A smaller number choose new apostolates, in existing schools or outside them. The tendency is for districts to become a composite of the individual choices of the Brothers. The possibility of corporate planning is quite limited. It seems clear that we are

operating out different models of association. We lack a common understanding of and commitment to working "together and by association".

Availability

Our Institute model — go wherever we are sent, do whatever we are asked — is not the only feasible model for religious institutes. But it is the one we have freely chosen as an international body. It is the model to which all of us committed ourselves. In essence it means that we agree to work together and by association to implement, in a structured and coordinated manner, a district plan which we make our own. Certainly we have the right and even the duty to make known our interests, preferences, and judgment relative to our suitability for specific tasks. Certainly also we can and should bring initiatives for new possibilities to the Visitor and District Council. What matters is that we are available, available to be challenged and to consider seriously the needs of the district and even the Institute internationally. The bottom line is that the Visitor has the last word, which is more than a formalistic rubber stamp. That power the Institute gives the Visitor is a responsibility demanding sensitivity, concern, and utmost respect for the human person, a responsibility for the exercise of which the Visitor is strictly accountable.

Association — that commitment freely made to one another for the sake of mission — must be built on mutual trust and self-sacrifice. An association of loving persons freely committed to the same ideal is a group with power — legitimate power at the service of the Lord and of the Church; a power to do really worthwhile and significant things.

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