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**SELECTIONS FROM RECENT INSTITUTE  
DOCUMENTS RELATED TO OUR  
LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE  
OF THE POOR**

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*Collected and Compiled by Dr. Greg Kopra*

# Selections from Recent Institute Documents Related to our Lasallian Educational Service of the Poor

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## An Introduction

This document, “Selections from Recent Institute Documents Related to our Lasallian Educational Service of the Poor” is intended to give readers a flavor for how the discussion around our Lasallian Catholic commitment to the educational service of the poor has developed over the past 50 years. The document includes excerpts from Institute documents published between 1967 and 2015 and are presented in chronological order. In most cases, these Institute documents are the result of serious discussions that took place at General Chapters.

The first excerpt comes from *The Brother of the Christian Schools Today: A Declaration*, written during the Brothers’ 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. This General Chapter was called in response to the call of Vatican II to all religious institutes to reclaim their founding charism and put it in dialogue with the contemporary situation. The Brothers’ reflections led to a serious and intentional reflection on their (and now our) commitment to the service of the poor through education and their commitment to social justice. The document is a prophetic document, calling all Brothers (and, by extension, all Lasallians) to recommit to the service of the poor through education. It is a challenging document, and, in many ways, it is a call to action.

Since the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the reflection on this topic has continued. The excerpts that follow the *Declaration* offer the reader some sense of the development of our Lasallian Catholic commitment to the service of marginalized youth through education. Our evolving response to this commitment has led to a great variety of new initiatives. Some examples include: founding new schools, enhancing social justice programs in schools, diversifying student bodies in existing schools to include more students from low-income families, new and expanded immersion programs, Twinning programs – and many more. The examples are as numerous as the number of Lasallian ministries throughout the world, and they reflect each ministry’s efforts to respond authentically to the commitment to the educational service of those on the margins of society.

Each decision on behalf of those on the margins brings with it new, often unforeseen challenges that must be addressed, must be attended to. In addressing the challenges, new decisions are made, bringing with them new challenges and new successes. “One commitment leads to another. . . .”

In reading these statements, you might ask yourself: what have we been doing in my Lasallian ministry to serve the needs of those who are marginalized by poverty? How has our response developed over the years? What are the challenges we have faced and continue to face?

It is important to note that these excerpts are just that – pieces of much longer documents. As such, they contain just a “snapshot” of much more involved conversations. A reading of the documents in their entirety would help provide greater context for each of the statements. To that end, these documents will soon be available in their entirety on the Lasallian Resource Center website (<https://lasallianresources.org>). Having said that, we recognize that a full reading of all the documents is not realistic for the Johnston Institute participants in preparation for the Fall 2018 session. And so, we offer these “snapshots” in the hope that they will stimulate your reflection on your individual and our collective response to our commitment to the service of the poor through education and our commitment to social justice.

## Selections from Recent Institute Documents Related to our Lasallian Educational Service of the Poor

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from *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (1967)

“... our orientation toward the poor comprises an integral part of the purpose of the Institute. This orientation should always be kept in mind whenever there is a question of a new foundation, or the evaluation of an enterprise already in existence, as well as in the guidelines for the formation of the young Brothers.” (28.2)

“It is the Institute in its entirety that is directly involved in the service of the poor. It is not, however, the role of the General Chapter to determine in detail the specific needs to which the Brothers should be attentive, nor in what precise manner they should respond. Different historical and sociological contexts require the chapters on the local level to elaborate a clear and appropriate policy that will commit in a practical way personnel and structures to the service of the poor.” (28.3)

“To determine who are the poor for us today, two extreme positions should be avoided:

- First, we should avoid a rigid interpretation that defines the poor only from an economic point of view. This casts suspicion on much of the work we are doing and denies the possibility that such works can be of service to the poor. . . . Such service requires in the first place a conversion in attitude which will enable us to recognize the poor and their problems in our ordinary classes, for example, or to direct our religion classes in such a way as to sensitize all our students to be concerned about those who are the most disadvantaged.
- “Second, we should avoid a formula so broad that would encourage us to maintain the status quo with an easy conscience. It is certain that poverty of intelligence, of affection, and of faith all call for our attention and our educational service. But it is not less true that material poverty very often lies at the root of these other forms of poverty, and that there are many of the poorest who have no family, who are in poor health, or who cannot adjust socially.” (29.1, 2, 3)

“The preferential orientation of the Institute toward the poor does not exclude the Brothers from involvement with other social contexts. They may even be sometimes obliged to do this type of work either because of pastoral needs or the requirements of good organization. Whatever the commitment, however, the Brothers will want always to be in solidarity with the poor and with the activity of the Institute that favors the poor. In every situation the Brothers will do all they can to awaken social consciousness by teaching social doctrine, leading the students to participate effectively in the struggle for justice and peace to which the Church calls them in the world today. Christian love disregards all social and racial barriers since every human creature is in need of salvation.” (32.1)

“In their educational activity the Brothers will be careful to help their students become aware of human suffering in its concrete forms. They will strive to awaken in them an increasing sense of universal brotherhood; they will do all in their power so that the young who live in favorable circumstances understand that human solidarity and the Christian spirit invite them to share their goods and to serve those who are in need.” (32.2)

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from *Circular 403: The 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (1976)

## **The Mission of the Brothers Today: Especially the Poor (p. 44)**

The study of the life of our Founder, and of the *Declaration*, moves the Chapter to emphasize a return to the service of the poor. This would be a source of renewal and revitalization of the Institute.

What is also required is the need for action on behalf of justice. Here every Brother should help others to form a clear social conscience which condemns all forms of injustice even when these are sustained by present day structures in society.

In its use of the word "poor" the Chapter points to the children of people in society today who lack the basic necessities of life, of the unemployed or under-employed, of migrants, of the victims of all kinds of social injustice, of the handicapped, of delinquents. These are the ones requiring help. The poor in the State schools may also need a special form of education which the Brothers could provide, to enable them to rise above their difficult station in life.

## **Proposition 13 (pp. 77-78)**

On the subject of the mission for the educational service of the poor and the effort on behalf of justice, the General Chapter adopts the following orientations:

A) It invites the Brothers:

- to develop, personally and in community, new initiatives with regard to the poor . . .
- to work directly in the educational service of economically poor young persons . . . of the victims of social injustice, of the handicapped, of delinquents . . .

B) It invites the Districts:

- to see to it that the orientation towards the direct service of the poor becomes the rule rather than the exception in District priorities;
  - to assure that the formation of the Brothers takes note of these directions;
  - to place no obstacle, even under the plea of maintaining existing works, to Brothers who volunteer for this educational service.
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# Selections from Recent Institute Documents Related to our Lasallian Educational Service of the Poor

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from *Circular 412: Educational Service of the Poor & the Promotion of Justice* (1980)

**Note:** Proposition 14 of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1976) directed each District in the Institute to submit a report to the General Council before December 1978 that shares ways in which the District has responded to the call of the *Declaration* and the orientations of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter regarding the educational service of the poor and action on behalf of justice. The General Council read and analysed the reports and published their response in Circular 412, *Educational Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice*.

## **General Impression (p. 6)**

The reports give clear evidence that educational service of the poor is a matter of *general concern* throughout the Institute. The programs are varied, the project numerous, and explicit reference to the Holy Founder is constant. However, here it is not a matter of overstating our activity in this area, or of engaging in triumphalism. Nevertheless, this general concern for the poor permits us to identify a common thread in the thinking of the majority of the Brothers. Therefore, in this context, the criticisms that will subsequently be presented are in no way intended as a reproach or a condemnation. Rather they are intended to express the *desire* to live *more profoundly* a type of service of which there are already so many examples.

## **Still Inadequate Results (pp. 7-8)**

We have just said that there was no question of engaging in triumphalism. In fact, a careful reading of the reports only confirms the conclusion formulated by the Chapter of 1976: *"Despite such efforts, we must admit that in many countries and in numerous regions, the Brothers are still mainly engaged in institutions which serve the middle classes and even the rich"* (Circular 408, p. 41).

Therefore, what remains to be done greatly exceeds what has already been accomplished. And the former persists as a challenge to the Institute to re-establish the balance between our apostolates on behalf of the poor and those that we maintain in favour of those social classes that are less in need of our services. . . .

On the other hand, some fifteen reports indicate that in these districts this challenge has been taken up and that in each a bold and sound district-wide policy has been developed in an effort to redress the situation. Yet, we also understand why after a period of only two years (1976-1978), results are still somewhat intangible. And this is why quite often only what is being planned is described, rather than a project in operation.

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from *Circular 422: The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter – Propositions and Messages* (1986)

## **Solidarity with the Poor**

Once again a General Chapter has called the Institute to greater solidarity with the poor. Whatever our particular function or assignment, we are to be in solidarity with the poor, the *Declaration* (32) tells us. Solidarity means we have to “SEE” the poverty that exists, seek to understand it, “FEEL” it and its consequences. Solidarity means we have to become more aware of our own attitudes, feelings, prejudices and be disposed to confront them and to change when necessary. It means we have to live as persons of modest condition. . . .

Solidarity with the poor means that we have to educate for justice, that is to say, help our young people to “SEE” the poverty and injustice that exist, to learn the social orientations of the Church, and to have structured opportunities to serve those in need.

Finally, Brothers, solidarity with the poor requires the Institute to move more decisively towards the direct service of the poor, both in our own countries and in other countries with urgent needs. If we do not see such service as feasible for us personally at this particular time, we can contribute by supporting wholeheartedly the efforts of our Districts to render our educational service of the poor more significant.” (Brother John Johnston, *Closing Address*, p. 42)

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from the *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1987)

**Article 3:** The purpose of this Institute is to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry the Church has entrusted to it.

**Article 40:** The Brothers have always in view the promotion of justice in light of the gospel and either the direct or indirect service of the poor as the preferred aspect of their ministry of education.

They work directly for the poor by providing an education for the economically deprived, victims of social injustice, delinquents, and those neglected by the rest of society. When the Brothers work with students from families that are more or less well off, they teach them their duties and responsibilities with regard to social justice and charity towards everyone. The Brothers give special attention to their students who have difficulties at school, at home, or problems adjusting to society.

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## from *Circular 435: Documents of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter* (1993)

### from the *Message of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter to the Brothers*:

We are convinced that if John Baptist de La Salle, canon of Rheims, stood on the steps of the cathedral today and gazed upon our society, he would be as “*deeply moved*” today as he was over three hundred years ago [R11]. He would also see in the hearts of many a searching for the meaning of life and a hunger for solidarity with one another. He would be touched by their yearning to experience the love of a God who wants all to be saved. But he would also see the dignity and rights of so many people, young and adults alike, abused on an interpersonal, national and international level. He would see many poor and abandoned people, left to themselves with little chance of a better life. He would say what he said then, “*God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools. . . .*” [MTR, 2:1]. (p. 7)

**Proposition 1:** To promote more effectively interdependence and solidarity in the Institute and to take another step forward in the educational service of the poor, the General Chapter asks Brother Superior General and his Council . . . to make an appeal to the Regions and the Districts to make available 100 Brothers and a certain number of Lasallian partners who will receive special training and will be sent in mission in view of responding to the following needs:

- to create new apostolates for the poor in places where the Institute is already present or in new places;
- to renew or strengthen existing educational apostolates for the poor;
- to train (initial or continuing formation programs) Brothers and Lasallian partners, especially in the small and developing sectors of the Institute. (pp. 26-27)

## from *Circular 477: Documents of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter* (2000)

It is necessary to promote, over the next seven years, the evolution of our educational establishments, so that they may be genuinely dedicated to the service of the poor. Each of them will have to respond to the need for evolution in a different way, but we think that the following appear to be the characteristics which will allow us to identify a work as Lasallian in respect to the educational service of the poor:

- adopting an educational program on justice and solidarity which will give a specific direction to the activities undertaken, to the experiences proposed to the young people, and to the kind of relationships that are built up;
  - thinking of ways (facilities, and pedagogical strategies) to make these centers accessible and effective for young people in difficulty;
  - creating ways so that poor youth and their families feel welcome and at ease in our institutions. (pp. 2-3)
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## from the *Report of the International Assembly 2006: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission (2006)*

This International Assembly of 2006 hopes that all Lasallians remember that the vitality of our mission depends upon how we, who associate ourselves with one another, respond to the needs of the poor. We value the effort that Lasallians make to liberate the poor from their different forms of poverty and we ask everyone to consider service of the poor and the promotion of justice as the heart and the main source of strength of the Lasallian Mission in the world. (p. 36)

“. . . we ask those responsible for mission and association at all levels – local, intermediate, international – to offer ways for:

- existing ministries to assess and renew their educational programs (in the areas of pedagogy, pastoral ministry, organizational structures and resource management) so that the focus upon the poor, the elimination of the various forms of poverty, the commitment for the transformation of the structures that create poverty, and the defense of the rights of children, become a priority.”
- favoring the establishment of new works – both formal and informal – that promote service to the poor and, above all, the defense of the rights of children.” (p. 37)

“Our mission is to procure the *human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor* (R.3). Our mission is to discover that the poor today are our teachers and it is they who will be our judges in the future. It is to allow the poor to become active agents in their own development. Our mission is to announce the Gospel and to discover in the poor the face of God. Our mission is to be attentive to all forms of exclusion. Our mission invites us to have our eyes open before the inequalities created by our society and to be creative in our response to new needs. Our mission must not be reduced to mere assistance but rather go to the roots of poverty in order to find structural solutions and educate to justice. Our mission, in the words of Father Kolvenbach, S.J., is to help all youth, whatever their economic situation, not to become men and women just *for themselves and those closest to them* but rather to be *for others*, most especially the poor and the excluded.” (Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, “New Wine in New Wineskins”: Closing address to the delegates)

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## from *Circular 455: Documents of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2007)*

Historically the Lasallian mission was primarily addressed to the economically poor. Over time economic development has led us to address ourselves more to the middle classes. This reality invites us to intensify our efforts to promote education for justice and to strengthen our actions for the direct service of the poor. (p. 29)

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from ***Circular 461: Associated for the Lasallian Mission . . . An Act of Hope!*** (2010)

“Since the General Chapter of 1966-1967 tremendous strides have been made in reinvigorating our commitment to direct service of the poor. . . . Still, all Lasallians face questions about their role in addressing new educational needs. In some countries people accuse the Lasallian School, as an institution, of merely reflecting and not challenging the current societal structures; being elitist. . . . Having heard this observation we believe that it is critical to mention that from the beginning schools were established for many classes of people. . . . Rather than criticize Lasallian brothers and sisters who serve more economically advantaged children, an effort should be made to be more concerned that these centers are teaching a doctrine of social justice focused on systemic change and empirically offering all students an opportunity to ‘know’ and serve the poor and marginalized. Nevertheless, serving the poorest among the young should be a constant concern.” (2.2.4)

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from ***The Prophetic Stance of Association for Mission***, an address given by Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, to the CIL 2010 group:

We have the privilege of having been born for the poor. Hence, the reality of our present society cannot leave us indifferent when we know, for example, that every three seconds, somewhere on our planet, a child dies. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that today, they have begun to refer to the so-called *lost generation*, when referring to the jobless youth. We cannot look on with indifference when we see immigration laws becoming tougher and on many occasions, ignoring some basic human rights. Nor can we remain indifferent when we learn that hunger is increasing in the world and that wars and terrorism continue to create victims and that the numbers of the excluded are increasing. Nor can we just pass by and slip through the sidelines in the face of so many young people who find no meaning in their lives and who live in loneliness. Our association should make us creative about finding answers to the needs of the young who are poor. That was the call made to us during the International Assembly for the Mission and Lasallian Association in 2006. (p. 4)

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from ***the Second International Mission Assembly*** (2013)

“Personally I believe that it is useless to ask the question Who are the poor? It is enough to open your eyes and see their growing number even in the so-called developed countries and the new kinds of poverty that we have to face today. I hope that we will have the necessary discernment that will allow us to identify those young people on the margin of society that have more problems and fewer solutions, and to discover and invent tailor-made programs for them that will help them live with hope and dignity. And I believe that our international dimension can have far reaching results in this regard.” (Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, Superior General, *Opening Address to Assembly Delegates*)

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## From the *Report to the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the International Young Brothers Assembly* (2013)

We are all convinced that despite many challenges and difficulties, we look to the future with hope, recognizing that “*the need for this Institute is very great,*” and that God calls us to address new and emerging forms of poverty. Therefore, we commit ourselves to witnessing the reality of the Gospel and the following of Christ for the service of the young, especially those with most difficulties, in creative, visible, and communal ways. (Statement of Commitment # 1, p. 4)

We are all convinced that God acts through our ministry of education, changing the lives of the young, especially the poor, in whom God is made visible to us. Therefore, we commit ourselves to be the accelerator of the Lasallian mission and seek new ways to make human and Christian education accessible to and inclusive of the poor, either bringing the school to the poor or making our traditional apostolates more accessible (financially and culturally) to them. (Statement of Commitment # 5, p. 4)

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## from the *Final Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium of Young Lasallians* (2014)

“As Young Lasallians, we are passionate about . . . being active in the Lasallian Educational Mission, especially through service *with* the poor. This inspires us to be agents of change in our world and challenges us to be stewards of the vitality and sustainability of the Lasallian Family and the Lasallian Educational Mission.” (1.1.3)

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## from *Circular 469: The Documents of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (2014)

“We want to respond boldly and creatively to the urgent needs of the vulnerable (e.g., immigrants, refugees, the homeless, unemployed youth, etc.) that are found ‘on the borders.’” (3.26)

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## from *Circular 470: Looking Towards the Year 2021* (2015)

“. . . we need to ask whether our educational ministries – from primary to tertiary, vocational-technical to academic research, formal to non-formal, and traditional to innovative systems – respond adequately to the poverty that surrounds us and the people who live isolated on the peripheries. As Lasallians, our vocation lies in education on behalf of the poor who live on the peripheries.” (p. 9)

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## from the *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2015)*:

The purpose of this Institute is to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry the Church has entrusted to it. (Article 3)

Deeply moved by the neglected state of “the children of the artisans and the poor,” and as a result of their contemplation of God’s saving plan, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers joined together to conduct gratuitous Christian schools. . . . (Article 13, ¶ 1)

Today, the Brothers pursue the Lasallian mission in partnership with men and women who recognize the relevance of the Lasallian charism. . . . (Article 13, ¶ 3)

The Institute’s primary concern is the educational needs of those whose dignity and basic rights are not recognized. By its mission, it seeks to make it possible for them to live with dignity as sons and daughters of God. (Article 13, ¶ 5)

The Brothers joyfully share the same mission together with their Partners who recognize and live the Lasallian charism. Together, they ensure the vitality of this charism by creating or developing organizational, formation and research structures, in which each one can deepen their understanding of their own vocation and of the Lasallian mission. (Article 19)

In the light of the Gospel, the Brothers always keep in mind the promotion of justice and the direct or indirect service of the poor – the economically poor, the victims of social injustice, delinquents and those excluded from society – which is the preferred option of their ministry of education. When they work with pupils from better-off families, they teach them the duties imposed by responsibility, and those regarding social justice and worldwide charity. (Article 29, ¶ 1)

The Brothers give special attention to those of their pupils who have greater difficulties at school, personal problems, or problems adjusting to family life or society. (Article 29, ¶ 2)