

**THE LASALLIAN MISSION OF  
HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN  
EDUCATION**

*A SHARED MISSION*

## PURPOSE AND DEDICATION

*“The General Chapter strongly recommends to Brother Superior and his Council the drawing up and publication of a study (circular) on the shared mission which contains coherent teaching, guidelines and pastoral orientations.”*

**Circular 435, 5.14, page 49**

The Brother Superior General and the members of the General Council, in response to the above recommendation, offer the following reflections **to all members of the Lasallian Family throughout the world** who share the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education, a shared mission.

This work is dedicated in homage to the memory of two great pioneers and architects of Shared Mission:

***Brother José Pablo Basterrechea***  
***Vicar General, 1966-1976***  
***Superior General, 1976-1986***

**&**

***Brother Patrice Marey***  
***Assistant, 1966-1976***  
***General Councillor, 1976-1986***

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## **Institute Texts**

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| B       | Bull of Pope Benedict XIII approving the Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools - 1725                                  |
| C       | Circular of the Brothers of the Christian Schools [serial number added]   |
| CL      | Cahiers Lasalliens [Critical editions and studies on the writings of John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Institute] |
| D       | A Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World today - 1967   |
| MTR     | Meditations for the Time of retreat   |
| RC 1718 | Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools [Ms of 1718]  |
| RC 1967 | Rules and Constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967  |
| R       | The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1987   |

**N.B:** OTHER REFERENCES ARE ACKNOWLEDGED WITHIN THE TEXT

## INTRODUCTION

Dear Fellow Lasallians,

Welcome to this introduction to your Lasallian Heritage, the Living Tradition, which links you to the first school of John Baptist de La Salle in Rheims in 1679 and so, today, with all those persons throughout the world whose educational mission is inspired by the same vision. In the following pages, you are invited to discover something more about your Lasallian Heritage. This is not primarily a history, but a connecting of various historical threads through a central theme which may be stated thus: *What does the Lasallian Heritage show us about generations of educators, inspired by the educational movement launched by De La Salle and his Institute, in trying always to find a response to the needs of young people, especially the poor, who do not have access to education.*

The story of the first 150 years of this movement is initially entwined with the social, political and religious history of France, but the very success of the Institute's mission of Christian education of the poor has subsequently made it become a world-wide movement to an extent which its Founder could never have envisaged. This *mission*, carried almost exclusively by the Brothers for the first 200 years, is now a "*shared mission*" in which many others, in various ways, choose to participate.

Most of you who read the pages which follow and so lay claim to your heritage come from countries and use languages which De La Salle and his first Brothers never knew, because you share this heritage with some 65,000 others who carry out their educational mission in more than 80 different countries. Since most of you who will read these lines are not members of the Institute, we have thought it most important to share with you a number of Institute documents of recent years which are part of our common heritage and which have determined the directions which have led us to recognize the grace of Shared Mission. You will find, therefore, frequent mention of the *Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World of Today* (1967), the decisions of the General Chapters of 1966-7, 1976, 1986 and 1993 and, above all, abundant citation from the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987, as well as from a number of other documents which were addressed originally only to the Brothers. It is a measure of our confidence in you and in the important role that you are called to play in the future of the Lasallian Mission of Christian education that we share these more recent "family" documents with you.

The hope of all those who cooperated in producing this Heritage booklet for you, is that you may find inspiration and a sense of common purpose in your particular contribution to the ministry of teaching as it is embodied in the Lasallian Heritage. May you be strengthened by the knowledge that you do not work alone but that you are bound across many nations and languages by the common vision, practices and traditions of the Lasallian Heritage.

*Brother John Johnston and the members of the General Council  
April 30, 1997, 346th anniversary of the birth of John Baptist de La Salle*

## Institute Texts

- B Bull of Pope Benedict XIII approving the Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools - 1725
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## THE FIRST CENTURY 1679-1792

### PRELUDE

- 1.10** *A Memoir written in Rouen in 1721, two years after the death of John Baptist de La Salle, expresses succinctly what this man had achieved between 1679 and 1719.*

*Monsieur de La Salle had the idea of setting up gratuitous schools where the children of workmen and the poor would learn reading, writing and arithmetic, and would also receive a Christian education through catechisms and other forms of instruction appropriate for forming good Christians. For this purpose he brought together a group of young unmarried men. He strove to have them live in a way which was consistent with the end of their Institute, and in order to recreate the life of the first Christians . . . he composed Rules for them.*

### **1.11 The Mission of the Institute**

The *Rules*, probably first formulated on a trial basis in the 1680s, were subsequently tested over many years of experience of the life in the communities before receiving some kind of definitive wording and publication, approved by all the Brothers, in 1718. As can easily be imagined, this set of Rules set out clearly in its opening chapter the very reason for the existence of this new society. Three of the articles in particular challenged generations of Brothers by their realism and clarity:

*The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims; and thus giving them a suitable education. (Chapter 1,3 RC 1718)*

*The necessity of this Institute is very great, because artisans and the poor, being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and family, cannot give their children the needed instruction. nor a suitable Christian education. (Chapter 1, 4 ibid)*

*All disorders, especially among artisans and the poor, usually arise from their having been, in childhood, left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this evil at a more advanced age, because the bad habits they have acquired are overcome only with great difficulty, and scarcely ever entirely, no matter what care may be taken to destroy them, whether by frequent instructions or by the use of the sacraments. As the principal fruit to be expected from the institution of the Christian Schools is to forestall these disorders and prevent their evil consequences, it is easy to conceive the importance of such schools and their necessity. (Chapter 1, 6 ibid)*

One thing is clear from the above three quotations: this group of people who comprise the Institute have come together in response to what they saw as an urgent need, namely, the provision of “*instruction* (i.e., religious instruction in the 17th C context) and a *Christian education*” (i.e. reading, writing, arithmetic, etc.) to poor boys who otherwise would not receive it through the ordinary schools which they might find it possible to attend. Today we are more inclined to see instruction as a general activity within the total process of education.

### **1.12 Response to needs**

This “*response to needs*”, in what he saw as the education of poor boys through the “Christian school”, is the unifying theme, the *leit motiv*, which can be traced through the 300 and more years since the first schools of the Institute in Rheims. La Salle’s concern, expressed so consistently through so many of his writings for his Brothers, is for the “*salvation*” of the students whom he saw always as “*confided to your care.*” Yet, he does not limit the mission of his Institute to ensuring that these students have a word-perfect knowledge of the “*truths necessary for salvation,*” important though that is for him and for his contemporaries, by founding a catechetical confraternity of Christian doctrine. Certainly, attendance at the daily catechism lesson, at the longer catechism lessons taught on the eves of feasts and at the special catechism lessons on the “*great mysteries*” taught on Sundays, became a special emphasis in all of his schools, indeed the indispensable condition for being admitted and being retained as a student. But the bulk of the time in the Christian school was spent on the educational tasks of teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, politeness and good manners to the students so that they could find useful employment in their society.

#### **a. Gratuitous schools**

Since the Christian school was to be at the service of the “children of artisans and the poor,” it was necessarily gratuitous. The poor could not pay. Since it was this uncertainty about payment which often prevented schoolmasters from remaining in their occupation and so threatened the continuity of schools for the poor, the Brothers provided a good, stable but gratuitous school in which the pupils could be prepared for useful occupations. Gratuity was above all an attitude of sharing freely without hope of reward in any shape or form. It was to remain one of the enduring characteristics of Lasallian works in education.

#### **b. Teaching in the vernacular**

Teaching pupils in their native French was one of the innovative aspects of the first Lasallian schools. This was a response to the obvious need of those first boys to be able to read and write their own language as an indispensable condition of their gaining employment. So, too, was the practical perspective that included making use of invoices and accounts in arithmetic lessons and the copying of contemporary documents as a part of the writing lessons.

#### **c. Training of teachers**

Besides training his own teachers thoroughly, De La Salle, in response to the needs expressed to him by others, devoted himself three times in his lifetime to training teachers, not members of his congregation, who would be schoolmasters in country areas. His vision was not limited to ensuring the future of his own works but extended to include ways of addressing the lack of any set structures for the training of teachers.

#### ***d. Unforeseen needs***

In response to the particular needs brought to his attention in the parish of Saint Sulpice in 1698, De La Salle took charge of a group of Irish boys, sons of followers of the exiled King James II, and provided them with lodging and schooling at his main house in Paris. Soon afterwards, and again in response to needs expressed by some former pupils, the first of the so-called Sunday academies, which taught more advanced drawing, arithmetic and accounting “*to young persons below 20 years of age*” was opened. Although this first academy lacked continuity, it was the predecessor of many similar works in later years.

#### ***e. The needs of those who were not poor***

After the transfer of the center of his Institute from Paris to Rouen in the course of 1705, De La Salle accepted the request of a number of better-off families to open a Christian school as a boarding school for their children. This involved a considerable enlargement of the curriculum to help prepare these young men for a professional career as merchants. Even here, great care was taken that the teaching as such remained gratuitous even though money was received for food and lodging for the pupils. In 1709, De La Salle accepted to enlarge the boarding facilities at Saint Yon in order to assume responsibility as well for the care of young delinquents from better off families, who followed the same curriculum as the boarders, and who could aspire to join them if their conduct was deemed satisfactory. While it is undoubtedly clear that the property at Saint Yon was important in offering De La Salle a site and the financing for his novitiate that was transferred from Paris, it is also clear that he was responding to the expressed needs of families both for the boarding school as well as for the correctional institution.

#### ***f. De La Salle’s writings meet the particular needs of his followers***

In the wide-ranging writings which La Salle bequeathed to his Institute, his principal motivation seems to have been to address the particular needs of his first followers by composing works which would help them in their personal formation. Without Latin, they had no access to the ordinary sources of further education in their society, such as the university. As laymen, they had no possibility of being admitted to study theology in seminaries. Since there were no teachers’ colleges as we now understand them, their pedagogical training depended on their own Institute. Read from this perspective, De La Salle’s writings address all the significant questions which their profession and state of life demanded of them: orthodox theological knowledge, pedagogical competence, catechetical skills, prayers, hymns and practices suitable for their pupils, a Rule, spiritual teachings and meditations for their lives as members of a lay Institute. In the early years of the Institute, he showed the importance that he placed on continuing formation by occasionally withdrawing Brothers from the schools for some months so as to give a more solid foundation to their religious and professional lives.

#### ***g. The need to recognize Christian education as ministry***

It is especially in his later writings, most notably in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, that De La Salle developed the theological foundations of education as ministry, based on the application of Saint Paul’s writings in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians:

*“... just as he (God) commanded light to shine out of darkness, so he himself kindles a light in the hearts of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they may be able to enlighten those children by unveiling for them the glory of God.*

*Since, then, God in his mercy has given you such a ministry; do not falsify his word but gain glory before him by unveiling his truth to those whom you are charged to instruct. Let this be your whole effort in the instructions you give them, looking upon yourselves as the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.” (MTR 1,1)*

The *order, system and method* of the Christian school, the emphasis on close relationship between teacher and pupil, is also based on the real needs of the students. *“God has had the goodness.”* De La Salle writes, *“to employ you to procure such an advantage for children.” (ibid)*

### **1.13 The Bull of Approbation, January 26, 1725**

The formal approval of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by the Church was by the issuing of an official document, in this case what was called a Papal Bull, entitled *In Apostolicae Dignitatis Solio*. In this document of approval, Pope Benedict XIII expresses succinctly its origin and purpose, first of all in the personal vision of De La Salle himself:

*“John Baptist de La Salle ... being moved with pity at the sight of the innumerable scandals that spring from ignorance, the source of all evils, more particularly among those who whether crushed down by want, or busy with manual labor in order to gain a livelihood, are not only extremely ignorant of all human sciences for want of the necessary pecuniary means, but, what is more lamentable, are often without the knowledge of the elements of the Christian religion . . . founded an Institute known by the title of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for the glory of God and the relief of the poor ...” (B, Preface)*

The 1st article of the Bull states clearly the mission of the Institute:

*“That ... they should make it their chief care to teach children, especially poor children, those things which pertain to a good and Christian life.”*

The 5th article reiterates the importance of gratuity and specifies how to implement it:

*“... that the said Brothers teach children gratuitously and that they receive neither money nor presents when offered by the pupils or their parents.”*

The 17th article indicates the balance that is to be maintained between their teaching of school subjects and their role as catechists:

*“That the Brothers not only teach the children reading, writing, orthography and arithmetic but that they chiefly imbue their minds with the principles of Christianity and of the Gospel ... and other things necessary for salvation.”*

What this official approval did was to recognize not only the legal existence of the Institute within the body of the Church but, more importantly, to validate its educational mission as a particular contribution to the overall mission of the Church.

#### **1.14 Remaining faithful to De La Salle’s vision**

The first century of the Institute’s schools up to the time of the suppression in 1792 during the French Revolution affords us many examples of how this “responding to needs” remained a dynamic principle. By forming schoolmasters through their particular methods, based on the *Conduct of Schools*, the Institute provided individual teachers for country and city parishes as well as for the early schools of the Sulpicians at Montreal. The particular difficulties and needs of various parts of France stimulated great creativity in adapting the curriculum of the school to the needs of pupils who would go to sea (Calais, Vannes, Saint Malo), to the particular problems of those isolated areas where the Church campaigned to convert the children of Calvinists to Catholicism, to the development of more advanced training in methods of keeping accounts. The prohibition on the teaching of Latin, which was to provide the target for so many of the attacks and jeers of the *philosophes*, seems to have been an important factor in maintaining the practical focus of the Institute’s schools and so continuing to make the schools accessible to the poor and drawing its major clientele from among the poor. The pioneer work with boarding schools and with the custodial care of delinquents, begun at St. Yon in De La Salle’s lifetime, was continued and extended to eight such institutions before 1792.

Three documents left by Brother Agathon, Fifth Superior General, illustrate this fidelity. The first was his second circular letter to the Brothers in 1785, the development of *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Master*, left simply as a list by De La Salle. This text shows a deep knowledge and understanding of the foundation principles of the Institute. So, too, does Brother Agathon’s letter of April 10, 1786, where he questions the Brothers seriously about the “*Public Contests and Examinations*” which had become traditional in many of the schools and which he felt risked favoring the more gifted pupils to the detriment of the others, reminding the Brothers that “*the finality of Christian and Gratuitous schools . . . is to bring up pupils in a Christian manner.*” Brother Agathon’s spirited defense of the Institute during the French Revolution in the document presented to the National Assembly in 1791, is a model of clarity and brevity which insists on the historical fact that:

*“Their schools are completely gratuitous; they never receive anything, either from the parents or the pupils; . . . It should not go unnoticed as well that they offer a quite notable present to the Nation each year by forming more than one hundred teachers for the instruction of the poor youth of the different cities to which they are sent.”*

In responding to some particular objections leveled against the religious congregations in general, Brother Agathon insists on the education of the poor:

#### CONCERNING THE INSTRUCTION OF THE POOR

*“It is certainly not for the Brothers of the Christian Schools to make known to the Nation the importance of children of the ordinary people being able to acquire religion, customs and some openness of spirit, of becoming accustomed from an early age to obedience, to rules of behavior, to being kept busy, according to their age and their position. Such things, by keeping idleness and the possibility of learning vicious habits at a distance, dispose them more easily to the different professions that they need to take up. In the lowest class of the people the majority of fathers and mothers lack the time and talent that are needed for their children’s education. It is obviously useful for artisans and tradesmen to know their religion, and to be able to read, write and calculate ...”*

There is no difficulty in recognizing the historical continuity between the mission of Christian Education here defended by Brother Agathon and the origin of the mission of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Unfortunately, the legal existence of the Institute in France was terminated from 1792 until 1805. Only a small group of Brothers in some of the Papal States and in Rome continued to exist officially.

## THE SECOND CENTURY 1802-1904

### PRELUDE

**1.20** *The restoration of the Lasallian mission in France initiated a century of extraordinary growth in the land of its origin, saw its expansion beyond France into 35 different countries of the world and the development of a missionary policy far beyond anything which De La Salle and the first generation of Brothers could ever have envisaged. The 160 Brothers in France and in Italy in 1810 were to become some 14,631 Brothers by the end of the century that culminated in the solemn canonization of its founder.*

*The mission of the Institute has to be understood against the social and political events in France, especially in relation to the role of the Church. Favored by Bonaparte and by the restored Bourbons in the early years of the century, the Institute, along with other educational works of the Church, was to suffer from the anti-clericalism of the latter part.*

### 1.21 Restoration and development of the Institute in France

The restoration of the mission of the Institute in France was a response to the needs expressed by ordinary people, the hierarchy, and the government. The Institute was at first the only congregation authorized to resume its work through schools but in accord with the centralization that marked many Napoleonic reforms, the Brothers' schools were placed under the direct control of the University. This privileged position under the University accorded to the Brothers by imperial decree in 1808 may not have always left them as free as they wished but ensured cooperation with government and freedom from the forces opposed to their restoration. In a nation that was to see 17 religious congregations of women and 4 congregations of men devoted mainly to education founded by 1830, the Brothers of the Christian Schools played an important role in restoring a great deal of what they had already pioneered before the Revolution, as well as being pathfinders in responding to new needs in education at a national level.

The most notable achievements are the following:

- the struggle to maintain gratuity in some form or another so that the poor could have schools;

*“For the 150 years that we have been teaching, our pupils have never owed us money ... . We teach them for God and for the State and not for ourselves. We require docility and virtue but no money. They are our children, not our contributors.”* Brother Anaclet, Superior General, November 11, 1833

- the accepting of responsibility for a large number of communal (i.e., government) primary schools which helped to provide the model for the national system of elementary schools;

*“There is an example known by everyone, the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It cannot be denied that they have multiplied, brought about a great deal of good, adopted the best methods, in a word, played an important role in the progress of education.”* Guizon, Minister of Education, 1833

- the insistence on maintaining their traditional methods, based on the continuing editions of the *Conduite des Ecoles*, against the attempt to impose the so-called Mutual, Monitorial or Lancastrian system. (*In this system, a master teacher controlled some 10 or more monitors, each of whom was responsible for 10 or more pupils.*) This was felt by the Brothers to be contrary to the close relationship between teacher and pupils that they thought essential. If the Brothers were judged “conservative” in this regard, nevertheless:

*“Despite the conservative spirit which distinguishes them, the Brothers are prepared to introduce important improvements into their pedagogy.”* Pierre Lorain, Inspector, 1837

- the provision of evening classes for adults, especially between 1830-1848 when a total of 48,500 workmen were received in evening classes as students, a system studied and subsequently widely imitated by government;
- corrective work in institutions for delinquents (St. Yon model) and instructional work in prisons 1840-1882;
- the Teachers’ College on the Lower Seine, opened at Rouen in 1829, re-established the lifelong concern of De La Salle to provide for the training of teachers and became the first of what was to become one of the consistent works of the Brothers throughout the world to the present day;
- after 1830, there was the gradual restoration of boarding schools such as had existed prior to the Revolution until there were 38 by the end of the century. It was in these schools, especially, that the Brothers, accepting the prohibition on teaching Latin, made a notable contribution to the development of technical schools, schools of agriculture and schools of design, which were usually developed in response to local needs;

*“The gentlemen of your Committee wish you to teach... geography, history, chemistry, mineralogy and popular physics. Let them know that we are going to reply in the affirmative and that the Brothers, friends of the people and dedicated to the service of youth, will always be ready to do whatever is useful, especially if it concerns extending knowledge and spreading the sciences.”* Frère Philippe, later Superior General 1838-1874, replying to a request from Rheims in 1831

- the development of special professional or commercial schools (business methods, double-entry book-keeping, etc.) was extended almost naturally to the development of what became known officially after 1867 as *Secondary Modern Schools* where modern languages were part of the curriculum;

*“It is to De La Salle that France owed, if not the first idea, at least the putting into practice and the popularizing of this kind of instruction (i.e. secondary modern schools). From the first attempt there emerged a teaching which, if it had been generalized, would have advanced by one century, the organization of specialized secondary education.”* Duruy, Minister of Education, 1867

- the composition and publication by Brothers of text books for primary schools, secondary schools and for evening professional courses became one of the most widely diffused aspects of the various Lasallian schools. Late in the century, a decision was taken to set up and maintain a separate printing press, known subsequently from the opening letters of its title, *Librarie Generale de L’Enseignement libre*, LIGEL.

## **1.22 Missionary efforts**

The missionary expansion of the Institute, in the classic sense of going into foreign countries to help establish a Christian society where the Gospel was being newly preached, is a clear example of “responding to needs.” The Brothers usually began by opening schools for the children of government employees, but increasingly these schools, with their catechism classes, catered to local people as well (e.g., the involvement of Blessed Brother Scubilion with the slaves in Reunion). The first efforts were, quite naturally, in French-speaking countries. The initiative usually came mainly from government or Church officials who sought schools in French colonial possessions as, for example, had occurred with the unsuccessful attempt of the Brothers in Martinique in 1776. In 1815, when the institute was struggling to re-establish itself in France, a combination of factors, including the interest of the French government and the concern of the Church reinforced by a direct appeal from Pope Pius VII, saw schools founded in the island of Bourbon (now called Reunion), as well as in the “Louisiana Territory” in what is now called the United States. Both these ventures eventually failed, probably because of the tendency to use the Brothers individually or in groups of two, rather than respecting their traditional way of working as a community. Successive Superiors General, Brothers Guillaume and Anaclet, wrote important letters to the Brothers reflecting on these “failures.” Their call for volunteers prepared to face the difficulties of life as missionaries as they saw it, saw practically all the Brothers offer themselves!

Following the failed attempt to send Brothers to Canada in 1718, a new group was eventually sent to Montreal in 1837. Other developments in North America were largely due to the important role played by French priests, often members of religious orders, who, dispersed during the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, had gone to the help of various Catholic immigrant groups in the United States. Their requests for Brothers, often forwarded through the Propagation of Faith Congregation in Rome (which was responsible for missionary efforts), usually brought a positive response especially during the long period of Brother Philippe Bransart as Superior General from 1838-1874. The Foreign Missions Societies of Paris and Lyons as well as the expansion of the Propagation of the Faith movement launched by Pauline Jaricot played important roles in the invitations made to the Brothers throughout the century.

The first missionary efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean and in other countries of Asia came about through similar circumstances. Without any single formulation of a missionary policy, the Institute moved out of the French-speaking world into parts of the then British Empire (Penang and Singapore, 1852) and in 1863 prepared Brothers to learn Spanish in order to open schools in Ecuador. During Brother Philippe's generalate, there were some 1,002 new foundations, more than a quarter of which were outside France. By the turn of the century, one-tenth of the Brothers were classified as teaching in what were then called "the missions."

### **1.23 Relationships with the great religions**

The expansion of the Institute into the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean brought the Brothers for the first time into contact with Islam and Judaism and the schools in Penang and Singapore included Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist pupils. The pupils of religions other than Catholic Christians could attend the Brothers' school but usually had to attend the catechism lesson that was seen as indispensable to the overall curriculum. But the experience of the Brothers in such mission countries usually modified the "conversion" model of mission that was the common theology of the time. Thus, for example, the prospectus written by Pere Beurel (Missions Etrangères) in 1848 announcing the opening of the Brothers' school in Singapore, included the following wording:

*"The principles upon which (the Brothers' school) is based will be as liberal as possibly can be: thus it will be open to everyone, whatever his creed may be; and should, for instance, a boy of a persuasion different from that of Roman Catholics wish to attend it, no interference whatever will take place with his religion, unless his parents or guardians express their wishes to have him instructed in the Catholic religion. Public religious instruction will be given to Roman Catholic boys either before or after school hours; but at all times, the Masters will most carefully watch over the morals of the whole, whatever their religious persuasion may be."*

### **1.24 Expansion outside of France**

In the introduction to his eighth volume of the *Histoire Generale de L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, M. Georges Rigault writes as follows:

*"The disciples of the saintly educator, already present in Italy, Belgium, Canada and the island of Bourbon before the time of Brother Philippe as General (1838-1874), spread into Central Europe, England, the United States, the republic of Ecuador, Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Madagascar, India and Indo-China during the glorious "era" which ended with the death of the leader known everywhere (i.e., Brother Philippe). This peaceful conquest of the globe was to be stabilized, organized and even extended further in the generalates of Brothers Irlide and Joseph. After 1904, it allowed their successor, Brother Gabriel-Marie, to open up paths of the missionary apostolate to a good number of the French Brothers who became victims of persecuting laws."* (Page 1)

This helps to explain why the General Chapter of 1894 (the official meeting of elected delegates periodically) included 25 elected members representing the following groupings: England-Ireland. Austria-Germany. North Belgium. South Belgium, Barcelona, Madrid. Rome, Turin, Algeria-Tunisia, India-China-Vietnam, Reunion-Madagascar-Mauritius, Orient (i.e. Eastern Mediterranean), Montreal, Toronto, Baltimore, New York, Saint Louis, San Francisco, Ecuador-Colombia-Chili-Argentine.

### **1.25 Difficulties over the “Latin question”**

The Brothers’ schools in France were in continuity with the Lasallian tradition but particular difficulties had already appeared in a number of other European countries because of the traditional ban on the teaching of Latin. This “ban” effectively prevented the Brothers’ pupils from being qualified to enter seminaries to study for the priesthood or from matriculating for universities where Latin was usually a condition of entry into many faculties. The difficulty was particularly acute in most of the English-speaking countries where Catholics were generally poor, a religious minority, and their access to higher education in practically all fields necessitated Latin. The Bishops, therefore, frequently requested the Brothers to teach Latin. In the traditional spirit of “*responding to needs*,” the Brothers attempted to do this but their particular situation was not well understood by the Superiors in Europe. This difficulty was felt in England, Ireland and Australia but became most severe in the United States and at one stage even seemed to threaten the links between these schools and the Institute. This was the first major manifestation of the difficulty experienced by the Institute in understanding itself as an international movement.

## THE THIRD CENTURY 1904-1966

### PRELUDE

**1.30** *The Lasallian story of this century up to the 39th General Chapter of 1966-67 takes place against the background of the “secularization laws” of 1904 in France, the First World War of 1914-1918, the world economic depression from the late 1920s to the mid 1930s, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, the Second World War and the beginnings of the Cold War. The educational mission of the Institute was affected by all these momentous events but the most important summary of what happened can be read in the statistical table which follows. This is a prelude to a summary consideration of three main issues:*

- *the implications of the 1904 “secularization laws”;*
- *the consequences of the resolution of the “Latin question”;*
- *attempts to revise the Common Rules in order to maintain traditional values of the Institute and its mission without sacralising certain observances which had become in practice irrelevant.*

### 1.31 The Institute becomes international

The profile of the institute, accelerated by the series of “secularization laws” which touched the Institute in France 1904-1912, changed dramatically as the following table shows.

Year	Brothers in France	Brothers outside of France
1904	10,626	4,806
1928	4,141	8,595
1966	2,784	13,951

### 1.32 The Secularization laws

The so-called “secularization laws” enacted in France from 1901-1912 were anti-religious in their orientation and intent and aimed at destroying the power and position of the Church. Schools were often summarily forced to close by severe legislation against the religious congregations which were responsible for them. These laws forbade the religious to own property, to wear religious habits and to live in community. In face of these prohibitions, some religious were prepared to forego these aspects of their previous lives in order to maintain their work. Others considered this a betrayal, even an “apostasy,” and sought to continue their religious life and apostolate outside of France.

Southern Belgium, Canada and Spain profited most strongly initially from the expatriate Brothers but Georges Rigault, in his *Histoire générale des Freres des Ecoles Chretiennes (Volume 10)*, notes the impetus given to already existing communities in Argentina, Ecuador and Egypt from these self-exiled Brothers, as well as the foundation of what were to become new Districts in Brazil, Panama, Mexico, North Africa and Australia.

Today, this may be read in hindsight as a providential way in which the international Institute developed beyond any conscious planning, as the 1966 figures in the above table indicate.

### 1.33 The resolution of the “Latin question”

In 1923, Pope Pius XI, by inviting the Brothers to include the teaching of the classics where appropriate in their schools, brought a satisfactory conclusion to the historical difficulties between all the Districts where the prohibition against Latin had brought serious difficulties for the pupils of those schools. It resolved the difficulty between the English-speaking Districts - especially in the United States - and the centralized government of the Institute. This decision relaunched the university apostolates of the Institute in the United States where Catholics, in a minority position and deprived of government support for separate education, relied on Catholic schools at primary, secondary and tertiary level to establish themselves within the society in general. In other parts of the world, it broadened the curriculum in many secondary schools, thereby facilitating the access of those pupils who aspired to the priesthood and to the professions.

*“The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools extends its teaching to the classics in order to conform to the August will of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, manifested by his letter to the Most Honored Superior General dated 17th April, 1923.”* Addition to Common Rules, 1925

### 1.34 Attempts to revise the Common Rules

The resolution of the Latin question more than 40 years after the difficulties posed by the complete prohibition on Latin had become apparent was the outstanding example of what had become a more general problem for the Institute: **How to remain faithful to the founding vision of the Christian education of the children of the poor when the pressing educational needs in modern society demanded greater flexibility in an Institute which had become international?**

In practice, the difficulty was between those who saw fidelity as the literal observance of the original words written by the Founder and enshrined in the Bull of Approbation or, on the other hand, those who felt obliged to attempt to implement the spirit, the Founder’s vision, rather than feeling bound by a literal interpretation of the original words.

This matter came to a head in the 37th General Chapter of the Institute in 1946, just after the end of the Second World War. A General Chapter, prepared in haste after a world conflict where many Brothers had been killed, where the lives of many others had been severely disrupted, was also the first opportunity to meet after the loss of some 165 Brothers put to death in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. The 1946 Chapter, therefore, had no time to study in depth the basic changes needed to bring the *Rules* up to date, but the Superior General sought Vatican approval for the same *Rules* with only minor changes. By 1956, it was evident that there would have to be a complete re-examination and re-expression of the *Rules*. A critical study was now urgent.

Although the 1956 Chapter was itself unable to carry out such a complex task of revision, it began the process. It took, moreover, the far reaching decision that *“the critical study of all the writings of our Holy Founder be continued and that the writing of books and articles investigating his spirituality be further encouraged.”* This was the important impetus given to official Lasallian Studies as such. The opening of the *Institute of Saint Pius X* at Salamanca in 1955 and the establishment of the *Institute Jesus Magister* at the Lateran University in Rome in 1958 for the theological studies of religious Brothers, furnished the Institute with a succession of highly-educated Brothers, of whom many theses provided the critical studies for a proper discernment on fidelity to the Founder.

Meanwhile, of course, it was not only the Institute that felt the need to be more relevant to the modern world. Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in Rome 1962-1965, thereby providing a renewed theological background against which the Institute prepared itself for the General Chapter of 1966.

# FROM THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND THE GENERAL CHAPTER 1966-1967 TO THE PRESENT

## PRELUDE

**1.40** *The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was such an important event in the life of the Church that it is impossible to exaggerate its influence on the General Chapter of 1966, prolonged into a second session in the autumn of 1967. As already indicated, the international Institute was already moving in a radical revision of its fundamental expression of itself and its mission through its Rules at the time when the Vatican Council was begun. Such a movement received new impetus through the event of the Council itself and its sixteen documents and has continued to do so from the various Pastoral Exhortations that have followed the prolongation of the Council through the sequence of Synods until the present day.*

*The changes in language which pointed to new perceptions of the Church's understanding of itself and its role through the Second Vatican Council were reflected as well in the "new language" of the Institute's Renewal Chapter of 1966-1967. The four following major themes help to outline how the Institute's adherence to the principle of "responding to needs" in the field of Christian education found a practical focus.*

- *The Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today (1967)*
- *The "service of the poor as a principal characteristic" of the Institute's mission*
- *The Rule ad experimentum (1967-1987)*
- *The gradual perception and recognition of "Shared Mission"*

### **1.41 A new language to express new insights**

From the moment Pope John XXIII convoked the Council, one of the major emphases was the change from preserving the tradition - the post-Reformation polemic - to the idea of being "up-to-date," summed up in the Italian word *aggiornamento*. This concept was to be the leading idea of the document *Perfectae Caritatis* on the *Renewal of Religious Life* with its direction to religious congregations to return to the sources of their original inspiration - what was subsequently to be described theologically as the charism (sic) of the Founder or Foundress - and to make themselves more strongly present to the modern world.

A second highly influential set of ideas was that of the *collegiality* of the Council Fathers with its theological emphasis on the sense of *communio* (*communio*) between the different groups in the Church, an idea that has dominated theological thinking to the present. This greater stress on horizontal relationships signaled a move away from an exclusively hierarchical understanding of authority and obedience. The concept of *People of God* as a description of

the Church and the adoption of the word dialogue to indicate the practical way in which matters could be discussed “collegially,” continued this movement. As these ideas developed, the word *subsidiarity* became an important description of the principle to determine the various levels at which decisions should be made in religious communities and in the Church in general. Later there came the ideas of *co-responsibility*, *solidarity* and *interdependence*. The first major document of the Council, *The Constitution on the Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* in 1963, not only brought important reforms to the liturgy but effectively moved the Church away from the uniform Latin Mass and forms of liturgy which were sanctioned by many centuries of practice since the Council of Trent. In putting to one side centuries of chant and polyphony and effectively reducing them to the cultural expressions of previous ages, the Church showed how far it was prepared to go to be “up-to-date” and relevant to people of today. A whole new approach was taken to *Religious Freedom (Dignitatis humanae)* and to other religions in the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (Nostra aetate)*. An emphasis on participation and the possibility of immediate understanding in the vernacular were henceforth considered more important than the carrying out of a ritual. The continuing growth of its self understanding is expressed by the Church in three great documents, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* in 1964, and, in 1965, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today (Gaudium et Spes)*, and the *Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*.

While it is important to see the importance of the Council as an *event*, it is even more important *to see it as movement*, both through its original documentation as well as through the cycle of subsequent *Synods* that have concentrated on particular themes. Some of this more recent documentation has greatly influenced the movement to various forms of “Shared Mission” in other religious congregations.

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

The emphasis on *today*, the present moment, (the famous *aggiornamento* of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council), led the Chapter delegates of 1966-1967 to a new, up-to-date formulation of the identity of the Brother. The *Declaration*, as its full title suggests, was a statement influenced by the Vatican Council and, along with the *Rule*, was the major document published by the Institute after the 39th General Chapter. There are 39 references to various Council documents, the major ones being to *Gaudium et Spes* and *Perfectas Caritatis*. Above all, the *Declaration* is a statement of identity, for, as Brother Charles Henry, Superior General, remarked in his preface:

“... it became more and more clear that we were in need of a document that would give a .synthesis of the Brothers’ life and mission in the world of today.”

This synthesis was formulated in a very important way by defining the constitutive elements of the Brother’s vocation as *Religious consecration*, *Apostolate* or *Mission*, and *Community life*. What was significant about this clarification was the stress that the *Declaration* laid upon the integration of these elements as essential for the Brother’s identity.

The challenge issued under the heading Renewal and Adaptation has a lasting relevance:

*“The renewal of the religious life implies that certain practices be given new vitality and that certain institutions be transformed. More importantly, renewal demands a return to the sources found in the Gospel and in the origins of the Institute. In this way new vigor will be derived from the creative principles that gave the Institute existence and the Brothers will be able to go beyond mere externals to live effectively the charism of the Founder in the world today.” (2)*

The same preface invited the Brothers to read all the documents of the 39th General Chapter *“in the light of the Declaration.”* The fidelity of the document to the heritage of the Institute is well brought out in the following words:

*“The spirit of the Declaration, the spirit that is basic to an understanding of all the capitular texts, is at once a spirit of spiritual renewal, a personal, responsible engagement in the service of Christ; a missionary spirit of dedication to the needs of youth and to the educational service of the poor; a spirit of community which daily nourishes itself on the word of God, heard and served together; the spirit of renewal of our apostolic works, and especially renewal of the school.” (ibid)*

A perusal of the titles of the eight chapters which make up the *Declaration* show just how much it is a document of its time. The sequence begins with *Fidelity to the Founder*, is followed by directly quoting from *Gaudium et Spes*, *The Signs of the Times*, and continues with two chapters which look at *The Constitutive Elements of the Brother’s Vocation* and the *Personal Synthesis* which each member is called to make. The 5th chapter takes up *The Religious Life of the Brother* while the 6th concentrates on *The Service of the Poor through Education*. There is a separate chapter on *Education and the Teaching of Religion* and the work concludes by an overall view of *The Educational Work of the Brothers*.

#### **1.43 The “service of the poor” as a principal characteristic of the Institute’s mission**

The common theme addressed by the Vatican Council and successive Church documents as the *“preferential option for the poor”* has marked the Institute in its renewed attention to its educational mission as that of the *“service of the poor through education.”* The strong coherence between the *Declaration* and the *Rule* is most evident in this regard, although the classic tension between established works and new needs is always present.

*“The Institute is devoted to the poor in a special way; although it offers its apostolic and educational services to all young people who are able to profit from it.” (RC 1g, 1967)*

*“Another element that can be drawn from the notes (sent to the Chapter) is the expressed will for greater flexibility in the commitment of personnel to institutions so that when more urgent educational needs present themselves the Brothers*

*will be readily available. In particular, there is a widespread insistence that the service of the poor become once again a principal characteristic of the Institute.”*  
(D 9,3)

The *Declaration* devotes its entire chapter 6 to a lengthy consideration of the service of the poor through education by considering such questions as *Who are the Poor?*, *War Against Poverty*, *Teaching the Poor*, *Training other Social Classes*, *Help for Those Most in Need*, and terminates by considering the necessary *Preparation and Practical Orientation* for this work.

Chapter 6 concludes with the following words that indicate the challenge posed to all:

*“Every level of authority; then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with the orientation, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our ‘return to the poor.’”* (D 34, 4)

#### **1.44 The *Rule ad experimentum* 1967-1987**

Through a period of nearly ten years of study and discussion with four separate drafts of the *Rule*, the Institute followed the practice of the founding Brothers nearly 300 years previously by judging the suitability of this reform against the background of the life and experience of the Institute for 20 years before presenting a new *Rule* to the 41st General Chapter in 1986. In its approval of this *Rule* in 1987, the Church notes that the *“Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes has recognized in these texts the faithful expression of the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and of the tradition of the Institute ... according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to them.”* (R, Decree)

The *Rule* of 1987 is formulated on principles drawn from the *Declaration* and the *Rule ad experimentum* of 1967 and in the light of that lived experience.

#### **1.45 The gradual recognition of the role of “lay teachers”**

If the 37th General Chapter in 1946 appeared to be dismissive in relation to the “emergency role” played by lay-teachers in many schools during the Second World War, it was probably because so many other immediate major issues had to be faced by that Chapter. There was also a hope, perhaps even an expectation, that the Brothers would continue to maintain or even increase their numbers. Both the *Rule* of 1967 and the *Declaration* make only slight reference to the role of “lay-teachers” in expressions which are similar. The *Rule* specified that *“they (the Brothers) co-operate closely with the lay teachers and others responsible for the education of the young, joining their labors with all those who promote the cause of justice and unity among them.”* (RC 9, k). The *Declaration* offers a broader vision:

*“The school will be molded into community only through a staff rich in diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason, the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world,*

*of family life, and of civic affairs. Lay teachers should be completely involved with the whole life of the school: with catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities, and administrative positions.” (D 46, 3)*

Both these documents draw attention to what can now be recognized with more clarity as the increasing involvement of the laity in many aspects of Christian life, especially through their work in schools. Many were increasingly inspired by the educational vision of John Baptist de La Salle. The late Brother Patrice Marey, in a text of June 7, 1990, entitled *The Relationship between Brothers and Lay Lasallians*, expressed this in the following words:

*“We need to try to understand the times in which we are living and agree to judge it in terms of duration. The growing role of the laity is written in terms of duration. It began well before the Council, it is generalized in the Church and has never presented itself as opposed to priests or religious. If the laity fear clericalism, it is to affirm their own identity without arguing with other apostolic workers ... Another lesson to be drawn from this “time-duration” bond is that there will be no return to yesterday’s models ... The coming of many lay Lasallians ... is going to allow our works to continue in a way which we had never imagined. It is up to us to grasp this passing grace ... We are living in a favorable time, a day of salvation.” (p. 7)*

#### **1.46 “Degrees of belonging”**

By the Chapter of 1976, however, there was such a clear recognition of the dedication of many lay-teachers that the matter was addressed in terms of their “*degree of belonging to the Institute*” through sharing in its mission:

*“The Brothers share Lasallian spirituality and the animation of their works with all the members of the educational community. They are concerned with their continuing formation and careful to make them know the different degrees of belonging to what is being called the ‘Lasallian family.’” (C 403,6)*

This matter of “*Degrees of belonging to the Institute*” was addressed in two formal Chapter resolutions.

*N. 44 Besides the postulants, a young man or one of mature age can be associated with the apostolic activity and the life of the community without having made religious profession. (The particular status and contract will be determined by the local community in agreement with the District).*

*N. 45 An individual or a group of persons can be associated in the apostolic activity of the Brothers and the spiritual life which animates them without sharing their community life completely.*

This text may now strike us as patronizing and limiting. But it is important not to overlook the advance in thinking which the Chapter delegates made by their reflection on experience and their openness to something completely new and different. Perhaps, too, in the general perception that not all those who shared in Lasallian works necessarily had the same commitment to them as a mission, there was a certain intuition that remains valid (cf. 3.26). That this growth in understanding continued to develop becomes even more marked in the next decade so that the group of Brothers constituted to prepare the draft of the Rule for the 1986 Chapter summed up this relationship between the Institute and those who work with it in the Christian education of young people, in the shorthand expression *A Shared Mission*. (R 17)

### **1.47 Lights and shadows**

The following of the directions of the Second Vatican Council and those of the renewal Chapter of 1966-1967 provided a strong challenge to an international Institute. If the Chapter delegates had a broad view of what had been achieved through the two sessions of the Chapter, it was not easy to communicate this uniformly and have it understood in the same way throughout the Institute. The inspiring tone of the *Declaration* was not always uniformly heard or understood despite the efforts to pass on the results of the Chapter. Much was achieved but the fruits tended to be seen somewhat later. That is why the twenty years between the General Chapters of 1966 and 1986 were a period of great challenge for the Institute. After 1966, when the Institute knew its greatest number at any period of its history, there followed a period of rapid decline when a significant number of its members for various reasons decided to leave it. At the same time, there was a marked diminution of younger members entering so that the overall numbers of 1986 were about half of those of twenty years before. Yet, paradoxically, the apostolic works for which the Institute was responsible in 1986 were more numerous because of the growth of the Lasallian Family.

### **1.48 Lasallian Family**

In 1946, the Sisters known as *Hermanas Guadalupanas De La Salle*, founded in Mexico, received canonical approbation and have continued to develop their apostolic works in close association with the Institute. In 1948, the *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate*, begun by Brother Teoderetto in Torino in 1917, received formal approval as a Secular Institute. In 1973, a small group of *Lasallian Sisters* in Vietnam and Thailand, received diocesan recognition. These three foundations, along with other groups and movements, were formally recognized by the General Chapter of 1986 as forming part of what was called the *Lasallian Family*. But there was clear recognition in the *Letter to the Lasallian Family*, issued in response to the Chapter on February 2nd, 1989, that many other persons, especially teachers and those closely associated with the Lasallian educational mission, belonged to the Lasallian Family even without formal links to any particular group or movement. The years since then have shown the richness and vastness of this gift of the Spirit.

## THE PRESENT SCENE

*The Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the kingdom of God requires. (R 11)*

### PRELUDE

**1.50** *In order to respond to this plan (of salvation) and also to situations of distress similar to those that the Founder knew, the Institute desires to be present to the world today as part of the Church's work in spreading the gospel. R 11*

The educational policies of Lasallian Institutions are centered on the young, adapted to the times in which they live, and designed to prepare them to take their place in society. These institutions are characterized by the determination to make the means of salvation available to young people through a quality education and by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ. R 13

### 1.51 The present reality

The Lasallian educational mission embraces 63,116 religious, priests and lay persons in partnership, teaching and administering in 914 establishments in more than 80 countries, reaching 785,127 pupils, according to the statistics published by the Institute in December, 1995. The Brothers, who are currently involved in full-time positions in schools and other educational works throughout the world, are around 7%. The accompanying tables shows this world-wide distribution of Lasallian educational works and those who are currently working in them.

### LASALLIAN SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS, BY CONTINENT

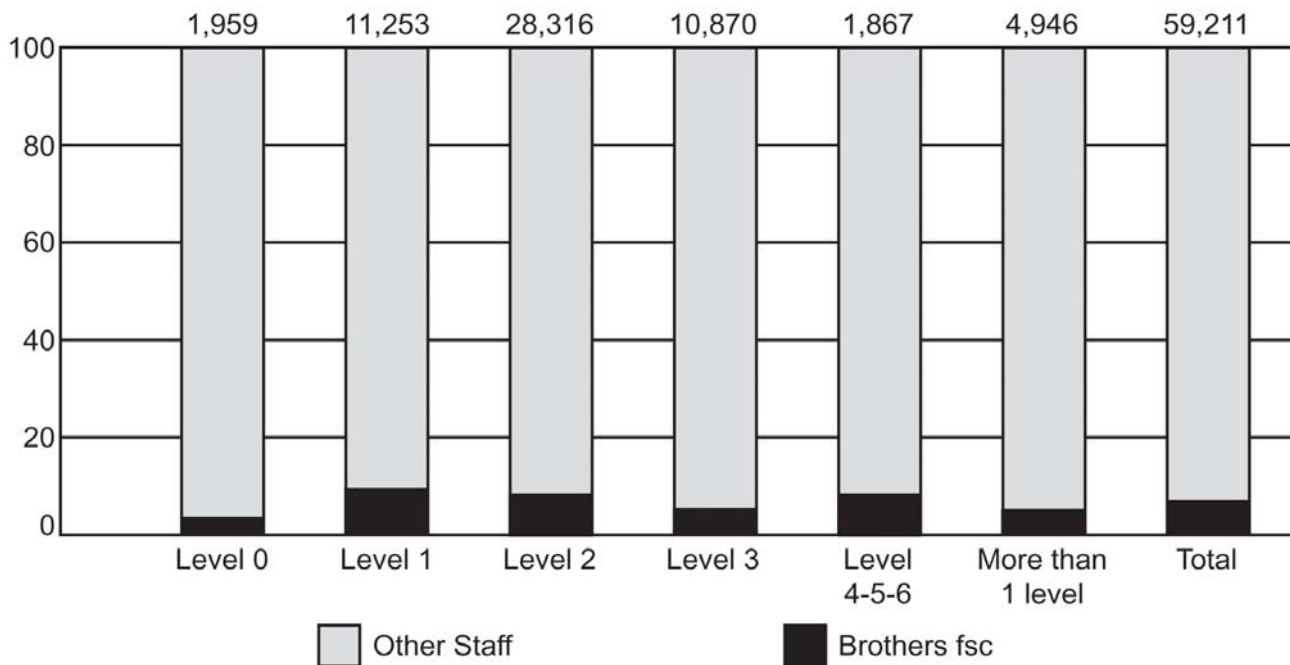
*Reported as of 31 December 1995*

	AFRICA	AMERICAS	ASIA	AUSTRALIA/OCEANIA	EUROPE	TOTAL
<b>Schools</b>	74	325	83	21	409	912
<b>Students</b>	53,075	337,982	112,675	12,278	268,120	784,100



### 1.52c DISTRIBUTION OF STAFF IN LASALLIAN SCHOOLS, BY LEVEL

Reported as of 31 December 1995



### 1.53 Variety and breadth of the Lasallian Mission today

Lasallian schools and institutions try to be open to all who wish to attend them. Pupils from all cultural backgrounds and faiths work with a similarly mixed body of teachers and advisers in a caring community.

Education in secondary schools is the focus for 49.9% of Lasallian works. The large number of teachers and administrators in tertiary level education, almost equal to those engaged in primary education, is a recent development. The 3.3% of Lasallians who work in pre-school and the 11.8% who work in special education services- as court-referred, handicapped, children at risk and other activities reflect the growing awareness of the crucial nature of early childhood development, and an expanding of the traditional Lasallian commitment to the deprived, disadvantaged and vulnerable in response to their special needs. It also reflects the greater involvement of women (now close to 44% of the total) in the Lasallian mission. The majority of pupils in the schools in Asia (with the exception of the Philippines) would be from the Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucianist, or Shintoist traditions. Many of the educators would also come from one or other of these traditions.

In all these levels of education, the traditional attitudes and values of the Institute as found in the Lasallian Heritage, are the basis of what is done. Lay colleagues are bringing their distinctive contributions to their increasing presence in posts of responsibility in this overall transition from what was the *Brothers' school* to the *Lasallian school*. The *Rule* of 1987 indicates the necessary openness to change and development as new needs arise.

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*“The Christian School, which has always to be given new vitality, is the preferred field for the activity of the Brothers. The Institute also explores other possibilities for teaching and education more adapted to the needs of time and place.” ( R 3)*

### **1.54 Level 2, secondary education**

If the original Lasallian mission began with primary schools and expanded only gradually via the boarding schools into secondary education (cf. 1.5 I; 1.52), today around half of Lasallian educators work in secondary schools. Frequently, the original primary school sometimes became the secondary school and, in a certain number of cases, the technical or trade school became the college or university,

Secondary education is the last stage of formal schooling for the great majority. In the “developing economies,” therefore, schools for young people up to the age of fifteen years are the obvious centers for a training in skills that enhance individual opportunity and community wealth. It is frequently found that these schools are fully engaged in promoting the social and economic growth of the people of the area through adult literacy classes and training in appropriate trades. In this regard, it is especially important to emphasize the role which can be played by technical schools in a better preparation of young people for a trade, by collaborating with public authorities, local businesses, trade unions and other educational and social agencies.

### **1.55 Level 3, adult higher education**

The industrialization of Europe and the immigrant settlement in the United States of America in the nineteenth century produced urban populations for whom the traditional primary education was initially indispensable and subsequently insufficient. The children of the working class and of the poor came to need and to seek secondary education. Both for reasons of expense and from fear of the secularism and even anti-clericalism of the existing universities, aspirations beyond secondary education would have been frustrated without the provision of Church-affiliated higher education at modest cost. In the changed circumstances in many parts of the world today, Lasallian higher education institutions are now challenged with the deterioration of the urban centers out of which many of them grew.

*“Many of the World’s great cities have significant areas which are in steady or steep decline. Accordingly, urban poverty constitutes one of the great strategic problems facing Lasallian universities, especially in that dimension of their mission which emphasizes justice, communal responsibility, moral reflection on social conditions and a commitment to providing access to a high quality human and Christian education for people of all economic categories, especially the*

*needy.*" (Br. James Gaffney to the meeting of Heads of Lasallian Universities, Encuentro 4, Rome, July 1995)

Statistics made available by the Secretary General show that, in 1995, one in eight of all pupils at Lasallian establishments was in tertiary level education and of our present Brothers and colleagues, one in five is involved in tertiary level teaching, administration and support. This is a staff deployment similar to that engaged in primary teaching. The Lasallian tertiary institutes number 76 in 19 countries.

The Lasallian response to the call for higher education has been to develop, with a certain pragmatism, a diversified service in universities, technical colleges and teacher training establishments inspired as much by perceived needs as by pre-existing models. Each institution tries to be present to the local society, responsive to its culture and adaptable to its particular needs. Research projects tend to support local industrial initiatives and to promote community awareness. At the same time, academic excellence and, in favorable circumstances, fundamental and theoretical research are pursued.

*"The educational policies of Lasallian Institutions are centered on the young, adapted to the times in which they live, and designed to prepare them to take their place in society. When the Brothers work in the area of adult education, they put the same emphasis on the importance of person, adapting their methods accordingly."* (R 13)

### **1.56 A special Lasallian tradition: the training of teachers and catechists**

The Institute tradition in teacher training and the preparation of catechists has been maintained since the time of the Founder, both in specific Teachers' Colleges and in integral programs in the professional training of student Brothers. The 1987 *Rule* notes:

*"Ever since the time of their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry.*

*The Brothers co-operate in forming Christian teachers. They help them to build their professional competence and also to become increasingly involved in the work of the Church and in the field of education."* (R 17)

A characteristic of recent developments in this professional training is the care to maintain a close relationship between the local realities and the approaches to the teacher training.

### **1.57 Literacy and community support programs**

There is a demanding and growing call for involvement in the lives of young people who are in specially difficult circumstances, especially where increasing urbanization threatens the cohesion of community cultures and often, paradoxically, limits opportunities for formal education.

The very poor are isolated and exposed to exploitation. The influence of the media can cause a distortion of values. Extreme poverty can deprive some of basic human dignity, leading even to their being excluded from the society of the better-off. The unequal distribution of wealth and the limited access to resources tend to foster frustration and undermine the sense of self worth. This was recognized by the Capitulants of the 40th General Chapter in their *orientations concerning the poor and justice*, when they invited the brothers:

*“ . . . to work directly in the educational service of economically poor young persons (children of laborers, of under-employed persons, of migrants), of the victims of social injustice, of the handicapped, of delinquents.”* (G 403, Oct 1976. page 79)

Young offenders, or children referred by the courts as being especially at risk, are cared for in an honored tradition dating back to the expansion of the school at Saint Yon in De La Salle's lifetime. It is not surprising, therefore, to note that everywhere, Lasallians are increasingly involved in various forms of education for parents, in family support services and in projects with street children, homeless children, young offenders, Boys' Villages and Boys' Towns, and also in many other forms of advocacy for the young. Many newer projects, with their holistic approach to education which addresses at once the intellectual and moral development of young people and the support of the communities in which they are growing up, cannot be fitted easily into the traditional groupings adopted in this review. A less formal *“pedagogy of the poor”* enables educators to go to where the young are and to be a presence of Christ to them there. Wherever the mission is especially adapted to meet the needs of the very poor, those who work in it are increasingly involved with a broad spectrum of authorities, religions, cultures and resources in a community approach to the education of the disadvantaged. The partnership of women, which has greatly enriched the Lasallian mission overall, has notably enhanced our understanding of the needs of families and extended the support services that can be offered to them.

*“In these educational communities all, both young and old, are called upon, with due respect to their freedom of conscience, to integrate their faith with their culture and so become available for the service of society and of the Church.”* (R 13a)

### **1.58 Non-formal schooling**

The incidence of “drop-outs” from formal schooling is a reminder that many students do not succeed in school. Alternative structures, more easily adapted to the special circumstances of neglected young people, are increasingly a feature of Lasallian education. Such centers usually involve cooperative arrangements among Brothers and local governmental and religious leaders of various faiths and the support of a devoted personnel. This was already anticipated for the Brothers by the *Declaration* in 1967:

*“New educational and apostolic needs are making themselves felt in many places; these will require new educational ideas, new teaching methods, new ways by which the Church can make her presence felt among the young . . . (Nevertheless) it is the mind of the General Chapter (39th) that the Institute not limit the*

*interpretation of its educational apostolate so as to refuse all apostolic activity unrelated to the school. Such a narrow point of view would not conform to the traditions of the Institute. It would run the risk of opposing the action of, ( the Holy Spirit among us, and it would paralyze the very initiative that is capable of renewing the schools themselves.” (D 51, 2, 4)*

### **1.59 Pastoral centers and youth support groups**

Even though many schools are able to develop and maintain excellent programs of religious education with strong pastoral emphases, school-based catechesis sometimes suffers from the fact that the time set aside for religious education is sometimes inadequate and not always well chosen. Such lessons may do little to engender spirituality. For reasons which differ from case to case, it may be difficult to foster positive attitudes to religion in the classroom. Lasallian pastoral centers of various kinds, led by experienced youth leaders, can help young people by giving them the opportunity to share their faith among themselves in less formal surroundings than the school.

#### **1.510 Responding to new realities**

The endorsement by the Church of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children* (1989) commits the Institute to implementing its proposals. While, historically, Lasallian principles have long preceded this formulation of the United Nations, the convention emphasizes significant elements in the contemporary understanding of individual autonomy during the years of dependency. It acknowledges, for example, that the right of a child to an identity extends to ethnicity and name, nationhood and culture, and to access to information and education (Art. 6-14). Children are to be listened to, especially where decisions affecting their access to resources are concerned (Art. 12). The convention is underpinned by a view of childhood which accepts young persons as partners in society and not simply objects of its care; as having a contribution to make. not merely a debt to pay.

#### **1.511 The colloquia on phenomena affecting the educational mission**

The Institute tries to respond through its educational mission to the particular needs of young people in different parts of the world. The 1993 General Chapter was particularly aware of the global problems which more and more influence the young at the approach of the third millennium. This was the perspective which led the Chapter to pass the following formal proposition so as to encourage continuous monitoring of the global issues which ultimately have their own influence on the lives of the young.

*“The General Chapter asks the Brother Superior and his Council to name a group of experts in the field of education who will serve as observers of the broad educational concerns throughout the world to enable the center of the Institute to develop a public policy’.” (C 435, Ch. 4. Proposition 2)*

Implementation of this proposition has taken the form of a series of Colloquia on issues that illustrate the current impact of world trends on young people. The Lasallian Mission is challenged to recognize a new anthropology of childhood and to renew and adapt itself accordingly. The five principal issues under examination in the series are, in sequence:

- The Family today (1994);
- The phenomenon of Globalization and its effects on education (1995);
- World-wide Urbanization and its consequences (1996);
- Information technology and some of its implications for education (1997);
- Suitable approaches to proclaiming the Gospel today (1998).

The main issues arising from these Colloquia will be published to all involved in the Lasallian Mission as part of the preparation of the 43rd General Chapter in the year 2000.

## 2.0 PRELUDE

As the preceding outline of the Lasallian Heritage has indicated, the Lasallian Mission in education has become a global mission. Wherever this mission is being carried out, those involved in it attempt to provide what the *Declaration* and 1987 Rule refer to as “a *quality education*” which will help all those who receive it to be actively involved in their own formation as they grow in their human and spiritual development. La Salle and his first Brothers chose to exercise the mission of Christian education principally through the school. The importance of the *Conduct of Schools* is that it is the expression of the corporate educational vision and practical experience of the first Brothers. In the history of education, it marks a new moment: it offers a serious and systematic approach to ensuring that the school, in La Salle’s frequently written phrase, “*runs well.*” The attention of the Institute to subsequent updating of this basic approach to running good schools accounts largely for its own success in the 18th and 19th centuries and for the model which it provided for other groups interested in promoting popular schools. It is the “*school,*” then, understood broadly in its different levels and manifold forms, which has always been regarded as “*the preferred field*” in the Lasallian Heritage for offering a good human and Christian education. It is through the school that Shared Mission has originated and developed: it is through the school principally that Brothers and their partners in Shared Mission came to meet and work side by side. This dynamic principle of updating, which has characterized the whole Lasallian Heritage, needs to continue with some particular emphases today. These are the same emphases as found in the *Lasallian Heritage* but they are sharpened and focused to what appear to be important needs of today’s world, even if the degree of emphasis will be determined in relation to the local culture. In the following chapter, then, the priorities for a “*human and Christian education*” for today are set out by considering the following six topics:

- 2.1 Educational works of quality;
- 2.2 The explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ;
- 2.3 Relating the educational work and the Gospel to the local culture;
- 2.4 Careful attention to the education of the poor;
- 2.5 Fostering ecumenical dialogue between Christians;
- 2.6 Openness to inter-religious dialogue.

# EDUCATIONAL WORKS OF QUALITY

## PRELUDE

**2.10** *Any good school or educational work needs good educational programs and the pedagogy which is appropriate to the particular needs of its pupils. Whether it is a formal school as such or an adapted learning center, it sets out to prepare and help its students to take their place in society by giving them the skills they need. Such is the clear message of the Brothers' Rule of 1987: such is the aim of every Lasallian educational work.*

*"The Christian school, which has always to be given new vitality is the preferred field for the activity of the Brothers. The Institute also explores other possibilities for teaching and education more adapted to the needs of time and place." (R 3)*

## **2.11 What does a quality school try to achieve?**

In a very detailed analysis of *The Need for the Renewal of the Christian School*, the *Declaration*, in a section (No. 45) greatly influenced by the Council Document *Gaudium et Spes*, insists that this renewal "calls for reference to contemporary culture." In its call for a school which offers "quality education, a truly professional spirit, and genuine service to students and to society," the document insists that one of the principal functions of the school is "the vitality and growth of a new culture without sacrificing fidelity to the living heritage of tradition." The emphasis in the curriculum of such a school, therefore, is not "mere book knowledge" but "the powers of observation, imagination, reasoning and discrimination" in a way that "does not undermine ancestral wisdom, or jeopardize the uniqueness of each people." This stress on the intellectual is not for the cultivation of an intellectual élite but as an integral part of "quality" education. More recently, in March 1996, in exhorting religious institutes to try to renew their commitment to "the mission of education . . . at every level," Pope John Paul II returns to a theme which he has treated often, stating that "the need to contribute to the promotion of culture and to the dialogue between culture and faith is deeply felt in the Church today." He makes a special appeal to consecrated people for "a renewed and loving commitment to the intellectual life" seeing it as "extraordinarily timely, in the face of present-day cultural diversity." (Consecrated Life, Nos. 97; 98)

What the school, then, sees as its mission to be accomplished is no mere abstraction but a set of achievements which, by giving due emphasis to the human, cultural and intellectual development of its students, attempts to open them up to a whole world of values, such as the following:

- awakening in them a sense of the meaning of their lives as human beings;
- helping them towards autonomy through personal reflection and the development of a critical spirit;
- helping them to think clearly, to express their personal opinions, to seek for and to respect the truth;

- teaching them to make use of their freedom to overcome prejudices, ready-made ideas and social pressures;
- forming them to listen, to seek, to understand, to trust others, to be ready to help others, to love, to admire to contemplate: all of this is to help develop the student in the image of God.

One of the most important ways in which this might be achieved in a school is indicated in the following citation from the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987:

*“In order to encourage their students to take in hand their own formation and so to develop a sense of social responsibility the Brothers give them an active role in the total life of the educational institution, including leadership positions, and a part to play in its functioning and in its discipline.” (R 13B)*

## **2.12 Relationships in the Christian school**

The Christian school asserts the essential dignity of each human being. La Salle's important work known as *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* saw the importance of its practices as “*virtues which have reference to God, to their neighbor and to themselves.*” Everything which engenders a school climate of warm relationships is an important step in achieving the school's mission. These relationships include those of the students with one another, as well as those of the students with all adults, the relationships of the adults among themselves: all of this is to be marked by respect for the uniqueness of each person. The framers of the *Declaration* in 1967 expressed this sense of the school as a community in what may be considered idealized language but with a vision which can encourage all who work together to realize it:

*“Thus the school will be a living community where young people, coming from different social and family backgrounds, educate one another by mutual understanding and respect, openness of mind in dialogue, acceptance of the uniqueness and limitations of each, growth in the spirit of service and the practice of justice and fraternal charity.” (D46.2)*

Given the size and nature of some schools as institutions, it is important that the school not lose sight of the importance of the individual student, clearly recognizing the individuality of each and the necessity that each be treated accordingly. This aspect touches something fundamental about the accompaniment of others. The first Brothers in the 1680s defined themselves indeed as “*brothers among themselves . . . and older brothers to the young people confided to their care.*” (R 53) This same *Rule* of 1987, in insisting that “*the educational policies of Lasallian institutions are centered on the young*” is picking up an important emphasis noted at greater length by the *Declaration*:

*“This concern (i.e. concern for each student) encompasses the whole person: family background, temperament, strong points, special interests; he or she is more than just another student who happens to attend the school. The (Lasallian teacher) will endeavor to discover and develop more and more the special tal-*

*ents of the students, not concentrating on shortcomings and mistakes.”* (D 46:2 Text slightly adapted)

### **2.13 New vitality in the Christian school**

The quality of the education given through the school is conditioned by the concern for renewal and the continuing updating of all those concerned in the educational process as well as by the attention given to programs and structures. The *Rule* of 1987 reminds the Brothers that *“the Christian school has always to be given new vitality,”* (R 3) while the Institute re-asserts what has been the constant characteristic of the Lasallian heritage when it affirms that *“the Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the kingdom of God requires.”* (R 11)

### **2.14 The overall educational plan**

The overall educational plan, worked out and evaluated regularly by all those involved in the educational process, is the best way of ensuring that Lasallian school and educational centers not only function well but are also capable of continuing renewal and adaptation to the needs of the pupils. In this way, the school avoids the danger of becoming “irrelevant” in comparison with the other “schools” of the media where the young are influenced by factors which are outside the knowledge, let alone the control, of the school community. This need for continual revision and updating is made succinctly in the 1987 *Rule*:

*“In order to fulfill their mission, the Brothers, together with those who work with them, undertake a periodic evaluation and revision of their educational programs.”*

(R 13d)

# THE GOSPEL AND THE SCHOOL

*(Lasallian) institutions are characterized . . .  
by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ. (R 13)*

## PRELUDE

**2.20** *“ . . . I am convinced that too often we have been satisfied and perhaps too easily satisfied today when we have created excellent academic, professional, technical, or agricultural institutions, whether the level is primary, secondary or tertiary. Even if these institutions are accessible to lower middle-class and poor youngsters, they cannot be said to be the privileged instrument of Lasallian apostolic ministries if they are not Christian.”* (Brother John Johnston, Pastoral Letter, January 1, 1988)

## 2.21 The Lasallian school is Christian

As the historical glimpses of earlier sections have indicated, the Lasallian school is unashamedly Christian in its origins and came into being to give a human and Christian education to young people, especially to the poor. It does this to the extent that its organization and its programs are concerned *“to tie together the work of evangelization, or making the Gospel known, with growth in education and culture.”* (D 40.2) In the 1996 Apostolic Exhortation Consecrated Life, Pope John Paul II notes that *“the Church has always recognized that education is an essential dimension of her mission,”* and shows how *“educational undertakings permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity”* not only help young people *“to mature humanly under the action of the Spirit”* but enable the *“community of learning (to) become an experience of grace, where the teaching program contributes to uniting into a harmonious whole the human and the divine, the Gospel and culture, faith and life.”* (No. 96)

## 2.22 Our students are at very different levels of commitment to faith

It is clear that the young people in the Lasallian schools are in very different situations with regard to Christian faith and its practices. While this is obvious in countries where Christianity is not a major religion, it is increasingly true in many of the traditionally Christian countries. In his Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1994, Brother John Johnston reminded the Brothers of this point in the following words:

*“We have in the same school young people who live their faith and others who do not; young people who are Christian but not Catholic; young people who are not Christians, young people who are indifferent and even hostile to organized religion.”*

Rather than being surprised by this, the Lasallian teacher sees this as natural to the age and development of students and recognizes the challenge which this presents in terms of the particular needs of each. In some circumstances, this means that the starting point is often in an education to values by a process which requires involvement of all the students. Meeting at this

level of reflection on behavior and the meaning of life through sharing of opinions may well be the necessary first step which disposes someone to reflect more deeply in a personal way on aspects of life which have been too easily dismissed or never previously considered. Sometimes in such circumstances, it is the voice of a fellow student which carries more weight than that of the teacher.

### **2.23 All of our students have the right to hear the Gospel**

Nevertheless, all the young people whom we meet, no matter the diversity of their situations, have the *right* to hear the Good News, the Gospel, the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. The Lasallian school has the duty to offer them this opportunity but this duty is not fulfilled simply by having compulsory religion classes: there must be a whole pastoral program or campus ministry which keeps alive the spiritual life of the school. Youth groups, reflection groups, the opportunities for retreats and such like activities, are indispensable. The Gospel needs to become known because it is taught, lived and celebrated through such traditional practices of Lasallian schools as the recalling of the *Presence of God*, the traditional *Reflection* (sic) and the invocation “*Live Jesus in our hearts!*” The Gospel becomes better known when formal classes enable students to see how Christian beliefs flow out of the life and teaching of Jesus. The social Gospel becomes real when students are helped to take part in service activities in which they learn how to express their faith through deeds. These are the practical means of salvation which the school can help to make available to its students. The *Declaration*, basing itself on the Vatican II *Pastoral Constitution in the World of Today (Gaudium et Spes)* (57, 4), encourages the Brother (and hence the Lasallian educator) “*to find God’s work in whatever he does for the advancement of human civilization and culture*” and presents the following broad perspective:

*“To open the mind of the human person to the world and to life, to the wonder and beauty of nature, to the diversity and richness of art, to the conquests of science and technology, to a deep thought and reflection, to the varieties of civilizations, to the joys of friendship and of giving oneself to others; by all these things a human being is led to recognize the Word of God who, before He became flesh in order to save all things and to sum them up in Himself was in the world already as the true light that enlightens everyone.”* (D 41, 3)

### **2.24 We propose, but do not impose**

This deep conviction that the Gospel should be made more readily accessible to all students will always respect the personal freedom of each person. A way through this tension between respecting human freedom and the duty of making the Gospel known in a pluralist society can be offered by remembering that “*the sole requisite of pluralism is that we propose, not impose.*” The *Rule* of 1987 in supporting this attitude by encouraging the Brothers to “*take advantage of the right moment and use the appropriate language to speak of Jesus Christ to those to whom they bring their message*” recognizes as well that “*reciprocally, they themselves are open to being evangelized.*” (R 15) This is a profound truth which touches the very nature of faith coming through hearing and through the mutual sharing of faith which is the very basis of catechesis. What is important, especially for all who teach, is the ability to cultivate an attitude of *listening* to students.

## 2.25 Catechesis or the education of faith

Catechesis is the aiding of nurturing and maturing in faith. It is, in the words of Catechesis in our Time of Pope John Paul II in 1978, “*educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” It is, by its nature, a sharing of faith with particular emphasis on developing a greater knowledge and understanding which is appropriate to the age of those participating. A Lasallian school takes this as its “*principal function*” and provides the staff, the resources, and the organization needed.

It would certainly be a serious mistake if the catechetical programs and activities of the school were reduced to the bare minimum because of other demands of the curriculum. It would also be an abnegation of the whole Lasallian tradition if catechesis were to be envisaged as something which is mainly applicable to junior classes and immediate preparation for sacraments. Above all, the catechetical program is a systematic presentation of the faith in a form which offers all the students the possibility of deepening their faith through the intellectual conviction which better understanding can bring.

But it would be a serious deficiency to limit “the education of faith” to knowledge and understanding since faith must also be developed through action. In his *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1994, Brother John Johnston suggests some practical ways in which this “sharing of faith” can take place:

*“ . . . that every existing school ‘reach out to the poor around it and respond creatively: literacy programs- in the school or in other centers; teams of volunteer teachers and young people to work with street children; night classes for school drop-outs; Lasallian youth groups to respond to the needs of the sick, the aged, the neglected . . . ”* (p.42)

## 2.26 Receiving the Sacraments

The Lasallian school has many opportunities to offer its students a deeper participation in the sacramental life of the Church. In primary schools, there is the preparation, in cooperation with the parish, for the reception of First Communion and Reconciliation. For many young people, Baptism and Confirmation may be offered through the school. Experience shows that school celebrations, especially of the sacrament of Reconciliation and the active participation in Eucharistic liturgy for which they have carefully prepared, can have great significance for many young people. The Lasallian school, through careful attention to such celebrations, may help to strengthen the faith community of the school.

## 2.27 The witness given by a community of faith

A *community of faith* proclaims by its very existence the truth which brings it into being and sustains it, i.e., that all the members have received Christian baptism and acknowledge God as Creator, Jesus Christ as their Savior and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as sent by Father and Son to bring us to wholeness in God. If this is the “classic” form which merits the description of

community of faith, it is important to note that this is not a group of the “elect” who wish to present themselves as better than others. It is the usual collection of human beings trying to be faithful to the vision which inspires them. This sense of community of faith may be much stronger at some times than at others when some particular happening binds the members more strongly to their faith and to one another. The celebrated text of Pope Paul VI cited in *Evangelization in the Modern World* comes to mind:

*“Today people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”* (No. 41)

The 1993 General Chapter saw, as an ideal to be pursued, *“that even Lasallian work, when that is possible, favors the birth of a community of faith, a reference group capable of welcoming various persons (Brothers, priests, religious, laity, young people...), who wish to deepen their faith and whose concern it is to proclaim in an explicit way Jesus Christ and to commit themselves to the service of the poor.”* (Circular 435, 5.5) What is important about this notion is that the community of faith is essentially outward looking. It is less concerned to restrict or limit its membership but is more concerned to include all those who can benefit by the grace of the moment to give expression to the faith that is in them. Christians, it has been said, often recognize their imperfect hope and charity but somehow seem to insist that their faith must never be less than complete, thereby forgetting the prayer of the Apostles *“Lord, increase our faith.”*

Moreover, it must always be remembered that the *“faith community”* is not simply a set structure with rigid rules of membership into which people enter by right of their Christian Baptism. The nature of Christian faith is such that it is clearly not exclusively a question of initiation via Baptism nor of knowledge of Christian doctrine which confers membership. The grace which the Christian tradition insists is conferred by Baptism can remain *potential* in those who make no effort to cooperate with it by the usual practices of Christian life. A faith community can be formed *implicitly* by those who act in accordance with the principles of St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 25, in giving to eat, in offering a cup of cold water, in visiting the sick and those in prison. Many have had that experience of an implicit faith community, somehow visible and tangible at those moments when members of the school community gather to celebrate the mystery of life and death, of sickness and suffering among its members. It can be felt in the efforts of those who strive gratuitously for humanitarian reasons to alleviate human suffering in any shape or form. The example of Pope John Paul II praying with other religious leaders at Assisi in 1986 is probably one of the most striking examples in modern times of this ad hoc *faith community* which met to acknowledge the one Lord and Creator in the common prayer for peace.

## **2.28 Personal witness**

There are Lasallian schools operating in countries where government restrictions make formal teaching or practice of religion difficult. In such cases, an important witness value comes from the very presence of the school and the service it offers for human development. The individual teacher’s own integrity is frequently the most important influence on young people. The discussion of topical problems-war, violence, racism, sexuality, AIDS, peace, the environment-can be

an important way of witnessing to truth. The words of the *Declaration*, written to describe the Brother as a catechist, can be applied more widely to all Lasallian teachers who wish to make them their own:

*“The Brother (Lasallian educator) reveals the religion of love by giving to the students an idea of what it means to experience a love that is sensitive, virile and unselfish .... It is not in words or in books that young people meet most forcibly the God who calls them by name, but rather in the person of the Brother (teacher) who catechizes them.”* (D 40.5)

## INCULTURATION (THE SCHOOL, THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE)

*The Brothers make every effort to get to know, to respect and assimilate the positive values of the people. . . whom they are called to serve. (R 18)*

### PRELUDE

**2.30** *One of the important historical lessons which all bearers of the Christian message have come to learn is that the Gospel needs to be presented in a way which respects the mentality, customs and traditions-in a word, the culture-of the people to whom it is brought. If the word inculturation has had a particular importance in modern times, the principle of respecting cultural forms is as old as Paul's famous discourse to the Athenians at the Aereopagus in **Acts of the Apostles** (17:23-34). The Lasallian School needs to question itself about its relationship to the culture in which it is found. Pope John Paul's "**Mission of the Redeemer**" (No. 33) proposes three broad situations which could be applied to education thus: Some Lasallian Schools are a Christian presence in countries which are overwhelmingly non-Christian; others in traditionally Christian countries are part of solid Christian communities which function well; a third group are those in countries "with ancient Christian roots" or "in the younger Churches as well" where "entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith."*

### **2.31 Inculturation is needed both in proclaiming the Gospel and in instructing others about it**

In his Apostolic exhortation *Catechesis in our Time* following the 1977 Synod, Pope John Paul II drew attention to the important link between the mystery of the Incarnation - Jesus, Son of God becoming man-and the need to express the Gospel in terms which have meaning in the particular culture being addressed.

*"We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures." (53)*

### **2.32 "Every culture needs to be evangelized" (R 18)**

*"Inculturation, " says the Instruction on Christian Liberty and Liberation of 1986, "is not simply an outward adaptation, it is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures." Such is the experience of the Christian church throughout history, as the same document continues, because "cultures will be given fresh life through their meeting with the Gospel. But all of this presumes that the Gospel is indeed proclaimed." (96)*

What this means in practical terms is that the Lasallian school has as one of its duties to make sure that Gospel values are known and appreciated even when they run counter to prevailing

norms as portrayed in the media. Similarly, if the Lasallian school introduced into a new culture becomes only a means of social advancement in that society and not an enrichment of the culture through the values of the Gospel, its long-term value must be seriously questioned.

### **2.33 For the Gospel to be heard, it must be expressed in the language of the culture**

The message which the Gospel can bring will neither be understood nor assimilated unless young people can hear it in their language and in their culture. This means in practice that there has to be a dialogue between the historical and cultural forms in which the Gospel has been transmitted and the hearers in any particular culture. Where this dialogue is open to speakers from within the culture and to those who proclaim the Gospel mystery, such openness may *“help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought,”* as *Catechesis in our Time* expresses it. (53) The same document goes on to remark that *“Genuine catechists know that catechesis takes flesh in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today.”*

### **2.34 What is the culture under discussion?**

Efforts at inculturation seek to root the Gospel in the distinctive aspect of each people and within their own history. It is the same effort at inculturation which envisages also the bringing of the Gospel into the emerging culture of today's world, marked by the phenomenon of globalization and all its attendant aspects. It is *today's culture* which has to be evangelized by a Lasallian education which is appropriate for today. The Brothers' *Rule* of 1987, having emphasized that *“every culture needs to be evangelized,”* points out that *“this effort at inculturation is equally necessary and applies as well to youth culture as to the rapidly evolving culture of contemporary society.”* (R 18)

### **2.35 What are the attitudes needed by a Lasallian educator towards inculturation?**

Among the attitudes needed by a Lasallian educator in face of the rapid transformation of traditional cultures through the phenomenon of globalization with its attendant knowledge and communications explosion, the following five points appear to be most important.

- **Knowledge and understanding in a rapidly changing world.** If the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesis in our Time* of 1977 emphasized the importance of *“knowing cultures and their essential components”* (53) and if the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987 emphasized the *“effort to get to know, to respect and to assimilate the positive values of the cultural heritage where they are located and where they are called to serve,”* the General Chapter of 1993 emphasized that *“Inculturation is an ongoing process. For the shared mission, formation to inculturation is necessary for both Brothers and lay persons. This formation includes a study of the language of the country, insertion into the life situation of the population, getting to know the young people, etc.”* (C. 435, 3.5, p. 43)

- **Respect and assimilation of the positive values of the cultural heritage of the people.** The Brothers' *Rule* further invites all Lasallian educators "to discover the signs of the presence of the Spirit," in the cultures of different peoples. (18)

- **The critical dimension in the approach to cultures.** Knowing, understanding and respecting cultures does not mean approving everything in them. The *Rule* of 1987 stresses that "the ferment of the Gospel renews and enriches this cultural heritage" (18), while the Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, insists that "the process of (inculturation) is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice." (52) It is in this spirit that Lasallian educators are called "with an open mind and yet in a spirit of healthy criticism to study the various religions, ideologies and cultural traditions of the areas in which they establish themselves. They will be able in this way to absorb the positive values therein and so to make a valuable contribution to the education of the people around them." (R 18c)

- **Patience.** Inculturation has to be a permanent process and therefore all those engaged in it have always to be open to the changes which are part of its vitality and a reflection of the life of the society.

- **Inculturation needs to be visible.** The *Rule* of 1987 insists that "Brothers (and Lasallian educators) who belong to the country are the ones principally in charge of inculturation into their own social milieu. (Those) who come from other countries collaborate . . . in a spirit of fraternal solidarity. In those areas where the latter are still numerous, they encourage the local people gradually to assume complete charge." (186, adapted)

## 2.36 The school community and the search for values

The students in the Christian school bring their own values, acquired in their homes, from their parents, from their peer-group, from their experience of life, according to their age. The role of the Christian teacher *qua* teacher is to open up the storehouse of Christian culture and to try to make this accessible to these students. Values, the wise old maxim asserts, are caught rather than taught. But, to the extent that this maxim is true, it needs to be refined by suggesting that values can also be caught precisely because they are taught, that is to say, they can be acquired precisely *because* students see these values embodied in the attitudes and actions of their own teachers in the climate of the school community and in the importance given to values in the curriculum.

## 2.37 Building a bridge between culture and faith

Many of the practical steps already suggested in 2.35 can help to bridge the gap between the contemporary culture and the practices by which faith is expressed. The frequent changes in language which have marked the post-war catechetical movement can be a useful reminder that this dialogue is never exhausted: it must always be open, as the changes with regard to the

following words and expressions indicate:

- for some hundreds of years the lesson in religion was the “**catechism lesson**”;
- the overall process was often referred to generally as “**religious education**” but the reappearance and widespread use of the word **catechesis** in the 1950s showed a search for more precision for those aspects of *religious education* which assumed a common faith;
- the expression coined by the post-war French catechists, “**the education of faith**,” displaced the center of attention from the catechism to the mysteries and great truths which the catechism could only express in precise formulae;
- the so-called **kerygmatic** movement of the 1960s gave prominence to **salvation history** as read, studied and celebrated through the **Bible**;
- the 1970s saw the arrival of **values education** and **religious studies**;
- at the same time, there was a tendency to seek to supplement the traditional lessons by various kinds of outdoor or **pastoral activities** - retreats, prayer sessions (Taizé style);
- in North America, there was the development of what became known as **campus ministry** with its wide range of activities ranging from formal studies in class to many kinds of outside activities. (A similar movement in France, marked by significant cultural differences saw great changes in the traditional **aumoneries** or chaplaincies.)
- In Spain and in Latin America, the expression **pastoral** tended to be used as the overriding description for a whole range of the teaching and celebration of faith, especially with the young.

It is clear that each change in language or terminology was an attempt to recognize important changes and differences. Note, for example, that **values education** and **religious studies** were already much more objective, less dogmatic, more inclined to be relativist, certainly some considerable distance away from the traditional assumption that all in the same school or class were practicing believers who all held and carried out the observances of the same faith. In the modern pluralist society, the Gospel can appear to be only one voice, one ideology among many others. What is essential is that the Lasallian school helps all in it to bring the criteria of the Gospel to the different and frequently conflicting values of the society by providing both a content and a basic philosophy of the human person to its curriculum and procedures.

Much more could be said but what is clear is that the culture/faith dialogue is essential if Lasallian schools are to offer a Christian education worthy of their name and then particular heritage.

# THE HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF THE POOR

*The Brothers are entrusted with their mission by the Institute,  
a mission especially to the poor. (R 14)*

## PRELUDE

**2.40** *The connecting thread which has linked the history of the Lasallian movement in education has been the response to the need to provide for the human and Christian education of the poor. It has been and remains the essential dimension of the Lasallian school. The Rule of 1987 reminds us that “John Baptist de La Salle gave a new meaning to the school by making it accessible to the poor and offering it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation” (R 3) and that, with his first Brothers, “they associated together to respond to the needs of young people who were poor and far from salvation.” (R 47)*

### **2.41 A “return to the poor”**

Following the orientation of the Second Vatican Council, the Institute, through its Renewal Chapter of 1966-67 as we have already noted in 1.43, addressed itself to the authenticity of its *Service of the Poor through Education*. The *Declaration* expresses this clearly by saying “*that the apostolate with the poor is an integral part of the finality of the Institute.*” (D 28.2) and concludes with the clear direction that “*every level of authority, then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with this orientation, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our “return to the poor.”*” (D 34.4) The *Rule* of 1987 invites the Brothers to consider “*the direct or indirect service of the poor as the preferred aspect of their ministry of education.*” (R 40)

### **2.42 The process is continuing**

The fact that this return to the poor is being addressed from the center of the Institute can be seen from the following steps which have been taken. In 1980, the General Council issued an important Circular of some 150 pages entitled *The Educational Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice* (No. 412), the last chapter of which concentrated on describing some important initiatives from each continent. The basis for this circular was a *Working Paper* of 1979 which simply gathered together experiences from all around the world of what was being done throughout the Institute for the service of the poor. The discussion which centered around the final form of the *Rule* after the 20 years *ad experimentum* led to some important strengthening of the historical sense of the special vow of *Association for the service of the poor through education* in articles 39-41. The request from UNESCO in 1990, the Year of Literacy, to provide a dossier of things being done by the Institute in various parts of the world to promote literacy revealed such a wide range of major activities that the **Noma Prize** was awarded to the Institute.

The General Chapter of 1993 made its own affirmation of its continuing option for the poor in the following words:

*“As members of the Institute of St. John Baptist de La Salle, we strongly re-affirm our option for the human and Christian education of young people and adults, and in particular, for the poor.”* (C 435, p.20)

In specifying ways in which this option is being exercised, the Chapter instanced the willingness of Brothers *“to become trained and to adapt to all kinds of social situations,”* and noted that Brothers *“especially in the third-world continents . . . have made a strong commitment to help the most deprived young people and adults.”* (C 435, 1.4, p. 20) As the section finishes, the text stresses the importance of being *“active witnesses to the dignity of all people”* and then enumerates a variety of ways, many of which have direct reference to the poor such as the following:

*“( . . . being) active witnesses to the urgent need for national and international programs which include specific cultural measures regarding the poor;*

*(. . . being) active witnesses to God’s solicitude for people who are marginalised by great poverty and other modern forms of misery.”* (C 435, p. 21)

## **2.43 Some of the new initiatives**

An important initiative in recent years has been the widespread concern, in the best tradition of the Institute, to ensure that educational works are as far as circumstances allow, gratuitous even if they cannot be completely so and open to all who wish to come. The progress realized to recent years has led to a growth in sensitivity, a greater awareness and concern for what can be achieved in spite of financial restrictions. Where the schools receive no or little state subvention, this has led to extensive fund-raising and development projects, often staffed by volunteers, and to the creation of new works or to the development of previously unforeseen initiatives to try to give some kind of answer to new situations of poverty such as the following:

- activities on behalf of refugees and immigrants;
- orphanages or centers for young persons in difficulty;
- centers for young people who have learning difficulties;
- various ways of accompanying young people who have dropped out of school;
- different ways of helping and supporting young people who are handicapped;
- educational activities which cater for street children and gypsies;
- the setting up of evening courses either as literacy courses for adults or to provide courses for young persons in need.

An interesting contribution from a pedagogical viewpoint has been the introduction of special programs and the creation of various structures so as to reach more efficiently those students who are having difficulty in our educational establishments. There has been a marked contribution from Brothers and other Lasallian educators in this regard. There are also places where older students help younger students who are having difficulty.

## 2.44 For which “poor” does the Lasallian School have a preference?

In its *Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum educationis)*, the Second Vatican Council spoke of three kinds of “poor”:

*“The Council exhorts all associated with Catholic schools to carry out their task even more perfectly, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in temporal goods, or deprived of the help and affection of a family, or are .strangers to the gift of faith.”* (No 9)

The *Rule* suggests to the Brothers that 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.*” (40. 2) There are, above all, those who have neither an active nor a passive role in society or who simply lack the possibility of developing their talents and aptitudes. This point was addressed by Brother John Johnston in the Second Lasallian European Congress at Strasbourg in 1994:

*“Many economically poor youngsters are extremely talented intellectually. They have a right to develop their God-given talents and abilities. We must be careful to avoid forcing the economically poor into a special category, as if economic poverty were equivalent to a lack of ability to learn. We need to open the doors of opportunities to those who have become marginalized by circumstance.”* (Lasallians ... without Frontiers No. 5)

## 2.45 A preferred option for the poor which arises from considering unjust structures which lead to poverty

In a powerful passage which could have come from today’s newspaper, the Declaration of 1967 considers the world where the Lasallian educator is called to serve.

*“It is a world in which the life, liberty and dignity of men are more and more threatened; a world of loneliness and despair for many who are trodden down by selfishness, greed, indifference, or desire for power; a world of social injustice with an increasing disproportion between rich nations and the poor; a world of illiteracy and ignorance in which the young are neglected.”* (D 11.3)

Pope John Paul II, in encouraging all to greater solidarity with the poor, reminds us that “*the freedom with which Christ has set us free encourages us to become the servants of all. Thus the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say, in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest.*” (*Sollicitudo Re Socialis*, 46) In his *Pastoral Letter on Solidarity* in 1989, Brother John Johnston suggests that “*we have to see more vividly and to feel more intensely the poverty that exists throughout the world, in our cities, and perhaps in our own backyard.*” (page 29) The General Chapter of 1993 highlights some aspects of the present world which are so many challenges to the Lasallian educational mission:

*“ . . . migratory movements, racism, urban violence, terrorism, drug addiction, loss of basic human values, crises of faith, refusal of religious education, the attraction of sects, unemployment, AIDS, hunger, illiteracy, street children, homelessness, contempt of life, broken families, school dropouts.”* (C 435 p. 22, 2)

Four particular challenges are presented to Lasallian educators:

- respect for children’s rights;
- the fight against illiteracy;
- education in values;
- specific ways of accompanying young people who are the victims of exclusion.

## **2.46 Preferential option for the poor enlightened by discovering the causes of poverty**

When the Brothers’ *Rule* invites them *“to become increasingly aware of the reasons for the poverty that surrounds them,”* (R. 14) it is not simply so that they be better informed of a phenomenon of our society. What is intended is that such an understanding, enriched by a variety of means such as the study and presentation of the social teachings of the Church, by attendance at local and international conferences which address the problem and, in general, by making this topic a focus of interest, should make students, parents and society in general more people aware of the problem and so be inspired to do something about it.

Such was the intent of the 42nd General Chapter in a series of *Recommendations* to the Institute on this point. Districts were encouraged to support *“projects of insertion in the world of the poor,”* Brothers in any kind of renewal project were invited *“to include . . . some involvement with the less fortunate.”* District Chapters were to look critically at their educational centers and programs to evaluate their degree of involvement with various groups in need, Lasallian universities and tertiary institutes were asked to consider *“scientific research into the causes of poverty and social injustice and into the elimination of the causes,”* while the same institutions were to look to *“the preparation of technicians and professional experts in the conversion of our ecosystems, in collaboration with national and international organizations.”* (C. 435, 3.1-3.4, pp. 25-26)

## **2.47 Making this option for the poor a reality**

Since the great Encyclical letter *Progressio Populorum* of Pope Paul VI in 1967, the Church has constantly addressed itself to the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The present cycle of debt of so many developing nations to the World Bank is so crippling that any further growth becomes impossible. But if this is the case at the macro-level of world economics, what can be done at the micro-level of education? In his address at Strasbourg already cited, Brother John Johnston, Superior General, made the following practical suggestions:

*“I have long advocated that each of our schools be an ‘impact center,’ that is to say, a center which ‘reaches out’ to the poor around it and responds creatively and effec-*

tively. The possibilities for service are almost unlimited: literacy programs-in the school or in other centers; teams of volunteer teachers and young people to work with street children; night classes for school drop-outs; Lasallian youth groups to respond to the needs of the sick, the aged and neglected, etc. Many of our schools 'reach out' to the poor of other countries by providing financial assistance. Some even send young people, teachers, former students, parents, and friends for service in needy countries during vacation periods." (No. 5, p. 11)

This solidarity with the poor challenges all Lasallian educators as well to give serious attention to their own situation if they are not directly involved with the poor. The *Rule* of 1987 reminds the Brothers that "concern of the Brothers for the poor serves also to motivate their activities when they deal with people in a more favorable social environment, urging these to become more sensitive to unjust situations of which the poor are so often the victims." (R 14)

In his comment on this point at Strasbourg, Brother John Johnston makes the following four practical suggestions about what Lasallian schools need to offer as programs:

- 1) enable the students to know and understand the injustices that exist at every level of society;
- 2) learn the social teachings of the Church;
- 3) have the opportunity to serve the poor, the sick, the aged;
- 4) participate in follow-up discussions and evaluations. (5, 11)

## **2.48 What are some practical steps to be followed?**

The General Chapter of 1993 suggested some strategies at different levels so that the preferential option for the poor would be an effective reality in the Lasallian Family at local, district and at Institute level. At local level, the Brothers were challenged "to respond concretely to situations of poverty;" at district level in "the District Plan for Shared Mission, worked out and evaluated by all concerned," by giving priority to "the promotion of the educational service of the poor and justice"; at Institute level, there was the first and major resolution of the Chapter expressed as follows:

*"The General Chapter asks Brother Superior General and his Council, between 1993 and 1997 . . . 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 on 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." (C 435, pp. 26-27)

# ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

*The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.*

(Second Vatican Council, The Restoration of Unity, November 21, 1964, No. 1)

## PRELUDE

**2.50** *“Dialogue is at the heart of ecumenical cooperation and accompanies all forms of it. Dialogue involves both listening and replying, seeking both to understand and to be understood. It is a readiness to put questions and to be questioned .... Ecumenical dialogue allows the members of different Churches and ecclesial communities to get to know one another, to identify matters of faith and practice which they share and points on which they differ. “ (Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism [172]). All Lasallian works have a particular interest in this task because of the many different Christian groups represented in their school communities.*

### **2.51 The importance of ecumenical dialogue in the Lasallian school**

The objective of ecumenical dialogue is reconciliation among baptized Christians, who acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord, seek for the unity - the communion - for which Christ prayed before his death. Lasallian schools in many different parts of the world include pupils from various Christian traditions other than the Roman Catholic. Since the school is a place where young people grow in their understanding of their heritage and of life in general, it is a particularly favorable place for young people to become aware of the importance of such ecumenical dialogue. Hence, the *Ecumenical Directory* of 1993 speaks of the role of the school as follows:

*“Every kind of school at every level, should give an ecumenical dimension to its religious teaching, and should aim in its own way to train hearts and minds in human and religious values, educating for dialogue, for peace and for personal relationships.” (68)*

The qualities of such a dialogue are further developed. It is to be marked by *“a spirit of charity, of respect and of dialogue which requires the elimination of language and prejudices which deform the image of other Christians. This holds especially true for Catholic schools where young people should grow in faith, in prayer and in the resolve to put the Christian Gospel of unity into practice.” (68a)* After suggesting how this delicate topic can be approached through such topics as the history of art, the Directory insists that *“it is also desirable that teachers be correctly and adequately informed about the origins, history and doctrines of other Churches and Ecclesial communities, especially those that exist in the same region.” (68b)*

## 2.52 Some ways of favoring ecumenical dialogue

Among other means of favoring ecumenical dialogue, the *Ecumenical Directory* mentions those which refer to the sharing of spiritual activities. The first one mentioned is that of common prayer because *“such prayers in common are certainly a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity, and they are a genuine expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to these other Christians. Shared prayer is in itself a way to spiritual reconciliation.”* (108) The content of such prayer is specified in the following article which stresses the importance of being present together so that *“together they may put before God the needs and problems which Catholics and other Christians share among themselves, as for example, peace, social questions, etc.”* (109) This idea is intensified elsewhere where the same document suggests that *“it may be helpful in certain cases to arrange for spiritual sharing in the form of days of recollection, spiritual exercises, groups for the study and sharing of traditions of spirituality and more stable associations for a deeper exploration of a common spiritual life.”* (114)

The same *Directory* recognizes a common source of enrichment which is possible in many schools but which can pose difficulties unless the issue is well understood. This is the question of the spiritual needs of Christians other than Catholics in our schools.

*“In Catholic schools and institutions, every effort should be made to respect the faith and conscience of students and teachers who belong to other Churches or ecclesial Communities. In accordance with their own approved statutes, the authorities of these schools and institutions should take care that the clergy of these other confessions have every facility for carrying out their spiritual and sacramental ministration to their own faithful who attend such schools and institutions. To the extent that circumstances allow for it, with the permission of the diocesan Bishop, these facilities can be offered on the Catholic premises, including the church or chapel.”* (141)

The implementation of these principles has important implications for Lasallian schools which include teachers of other Christian denominations in their faculty.

## 2.53 Forms of collaboration and common witness

The Second Vatican Council, in its decree on Ecumenism, had already emphasized that forms of collaboration between Christians was an important way of setting *“in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant.”* (12) Collaboration between young people in a school setting is possible at a number of levels. First of all, there is the work together in a common Lasallian project of some kind. One of the most important ecumenical experiences can come through a common task which attempts to build towards unity. The same appreciation of human life, work towards building peace, applying the social principles of the gospel, sharing cultural forms, working with the poor and so many other forms of Christian service can provide an important experience of shared Christian values, while at the same time the pain of separation, felt more poignantly, can be its own prayer for unity.

Secondly, even if this is more delicate, there can come about a deeper understanding in certain forms of catechesis where the common and differing aspects of various traditions are looked at respectfully. This certainly should not deteriorate into a kind of “*reduction to a common minimum*” (35) as *Catechesis in Our Time* insists, for, as the same document says, “*the communion of faith between Catholics and other Christians is not complete and perfect.*”

In this respect, the role of individual teachers is of the greatest importance in order that this ecumenical dimension is always present in the overall life of the school or institution. The openness of older pupils to an understanding of ecumenism according to their age and circumstances is a pastoral question with many implications for the lives of young people today in a way that was not so for previous generations.

# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## PRELUDE

**2.60** *The presence of the Institute since 1817 in the countries of Africa and Asia where Christianity is a minority religion has always been marked by a profound respect for the different religions encountered. (Cf. 1.23) But this classic sense of interreligious dialogue has been greatly extended as a consequence of the expansion of the Institute and the large-scale immigration of the post Second World War era. Nowadays there are Lasallian educational works in Europe, North America and Oceania where Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and many other religious groups can be encountered. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is not something exotic reserved to scholars and theologians but something which takes place daily in many schools at one level or another.*

### **2.61 Why interreligious dialogue now?**

The history of religions shows that religious people have too often in the past seen their mission too narrowly as persuading or enforcing their particular religion, sometimes even to the extent of imposing it on others. When religion acts in this way and becomes more of an ideology, it effectively loses its spiritual sense because the first gift of the Spirit according to Saint Paul is “*freedom*.” *The Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae*, from the Second Vatican Council is uncompromising in insisting “that the human person has a right to religious freedom” so that “*nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public.*” (No. 2)

### **2.62 What is understood by interreligious dialogue?**

Ever since this important change of attitude towards other religions, apparent in *Dignitatis Humanae* and in other documents from the same Council, notably documents such as *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*, the Church has pursued interreligious dialogue through many symbolic meetings such as the meeting of the Pope with other religious leaders at Assisi in 1986 as well as by the publication of a number of important documents from what is now known as the **Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue** such as *Dialogue and Mission* of 1984 and *Dialogue and Proclamation* of 1991. Both these documents state their understanding of interreligious dialogue.

*“(In the context of religious plurality) dialogue means ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment,’ in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”* (Dialogue and Mission, No. 3 )

This form of dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* assures us, is “*one of the integral elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission,*” (9) but goes on to say that “*The foundation of the Church’s commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological. God, in an*

age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.” (38) What is being sought is not to win an argument but rather to be open to the same broad questions which the traditional religions seek to answer:

*“Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the Word’ (Ad Gentes, 11, 15), a ray of that truth which enlightens all men; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind.” (Redemptoris Missio 56)*

### **2.63 Such dialogue does not stop us from presenting the Gospel**

Pope Paul VI in his 1975 exhortation, *Evangelization Today*, stresses that *“the presentation of the Gospel is not optional for the Church. It is her duty, by command of the Lord Jesus, so that men may believe and be saved.”* (5) But at the same time, it is the Church which recognizes the importance of being open to these *“seeds of the Word”* which are to be found in the profound truths of other religions. That is why the interreligious dialogue is of such importance, as the document of 1991 called *Dialogue and Proclamation* from the previously mentioned *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* points out:

*“A just appraisal of other religious traditions normally presupposes close contact with them . . . These traditions are to be approached with great sensitivity, on account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. They command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers ‘to those profound mysteries of the human condition’ (Nostra aetate, 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and the longings of millions of their adherents, and they continue to do so today.”* (No. 14)

### **2.64 What are some implications for the Lasallian School?**

When he addressed the question of furthering interreligious dialogue in the school in his address at Strasbourg, Brother John Johnston based his approach on the section called *Forms of Dialogue* (No. 42) in the already-mentioned document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation*. He published it also in the *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1995, where he considers some different forms of interreligious dialogue and affirms that each form is a participation in the mission of evangelization as follows:

*“We can identify at least six ways in which we can engage our young people in dialogue - whether they are Christians, or non-Christians, believers or non-believers.*

**1. Fraternal relations:** *when we promote fraternal relations among our young people, regardless of their religious beliefs, we are evangelizing;*

**2. human promotion and education:** *when we commit ourselves to the intellectual, moral, psychological, and physical development of those God confides to our care, we are evangelizing;*

3. ***promotion of justice***: when we strive to sensitize our students and pupils to questions of social justice and encourage them to commit themselves to the construction of a more just society, we are evangelizing;

4. ***prayer***: when we make possible and promote various forms and celebrations of religious expression and of prayer among our young people, we are evangelizing:

5. ***informal “dialogue”***: when we communicate with youth through the signs and symbols which identify the school as Catholic and when we share our faith with young people in informal conversation - while maintaining total respect for them in their belief or nonbelief- we are evangelizing;

6. ***formal “dialogue”***: when we organize lectures, seminars, discussion groups on topics relating to our faith as Christians, we are evangelizing . . . (Pastoral Letter, January 1, 1995)

## **2.65 Role of faculty members in particular circumstances**

All teachers in the Lasallian school are invited and expected to accept the basic philosophy of the school. At the same time, educators coming from different religious traditions will enrich the overall education by bringing something of their own convictions in their relationships and general attitudes, thus promoting mutual respect and support for religious attitudes. In practice, it is impossible to maintain a strictly “neutral” position in so many aspects of teaching. This is not required. What is necessary is more accurately described as an *impartiality* which indicates a deep respect for convictions other than one’s own and an openness to dialogue.

## THE MISSION IS SHARED IN “RESPONSE TO NEEDS”

### PRELUDE

**3.10** *The historical circumstances in which the Lasallian mission of Christian education originated meant that the members of the young Institute were recognized in 1725 by a Bull of Approbation of the Catholic Church as members of a lay religious congregation with an approved Rule of life. We have already traced how the task of living out this mission in the second half of the twentieth century has involved bringing the Rule up to date, a lengthy but extremely enriching process. Part of this process has been the recognition that the mission of Lasallian education, pioneered and preserved for a long time entirely by generations of Brothers, has now been enlarged and enriched by the gifts brought by others who have already become associated with this mission and wish to share it. But these gifts are not simply at the level of talents but, above all, at the level of identity and vocation. An unsuspected source of enrichment for the Lasallian mission can come from this mutual complementarity.*

*This transformation has not taken place in a vacuum nor in response to any theory: it has come from life. Ideas have certainly come from the Institute’s reflection on its own heritage as we have seen above, especially in 1.42, 1.43, 1.45 and 1.48 and from the new emphases which have marked the Catholic Church’s profound attempt at renewal following the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965. This movement of the Church and the Institute has continued through Church Synods and four Institute General Chapters so that the new needs of the poor in their search for a good education have become more apparent and more challenging. It is the wish to respond as far as possible to traditional needs in education, as well as to seek solutions to those of a changing world society, which brings Brothers and Lasallian partners together in their common Lasallian mission.*

### **3.11 A gradual process of openness and association with lay persons**

If it is true that “ever since the time of their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry,” (R 17) it was especially in the 30 years since the General Chapter of 1966-67 (cf. 1.4) that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools advanced significantly in its understanding of the role and place of lay collaborators within Lasallian educational communities. Let us remind ourselves of what the *Declaration* of 1967 had said:

*“The school will be molded into community only through a staff rich in the diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers work closely with lay teachers .... Lay teachers should be completely involved with the whole life of the school: with catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities, and administrative positions.” (D 46.3)*

Some nine years later, the General Chapter of 1976 introduced the idea of “*different degrees of belonging*” when it spoke of mission in the following way:

*“The Brothers share Lasallian spirituality and the animation of their works with all the members of the educational community. They take care of their ongoing formation and are careful to make them know the different degrees of belonging to what is being called ‘the Lasallian Family.’”* (C 403, p. 77)

It has already been noted that the General Chapter of 1986 approved the new *Rule* which introduced the expression **shared mission** and explicitly stated that “*the Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide, for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.*” (R 17) Along with other very concrete orientations from this *Rule*, this Chapter gave a strong impetus to **shared mission** (sic) and to the closer integration of lay persons into what is more accurately described as the Lasallian Mission.

In the years which have followed, Brother John Johnston as Superior General, frequently refers to the important role of lay people in the Lasallian mission in the traditional New Year pastoral letters which he addresses to the Brothers. Thus, on January 1, 1988 he states:

*“(Lay people) take their place as full partners’- and we Brothers gladly associate them with us in our mission. We accept that from now on our schools will not be ‘Brothers’ schools, ‘ animated by the Brothers’ community with secondary collaboration of lay teachers, parents, students. They will be instead ‘Lasallian schools, ‘ animated by Lasallian educative communities of faith within which the apostolic activity of the Brothers’ community takes place.”* (R 17) (*The Destiny of the Institute: Our Responsibility*, p. 32)

In 1989, the General Council of the Institute, in response to the demand of the 1986 General Chapter, published the Letter to the Lasallian Family, which gave a new stimulus and attempted to offer clear and concrete directions concerning *Shared Mission* and the *Lasallian Family*.

### **3.12 The 42nd General Chapter and Shared Mission**

The General Chapter of 1993, by inviting some 20 lay consultants to participate in the Chapter’s discussion on Mission and by deciding to make shared mission one of the priorities for the next seven years, showed how essential the development of shared mission was for the continuation of the Institute’s traditional mission of human and Christian education. Some of the leading ideas on this important topic as they are reported in the official document of the Chapter, Circular 435, indicate new insights from the Chapter. Thus, Shared Mission is:

- “*a sign of the times*” (p. 8 & p. 15);
- “*a grace*” (p. 31);
- “*guided by the Spirit*” (p. 42);
- “*a call of the Spirit*” (p. 9);

- “a new chapter in the history of the Institute” (p. 8);
- an “irresistible and irreversible (step) in our history” (p. 13).

The Chapter saw the Institute as being at a new moment of its history:

*“In this new perspective we see our shared mission as a sign of the times. Far from being a regrettable situation, it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons. The Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called to do.” (C 435, 3.61. p. 43)*

Such an understanding of this new reality demands a change of mentality quite as much among lay people as among the Brothers so that *shared mission* can be accepted as a gift of God which commits all engaged in it to develop it for the good of the common mission, the Christian education of the poor.

**For the Brothers:** this change of mentality implies that they will no longer consider themselves as the only trustees or proprietors of the Lasallian charism in education. It is their duty to believe in the vocation of lay people, to support it and to encourage it. What is even more important is that the Brothers draw the practical consequences at the personal and community level for the specific responsibility which they carry in the *shared mission* as “*the heart, the memory, the guarantors of the Lasallian charism.*” (C 435, p. 17)

**For lay people:** the change of mentality allows them to consider the Lasallian task in which they work as something which is proper to them and not something for which the Brothers alone are responsible. It means that they should completely accept their place and their responsibilities in the Lasallian educational plan and to feel that they are co-responsible in the common mission.

For both groups, this change of mentality means accepting differences, respecting them and working at the common mission together in a complementary way, according to their respective and specific vocations.

*“God is calling each one according to his or her own vocation, to accomplish together the mission confided to St. John Baptist de La Salle and to the Institute he founded.” (C 435, p. 13)*

It can be seen, therefore, that this General Chapter opened up vast horizons with regard to the theme of shared mission. This is expressed succinctly in the following sentence:

*“The modest sub-title -A Shared Mission - in article 17 of the Rule is now seen as the bold title of a new chapter in the history of the Institute.” (c 435, p. g)*

### 3.13 How did the expression shared mission come to be used with regard to Lasallian mission?

The expression **shared mission** was used by the framers of the 1987 *Rule* as a shorthand expression to describe the evolution of thinking about mission in the light of the practical experience of the Institute during the 20 years of the *Rule ad experimentum* which followed the revised *Rule* of 1967. It is significant that the expression is not found at all in the 1967 *Rule*. If, at one level, it is possibly true that the expression would not have been necessary if the Institute had continued to develop as it had in the post World War II period to the mid-1960s, it is also important to note that the Catholic Church's own understanding of the role and the mission of the laity has developed most strongly in the years following the Second Vatican Council. This new thinking recognizes the indispensable role of lay persons in the ministry of Christian education. The combination, therefore, of the declining numbers of the Institute since 1966 and the new attitude to lay involvement in the Church is what has led the General Chapter to the statement already cited above that *"God is calling each one according to his or her own vocation, to accomplish together the mission confided to St. John Baptist de La Salle and to the Institute he founded."* (C 435, p. 13)

### 3.14 Shades of meaning in the expression "shared mission"

The expression *"shared mission,"* as used by the Brothers' *Rule*, is naturally a viewpoint from *within* the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. As a new term, it expresses a new perception, a recognition of a major change in self-understanding. At its face value, it means that the mission of Christian education which was carried out almost exclusively by the Brothers of the Institute since 1679 is now being shared with persons who, without formal links which bind them to the Institute, have become involved in helping to carry out the Lasallian mission. In many of the more than 80 countries where the Institute is located, the expression "mission" is easily and naturally understood as referring to the way in which the particular mission of the Catholic Church in education is being extended to Christian educators who are not members of the Institute. This retains the sense of mission from the Latin root **mittere** with its basic meaning of *"being sent"* by some authority to do something in the name of that authority.

Mission is not just a personal choice in the way that someone chooses personally to follow a particular career, to be doctor or teacher or factory worker. The grammatical passive "being sent by" is central to the idea of mission. In Christian theology, therefore, mission in this sense is always linked to the one mission of Jesus Christ, whom Christians believe was sent by God the Father as Savior and Redeemer, and who, in his turn, promised to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to give continuing vitality and inspiration to the human beings who share in carrying on this one mission. In the *Theological Synthesis* which he presented at the conclusion of the Rome **International Congress on the Consecrated Life Today** in November, 1993, Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes wrote about mission as follows:

*"Mission proceeds and comes from God. In it the mission of the Holy Spirit is actualized in a visible way, the same mission, in fact, which in a mysterious way, energizes the march of the nations towards the Reign of God .... For this reason*

*we are aware that the mission is not an activity that is simply added to the being of the Church. It is its very being. The Church is called to be sign and docile and humble instrument of the mission of the Spirit to be a witness of the love of God for the world, to proclaim Jesus Christ and to make him present, to commit oneself to the task of reconciliation and of making all men and women of the earth brothers and sisters.”* (Page 19)

But the word mission itself is also used more broadly in a contemporary sense to describe the particular purpose of many kinds of organizations. For example, the title of “mission statement” has been appropriated in recent years by many business organizations in order to state their underlying aims and philosophy: *Why* does this organization exist? *What* does it try to achieve? *What* are the principles which guide it?

It is against this rich background of meanings that the expression itself, *shared mission*, is better thought of henceforward as the *Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian education* which is by its very nature today, a *shared mission*.

### **3.15 The importance of education for the Church**

The Church’s document of 1965, *the Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum educationis)* from the Second Vatican Council, before setting out certain enduring principles regarding education, justifies its role in education because of its obligation, its “*mandate from her divine founder . . . to promote the welfare of the whole life of human beings, including their lives in this world*” (Preface pluralized and adapted). The document then begins by asserting that all persons “*of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education*” (1), thereby endorsing the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child** of November 1959. Becoming more specific, it asserts that “*all Christians . . . have a right to a **Christian education***” (2) (emphasis added); that the obligation to educate belongs first of all to parents before becoming the responsibility of society as a whole (3); and that the Church is particularly concerned that the spiritual aspect of education be seen as essential. The role of the school is seen as essential (5) and parents should have the right to choose the kind of school they wish for their children. (6) The Church’s role “*is especially evident in Catholic schools*” because of the service it can offer “*in developing the mission of the People of God.*” (8)

This concern for education has been continued since the Council, notably through a series of documents issued by the Vatican Congregation for Christian Education. These include *The Catholic School* (1977), *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to the Faith* (1982), and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988). Consistently developed through these documents are the following principles listed in the Introduction to the 1988 document:

*“ . . . What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension and this is to be found in a) the educational climate, b) the personal development of each student, c) the relationship between culture and the Gospel, d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith.”*

To focus these ideas today in relationship to the existence of Catholic schools in countries where there is greater religious pluralism or where the Christian religion is a minority religion, the following principles need to be kept in mind:

- *the educational mission of the Church, based on the principles of the Gospel, asserts that all human persons have the same right to an education which enables them to live with dignity in their particular society and culture. Such an education, through the offices of the Church, is extended to all those of the Christian faith or of any other religious faiths who wish to profit by it;*
- *the educational mission of the Church is to make Jesus Christ and his Gospel more widely known but it must never be a proselytizing effort to win new adherents to the Christian faith (cf. 1.23);*
- *in seeking to present the religious principles and attitude to life which it believes should underlie all education, the Catholic Church, in terms of its own official teachings, must be respectful of other religious beliefs and practices and indeed encourage the educational process through dialogue with other religions (cf. 2.6);*
- *throughout its history, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has been open to sharing its educational practices with all those who have become its students, as has already been mentioned (cf. 1.23; 1.24).*

Lasallian Schools, therefore, as the earlier treatment of the Lasallian Heritage has indicated, have a clear *mission* linked to the historical reasons for their existence. That is why it is now important to consider the mission of the Brothers of the Institute in this “new” way of living the *mission* which is one of the constitutive aspects of their vocation. (cf. 1.42) Second, it is no less important to consider the *mission* of those many educators in different parts of the world who share in the educational work of the Lasallian School without being members of the Institute. Third, there are those who work in various aspects of Lasallian works but without sharing the same adherence to the Christian religion. In what sense can it be said that these latter educators “share” in the traditional *mission* of the Institute? Such educators might rightfully claim to be willing to be associated with the educational work of the school, to carry out the duties for which they were engaged as educators in a professional way but to have no particular interest in furthering what they are now told is part of “*the mission of the Catholic Church.*” Profound respect for the religious freedom of each teacher makes it important for the Institute not simply to assume their participation without consulting them as to whether or not they wish, or feel free, to *share* this *mission*?

## SHARED MISSION: DIVERSITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY

*The Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life, and of civic affairs. (D 46:3)*

### PRELUDE

**3.20** *One of the important recurring questions which has touched the Brothers in a special way is that of the identity of the Brother in the Shared Mission. The Brother can find himself asking what is the particularity of his vocation as a person, consecrated by the vows of religion, who now finds himself in a minority position as regards the number of persons sharing in the ministry of Christian education through the Lasallian Mission. At the same time, many Lasallian educators, while anxious to share as deeply as possible in the spirituality which has underpinned the Lasallian Mission in education since its beginning, do not see their role in any way as simply a diluted version of the Brother's vocation. Others, because of their personal religious beliefs and affiliations, may find themselves uncomfortable with the description of their educational work only in terms of Christian theology and may well feel that there is a solid anthropological basis for what they choose to do. These three questions, and other related questions are considered in the section which follows.*

### 3.21 What is the role of the Brother in the Shared Mission?

In attempting to situate himself in this new context, the Brother has to avoid the temptation to seek out differences between himself and his lay colleagues by reserving certain educational functions, whether administrative or pastoral, to himself. Brother Superior General has been careful to draw attention to this point in his *Pastoral Letters*:

*"We Brothers have to acknowledge that there is no educational service that is reserved to us. It is clear, therefore, that the nature of our identity and specific mission in the Church is not to be found in the particular services that we render" (January 1, 1991, P. 20)*

The Brothers' *Rule* of 1987 takes up the fundamental insight of the *Declaration* of 1967 (Nos. 12, 13) in setting out the fundamental three elements, the constitutive elements, of the Brother's vocation as

*"Consecration to God as a lay religious, (the) apostolic ministry of education, especially of the poor, and community life." (R 10)*

First of all, these constitutive elements can be distinguished separately but are inextricably linked for the life to be lived authentically. As a person consecrated to God by vows, the Brother tries to live out his consecration. But this is not something hidden, something personal between himself and God: the Brother consecrates himself by public profession of vows, to

be lived out in a community devoted to the apostolic ministry of education. The Brothers' *Rule* is challenging:

*"As religious vowed to the ministry of Christian education, the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life."* (R 24)

Religious consecration, with its particular characteristics expressed in the vows, constitutes the Brother as a sign, a reminder to his colleagues in shared mission of something in which all Christians share. Brother Superior General, in an allusion to ideas brought out in the Synod on Consecrated Life, refers to it in the following way in his *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1995:

*"Its identity (i. e. that of consecrated life) lies in the capacity to be a clear and visible SIGN of the radical choice of Christ which is innate in the vocation of all Christians."*  
(p. 47)

The consecrated layman, the community man, and the minister, are three aspects of the one same identity of the Brother. Each aspect assumes the others and is manifested in them. That is why we can say that the specific ministry of the Brother in the Church- his identity within the Church - is his personal consecration, lived in community for, and through, Christian education. From the origins of the Institute in the late 17th century, John Baptist de La Salle saw that communities of laymen were necessary if there was to be any continuity in the Christian school which he founded. That is why the lay character of the Brother's vocation has always been insisted upon because of the possibility of a full-time dedication to this important ministry of the Christian education of the poor without being diverted by the necessary duties associated with priesthood.

Lastly, the challenges of the shared mission which require the Brothers themselves to be *"the heart, the memory, the guarantors of the Lasallian charism,"* (C 435, p. 15) must not remain simply at the level of imagery. Before all else, this expression, in its strikingly heightened imagery, reminds us of the prophetic function with regard to the Covenant between God and his people. In the same way, the Brother has to be watchful in regard to the overall fidelity of the Lasallian body to this small covenant which is none other than the Lasallian charism, a precious gift of the Spirit to the Church. In facing the challenges of being the heart, the inner heart as it were of the international body, the Brothers everywhere are called to draw from their heritage those aspects of the common memory which are more immediately accessible to them through their initial formation and education as members of the Institute. Such aspects may not be reduced simply to history and documentation but should include rather the living manifestation of those Lasallian characteristics of devotedness to the mission of Christian education, the profound sense of gratuity as free giving without hope of reward and such fundamental Lasallian practices as the recalling of the Presence of God, the daily Reflection (sic) and frequent prayer with students, where the Brother is called to speak in faith with his students. He does this in faith because of his concern, his zeal, that all students come to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the salvation brought through Jesus Christ. Lastly, there is the importance to the religious community as such to be a true sign of the Gospel life which it professes. To the extent that this is authentic, it can be the nucleus of the educational community and thus, the creator of other communities of various kinds around itself.

*“We witness by our community life and the vow of stability, our availability to take on urgent tasks when others are unable or unwilling to do so and our unselfish dedication to the advancement of the laity. The Brothers’ vow of association for the educational service of the poor is an indispensable sign for everyone of fidelity to a mission received from God.” (C 435, p. 44)*

### **3.22 How do Lasallian educators, other than Brothers, share the Lasallian mission?**

As has already been pointed out in 1.46, the General Chapter of 1976 made use of the phrase “*degrees of belonging to the Institute*” in a way which was limited at that time to men to try to express its appreciation of certain men, who without formally joining the Institute, wished to share some aspects of its community and prayer life while making their particular contribution to the Lasallian mission of Christian education. If this notion has been superseded by the subsequent development of a clearer understanding of the Lasallian mission, the irreplaceable contribution of women and the use of the expression *shared mission*, there seems to be a basic intuition of the 1976 General Chapter about “belonging” which should not be lost. Objectively speaking, from the viewpoint of dedication to Roman Catholic Christian education, there are certainly different levels of commitment among the many participants who contribute to the Lasallian mission. As the photos and statements of various Lasallian educators in this text indicate, there is also a wide diversity of religious affiliations among those who work in the various Lasallian educational works. As the same illustration shows, the cultural and religious circumstances in which these Lasallian educators work are extraordinarily diversified. Perhaps beginning from life, as the photos in this text do, in showing different levels of participation in the Lasallian Mission is to stand before an extremely rich panorama of real life situations where the mystery of life, of individual existence and the overriding importance of the freedom of the individual meet. If the following points show a certain gradation towards complete acceptance of Catholic beliefs and practices, this is intended to be simply descriptive and not normative in all circumstances. Thus, the Lasallian Mission in education is shared by:

- those, who while not sharing the same religious beliefs or practices as Catholics, wish to devote themselves personally and professionally to the education of their pupils and are prepared in complete respect, to support the traditional religious practices of the Lasallian school;
- those who for personal reasons do not consider themselves as fully-practicing Christians but wish to support the principles of the educational work in which they freely engage;
- those who see their involvement and commitment to the Lasallian mission as linked to their understanding of their own Christian beliefs and practices and bring a certain personal vocation and commitment to what they see as the *ministry of teaching*.

This gradation is viewed from a Christian perspective. But the *Lasallian Heritage* (cf. 1.2 & 1.3) has already shown us that for the second half of its history, the Lasallian mission in education has grown and developed in many countries precisely because of the openness, good will and dedication of many Lasallian colleagues of other faiths. The Lasallian school or work has been a presence, a witness to gratuity and the willingness to share the living of the Gospel with others.

Brother Robert Schieler, in *Lasalliana* 32-16-D-84, has approached the question of *fostering the shared mission* through what he calls the stages of “degrees of commitment” and “levels of sharing” according to a sequence which can be presented diagrammatically as follows:



It is important to recognize that each degree of commitment and sharing is valuable in itself. Those persons who wish to be more than professionally committed may come to develop a personal sense of vocation as Lasallian educators through their willingness to take part in sessions of Lasallian Formation.

Many such Lasallian educators seem to have found that their lives as married persons with family responsibilities can find a particular enrichment and focus through programs of Lasallian formation.

### **3.23 Christians understand that all baptized members are responsible for the Church’s mission**

Christians have always accepted that they should help in their own way to make Christ and his message known. The *Acts of the Apostles* tells the story of the first generation of Christians who took it as their duty to make known to others the *Good News* (Gospel) which they had received through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians (9:16), expresses his conviction about this duty as “*not that I do boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it.*”

Every Christian is not necessarily called to be a full-time preacher of the Gospel but is rather someone who “*proclaims the gospel*” by allowing his or her life and actions to be shaped according to the principles of the Gospel. This attitude is strongly confirmed in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful*, of December 1988, in the following citations:

*“The voice of the Lord clearly resounds in the depths of each of Christ’s followers, who through faith and the sacraments of Christian initiation is made like to Jesus Christ, is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation.”* (3)

*“The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” (ibid, 33)*

### **3.24 This advancement of the laity is a “sign of the times”**

When there is greater awareness of the mystery of the Church as *communion*, as *People of God*, everything in the Church is directed towards ministry, all the members are equal in the dignity conferred on them by baptism and all are co-responsible in the one mission of Jesus Christ. When this is understood, lay persons are equal with all others in the Church, that is, they are not simply people to be evangelized but are rather foremost in sharing the gospel themselves. This is a transition from a “clerical” Church to a new understanding of Church in which lay people find their particular place and their specific role. This is what is meant by the advancement of the laity. By reason of their Christian vocation, lay people are called to be in Gospel images light, *salt* and *leaven* in the very heart of family and social life, so that their role and their mission are irreplaceable. It is because of their very lay character in the world that they have to arrange earthly matters according to God’s saving plan. Such an advancement of the laity is a genuine sign of the times with great advantages for the Church’s overall mission.

This is the movement followed by the Institute in its development from “*tolerating*” the presence of lay teachers in the emergency situations of the Second World War (1.45) to considering and esteeming them as *partners* in a common mission in the General Chapter of 1993. Pope John Paul II, referring to the “objective of the third millennium” makes reference to the role of lay Christians in the task of a new hearing of the Gospel:

*“The whole Church, Pastors and lay faithful alike, standing on the threshold of the Third Millennium, ought to feel more strongly the Church’s responsibility to obey the command of Christ, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation’ (Mk 16:15), and take up anew the missionary endeavor . . . . The lay faithful ought to regard themselves as an active and responsible part of this venture, called as they are to proclaim and to live the gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.” (The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful, 64)*

*“The Brothers, who ‘have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry’ (R 17), continue their work in this direction with renewed vigor and with new perspectives.”*

### **3.25 A complementarity of vocations: charisms and ministries in the Church**

If it is true that all Christians are responsible for the mission of the Church, each person is so in terms of his or her own vocation and personal identity. In the decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* in 1965, the Second Vatican Council expressed this clearly:

*“In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission ... But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have, therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God (2) ... From the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arise for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and for the development of the Church.”*

(3)

This emphasis is, of course, not new in the Church. The First Letter of Saint Peter (4, 10) reminds its readers that *“Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourself at the service of others,”* while in his First Letter to the Corinthians (12, 7), Saint Paul points out that *“The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for the common good.”* The complementarity of gifts which can enrich the educational community and thus be a source of richness for the mission is well described in the citation which follows:

*“Education in the faith is apart of the finality of a Catholic school. The more fully the educational community represents the richness of the ecclesial community, the more capable it will be of fulfilling this mission. When priests, men and women Religious, and lay people are all present together in a school, they will present students with a living image of this richness, which can lead to a better understanding of the reality of the Church.”* (Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith [No. 43, 1982])

### **3.26 Every Lasallian educator enriches shared mission**

All educators who work in Lasallian schools and foundations, therefore, are invited to share the common principles and particular emphases which are essential to the Lasallian heritage. To the extent that these educators feel that they can bring their own particular gifts to Lasallian education, they can legitimately feel themselves *sharers* of the overall *educational mission* carried out by their particular institution. They should feel as well that they bring distinctive elements of their own religious traditions as Protestant Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucianists or Shintoists to the religious understandings and spiritual traditions which are essential to Lasallian education. In a very important sense, they should see themselves as enlarging and enriching the Lasallian Heritage’s traditional sense of *responding to needs* by bringing and sharing their own particular gifts with their students. In this important exchange of gifts, the Lasallian school can help to further the important principles of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue (cf. 2.5; 2.6).

If this was not always the historical position taken by the Church, what has led to this different perception? The key to this change during the 20th century lies in the development of the theological idea of *communion* and its application to widely different situations.

## ASSOCIATED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MISSION

*The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. (R 17)*

### PRELUDE

**3.30** *The first generation of Brothers found their collective strength in choosing to associate themselves with others for the rest of their lives so as to provide schools for poor boys. It is a similar common vision derived from the Lasallian Heritage which can link all those who wish to be more closely associated in creating or maintaining Lasallian educational works. This is not to limit the Lasallian Heritage to something static and pre-determined. As the historical survey of the opening chapters has shown, the continuing vitality of the Lasallian work in education has come from its ability to continue to apply its founding principles in its response to new needs. The willingness of others who are not members of the Institute to work together in unity to apply the principles found in the Lasallian Heritage can develop and extend its content, as has happened in previous generations. If the Lasallian Heritage can help to motivate and enrich those lay persons who share in it, these “newcomers” do not come empty-handed. They, in turn, can bring their own gifts to enrich the Heritage. In this sense, the Lasallian Heritage can constantly be revitalized by all those who share in it.*

*This strong sense of unity was expressed in the foundation Rule and in the formula by which the Brothers still consecrate themselves to God for the work of Christian education: “**together and by association.**” This guiding principle has much of the richness of the central idea which has unified theological reflection during and since the Second Vatican Council, that of **communion.***

### **3.31 Communion and the Lasallian Heritage**

Shared mission, as the very words themselves suggest, demands a process of growth in unity, in *communion* (literally in its root sense of *united with*), between persons who share the same mission. This process of communion requires the development of links of unity, of communication, unified objectives, common actions, and good personal relationships in the same Lasallian tradition which brought the Brothers to make a vow of association among themselves so as to maintain the schools “*together and by association.*”

*Association*, such as it was lived by the Brothers, had a deep impact on the organization and functioning of their schools. It was a decisive factor in helping their cohesion, efficiency and creativity. Today, under new forms still to be invented, the same spirit of association should continue to inspire and give life to the Lasallian Schools where Lasallian partners are the great majority. The challenge now is for the Brothers and all other Lasallian educators to discover together in open dialogue how to found and promote in new foundations the associative dimen-

sions of their commitment on behalf of the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor.

This may not happen in one step. There may have to be first the stage of mutual acceptance and respect; this may lead to working together with common objectives and developing a real co-responsibility; a third stage may well be marked by the deepening of interpersonal relationships; perhaps this may lead towards that deeper unity which comes through sharing in faith; and this latter experience may lead towards a deeper sense of the educational work as ministry and the development of bonds which have been formed gradually across this sequence of experiences. Working together is the important first step which can ultimately give a common meaning and become the source of the dynamism in whatever is done. It is important to leave enough space and time to encourage a gradual progress towards this unity, and the development of this communion which can ultimately bind all together. The imposition of an initial uniformity may stifle creativity and thus frustrate the growth of real communion.

### **3.32 The process that links communion and mission.**

The process of communion within Lasallian educational communities is very important for the mission itself. The following text from *Lay Persons Faithful to Christ* makes the point strongly:

*“Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that **communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.**”* (CL 32,4)

The *Rule* indicates that the aim of the process of communion is one of co-responsibility within the educational community to come to the setting up of “*faith communities*,” the highest level of communion and the ultimate aim of Christian educational activity. The following two citations explicitly point in this direction:

*“The Brothers’ community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition. The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment. The Brothers join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess.”* (R 17c)

*“The Brothers’ community shares in the animation of the institutions in which it is involved. It develops therein an atmosphere of brotherhood rooted in mutual respect and freedom. Its action to promote the gospel aims to bring into being a community of faith in the midst of the educational community.”* (R 51a)

The setting up of an authentic faith community through the process of communion is so decisive that the *Rule* reminds the Brothers that gospel activity and catechesis would be difficult without

this reality:

*“Catechesis is above all a form of witness. It springs from the depth of a community of faith, that brings together Christians within whose hearts dwells the Holy Spirit, the teacher of all truth.”* (R 15a)

This represents the ideal in Christian language. But, as has already been pointed out in earlier sections (especially 2.2; 2.5; 2.6), this community is not like a closed club with narrow rules of membership, but something to be found in the process which develops thanks to the tension between two poles. One pole is that grouping of faith-people which is being constantly created and lived in the events that mark the life of the community of the school or work, especially in the anthropological constants of life, joys and sufferings, and death. The other is that stable faith-community, notable for the permanence of its ministerial aspect and for the commitment of the people who form part of it. It is this group which is the guarantee of the continuity of the gospel plan which it sustains in the school. These two groups are like concentric but open circles, with each in need of the other so as to be able to exist.

### **3.33 Communion in the sense of educational work as ministry**

Communion in mission is not only a possibility for those who make it so in a common work but can be strengthened when such work is viewed and carried out as *ministry*. Communion then can be richer and more profound as Brothers and other Lasallian educators try to accomplish their educational work, the common mission, *“according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it,”* i.e., the Institute, and so to all those who wish to share the Lasallian mission as fully as possible.

For La Salle, the Brother who frequently met his students during the day at the level of faith, sharing the Gospel with them, helping them to understand their religion, speaking to their hearts during the daily Reflection, accompanying them to Mass and helping them to assist at it was exercising a *ministry* in the Church. The language used by La Salle was daring for the time but unequivocal: the Brothers exercised a *ministry* in the Church by their work with children in matters of faith and religion. But the Brothers' work for most of the day was also *ministerial* as they helped their students to acquire the knowledge and skills which would help them to gain employment. Nevertheless, La Salle did not limit himself to underlining the ministerial character of the Brother's educational tasks but went much farther to the very identity of the Brother: *“You are ministers of Jesus Christ and of the Church.”* (M 195.2) According to La Salle, the Brother should live with the awareness of being a minister during the whole day, even when he was back in the community, praying or taking recreation with his Brothers. The secret of his ministry lay, as La Salle notes in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* of 1711, in *“making no distinction between the duties of his state of life and those of his personal sanctification.”* (p. 78)

The Brother's way of living, his consecration to God and his community life gave him a particular credibility which was confirmed by the Bull of Approbation as has already been remarked (cf. 1.13); thus recognizing this as a ministry particular to the Brother in the Church, something which was later confirmed by the Church's approval of the *Rule* of 1987: *“The Brothers are called to*

*provide a human and Christian education to young people, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to them.*" (Decree of January 26, 1987)

There is a text of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vocation and Mission of Lay People in the Church* which, for many reasons, makes us recall the Lasallian meditation No. 9, MTR. Pope John Paul II personalizes the common origin of the different ministries in Christ, the Good Shepherd, and highlights what gives meaning and consistency to ministry. This is not the external task in itself but the attitude from which the task is done, an attitude which both unifies and directs life towards those who are being served:

*"The ministries which exist and are at work at this time in the Church are all, even in their variety of forms, a participation in Jesus Christ's own ministry as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:11), the humble servant who gives himself without reserve for the salvation of all." (cf. Mk 10:45). (No. 21)*

It is in the root sense of *servicing* others, serving their interests ahead of personal convenience that we can recover the profound sense of what ministry is in practically all uses of the word, whether as a religious expression or in ordinary usage.

Maintaining this reference to Christ, the man who came to serve and not to be served, we can understand *ministry as a peak expression of communion*. The ideal of shared mission would be, in that perspective, the formation of a ministerial community among those who share the Lasallian mission.

This new ministerial community has to be for the Lasallian school what the community was previously for the Brothers: the sign that the Kingdom of God is made present and grows in this space. All those who share in the community, to the extent that they are animated by faith, live and show forth their ministry in complementarity with others, but with different characteristics according to the proper identity of each. The Brother, from the perspective of his consecration to a celibate life in community; the lay person, from a life much more in contact with the secular reality, and according to circumstances, from the viewpoint of being married or celibate as a lay person; the priest, from the particular aspect of his priestly ordination, placed at the service of Christian education.

*"Because of each member's unique and unrepeatable character, that is, one's identity and actions as a person, each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community." (Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful, No. 28)*

### **3.34 The ministerial aspect of the Church**

If we are talking about a ministerial community today, it is thanks to the renewal which the Church has brought about of its own image from the Second Vatican Council. The divisive schemes such as "hierarchy-laity" or "clergy-religious-faithful" with their tendency to highlight differences rather than that which is common, are being replaced by schemes which are much more representative of the *ecclesiology of communion: community - ministries and charisms*, in which

unity precedes and lays the foundations for the distinction; in which the common Christian condition shines out at the same time as the free and varied initiative of the Spirit, which sustains the richness of ministries and charisms in the Church for the common good; a scheme which, moreover, values differences but in a way which is complementary and subordinated to unity.

The Church community feels called to offer the world the service of being a sacrament of salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 1, 9 & 48). This statement is true both for the universal Church as well as for each small local community. This service is the great Church ministry. The ministries themselves, both for the ordained as for the lay, surge up within the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ so as to complete his mission in the world (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 4). Both ministries and charisms come from the Spirit to the Church.

The time when ministry was limited to what came from the Sacrament of Orders has now passed. As we well know, La Salle never accepted that limitation. Since Vatican II there has been a recovery of the ministerial set-up so characteristic of the apostolic Churches, as Saint Paul expresses so openly in his letters. John Paul II refers explicitly to the direct sharing of the faithful lay person in the common mission of the Church in the following words:

*“The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of service and reminding them, as he reminds all people in their relationship in the Church, that what distinguishes persons is not an increase in dignity but a special and complementary capacity for service .... Thus, the charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service exercised by the lay faithful exist in communion and on behalf of communion.”* (The Vocation and Mission of Lay People No. 20)

*“The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a great many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.”* (Ibid No. 23)

Following this idea, lay ministries are not simply the result of a personal choice but come from the gift of grace, or charism, which is given by the Spirit and passes by the recognition of the church community. Charisms, whether extraordinary or simple and ordinary, are given to all, since the Spirit works in all (cf. 1 Cor 12,6) and always have *directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world.* (Ibid No. 24)

The concept of “*charism*” in this new model of post-conciliar Church can help us to clarify how to form a ministerial community in the service of the Lasallian mission. A charism is a personal gift for a specific purpose, but it may be shared, by what is changed into a “*bond of communion*” between various persons. This is what John Paul II proposes:

*“These charisms are given to individual persons, and can even be shared by others in such ways as to continue in such ways as to continue in time a precious*

*and effective heritage, serving as a source of a particular spiritual amity among persons.” (Ibis No. 24)*

This is what has been recognized by the Brothers' *Rule* when it states:

*“The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.” (R 20)*

The Lasallian charism generates a particular spiritual affinity between many persons at the service of Christian education. This means that the ministerial Lasallian community can never be reduced to an “organization for work.” What gives it its proper identity, life and the possibility of development is this common foundation which *“implies a particular mode of being, mission, fraternal life and spirituality.”* (Brother John Johnson, Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1995, page 38.)

Let us complete the presentation of the Lasallian ministerial community by comparing it to a musical chord, which is richer and more varied according to the number of notes it contains. The possibility of agreement comes from its affinity with the charism which is common. But each person, each group - Brothers, Sisters, Partners, Priests - adds its personal note, that is its particular identity and charism, to the chord. It is especially up to the Brothers to watch out that they do not spoil the tonality in the way that the chord is developed.

By means of this basic image, we will more easily understand why we can affirm at the same time that we have in the ministerial Lasallian community a common Lasallian charism and also different charisms which are characteristic of each group. Let us hope that a common ministry, that of Christian education, can be developed from these specifically different ministries.

### **3.35 A particular “ministry”: administration and support services**

One of the most important roles which can determine the overall direction of any school or educational work is that of the person or persons who are responsible for the various aspects of its administration and support services. There is the deep Gospel sense of stewardship, that is, being responsible for things which belong to the whole group or community. It is not unimportant to recall, as does Ghislain Lafont in his book *Imaginer L’Eglise Catholique*, that *“one of the first examples of praying and laying on hands in the New Testament concerns those chosen by the early Church community and accepted by the Apostles with the aim of administering the goods of the community and especially, looking after the poor.”* (page 192-193)

The good administrator makes it possible for others to use their gifts to the full. Often, the work is a hidden one, but when good administration is absent, the whole project suffers. The many different tasks of administrators, ranging from those who are the leaders and animators of their fellow teachers to those whose task is more with ensuring that there is proper accountability for the money, equipment and property at the service of the whole community, all call for efficiency and dedication to the service of others. This requires on the part of all concerned a good sense of *association*. In many Lasallian educational works today, the administrative and support services are increasingly entrusted to Lasallian partners.

In many parts of the world, parents, former pupils and others linked in some way to the Lasallian work make an important but often hidden contribution to the success of the school. Since, as sociological studies often show, the success of a school - especially in an economically poor area - is linked closely to its relationship to the local community and it is here that parents and other interested persons can play a vital role.

### **3.36 Living co-responsibility, solidarity and association**

Co-responsibility is the attitude which leads to a search to respond together to the challenges and demands of the common mission, in *interdependence* with one another, or even better, in *solidarity*.

For all Lasallian educators, this living according to the spirit of association is, at the local level, to feel co-responsible for carrying it out, for being steadfast and active partners in putting it into operation. It is, in fact, to be convinced that maintaining a Lasallian centre is first of all everybody's concern and then acting accordingly. At the District level, it is also to recognize oneself as a member of a network of educators and of establishments sharing the same spirit and the same educational plan.

The spirit of association lived in this way helps to bring about closeness between men and women of different religious beliefs working together in the common service of the poor through education in order to build up a more fraternal humanity. For Christians, it invests their action with a church dimension by the exercise of co-responsibility between baptized persons among the *People of God*.

### **3.37 Living the spirit of association according to the ideas of the 42nd General Chapter**

For Brothers and all other Lasallian educators, the spirit of association is nourished by seeking and deepening what they have in common. First of all, there is the fact of living a common human experience in different states of life, being marked by a culture and the same concerns, especially that of living the same profession. Committed as they are to the human education of their students, Brothers and lay Christians, or believers of other religions, share a certain number of fundamental human values without which any agreement on such an education would not be possible. What unites them is their common reference to Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the pedagogical tradition associated with him.

With teachers who are Christians, the Brothers share in the richness of the same baptism as well as in that of lay people in the *People of God*. All are called and sent for a common mission which is that of carrying the Gospel into the world of education. The mission and the Lasallian charism unite them also in a common Church ministry, even though each one, according to his or her different identity, brings ministerial characteristics or dimensions which are different.

*“Lay teachers . . . make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life, and of civic affairs.” (D. 46.3)*

### 3.38 Proposition from the 42nd General Chapter

In this dialogue which deepens the sense of association and leads towards a deep sense of communion, there is a particular *content* which comes from the Institute's 42nd General Chapter in the following Proposition 5:

*"Inspired by Chapter 2 of the Rule, every District will draw up a plan for the shared mission, concerning the educational works: a) this plan will make quite clear how the articles of the Rule will be implemented, taking into account local conditions. It will give priority to:*

- the promotion of the educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice (R 40, 40b. 40c);*
- evangelization and catechesis (R 13; 15);*
- the formation of Lasallian educators (R 17c) (C. 435, p. 49).*

These emphases are indeed to be the substance of the dialogue between the Institute and its Lay Partners in attempting to strengthen the bonds of association and so develop the profound sense of *communion*.

## FORMATION FOR THE LASALLIAN MISSION

*Brothers and Lay Persons together will intensify the activities of Centers of Formation, suitable courses and programs. (C 435, p. 47)*

### PRELUDE

**3.40** *It is clear that the continuing vitality of the Lasallian Mission will depend on the extent to which all those engaged in it have the necessary preparation and formation to keep themselves and the Lasallian mission up to date. In this process, the Brothers, whose numerical involvement is shrinking, have their particular role to play as “heart” and “memory” of the Lasallian Heritage. There is an urgent need to ensure that other Lasallian educators have different forms of access to this Lasallian Heritage according to their personal backgrounds and their desire to be more deeply involved. This reciprocity of relationship, this interdependence between Brothers and Lay Partners or colleagues, has particular implications which need to be explored in greater depth by considering the necessary processes by which others may be inducted into the Heritage and how their understanding and appreciation may be further developed and sustained.*

### 3.41 Formation for the Lasallian mission

Proposition 4 from the 42nd General Chapter in 1993 insisted that *“in the Institute, at every level, shared mission is to be one of the priorities for the next seven years”* and that *“the District will make the Lasallian formation of teachers and educators a fundamental priority.”* (C 435, 5.4, p. 47) As part of the Institute’s implementation of this request, the *Institute Bulletin No. 242, 1996*, is devoted completely to setting out *Experiences of Shared Mission* from all around the Lasallian world. In some way or another, all the activities so described can be understood as part of the continuing formation for this priority, but certain chapters are explicitly so. For example, Chapter 4 entitled *Sharing the Mission requires an adequate formation* (pp. 32-57), gives 26 examples of various courses, workshops and seminars which address this question of formation. Some of these courses are run in permanent Lasallian Centers, others in *ad hoc* Lasallian Centers and most of them are individual units of a complete course over a scheduled number of meetings which may run during a year, two years, or over three summers.

### 3.42 Those for whom Lasallian formation is intended

It is obvious that some basic or initial Lasallian formation is important for all those who are to work in various ways in the Lasallian Mission. This includes the Brothers with their particular formation as members of the Institute and all others who wish to work in the same spirit. Then there is the question of continuing formation, the necessary updating which is part of professional life, but also the attention to the underlying spirituality which can help transform school teaching into ministry. Such continuing formation is indispensable for all who share the mission. Indeed, one of the most important gifts which the Brothers have to share out of their own lived experience as members of the Institute is the willingness to participate in such continuing forma-

tion sessions so as to facilitate the passing on of their lived experience as “*heart*” and “*memory*.” No less important for them is the opportunity for them to hear the questions posed by their lay partners in their search for a lay spirituality which is derived from the Lasallian Heritage but which is not simply a scaled-down version of the Brother’s spirituality.

The role, indeed the *duty*, of the Brothers’ community is clearly indicated by the *Rule* in the two stages which follow. First of all, “*The Brothers’ community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition.*” Then, with great respect for individuals, a second stage is proposed as “*The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific commitment. The Brothers join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess.*” (R 17c) The activities in the already mentioned *Institute Bulletin No. 242* offers some ten very different examples of how some communities and Districts have implemented this second stage (pp. 98-107). Indeed, it is not really possible to separate spirituality as such into a kind of separate compartment in the Lasallian Heritage since it furnishes the underlying principles for the educational work. In that sense, practically all the experiences cited in the *Bulletin* indicate various stages of that “*more intensified sharing*” of which the *Rule* speaks.

### **3.43 The aim of Lasallian formation**

The aim of Lasallian formation is to ensure that educators make a gospel ministry out of their work and thus successfully carry out the mission which is being entrusted more and more to them. It is certainly true that there is a content to be handed on, certain non-negotiable aspects which are essential if new teachers are to come to understand progressively that their task can be a gospel ministry and carried out as such. Of course, since not all Lasallian educators are Christians, the formation of such persons needs to take into account important religious and cultural differences. In this matter, *Bulletin No. 242* has an extremely interesting account of how the Lasallian Center in Egypt has developed its program to include its non-Christian teachers (cf. p 46). Basically, this approach gives emphasis to two specific dimensions of the Lasallian tradition, the importance of a human formation (formation to human values) and the educational service of the poor.

Formation is obviously a continuing process which demands personal conversion, the renewal of educational communities and the bringing up to date of whatever is needed to achieve this aim. The final aim in centers of Christian confession is to create, where possible, the “*communities of faith*” of which the *Rule* speaks. (R 17c)

### **3.44 The spirit of Lasallian formation**

Becoming *partners in mission* is the ideal which the 1993 General Chapter proposed to all who share the Lasallian Mission. This means that they participate together “in complementarity and without paternalism” (C 435, p. 32) in the same programs. Such a common formation of Brothers and Lay Persons is in the spirit of Recommendation 5.4 from the same source:

*“Brothers and Lay Persons together:*

*a) will intensify the activities of Centers of formation, suitable course and programs;*

*b) develop Lasallian research, information and communication;*

*c) name one (or more) persons to coordinate, animate and supervise this formation.” (C 435 p. 47)*

### **3.45 Conditions for a Lasallian formation**

Experience teaches that there are several conditions which guarantee the value of Lasallian formation for teachers and educators.

- It needs to be adapted to the diversity of the recipients, to their needs, their expectations, their state of life, their family or professional commitments. Certain programs need to be considered in relation to the responsibilities which they carry out or could be asked to carry out in shared mission. As the General Chapter (C. 435, p. 32) comments, *“it is important that the strategies and the programs allow for a wide participation,”* and develop with a certain flexibility.
- Since it is a continuing formation, it needs a follow-up. It should not, therefore, limit the structures of accompaniment in order to give more life to the content by simply multiplying sessions which are mainly informational. It should help whoever wishes *“to develop further his or her commitment, according to the successive calls which might be received.”* (Ibid)
- It should take care to be progressive and set up according to stages. On this matter, the General Chapter has also given some directions:  
*“Some of these programs offer information and ‘pre formation,’ for example, about works, objectives and methods of the Institute for those who have a professional relationship with the Institute; others will be more specific, offering stimulating information and an appropriate formation for people who are committed. For those who wish to share in the mission to the extent of forming Lasallian communities of faith, a deeper formation is needed: ‘They provide for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.’”* (R 17) (ibid, p. 33).
- It needs time. It is continuing formation with all its aspects for *“in order to take on the challenges of the world of education, we need to develop and deepen our mutual understanding, to respect our differences and to trust in one another.”* (Ibid, p. 14)

### **3.46 The content of Lasallian formation**

Experience shows that the following dimensions be given importance in Lasallian formation:

- an anthropological dimension which favors the human and spiritual maturity of the Lasallian educator;
- a professional dimension which envisages the acquisition of “know-how,” but especially a “knowing-how-to-be” in the relationship between adults and young persons;
- a Christian dimension in view of the ministry of Christian education;

- *a Lasallian dimension which begins from John Baptist de La Salle's own story and from the Lasallian educational heritage.*

Each District and Region needs to work on this content in relation to its particular Lasallian origins and cultural circumstances.

### **3.47 Joint responsibility for Lasallian formation**

The responsibility for Lasallian formation should gradually be assumed jointly by Brothers and their Lay partners and colleagues. The Recommendations of the 42nd General Chapter (5.2 to 5.14, pp. 4649) go into great detail. At the local level, every educational work is to see to this as one of its priorities; at the community level, the *"means of living the shared mission"* are to be indicated, with particular attention to the community's willingness to be welcoming and open to sharing the means of *"human, educational and spiritual formation"*; at the individual level, each Brother is invited to reflect on his *"specific way"* of committing himself to the shared mission. At the District level, it is the Brother Visitor and Council who are responsible for setting out the plan for Shared Mission which the 1993 General Chapter in Proposition 5 requested to be in place by 1995. This plan was to be worked out and evaluated *"with the participation of partners associated with the educational mission."* The *Institute Bulletin No. 242* gives an extremely rich panorama of what is being already done around the Lasallian world.

### **3.48 The creation of appropriate structures**

Educational programs, no matter how good in themselves, will not achieve the long-term aims of Shared Mission unless certain structures are put into place. Such structures are not imposed. Indeed, it is the spirit of association which becomes embodied in appropriate structures and thus favors the communion of persons and groups in the Lasallian Family, while at the same time respecting the autonomy of each. This seems to be an area where there remains much to be done even if certain groups, such as Signum Fidei in some countries, parent groups and youth groups, associations of former pupils, already have their own established structures. The most pressing need, certainly, is that structures of equality be established between Brothers and Partners in Shared Mission. Good will by itself is not enough. This kind of association of different groups with diverse interests needs "rules" which ensure the harmonious exercise of the responsibilities of each group in carrying out a task, a plan, a mission.

The 42nd General Chapter insisted on this aspect of collaboration between Brothers and lay people by the following details:

*"The relationships among the partners in the shared mission ought to be characterized by respect, understanding, justice and mutual trust. Collaboration implies that both rights and duties are recognized by everyone in what concerns regulations, work contracts and job descriptions. Collaboration ought to guarantee an effective co-responsibility, common understanding of guidelines and of priorities and shared power in preparing, making and carrying out decisions." (C 435, 3.63, p. 44)*

At the District level, the recommendations are an invitation to put appropriate structures into place so as to assure a harmonious and fruitful collaboration between Brothers and lay people as the two following citations indicate:

*“The District will strengthen the structures (people, places) with a view to animating and coordinating the shared mission, after having been the object of discernment between the Brothers and Laity. These structures will respect the various levels of commitment in the mission of the Lasallian network.”* (c 435, 5.6, p. 47)

*“In the light of Article 17 of the Rule, the District will strive more and more to integrate the Lasallian Family and the Shared Mission. It will take into account the requisite changes which sharing necessitates:*

- recognition of the rights and duties of everybody (position, work contract, family expenses);*
- mutual recognition and confidence;*
- sharing of responsibilities.”*

### **3.49 The challenge to be confronted**

The future of the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education clearly depends now on the way in which the shared mission is developed. The capitulants and consultants at the 42nd General Chapter in 1993 saw this with great clarity and the Brothers have since received the practical recommendations contained in Circular 435. Many different sectors of the Institute have already developed and implemented long-term planning for the development of shared mission. On the principle of sharing “family documents” as enunciated in the Introduction to this document (pp. 9-10), it seems important to share finally some of the main recommendations of Circular 435, pp. 47-48 so that these points may serve as a common reference point for continuing evaluation by all concerned with shared mission.

#### **At District Level**

- 5.4 The District will make the Lasallian formation of teachers and educators a fundamental priority. To achieve this aim, Brothers and Laity together:**
- a) will intensify the activities of Centers of formation, suitable courses and programs;
  - b) develop Lasallian research. information and communication;
  - c) name one (or more) persons to coordinate, animate and supervise this formation.
- 5.5 The District will take the necessary means to ensure that every Lasallian work, when that is possible, favors the birth of a community of faith, a reference group capable of welcoming various persons (Brothers, priests, religious, laity, young people) who wish to deepen their faith and whose concern it is to proclaim in an explicit way Jesus Christ and to commit themselves to the service of the poor.**

- 5.6** The District will strengthen the structures (people, places) with a view to animating and coordinating the shared mission, after having been the object of discernment between the Brothers and Laity. These structures will respect the various levels of commitment in the mission of the Lasallian network.
- 5.7** In the light of Article 17 of the *Rule*, the District will strive more and more to integrate the Lasallian Family and the shared mission. It will take into account the requisite changes which sharing necessitates:
- recognition of the rights and duties of everybody (position, work contract, family expenses . . . );
  - mutual recognition and confidence;
  - sharing of responsibilities.
- 5.8** The "Signum Fidei" groups constitute for the Districts a form of spirituality well suited to the laity, especially educators, which finds its source of inspiration in St. John Baptist de La Salle.
- 5.9** The District will contribute to the renewal of Alumni Associations according to the spirit of the "Charter of the World Federation of Former Lasallian Students."
- 5.10** The District is concerned about the formation of animators (assessors), either Brothers or lay people, for the various Lasallian groups, in order to favor their own identity and autonomy but avoiding every form of paternalism and clericalism.
- 5.11** The Brother Visitor will make the shared mission one of the most important themes of his visits. Together with his council, he will plan to invite the laity to retreats, chapters and other meetings of the Brothers.

As an overall strategy to respond to the overall picture presented by the various diagrams of 1.52, the priorities could be summarized as follows:

*Groups of persons committed to the shared mission should be given programs of gradual initiation and continuing formation in which the members feel that they are being accompanied, that they have the support of other members of their group and that they accept responsibility for the continuing inspiration of the Lasallian communities of the future.*