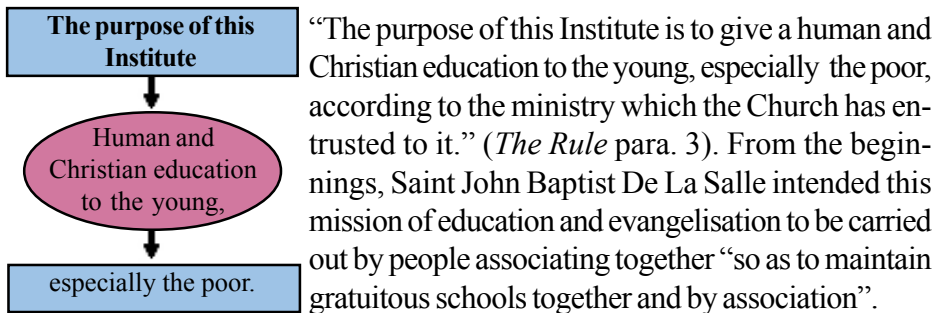
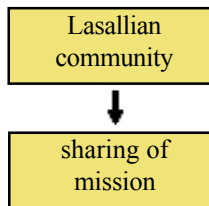


## BROTHERS AND LAY PEOPLE ASSOCIATING FOR A SINGLE MISSION



Community and association for the mission have always been seen as fundamental Lasallian characteristics. They were and still are the preferred basis for the Lasallian mission venture.

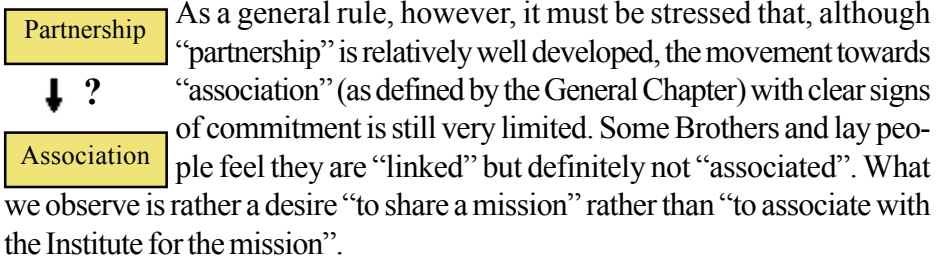
Until recent times, the Lasallian community was identified with the Brothers’ community. However, since the General Chapter of 1966-67 in particular, the mission has undergone an unprecedented expansion, marked by a massive input from lay people. Since that time, through General Chapters, statements from superiors, various publications and official documents (circulars, pastoral letters etc.), the Institute has consistently encouraged and promoted the sharing of mission, responsibilities and spirituality with lay people.



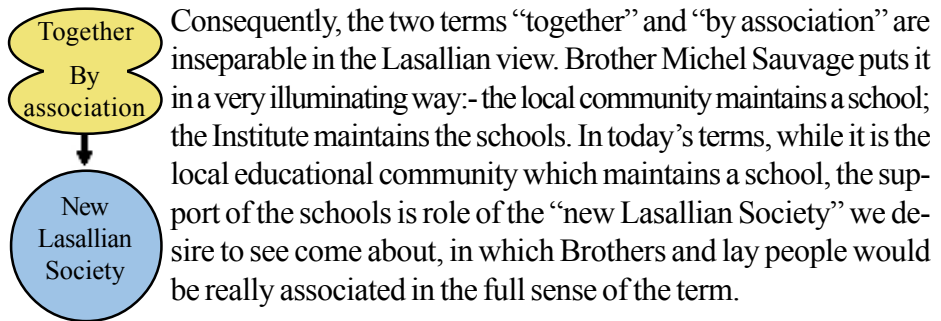
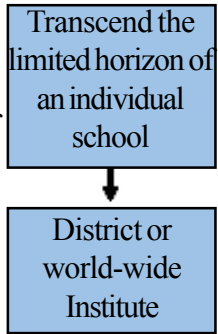
Since the General Chapter of 1966-67:

- Nowadays, Brothers and lay people are making great efforts to share a common spirit and mission. They are working together as partners.
- The driving force of their commitment is always an educational project involving the evangelisation of young people.
- Even if it is not automatic, there is always a point of reference in some link with the Institute or with a District, but it needs to be constantly redefined.
- People may commit themselves as individuals or in a group or even as associations and communities.

- The structures of the partnerships between Brothers and lay people vary in strength according to place, culture and prevailing mentality.



We need to deepen our understanding of Lasallian association and to analyse the meaning of the traditional expression “to keep schools together and by association”. The word “together” does not cover all that is included in the reality of association. Certainly, the purpose of association shows itself concretely in the action of maintaining schools “together” in specific locations. But to have real association, we must transcend the limited horizon of an individual school and reach out to a wider community in terms of a District or a world-wide Institute. Viewed in this way, association can provide inspiration and motivation to all the individual schools and open them outward to others. This is what will evoke and ensure the permanence of the Founder’s charism.



**Going forward with Clarity and Boldness**

I think that, considering the distance we have come, we are obliged to continue with determination along the road on which we have started. We have at our

disposal all the opportunities and means necessary to take new and decisive strides along the path towards greater association of Brothers and lay people in the service of youth. But this presupposes that we have a certain clarity in our ideas.

### **Three Dead-ends to avoid**

There are three attitudes that will get us nowhere:

- the ostrich policy of burying one's head in the sand and refusing to look at reality;
- an excessive feeling of guilt which paralyses action;
- wishful talking, which makes things worse...

### **Clarity about the Society in which we Today.**

I sometimes think we need to take more account of the phenomena of secularisation and laicisation which have so deeply influenced people and institutions in society in all our countries.

Reference to religion (even more to the gospel or the church) stopped being automatic a long ago. Ideas about the human person, history and value-choices are increasingly seen as independent of any sacred, religious or church order. One of the French bishops recently produced a book entitled *Vers une France Païenne?* - ("Towards a Pagan France?"). Is not the same question relevant to most of our western societies?

Make no mistake, this phenomenon affects both adults and young people in our own educational communities. It would be a serious and very dangerous mistake not to realise the importance of this fact. These realities oblige us to revise our traditional vocabulary (which is often useless because it is not understood) and also our practice of education and pastoral care.

Revise our traditional vocabulary

Useless because it is not understood

We cannot avoid taking account of this objective reality as we try to devise new kinds of shared mission and new forms of association.

## Clarity about the Brothers

I would like to think that the majority of the Brothers have accepted the idea of association. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the existence of inevitable pockets of resistance. Some feel they have been dispossessed of the role they always had up to now, that they have been pushed out of the privileged place they had in the schools and become excluded or marginalised in terms of exercising responsibility or indeed power. In some cases the wound goes deep enough to make Brothers seriously question their identity. The recent Chapter was sensitive to this problem.

Inevitable pockets of resistance

Other Brothers see these changes as simply a less painful way of dealing with the demise of the Institute in their locality. For them, the arrangements for shared mission and association are simply a palliative pain-killer or, worse, a stubborn reflex action thinly disguising the death process that has already started. All this is understandable. Only faith, trust and humility will enable us to overcome such thoughts and avoid falling into despair or naiveté

## Clarity about Lay People

Some are far removed

Others are more committed

A wide variety of positions obliges us to be realistic.

Some of them are far removed from the concerns which are preoccupying us here. They have had, and many still have, their frustrations arising from the limited role to which they were confined for years. They could have good grounds for mistrusting theories and discussions which are slow to produce any practical results. Some are afraid of being registered into going further than they would like to. Others are more committed and are impatient with the slow response of their colleagues and the Institute. This a wide variety of positions obliges us to be realistic. We should not plan, speak or act as if there were unanimity. It is imperative that any decisions we come to should take account of the diversity and pluralism in our educational communities. We must learn to recognise the importance of time as a factor in the development of people's attitudes and personal journeys.

We must also take into account the various other commitments people may have, especially family commitments. Let us be aware of the danger of asking

too much. The quality of commitments is more important than their quantity. If we keep on asking the same people, we risk wearing them out and discouraging them, which is why it is sometimes difficult to find people to take on responsibilities.

We must also recognise that it is not always easy for our colleagues to assert themselves or adopt a high profile in an environment where there is a strong tendency to view as proselytizing any attempt to assert oneself or to share one's convictions, and to treat as a marginal set those who try to give a high profile to their special character.

Finally, it must be made clear that the lay teachers are not there just to replace the Brothers or to imitate the Brothers' way of operating. They have, and should have, their own way of committing themselves to the Lasallian mission. We must accept this difference and respect it.

Lay teachers are not there just to replace the Brothers

### **Clarity as to what is at stake**

I want to call attention to two important issues: the ecclesial mission and baptismal vocation of the laity.

The promises of eternal life are not invested in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Protecting the Institute's survival is not what this is all about. What is at stake is the **ecclesial mission to the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor**. This statement in no way diminishes the significance of the contribution we can make by our participation, but the Lasallian association of Brothers and lay people derives its *raison d'être* from our mission as members of the Church.

A career viewed as a ministry

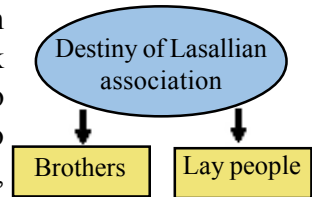
For three centuries, the Brothers fulfilled this mission, faithful to the charism of the founder, by associating in order to ensure the existence of the "Society of Christian Schools".

Today, many lay people also feel called to live out their baptismal consecration and their Christian commitment according to the charism of John Baptist de La Salle. The important thing is to **give them the chance to live their vocation to the full in the exercise of a career that is viewed as a ministry**, lived in

association with other lay people and with the Institute.

I am personally convinced that the vitality of our common mission today will depend on the strength of our associating. This is a fundamental issue for the Lasallian mission in all the Districts of Europe for the immediate future and after. That is why it is so necessary to reflect on the idea of the “Society of Christian Schools” as De La Salle envisaged it and as it could be today in our present context. I think it means much more than the idea of a religious institute bringing lay people into its mission.

The *Rule of the Brothers* (article 142) says that “By the gift of freedom, the Lord has willed to place the destiny of the Institute in the hands of the Brothers who are committed to work together so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission”. In my view, the Lord has also chosen to put the destiny of Lasallian association into our hands, Brothers and lay people.



Patience:

it takes time for people to respond.

I was making a plea for clarity. We need it to make us aware of the road we have already traveled and of the one that lies ahead of us. We need it to help us see the real challenges confronting us and to inject a sense of urgency into our determination to carry on with what we have begun. Of course, that does not

mean we must rush at things. We will make no progress that way. Our progress will depend on the extent to which we are able, in the words of Thomas Merton, to combine patience with passion: “**patience**”, because we know it takes time for people to respond to a call and really commit themselves. It is only by moving forward from one commitment to another, as the Founder did, that we can gradually build association. We need “**passion**”, because the work we have in mind can only be the result of a passionate love for the young as well as for the Church and for our Founder.

Passion:

our work can only be the result of a passionate love.

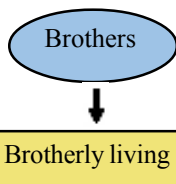
## Three roads we can take in order to build our association and to strengthen it.

### THE EDUCATIONAL ROUTE

The education and evangelisation of young people are burning questions for all today. There are conflicting views on the nature of education. The role of the school and its place in society are matters of dispute. In the meantime, there is no let-up in the crying needs of young people, especially of those who suffer under multiple forms of poverty. Answers to the problem can be found in the Lasallian tradition embodied in the work of men and women anxious to be faithful both to needs of today and to the inspiration of Saint John Baptist De La Salle.

#### **Building educational teams that are truly “brotherly”**

At a very early stage in the Institute’s origins, Saint John Baptist De La Salle and his companions agreed to use the word “Brothers” instead of “Schoolmasters”. The motive behind the change was clear enough, as Blain (De La Salle’s biographer) says: they want to show that they considered themselves to be like elder brothers to those who come to them for an education. However, the change in terminology also marked the beginning of a whole new project of “brotherly living” between them. Saint John Baptist De La Salle knew very well the difficulties in store for any group of people living and working together (Meditation 74), but he still insisted repeatedly on the need for a “union of hearts”. In his view, the “brotherly” spirit developed in community life would have its effects on the style of relationships in the educational work.



There is no point in trying to build association, if we do not establish quality relationships between the members of the team, with mutual support and real solidarity. “Brotherliness” is something we build up by accepting to work with others in a complementary way for the sake of shared goals.

#### **Drawing up educational projects together**

It was the plan to undertake a joint mission which lay behind the association formed by Saint John Baptist De La Salle and his first Brothers. By sharing the

results of their experiences and experiments, the successes and the failures, they gradually assembled what was called “The Conduct of Schools”, which was in fact the original educational project. Today, on the other hand, educational projects are sometimes drawn up purely in response to administrative needs.

The Conduct of Schools

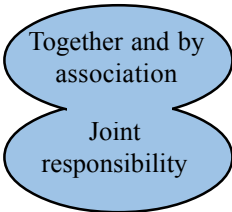
the original educational project

However, the spirit of association flourishes when people jointly draw up plans that are relevant and achievable, put them into operation, evaluate them and improve them. This way of working together leads to a mutual understanding, an appreciation of differences, reliance on complementarities, mutual criticism and support in difficult times.

Moreover, it is by regularly revising the main features of our schools, their precise nature and their relevance that we justify our existence and the reasons why we are making a joint commitment to a common effort.

### **Exercising joint responsibility**

When Saint John Baptist De La Salle talked about keeping schools “together and by association”, was he not, in a way, talking about what we today call joint responsibility? This involves three things, which are in fact a feature of all Lasallian association:-



- the fact of having responsibility jointly with others,
- the aptitude for exercising that joint responsibility,
- the ability to accept responsibility for actions taken together.

The functioning of joint responsibility in a school or a District presupposes that people are recognised as equal in status though different in their areas of competence, their charisms, and even their ministries. They should all be able to feel responsible for the life of the group, for its future and for its mission.

The exercise of joint responsibility also presupposes a theological understanding of the Holy Spirit which recognises that God can speak to others through any given individual in the group. And the most challenging words do not always come through the one who possesses superior knowledge or status.



At the same time, however, it is important that people's respective areas of responsibility should be clearly defined, so as to avoid confusion and conflict.

Developing people's responsibility and co-responsibility is the real way to open up the road to association, because association means carrying joint responsibility for the project which is the reason for coming together. It seems we still have to learn the full meaning of the phrase "to maintain schools together and by association".

## THE INSTITUTIONAL ROUTE

St. John Baptist De La Salle associated himself with the first schoolmasters in order to accomplish a very precise mission. **Lasallian association has never been an end in itself.** It has never been seen first and foremost as a question of structures. It is more a question of choices and of a spirit which impels people to share their gifts and initiatives in order to serve young people better.

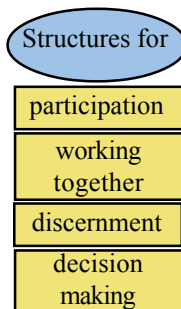
Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves whether a spirit can survive without incarnating itself in some kind of structures. It needs structures that are not pre-determined and imposed but are specially developed and come into existence to meet the needs of the situation.

**Group** ↓ **Organised structures**

Any group needs to develop organised structures, if it is to survive and function properly. I am aware that on this particular point our ideas and attitudes may differ from one place another. We have to take this into account. Each District must sketch out its own lines of action, in line with its history and its situation. Nevertheless, according to the General Chapter there are two lines of development which we all need to explore.

### The adaptation and renewal of existing structures

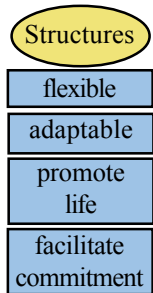
What counts most is life. Organisation and structures are there to serve life and promote its development. When they sterilise action and regiment people, when they stifle individual or collective initiative, they definitely need to be changed. Do we have the appropriate structures for participation, working together,



discernment, making decisions?

### The creation of new structures

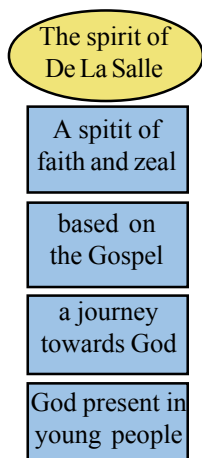
The situations in our schools and Districts are changing rapidly. I am a firm believer in the need for structures which are flexible and adaptable. Are we able now to put new structures in place in our schools, in our Districts and our Institute? - structures which promote life and facilitate commitment? This is absolutely necessary, and it is down to all of us to make it happen. Such structures must give people the opportunity to express their sense of belonging to the Lasallian network freely and responsibly. They must allow that sense of belonging to flourish and to express itself in appropriate ways.



It is a question of our institutional policies at the level of Districts, Regions and the Institute. These must go beyond the expression of pious and noble messages. They must stimulate and support research and experimentation. Certainly, it is the duty of those who are in charge to be vigilant, but they must also recognise people's right to make mistakes as they experiment.

### THE SPIRITUAL ROUTE

Lasallian association should aim at more than just setting up working parties. It cannot be reduced to a method of organising the work. My experience has taught me that we often run the risk of secularising the Lasallian charisma and so mutilating the project elaborated by Saint John Baptist De La Salle. Being a Lasallian involves more than being generous in serving young people, and it is not just a question of being concerned especially for the needs of the poor. The spirit that De La Salle wanted to hand on to his early followers was “**a spirit of faith and of zeal**”. The two are inseparable. The Lasallian commitment to education as professionals in a society presupposes a certain view of human nature, of the nature of God and the relationship between the two, a view based on the Gospel as its prime source. The Lasallian educational venture is also a spiritual journey, because it is a journey towards God recognised as being present in young people.



Nowadays, many people are looking to give meaning to their commitments, their work and their life. Lasallian association, when lived in all its dimensions, can be a place for building meaning.

No doubt you have heard the story about the wise old sage who was walking through a quarry where the men were at work. One by one, he asked them:


“What are you doing?”

The first one answered: “I’m breaking rocks.”


The second replied: “Can’t you see? I’m earning a living for me and my family by cutting stones.”

The third one answered: “What am I doing? As you can see, I am building a temple for my God.”

It all depends on the meaning we give to things. It is essential that we ask ourselves what things are capable of giving meaning to the work we want to do together. Where can we find the ultimate meaning for our activity? John Baptist De La Salle points to the answer when he insists on the fact that our employment is a ministry.



Employment



ministry

In his book *L’Evangile d’un libre penseur - (The Gospel of a Freethinker)*. Gabriel Ringlet, vice-rector of Louvain university, invites us to meditate on the scene on Maundy Thursday. God kneels down and washes the feet of a dozen men. This was no mere ritual practice, but a spiritual act, a service of love. God in an apron “at ground level”, to quote Jean-Yves Quellec, content to be down to human level. God made man, incarnate in our humanity to serve and save humankind. A God who reveals himself by saying to his disciples; “What I have done, so you also must do”. Surely it was in contemplating such a God that Saint John Baptist De La Salle was led to associate himself with a group of poor teachers in order to bring the means of salvation to all. Just as Jesus, having been sent by the Father, associated himself with a group of men to carry the good news far and wide.

The desire to enter into association can never be fulfilled, unless we take into account this dimension of faith and zeal which is in a way a kind of kneeling down.

A special effort must be made to highlight the spiritual dimension of our association so as to develop a true Lasallian spirituality. This is, too, is a road we have to take.

Next year, we shall be celebrating the 350th anniversary of De La Salle's birth. He was a man who moved forward, one commitment at a time, in search of the fulfillment of his vocation. The Brothers' Rule says that the life of the Institute is something that is constantly being created. Every form of individual or communal life is the result of countless moments of birth. Will our Lasallian association be able to generate new life and give new vitality to the Lasallian charism? The answer is that it will, provided it does not restrict itself to being a professional association or an organisational structure or even just a spiritual movement. It will only be fully realised, if it unites all these elements and finds its roots in a step of faith, zeal and hope.

Move forward
one commitment at a time