

THE NEW FORMS OF LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION Report for the Visitors' Meeting, May 2004

The path marked out by the 43rd General Chapter:

- *"In order to encourage and support the development of Lasallian association for the educational service of the poor: that, in the next seven years, each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation decide on practical steps to promote the creation and development of groups of Partners and/or Associates and of Brothers, as well as of Partners and/or Associates among themselves, which will reflect on their identity in the context of the Lasallian mission, and to develop forms of association." (Proposition 1)*
- *"... - That, during the next seven years, the Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations:
- evaluate and strengthen present forms leadership and accompaniment offered to partners in Lasallian establishments; and
-encourage, sustain and evaluate new forms of collaboration and association, which will enable those who implement them to find new forms of commitment in the educational service of the poor." (Proposition 4).*
- *"... We recommend that formation of Brothers and Partners be a priority in the Institute for the next seven years". (Recommendation 4).*
- *"That, each District, when setting up plans for its establishments and administering its goods, by creating or promoting communities in very poor areas, with the participation of Lasallian Associates, and in conjunction with other Districts and Regions". (Recommendation 18).*

1. The journey of association thus far

1.1 What are the Districts doing to follow the way indicated?

A) Formation programs

Almost all the Districts have devised some plan of formation, however simple it might be. The effort of many Districts in dedicating financial support to the Lasallian formation of the educators is noteworthy. The best results have been obtained when the formation takes place with Brothers and lay associates together.

Few Districts or Regions have developed systematic programs of reinforcement or specialized programs for the formation of Lasallian formators. In many cases the formation consists of occasional or very sporadic meetings.

(Data obtained from the questionnaire sent to the Districts.
The complete report was sent to Districts in October 2002)

B) Methods of shared reflection

Several Districts and Regions have initiated a series of workshops or some other type of encounter between Brothers, Associates and Collaborators to reflect together on association and Lasallian identity. The workshops have been effective in awakening interest, resolving doubts, sharing experiences, overcoming prejudices and so advancing toward the diverse forms of association.

In some cases the processes of shared discussion/reflection have been difficult and even traumatic in the beginning stages, but the effort in keeping them going has allowed for going forward and creating participatory cultures at the District and local

levels, and very valuable structures of communion. These processes go through defining power relationships and help in a co-responsibility for making decisions. They include a serious discussion on theology and ecclesiology inspired in the models of mission and communion, and they also deal with financial organization, pedagogical options, educational visions, policy positions...

Some examples:

- Drawing up the "District horizons" in Argentina, with several aspects common to Brothers and lay: pedagogy-pastoral ministry, vocations, formation...
- The Assembly of the Lasallian Family of the Philippines (2003)
- The European Colloquia on Association and Lasallian Identity convoked by the European Commission on Lasallian Formation (2000 y 2004).
- The participants in the LLI (Lasallian Leadership Institute) have set out to form an "emerging group", in order to explore association for the mission and seek greater clarity thereof, with the backing of the Visitors of the East Coast of the United States (Baltimore, LINE and New York).
- A Workshop on Association in the Districts of Baltimore and San Francisco (2003-2004). This has stimulated the reflection of the lay persons on this theme which, until the present time, has been predominantly based on the reflection of the Brothers.
- The Committee on Lasallian Association and Formation of the LINE District which has analyzed the programs of association of other religious families (the years 2002 and 2003) as well as the specific contributions that Brothers and Lay Persons are making together for the mission.
- The Lasallian Week on Association, ARLEP (July 2002).
- Encounter on Association, RELAL (July 2002).
- The Workshop on Association of the Delegation of the Antilles (July 2003).
- Encounters of the Associates and Partners of France, based on the Assembly-Chapter of 2002.

C) Personal experiences and accompaniment

People have learned to live and to understand the meaning of association through personal relationships with other associates and the experiences of communities that are at the service of the mission. Some districts have made the effort to link groups or individuals who are in the process of association with some community of Brothers or with other associates who, in their turn, take charge of their mentoring while helping them to discover the value of community. When there are individuals who are not part of any group, they are introduced wholly or in part into the life of the community. Special mention must be made of the experiences of the volunteer movement that have been developing in several Districts and Regions: USA, the Philippines, North Mexico, Ecuador, etc. These experiences have offered the participants the opportunity of living and of fully comprehending the Lasallian identity and charism through their commitment to the mission within the framework of a Lasallian community.

The worth of these experiences for the volunteers has largely depended on the quality of the accompaniment provided, both personalized and in community. Many of the actual experiences have had the support and/or the accompaniment of the senior Brothers (65-75 years), a fact that is much appreciated by the volunteers that have benefited by them.

D) Participation in the responsibility for the mission

Lasallian formation ought to be followed by the sharing of responsibility for the mission in the same way that entrusting responsibilities follows after initial and on-

going formation which will permit the fulfillment of the charge, not just materially but in the sense of the overall Lasallian plan. In general the Districts and Regions that have the most complete formation programs are also the ones that possess the better structures for participation.

In some Districts, in spite of having some sufficiently prepared lay people, important responsibilities just have not been entrusted to them, for the dominant criterion prevails that as long as there are Brothers able to fulfill these functions they should not be given to the lay people. It is a paternalism that is opposed to the basic principal of the Lasallian Association.

Following the guidelines of the 43rd General Chapter, (propositions 5 and 6) that asked the Districts to create structures for the Lasallian mission of education that are fully and explicitly participative, various experiences have taken place, including some that even anticipated the General Chapter's directives:

- The District of Argentina has been organized into four "pastoral" regions, each with its own administrative commission in which lay persons have the same voice and vote as the Brothers.
- The District of France has confided the responsibility for its educational works to the "La Salle Association" which coordinates the entire network of the centers through its plan of "tutelle" or guardianship.
- Many Districts have established a Mission Council in which both Brothers and Lay Partners have full membership.
- The District of the Philippines has set up the Lasallian Partners' Council which works in coordination with the District Council in order to bring the lay perspective to many aspects of the life of the district.

1.2 The results are to be found underway

A) "By their fruits you will know them"

The development of the Lasallian association is bearing fruit in the new forms of *communion for the mission*, between Collaborators and/or lay Associates with the Brothers, and of Collaborators and/or Lay Associates among themselves. These forms of communion for the mission do not always fall into an "institutional" mode through official symbols, promises and gestures. In this sense we can speak of a certain "de facto" association that actually is more frequent than the association that includes the sign (an association that is formalized or institutionalized). But both one and the other are complementary parts of the same process of Lasallian association.

It is important to recognize, appreciate and accompany association that occurs as "fact" or "experience" before it is formalized and even if it is not formalized. This is seen in:

- the steady attitude of solidarity with other Lasallians and its commitment to the Lasallian mission (which does not necessarily involve activity in a Lasallian institution);
- the search for Lasallian meaning and nurturing; the awareness of collaborating in God's work;
- a clear sense of belong to the common Lasallian story and to the District;
- an interest in and an openness towards the universality of the Lasallian mission.

The Lasallian charism is made manifest in the new forms of association by means of responses that these new forms contribute today to the needs of the mission. Many traditional educational works are being renewed thanks to new associates, but in a

special way there is a need to highlight and recognize the works and educational innovations that the new forms of association are creating, based on efforts made to reach out to the poor. Associates and lay collaborators can be protagonists and creators, not simply repeaters, of Lasallian works, and each District ought to recognize that protagonist, encourage him/her and promote him/her.

B) Association that is being lived out “de facto”

- There are Christian and Lasallian communities that are united in the charism of the Institute but without explicit ties of association. Even while maintaining their autonomy, they develop bonds of communion with the body of the particular district. Their community structure takes on various forms; in some cases it may be the moments of encounter either in a weekly or a bi-weekly meeting while reserving more intense moments or longer periods of sharing for scheduled times of the year. There are also cases of Christian and Lasallian communities living in common under the same roof, with a daily rhythm of community prayer and a high level of communication and the sharing of goods, all of which is motivated by the Lasallian mission of education. Oftentimes these faith-based communities are formed within the existing educational communities, or rather side by side with a particular Lasallian educational work, and they offer their cooperation in various ways. But as frequently happens the Lasallian charism causes them to find new needs and provides them with the initiatives to invent new responses and begin new works of education.
- There are also Lasallian Communities formed with the adherents of different religions. It is the mission that unites them, the desire to give a response to the needs of the poor, and that finds them laboring together in the Work of the Lord. Many elements of Lasallian spirituality help them to find meaning to what they are living, even though each one may add the perspective of his or her own faith. For all of them John Baptist de La Salle is a teacher of life and spirituality. This kind of pluri-confessional community for the mission is an example that the Spirit and his presence in our midst are at work through the Lasallian charism, even beyond the limits of the Institutional Church.
- The Lasallian Volunteers: This movement may be described as an experience of temporal association in which the volunteers gratuitously place themselves at the service of the Lasallian mission of education for the duration of at least one year (or a school term). The richness of the experience comes from being lived and accompanied in community while receiving the lights of Lasallian spirituality. This type of experience, besides its own positive aspects, may open the door to a more lasting association either as a religious or a dedicated lay person.
- Mixed communities, formed by Brothers, Lay Educators (married or single) and Volunteers. Usually these communities take shape in order to give a response to the felt needs of the Lasallian mission of education. At times they are joined to a particular school, such as in the case of the San Miguel Schools in the United States. Other times it may mean a community “of insertion”, that is, situated in a social milieu of especial necessity, either in an urban barrio or in a rural area, in order to feel from within the needs related to education and provide effective and global answers.

C) Association being lived in fact and as a sign

- Each of the types of association mentioned above can be formally and officially recognized in the District. The recognition may take the form of some sign, some formula of offering or some promise.

- The Signum Fidei Fraternity: The communities that make up the Signum Fidei Fraternity come under the heading of “Christian Lasallian Communities” which have been previously explained, in all their variety. Their manner of operation, however, is far from uniform, but they do have a common “Life Style”. The Signum Fidei Fraternity is officially associated with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and its communities are integrated into their respective Districts. They are, then, a de facto association, sealed on the part of each member with the sign of the “Signum Fidei Consecration”, with a “Life Style” authorized by the Brother Visitor of the respective District.
- There are numerous “de facto” associates in the Lasallian world, comprised of individuals. However, it is also noted that those who wish to formalize that association are on the increase as they request recognition by the District authorities. The individual commitments to association form a wide spectrum. For example:
 - The associates that are presently inserted in Lasallian ministries, or who even take part in the animation and administration of the District. This is a fairly numerous group.
 - Other associates carry out their work of education on the margins of Lasallian works.
 - There are associates who place themselves at the disposition of the Brother Visitor to be sent wherever they may be needed, according to the plans of the District.

2. Signposts along the way

2.1 Doubts and confusion

- Confusion arising from the way the commitment to the association is understood. For example, in several cases the objective of formation is understood as an “extra” commitment, in place of appreciating the search for meaning and the development of the ordinary commitment to the life of an educator as the priority. On the other hand, many lay persons say that they do not feel capable of taking the step toward an explicit association because they think that their family obligations will not permit them to “dedicate more time” to educational activity.
- Extending the concept of “associate” to all Lasallian collaborators, without taking into account the quality of the commitment and the identification with the Lasallian charism. At times this is done to avoid divisions among the lay collaborators. Other times this indiscriminate extension of the concept is simply a concession made to paternalism, for not believing that the Lasallian Lay Partner will ever be able to live the Lasallian charism in all its richness. And so, all of them are placed at the same low level of responsibility with regard to the Brother.
- Frequently, belonging to the District is confused with belonging to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In this sense, the fact of being officially recognized as an associate in a District, is seen as belonging to the Institute. This confusion is owing, perhaps, to the identification that is made with the District as an organized unit of the Institute, for it is this and nothing more. It would be well to clarify, then, that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools does not increase in numbers with the entrance of lay associates, rather, that the Institute itself becomes part of a broader reality which is a new entity of Lasallian Associates, religious and lay. And the District, besides being an organizational unit of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, grows by means of these other ways of belonging.

2.2 Challenges and pressing needs

- Many Brothers and Lay Persons fear that the formalization of the commitment of association, be it with a sign or by the constitution of a group of associates, supposes a split among Lasallian lay persons, a species of classification. Without denying that this risk exists, it is also necessary to affirm that the charism requires a certain institutionalization in the ecclesial community in order to be recognized, transmitted and continued. But at the same time the charism is not subject to the institution for it can manifest itself in spontaneous forms. A certain tension between these two poles ought to maintain in a District, without breaking with either of them. Those who feel themselves called should be encouraged to make formal their commitment to association with some sign or symbol. At the same time the District should recognize the association of others that are not part of the institution even though they are indeed living their association.
- The scant awareness of “association” on the part of the Brothers of some Districts is a serious obstacle for the development of the process of association with the lay people. Personalism abounds and a sense of belonging to the District is lacking. Where this problem exists it is urgent to work toward the recovery of this dimension of association to the identity of the Brothers, helping them to discover the content of their Vow of Association and to enter into the spirit of association with the Lay partners. In many places it may be very effective to invite the Brothers to make some gesture of association with the Lay Persons with whom they share the mission.
- Among the various forms of being associated, the individual commitments of persons without a group of reference are those that appear to be the most fragile. This is where the collectivity of communities of Brothers in the District must be most attentive so that they can facilitate communion with these people, strengthen the sense of belonging, attend to formation, living the faith, quality relationships and the sense of co-responsibility for the mission.
- In formation and in accompaniment, the variety of situations in the individual processes should be taken into account as much as possible. But in addition, special importance should be given to the make up of communities that can become bearers and transmitters of the Lasallian charism. These communities of Brothers, Associates and Lay Collaborators, by themselves or mixed, will be the pillars that will give consistency to the Lasallian Association.

2.3 The process goes on

- The recognition of a person or of a group as associated means the same thing as recognizing that the Lasallian charism is a work in that person or group. It is not a concession of the charism conferred on them but it is the stamp of approval granted by the ecclesial community though those who represent that charism in the Church. It is also the recognition that the person or group is committed to the mission in solidarity with the other associates, not just individually.
- The persons who associate themselves do so not only with the Brothers but with all those who are at the service of the Lasallian mission. The expression “associated to the Institute” really is not correct. It is preferable to say “associated with the Institute” for the mission. And it is necessary that the Lay Persons understand that they can be associated among themselves, at the same time or even before, their association with the Institute. The formative processes ought to impart the conviction to these persons that they have their voice and their role in the Lasallian charism.

- The five Lasallian characteristics that the General Chapter provided as a measuring stick for the process of Association are applicable in every one of the cultures. They are also broad enough to be applied and adapted in all the various places.
 - o “a vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values;
 - o a life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts;
 - o a community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members;
 - o a mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor;
 - o an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.” (Circular 447, pg. 4)

3. The horizon that can be glimpsed along the path of association

3.1 The new joint enterprise of Lasallian Associates

- The combination of Lasallian associates (Brothers and Sisters, other consecrated persons, Lay Associates) is shaping up as a new ministerial fraternity whose ultimate configuration is the object of all sorts of re-workings and touchings up. The shape of this new reality, made up of the different ecclesial vocations and through the diverse groups of associates has as its purpose the promotion of the communion of the associates in order to serve the mission (the educational service of the poor...) in the best way possible, in fidelity to the Lasallian charism.
- The new configuration must promote solidarity in the shared search and choice of responses to the needs of the mission, co-responsibility in preparation of programs, and subsidiarity in action among all those who share the mission.
- And the charism must be permitted to live in communion with persons of other religious faiths who are recognized as “Lasallians” and in complementarity with them. The interpretation and the application of the charism cannot be the sole responsibility of the Brothers; rather it should be of the entire body of Lasallian Associates.
- This new reality, distinct from the Lasallian Family (which includes all those with some relationship to De La Salle through various connections) and from the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (which includes only the Brothers) needs a name for a convenient reference. The terms “Lasallian Association” or the “Lasallian Society” are complicated in the sense that they are already applied to very different organizations.
- The FSC Institute, because of its historical relationship to Lasallian roots, is responsible for exercising a certain role of leadership within the ensemble of the Lasallian Associates. This leadership is not exclusive, but rather by *proposing* rather than *imposing*, respects the autonomy of the various groups and institutions that make up the Lasallian ensemble. On the other hand, the almost universal extension of the FSC Institute can favor an organizational structure that befits the various Lasallian groups.
- The International Assembly of Association for the Mission of Education, decided by the 43rd General Chapter, to be launched in two phases during 2005 and 2006, will

most probably be an important means to continue the process of sculpting the form of communion among Lasallian Associates.

3.2 The new configuration of the District

- The District tends to be the *frame of reference* where the structures of the new Lasallian ensemble take shape (see Circular 447, p.9). It is called to configure itself as a “community of Lasallian communities.” That was already the case when it was made up of just Brothers’ communities, but now it must take account of a much greater diversity of communities.
- The main objective of the District community is to assure the communion of all its communities in order to serve the education mission more fully within the Lasallian charism (FSC Rule, 124). To do that:
 - o It must guarantee that formation in the Lasallian charism is available to all its members.
 - o It must facilitate human relationships and communion among the communities and members of the communities.
 - o While respecting and autonomy and particular gifts of each institutional Lasallian group, it must seek a coordinated response to the needs of the mission, both in discernment of present works as in the establishment of new works.
 - o It must make sure that all those who are responsible for the guidance of Lasallian educational works, are aware that the educational service to the poor is a fundamental priority (Circ. 447, p. 11).
 - o Based on the above, it must stimulate a sense of belonging among its members: to the District, to the lived Lasallian history, to the ensemble of Lasallian Associates.
- What is here attributed to the District is, in other cases, the work of the Region.
- To the extent that new Lasallian groups are incorporated into the District, structures of animation must adapt to them. Especially:
 - o The Brother Visitor, “*guarantor of the unity and vitality of the District*” (FSC Rule, 132), continues to have authority (Major Superior) with respect to the Brothers; this role is not applicable to the rest of the associates that make up the District. But he must also assume a role of leadership in animating the totality of the District, sharing authority according to the situation, with other Lasallian groups present in the District.
 - o The District Council (FSC Rule, 136), as a canonical entity that guides the Major Superior, must also share or distinguish between its attributions, reserving to itself only those that correspond to its function of representation of the Brothers. It must act in a complementary way with reference to other structures of animation within the District.
 - o The Council for the Mission, where the various groups of Associates are represented, might assume those functions of discernment and decision that formerly were attributed to the District Council. Nevertheless, it must be clear that final decisions about management of each work are the domain of those given the titular responsibility for the work itself.
 - o What is said of the District Council and of the Mission and Ministry Council should also be applied to the District Chapter and the Assembly for the Mission, respectively.