

The dynamics of Association for a Lasallian ministry

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What are the dynamics (or aspects, facets) that would allow one to say that a ministry (school, college, activity) is "Lasallian?"
How does one evaluate and how does one promote these dynamics as regards Association between Brothers and lay colleagues?

1. As it was in the beginning, so it is today:

In the beginning, Lasallian Association set in motion three dynamics, aimed at forming the three pillars of the Lasallian project according to the founding charism:

- a certain style for the educator: a man who lives interiorly (from his spirit) in God's presence; who feels he is a professional and is responsible for and a mediator in the educational process, including being a minister of Jesus Christ and the Church; who dedicates his body and soul to the task of education and who understands his relationship with his students as a fraternal relationship;
- a certain style for the educational community: the community as the foundation and the guarantor of the educational project, community as the teacher of the educators who comprise it, and community as the sign of Christian fraternity by means of the relationships that are established among its members;
- a certain style for the educational ministry itself: tailored to the poor; with a personalized and quality pedagogy which educates in a Christian manner.

It is important to see the relationship that is created among the three pillars, because the intensity of the dynamics depends on that relationship:

- the identity of the educator is developed based on the possibilities that are offered by the educational community and, in turn, the educator's identity conditions the community;
- educators and the educational community determine the style of the educational ministry and in turn they find in it the motivation of the dynamic which transform them both.

The dynamics which Lasallian Association set in motion in the beginning of our history are the same ones which we need to attain today, in very different circumstances:

- We need to have:
- a strong line of action which fosters the educator's vocational life journey;
 - a strong line of action which develops the process of communion among educators;
 - these two lines of action are intertwined like two strands of a single cord, offering each other mutual support; and together they lead to the third line of action, which builds up the educational project according to the Lasallian charism.

2. The first dynamic: the educator's vocational life journey.

The process of Association has as its first objective to help the teachers to traverse their life journeys as educators. And when the times comes to evaluate the process of Association in an educational ministry or within the District, the first questions that should be asked is about the existence of these vocational life journeys, how they are developing, what levels are they reaching, where are the majority of teachers, if there is stagnation or blockage at some level and why this is so, and if there are some educators who might take on a role as "prophet" or "sign" that could serve as a reference point and motivate others to move forward.

The life journey begins with the passage from being a "teacher" to being an "educator." A good teacher reconciles these two facets: that of being a worker or someone who is salaried (concerned about his own well-being and that of his family) and that of being a professional (concerned with doing his job well, with quality instruction). The facet or dimension of the educator begins when the teacher is concerned, above all, with listening to, understanding and responding to each and every student. This is the educator's vocational life journey.

Let us point out some easily identifiable steps in the educator's life journey:

- The needs and problems of the kids, especially the most needy, are a frequent topic of dialogue with other educators.
- He devotes more time and attention to those with the greatest needs.
- The relationship with his students tends to be a fraternal relationship, based on that of an older brother who is responsible for his younger siblings.
- He is interested in keeping up-to-date in his professional training to respond better to the needs of his students. He is happy to accept opportunities that are offered him for formation/training. But he is also interested in training that will prepare him to be a better educator as regards non-academic issues.
- He develops his creativity, he searches for new responses to students' needs.
- He joins with other educators, he collaborates with them and he enriches them, he develops his experience of community.
- He discovers himself as a mediator in the human growth of his students.
- He now discovers his own ministry based on faith and he goes more deeply into Lasallian spirituality.
- He is interested in getting to know about De La Salle and learning from him.
- He begins to develop a conscious sense of Lasallian identity. At this level the educator experiences a sense of belonging. He forms part of the District, he is part of the Lasallian story, he is involved with a more extensive set of persons than that of the educational community where he works.
- The educator is fully in solidarity with other Lasallians, not just in the local environment but also on the District level.

3. The second dynamic: the process of communion for mission.

The second objective of the process of Association, which is intertwined with the first, is the development of communion among the educators, a communion for mission.

- Working among a team is the most basic level, necessary so that the school might function effectively. But it is not enough to make a school Lasallian.
- It is necessary to go more deeply into the level of cordial relationships, which

generates first of all a mutual appreciation and then develops into integration among persons, collaboration, complementarity, and finally achieves solidarity.

- These cordial relationships, this solidarity, translate into co-responsibility for carrying out together the common project.
- In this communion of persons the ministerial community develops when some of the educators live out their vocation as a ministry, that is to say, one that is based on faith. Therefore, the educational ministry is seen as God's work. Faith is shared and celebrated and together they search for God's light and strength to carry out his work.
- The local community feels a part of the District community. Ties with other communities are developed and there is participation in District meetings.
- The ministerial community feels that it bears the Lasallian charism and is responsible for it. It feels the urgency to be formed in everything regarding the Lasallian charism and in passing it on to other educators. Together these persons look for new responses to students' needs.

4. The third dynamic: the Lasallian educational project.

The third objective, certainly not third in order of importance, has to do with the purpose or aim of Association. We find here the fruits by which we will recognize the reality and the reliability of the Association that is happening.

The educational project is the meeting point for the various "actors" of Lasallian Association, associates and partners. It is the result of the vocational life journey of each of them, and the process of communion among them. But it is also the source which gives nourishment to and which motivates the vocational life journey and the process of communion.

When the dynamic of Association is played out in the educational project, the following points are evident:

- the project is the work of a team, where all educators feel that they are in solidarity;
- the project is focused on the persons of the students and their needs, before academic programs or learning materials;
- the project has a clear preference for the poor and abandoned;
- the project fosters creativity in the search for new educational responses in favor of the poor;
- the project sets out to achieve a fraternal, community style in relationships among educators, students and staff;
- the project works hard to be evangelical and it offers accompaniment in the process of discovering and living the faith;
- the project has as its reference point a clear vision of the pedagogy and teaching of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

5. Cross sections of the axes (focal points) of Association.

The dynamics of Association are not activated by themselves. They are triggered by and they make progress thanks to "focal point cross sections." These are like driving forces that set in motion or reawaken these dynamics. They are like steps on a staircase, thanks to which Association can continue to reach new levels. Here are the most typical ones (cf. the report

on "The New Forms of Lasallian Association," presented at the Visitors' meeting in May 2004):

1. **Formation**, carried out systematically and aimed at the various facets of the Lasallian educator's life journey: pedagogical, spiritual, involvement in the Lasallian story (cf. 43rd General Chapter, recommendations 4, 7, and 10).

2. **Personal relationships and shared reflection** of the Brothers with lay colleagues and with lay colleagues among themselves (cf. 43rd General Chapter, propositions 1 and 2 and recommendations 1 and 2).

3. **The experience of communion**, which ought to come first of all in the form of witness and as an offering to be shared, in the Brothers' communities; it ought to be then a source of inspiration to be lived among lay colleagues, in various and appropriate forms (cf. 43rd General Chapter, recommendations 17 and 18).

4. **Participation** in the responsibility for the mission and in leadership structures (cf. 43rd General Chapter, propositions 5 and 6).

5. **The existence of "prophets"**: persons/groups/educational projects that take on a certain "radical nature" in the commitment to or in the process of Association, or who publicly commit themselves as a sign for themselves and for others.

Prophetic witness should be encouraged, without imposing it on everyone. Propose it as a form of service to the community, not as something for the "elite" which leads to separation from others or which is considered as getting ahead of others. Along these lines these could be considered as public commitments of Association.

FOR REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE:

1. What is the reality of each of the five "focal point cross sections" of Association in my District? (plans, means, structures, organization...)

2. How does that reality influence (positively or negatively) the development of each one of the three dynamics of Association in the District at the present time?