

Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of  
the Christian Schools



**CREATIVITY AND  
COURAGE:  
LIVING THE PROMISE OF  
THE 39<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL  
CHAPTER**

*Years*

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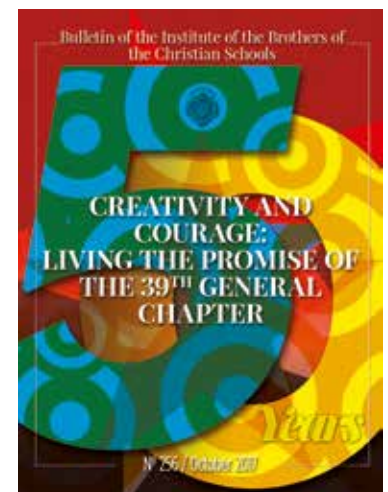
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# **Creativity and Courage: Living the Promise of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

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# Presentation

Three years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, and half a year after the 39th General Chapter, the Generalate offered the Institute an Anthology of the Chapter Texts (Bulletin 194, July 1968). At that time, some of the great protagonists of the Chapter were assuming the most important roles of the new governmental structures of the Institute. Others continued to offer a service of support to the new dynamic of leadership that was barely present at that time throughout the Lasallian world. Many notable names appeared in the Bulletin: Charles Henry Buttmer, Maurice Auguste, Paul Antoine Jourjon, Michel Sauvage, Patrice Marey, José Pablo Basterrechea, Bernard Mérian, André Léon, Ruggero di María, Aubert Joseph, Paul Griéger, Vincent Ayel, Celestine Luke Salm... Each one would offer his contribution during the new intercapitular period and would leave his personal imprint on the entire Institute.

The Catholic Church was experiencing a burst of vitality that made dialogue with the modern world possible. Of course, this conciliar aggiornamento challenged the old paradigms and forced Catholics to leave their comfort zones. The documents of Vatican II were studied with interest, and the new liturgical and pastoral practices demanded the formation of adult Christians to appropriate the Word of God, the official doctrine of the Church and new customs and practices. In Medellín, the Second Conference of the Latin American Bishops launched a powerful message: The Church in the Present Day Transforma-

tion of Latin America in Light of the Council. In the Christian continent par excellence, where there was deep social inequality, it was possible to engage in a pastoral dialogue with the reality of the majority of the population that lived in poverty.

The world of 1968 was also in constant turmoil. The United States of America and the Soviet Union maintained a cold war that put world peace at constant risk. Both military powers tested nuclear weapons and sent probes into space; in that year, the Apollo 8 entered the lunar orbit and increased the likelihood of a lunar landing. The world followed with great concern the Vietnam War and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The May Revolution in Paris and the massacre of the students in the “Plaza de las Tres Culturas” in Mexico City would become symbols for young people who wanted to build a different future: “Prohibited to prohibit”. The XIX Olympic Games in Mexico, the assassination of Martin Luther King and Stanley Kubrick’s film 2001: A Space Odyssey, are also part of the history of that year. Definitely, the planet seemed small; we dreamt about the conquest of space.

By the time Bulletin 194 was published in 1968, the Institute was only beginning to absorb the content of the Declaration on the Brother in the World Today and the final draft of the Rules and Constitutions. The 39th General Chapter chose to nourish its fidelity to the Founder by accepting the challenge of

reading the signs of the times. It was important to show the Brothers the profound changes that were to be expected: a new Christology, a new anthropology, a new ecclesiology, and a new pedagogy were necessary to attend to the needs of the children and young people of the whole world, especially those most disadvantaged because of poverty, war, drugs, or loneliness. Today, almost fifty years later, we are surprised by the immensity of the challenges faced by our Brothers in 1967.

**B**ulletin 256, of October 2017, celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of the 39th General Chapter and the publication of the Declaration on the Brother in the World Today. Brothers and Lasallians representing the present diversity of the Institute were invited to offer their personal and community reflection on some essential themes developed by the 39th General Chapter. Due to other commitments not all were able to contribute. I am grateful to those who have contributed.

**T**he present text begins with a historical look at the last fifty years of the Institute. This framework allows us to address two essential texts: the Rule and Constitutions and the Book of Government that were born in that unrepeatable moment in the history of the Institute. Subsequently, some specific themes are addressed: consecration and vows, asceticism and prayer, community life and Lasallian education. Reflections on the lay character of the Institute and Lasallian women enrich the text with perspectives hardly dreamed of by the Capitulants

of 1967. Finally, the Bulletin closes with a reflection that invites us to draw hope from the radicalism of the Gospel.

**M**any of the articles incorporate questions for personal and community reflection and discussion. Readers are encouraged to bring their own experience and perspective to this important half-century in the Institute's history.

**I** conclude this presentation by recalling the words of Brother Charles Henry, then Superior General:

... this Declaration must contribute to the affirmation in all our hearts an apostolic virtue par excellence: the security of one who feels called by the Lord, sent to people to serve them, and who is aware that the power of the Spirit acts in him to make him a better servant of God and youth. (Bulletin 194, p. 9)

**W**e are celebrating 50 years of a shared journey and the continuing narrative of an Institute that is looking towards the future. May the Lord continue to nourish our hope, Brothers and Lasallians, as we work tirelessly for the glory of God through the apostolic ministry of human and Christian education, we are accompanied fraternally by the prayer and witness of our older Brothers.

*Brother Robert Schieler, FSC  
Brother Superior*

# 50 years have passed, rich in the unforeseen and in grace

*BR. ALAIN HOURY, FSC - LASALLIAN ARCHIVES - LYON, FRANCE*



As members of the Church, the Brothers live in this world and ought to be sensitive to the problems which arise in every period of human history. They share the hopes and anxieties that everyone experiences. The signs of the times alert the Brothers once more to the importance of their mission in today's world, as well as to how urgent it is that they renew their religious life, their apostolic ministry, and their presence among people.

Declaration 8, 1



*EDITORIAL COMMISSION FOR THE  
DECLARATION, 1967*

## Springtime of a new era

**T**he 1966–67 General Chapter was for the Brothers of my generation the first perception of an Institute truly seeking to rewrite its Rule, whereas at the 30 days Retreat of 1963 in preparation for my final profession I had heard the words: “Our rule is no longer adapted but it must be followed because it is our Rule”. The Second Vatican Council was not yet finished and I had followed its stages while doing my studies in theology at the Institut Catholique in Paris.



I participated with enthusiasm and pride with young student Brothers from various countries at the Rue de Sèvres in studying the latest projects of the Rule that were stimulating the yearning to go much further with the “adapted renewal” demanded by the Council.

The *Declaration* was for me the major text: it was opening up a path of conversion in creative fidelity to our origins without reproducing their literalism. I would have wished the Prologue of the Rule would have set the tone for the whole Rule but it did not gather the 2/3 votes required to be included in the

long sessions of the Chapter had involved in a journey, and the ordinary Brothers who had only read the Chapter mail.

## The bitter fruits of the world’s evolution

To some people May 1968 appears to be the reverse image of the world to be constructed. It caused one Assistant to set himself henceforth against the

*“Most Honoured Brother, don’t you find that the change requested by the Chapter is going too fast?”*  
*“Maybe, but we are so far behind that we mustn’t dawdle!”*

Rule. I learned that at the injunction of the Congregation for Religious it had been necessary to elect as soon as possible the Superior and his Assistants before being able to adopt the basic lines of the renovation – and several territorial Assistants found themselves in the small minority that had voted against the major texts of the Chapter. That must have been hard to live within the Superior’s Council.

I still recall Brother Charles Henry passing through the Rue de Sèvres. A Brother of mature years asked him: “Most Honoured Brother, don’t you find that the change requested by the Chapter is going too fast?” “Maybe, but we are so far behind that we mustn’t dawdle!” At the District Retreat moreover I became aware of the gap between a capitulant whom the two

Chapter directions. The agitation arising from the CIL conferences of *Brother Charles Henry Buttimer* and several Brothers in France proclaiming themselves to be “of the strict observance” upset some minds. I recently found the supplement to the history of one community in 1974: “*The future of the Institute being so uncertain we do not believe it honest to propose to young people that they join us.*” Suicidal! At the cross-roads of the school crisis and apostolic commitment in the Church, our Institute found itself frail.

In two day in April, 1975 North Vietnam took control of the South. At a stroke the Vietnamese Brothers lost their works, the right to recruit and their very existence. A formation group of Vietnamese Brothers landed in Paris and continued on to

the USA – what was their future to be? Had they been priests they would still have a certain freedom of action in their country and the wherewithal to feed themselves.

At the 1976 General Chapter the Brother Visitor of Vietnam requested a dispensation for his District but the Chapter maintained the “*exclusively lay character of the Institute*” (Circular 403, 47) and this Brother Visitor left the Institute to become a priest.

## The 1976 Chapter does away with Assistants and launches Regions

This is what the Brothers recall from this Chapter: henceforth a more limited Council will assist the Superior without the Councilors having a territorial responsibility. It would be necessary to set up Regions – this was relatively easy for France which since 1966 formed a single Assistancy and which held a national Chapter in 1968–69 in which I participated. Certain Regions however, such as Africa, had to start from scratch.

In these years, numerous Brothers left the Institute. Novitiates emptied out and closed. I was Director of Novices and could resume teaching for lack of candidates. The comparison of figures was worrying: in 1962 there were 1,291 novices in the Institute – there were 130 on the books in 1978. How were the Brothers to be remobilised? To begin with the Chapter asked the Councillors to publish the texts they had just adopted – with tools for reflection, sharing and prayer. Successive circulars thus appeared designed to facilitate their assimilation. Brother *José Pablo Basterrechea* devoted a pastoral letter to the way in which *The Educational Service of the Poor* was lived in the Institute giving significant examples – a breath of oxygen for everybody.

*“We have discovered in our contact with you that your pedagogy is born of an experience of God. Allow us to share this experience so that we may be able to write our own page in the history of the Institute.”*

Having become Visitor I saw that in a short time the presence of Brothers in our schools would become crucial. At the same time there developed on the part of a certain number of our lay teachers – then our co-workers, not yet “partners” – the request for Lasallian formation. “We have discovered in our contact with you that your pedagogy is born of an experience of God. Allow us to share this experience so that we may be able to write our own page in the history of the Institute.” With time the theme of “Shared Mission” would be taken on board in General Chapters. These Chapters are graces but also observation points of the evolution of the Institute, in addition to the 15 years (1993–2008) that I lived in Rome.

## 1986 and the situation of the Lasallian mission

The 41st Chapter not only prepared the text of the Rule for its definitive approbation by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRIS). There was also need to take decisions regarding the current situation of the Institute. I remember the closing speech of *Brother John Johnston* evoking the places where the Institute was suppressed and what the Brothers of Lebanon had lived in the last twelve years. “*And what is there to say about our Brothers in several countries of Central America, in Sri Lanka, in Northern Ireland, in South Africa?*” (Circular 422, 21).

The Chapter asked each Region to move towards devoting 10% of its Brothers “*to offer service in the regions of the world most in need of their skills and presence*” (id. 6). In 1993 this was to become the “100+” appeal (Circular 435, 27) that was adopted after a particularly rich discussion. The 41st Chapter focussed on all those who are associated with us in our international family. The message to the members of the “Lasallian Family” and the one to the Brothers broached themes that were to undergo extensive development in following Chapters: “Shared Mission”, ageing Districts and Brothers, and the need for a renewed spiritual vitality. Furthermore, faced with acceleration in changes in the world and the Church, General Chapters would take place henceforth every 7 years.

***“to offer service in the regions of the world most in need of their skills and presence”***

# Tuned in to the deepening of the thought of the Church

Without enclosing ourselves in a chronological framework, I can recall here several great texts that helped us enter into a new reading of our mission and of the place of the Brothers in the Church. *Christifideles Laici* (the richness of the lay vocation) and *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school* (1988); *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1976), following the synod on Evangelisation, *Mutuae Relationes* (1978) relations between Religious Superiors and the diocesan Bishop, and *Vita Consecrata* (1996 Religious life and other forms of consecrated life). There were also the themes such as: “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation”: *the Letter to Cardinal Roy* (1971) which deepened *Pacem in Terris*; and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) which prolonged *Populorum Progressio*, warning against merely economic development. We can all recall the texts that have been appearing since 2000 right up to *Laudato Si*’.

The worldwide dimension of the Institute is more than a geographic fact – it is in addition a strong sign of holiness: the beatification in 1989 of Brother Scubilion on Reunion Island, the canonisation of Brother Miguel (1984) and of the many Brothers martyrs of Spain – among them the first Argentinean saint, Brother Benito of Jesus, Hector Valdivieso Saez of the Turon community (1999). The period was also a powerful stimulus for pedagogical research linked with the International

Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in which the Institute participates. The Institute Bulletin on the Noma Prize *Literacy and promotion of culture* (n° 234 April 1991) presents an activity of international scope while that on *Higher Education in our Institute* (n° 236 April 1992) underlines the rapid growth in university student numbers – these end up constituting 1/3 of the direct beneficiaries of the mission of the Institute. *The International Association of Lasallian Universities* (IALU) saw itself more and more called upon to work in liaison with the priorities established by subsequent Chapters, notably the 45th Chapter (Circular 469, 3.20-25).

## Lasallian laypeople invited to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Chapter (1993)

Twenty consultants participated in the early stage of this Chapter dealing with “Shared Mission” which was at the heart of 6 mixed commissions. Later came the International Assemblies of the Lasallian Educational Mission (IAMEL of 2006 and 2013) among whom several members presented the orientations at the 2007 and 2014 Chapters: permanent mission council structures were put in place at all levels. The 42nd Chapter spoke also of the “Rights of the Child” – the Convention of the United Nations having become international law in 1990. This was yet again a recurrent theme – dear to Brother John Johnston – who was to create a foundation for this purpose which was particularly necessary when a migratory crisis without precedent raged and when children were exploited as hostages or soldiers.

The 43rd Chapter (2000) seized upon the question of the demographic imbalance of the Institute – prolongation of life in the more economically developed countries, and the crisis of vocations that affected practically all apostolic congregations and all dioceses while at the same time new movements and congregations were arising in the Church which attracted vocations amongst the young. The future demanded regrouping of Districts and the creation of retirement funds in addition to funds for formation and for missionary cooperation – this multiplying of funds raised questions for some Brothers. It wasn't the Founder's practice and won't it deprive us of the finance needed for the educational service of the poor? The usefulness of such reserves for Darfur or the transfer of the novitiate of Kinshasa would be seen.

The Rule foresaw that 10 delegates to a General Chapter may be nominated by the Brother Superior but this was insufficient to make up for our demographic imbalance. *Brother Álvaro Rodríguez* obtained the power to nominate a sufficient number of young Brothers (less than 40 years of age) as much to have them share in the formative experience that a General Chapter offers as to involve them more in the decisions that concern them first of all. They were 13 at the 44th Chapter (2007) and in July 2013 an international meeting of young Brothers preceded the 45th Chapter (2014) that benefited from their dynamism and propositions.

***“We must offer our support for the refoundation of the Institute for today's realities.”***

This 45th Chapter (2014) practically launched an appeal for a refoundation and it envisaged urgent measures: “We are arriving at a point where some Districts will no longer have Brothers to serve as Visitors or who can animate the Brothers' communities or care for their material needs. In the next few years, the Institute will need a new vision of administration and animation for these Districts.” (Circular 469, 1.23). Meantime the Pastoral Letter of Christmas 2016 of *Brother Robert Schieler: One Call, Many Voices*, passed on to us the conviction of one of our aged Brothers: “We must offer our support for the refoundation of the Institute for today's realities.”

Is there a linking thread for these 50 years? I would say: “*Association for the Educational Service of the Poor, An essential dimension of our lives as Brothers of the Christian Schools*” (id. 2): its aim invites us to open ourselves up together to the unforeseen of God in the world of young people “far from salvation”.





# The strength to walk towards the future

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The charism of the Founder involves institutions only through the mediation of persons. From the beginning, Saint John Baptist de La Salle founded a living community of Brothers with whom he shared his apostolic ideal and who in turn passed on this ideal to their successors. Fidelity to the specific goals of the Founder and to the tradition of the Institute is confided to us as the living persons that we are, and it is as such that we have to carry on the search.

Declaration 7,1

# Introduction

Fifty years ago we, Brothers of the Christian Schools, closed a General Chapter that wished to update and give meaning to our spiritual and apostolic life. The preparation and development of Vatican II had created in the Capitulants and in the whole Institute a series of expectations regarding our identity and our mission as lay religious. The charism of the Holy Founder, the signs of the times, a new ecclesiology ... all these elements allowed the Brothers of the late sixties to understand themselves better encouraged by a dynamism of evolution and research. It was the beginning of a new phase of the Institute.

As young Brothers, when we read the documents of that historical moment, we perceived how much depth was there in the preparation and reflection of the 39th General Chapter. Even today its texts remain inspiring for us. When we read again the *Brother's Declaration in the world today*, the Rules and Constitutions of 1967, we became aware of the need that these Brothers had to respond to the demands of a Church and society in fidelity to the nature of the Institute: The educational service of the poor.

In fact, both documents affirmed the religious and lay character of the Brother, consecrated to God to procure his glory through the explicit announcement of the Gospel through the educational service of children and young people, especially the poor. The members of the Institute had been called to listen to the voice of injustice of peoples who had not yet reached a development in accordance with the dignity of the human person. The Brothers were also sent to understand the concerns of those who were looking for

salvation outside the Gospel. Convinced by the reality they were seeing and impressed by it they understood the Founder's experience and generated a movement towards a radical commitment to human promotion and its evangelization.

Re-reading the Declaration and the Rules and Constitutions written 50 years ago, we have looked into the challenges we have to take up in the second decade of the 21st century:

- The urgency of a deep evaluation of our community life to renew it, reconsidering its objectives, programs and methods, especially those that promote the opening to new social realities.

- The recognition of the purpose of the Institute, which continues to be human and Christian education through the school as a privileged - but not exclusive - mission of the Brother as ambassador of Jesus Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God through the exercise of Ministry of the Word.

- The need to accompany our students in their search for the meaning of life, and the infinite possibilities offered by the school to propose the following of Jesus Christ with the absolute respect of freedom.

- The desire of the Brothers to collaborate with all agents in the educational field, the Church and the various pastoral movements with whom they collaborate.

With all this in mind, it is easy to make a parallel between the above and what we lived as members of the 45th General Chapter, where we manifested our clear intention to read the new signs of the times. Of course, this exercise involves new skills, new sensibilities and new positions before a world that does not stop surprising us.

# The Rule born at the 45th General Chapter

**W**e understand the current Rule, approved by the Holy See in September 2015, as an inspiring and dynamic text that reaffirms the essence of our faith as Brothers; it is an instrument that guides our discipleship with Jesus Christ as lay religious, focusing our consecration in the Holy Trinity. This option is lived from the founding charism and commitment we assume facing the world in the educational service of the poor, as Brothers with the laity, sharing the educational mission. Our option is written with the realism and plurality of an Institute that nurtures diversity. It is the voice of our Brothers, past and present, who say: “This is what we were, this is what we are and this is what God calls us to be in the future.”

***The current Rule, approved by the Holy See in September 2015, as an inspiring and dynamic text that reaffirms the essence of our faith as Brothers; it is an instrument that guides our discipleship with Jesus Christ as lay religious, focusing our consecration in the Holy Trinity.***

**I**ts structure demonstrates the commitment of the vow of association and the deployment of the Lasallian mission as core elements of our identity. It is for us a compass, because we turn to it when we need to direct all our actions and discern the situations we meet on our way. In addition, it connects us with our roots because it is written with the spirit of the Founder and the first Brothers, insisting that we work “together and by association”.

The contemporary realities mentioned in the Rule are illuminated by the belief that our Institute is needed in the world and its answer is rooted in a creative fidelity as disciples of Jesus following the example of the Founder. In addition to renewing our understanding of our mission as a fruit of God's call, our option invites us to live associated, sharing this bond with those who feel committed daily to our charism and wish to offer a continuous response to the needs of children and young people.

We would like to stress that all these needs have an impact on how we imagine the Lasallian community of the future; undoubtedly, it will not be possible to think our educational ministry without a strong sense of association. This experience is at the root of our being Brothers for the children, youth and adults to whom we have been sent and with whom we live day by day our educational service. On the other hand, Pope Francis invites us to recover the freshness of the Gospel, maintaining hope, living joyfully and opening us to an ecclesial diversity that strengthens each one in his own call. We understand that each vocation occupies its specific theological place within the Church and is complementary to the others.

From the 45th General Chapter we have been challenged by the desire to deepen our work as catechists, by strengthening formation and accompaniment throughout our lives as Brothers. We believe in the missionary zeal for evangelization that responds to the educational needs of children and young people, especially the poor. We recognize the technological advances run the risk of addiction but also offer immense possibilities for the apostolate. We encourage the search for financial autonomy and the care of the Brothers in the fragile districts. We

desire a stronger community life coupled with the commitment to the poor and vulnerable and the invitation to go out to the peripheries of the world.

We are strongly challenged by the vocational crisis and the departure of young Brothers from the Institute; the loss of faith, indecision or lack of clarity concerning the associative process that exists in some places. The financial dependence of some Districts and the lack of local initiatives for self-sufficiency is a concern for us; as is the fear of losing the evangelizing character of Lasallian institutions as a witness of faith in the educational world.

The Rule, as a living document, continues to invite us to discern our being Brothers today. It requires from us renewal and change, to deepen our inner, personal and community life. It also claims a careful formation for the Brother who enters the Institute and for the Lasallian committed to education – both aiming at responding to the new demands of society without forgetting the places where we may be sent with a project and a defined mission, ensuring our presence among children and young people. All of this being carried out in an original way of living and proclaiming the Gospel.

## Future prospects

We remember that the Institute and its mission are the work of God and also ours. St. John Baptist de La Salle always trusted in Providence and we must follow his example, but not passively. Just as we say that the Lasallian presence in the world is of great necessity, it is worth remembering the numerous things that remain to be done. Many are the roads that are yet to be discovered. We believe we can do so by:

■ Looking for an integrated and consolidated spirituality: this dimension leads us to understand that what sustains us and gives depth is a unified spirituality. This has been the insistence of Religious Life strongly affirmed by the 44th General Chapter. It is necessary to foster the deepening of our inner life and the urgency to be visible witnesses of fidelity to one another, to our evangelical mission and to the Church. We must remain rooted in our consecration to the Holy Trinity and lived faithfully, regardless of our age or ability to participate directly in the educational apostolate.

■ To promote and allow adequate changes: The direction the Institute should take in the future starts with the promotion of initiatives for a renewed religious life that answers to the needs of the poor, rejecting routine and going against the current. Keeping faith and hope in these critical times, being leaders to guide and accompany those entrusted to us. We are in an era that needs evangelization from innovation and creativity to understanding the power of evangelistic leadership and seeking to be a fraternal presence among ourselves, lay and young people alike.

■ To foster the different Lasallian vocations as complementary to one another: we must believe that our vocation as Brothers continues to be relevant and that living it authentically will inspire others to respond to God's call according to our style of life. On the other hand, differences reinforce different ways of Christian discipleship and the unfolding of the mission, inviting us to give more responsibilities to the laity respecting the identity of each person according to the choices made for the good of many.

■ To promote new presences in the world: it is vitally important to place ourselves in the Institute today and prioritize new long-term responses. It is good to ask ourselves how we want the Institute to be in a few years and how it will carry out its mission. It is urgent to give our answers after reaching important agreements. The Institute must take risks in new scenarios; it is called to reinvent itself with us, seeing where and who needs us, with itinerant communities, in schools making real the metaphor of "going beyond the frontier".

■ Creating a culture of vocations and knowing how to accompany them: it seems that the current formative itineraries throw us into the adventure of accompaniment in a vocational perspective. Pastoral care is one of our characteristics, but good intentions are not enough. It takes trained people who can guide others and lead them to places where they could not reach by themselves. In this way we would be promoting the discipleship of Jesus in the style of La Salle in many contexts.

■ To examine more closely the realities in the ministry of education and evangelization: we need to learn again how to listen to the signs of the times within a conflicting communicational environment. Therefore, it will be important for us to properly use technology as one of our privileged means and thus maintain contact with the world, allowing us to reach beyond the borders, a greater number of children, youth and adults with an evangelizing message.



# We are moving towards the future

**W**e trust that the future of the Institute will be brilliant. Our commitment to the educational mission lived with a spirit of faith and in community, will continue to answer the needs of children and young people, especially the poor. Based on our experience at the 45th General Chapter, our fragility will be a source of hope. We must recognize it and at the same time be prepared to respond with courage to the demands that are emerging in the world.

**T**he example of perseverance of our Founder when he retook the leadership of the Institute after a period of crisis should guide us to continue saying “yes” to the work of the Lord. Therefore, we believe that the Institute should encourage the continuation of a community life where fraternity, prayer and simplicity of life are authentically lived, encouraging the Brothers who can engage directly in the educational apostolate to respond to the call of “going beyond the borders”, provoking the educative boldness of the Gospel.

**A**s young Brothers we have inherited a priceless history that is fertile for our own spirituality and in the educational ministry that is carried out today. What is happening in the Institute makes us participate in the construction of its evolutionary process and invites us to update our minds about who we are, not only in social networks but also in our surroundings, as religious and educators, called to procure the glory of God and listening to the voices that cry out for our evangelizing service.

***We trust that the future of the Institute will be brilliant. Our commitment to the educational mission lived with a spirit of faith and in community, will continue to answer the needs of children and young people, especially the poor.***

# New responses to new situations

*BR. FABIO CORONADO PADILLA, F.S.C. - BR. ISRAEL JOSÉ NERY, F.S.C. - BR. PAULO PETRY, F.S.C.  
LATIN AMERICAN LASALLIAN REGION (RELAL)*



*BROTHER SUPERIOR GENERAL NICET-JOSEPH AND HIS COUNCIL IN A PHOTOGRAPH PRIOR TO THE 39TH  
GENERAL CHAPTER WHICH WAS CONVENED IN 1966.*

While the General Chapter wants to maintain the cohesiveness and specific nature of the Institute in fidelity to its origins, it affirms also the interior liberty of each Brother and the benefits that come from different charisms. Unity is not to be found in uniformity, but in harmonious complementarity, according to the words of St. Paul, “There is a diversity of gifts, but it is the same Spirit,” and again, “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (I Cor 12, 4-7)

Declaration 14,4

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

**F**ifty years later, the guidelines established in the “Book of Government” – namely the document issued by the 39th General Chapter – for the Government of the Institute and Formation have already become a living reality in the Brothers’ daily lives. Furthermore, they have been adjusted, improved, and enriched over the years. On the whole, they are the heritage and legacy passed on by those who came before us, who were marked with the sign of faith and dreamed about a new and distinctive Lasallian Religious Life.

**W**e, the Brothers of 2017, are the witnesses that everything that was written in the guidelines was prophetic and visionary and that, with their progressive implementation, they gave rise to an up-to-date and renewed way of living the Lasallian charism, which constitutes our customary way of being Brothers today. We, the Brothers of the second decade of the 21st century, are the result of those 50 years of continuous transformations in the government and formation of the Institute.

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<sup>1</sup> We present our considerations starting from the reading of pages 41-45 of the Bulletin de l’Institut, N° 194 (French version), July 1968, concerning the Minutes of the 39th General Chapter which took place in two sessions, one in 1966 and the other in 1967. It was the Chapter devoted to the renewal of the Institute in the light of Vatican II (1962-1965), as requested by the conciliar Decree *Perfectæ caritatis*. These pages of Bulletin No. 194 tackle two different issues. The first one concerns the Book of Government, the second one refers to the stages of formation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: postulancy, novitiate, scholasticate, and continuous formation. As was highlighted by the title “Book of Government”, the format leads to the understanding that the topics concerning the Stages of Formation are part of this book. From our current standpoint, it would have been correct to also emphasise the topic of “Étapes de la Formation Religieuse”, as well as the title of Book of Government”.

## Between two historical periods

As Brothers, we should be aware that we are between two periods: one that has already ended and a new one that is just beginning. In the last fifty years, the global Institute has risen up to the calls and challenges of the *modern world*. Thanks to the upgrading and updating of its habits and customs, it has progressively given rise to a new way of being Lasallian, namely the one that we currently have. Nevertheless, the emerging *contemporary transmodern* world is calling upon us. In this world, concurrence and caring exchange between cultures – some of which are thousands of years old, others more recent – is occurring. There, the aim is to build a fairer and more equitable society, without wars or colonialisms of any kind, starting from mutual respect and a critical exchange of traditions, knowledge as well as cultural and scientific heritage. Therefore, new generations, new entities, and new world scenarios are calling upon us, challenging us to continue setting a new stage of Lasallian Religious Life, starting from what has already been achieved

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# The change that occurred

The renewal experienced within the Institute and by the Brothers in the last fifty years caused a change in paradigm, a shift from an infantilising (completely dependent) Religious Life to an adult (responsibly autonomous) Religious Life. In other words, a change in the model that shaped our lives, a shift from a “dependence” model to an “interdependence” model, which is subsidiary and co-responsible, both in government and formation. We might emphasize the following – inter alia – as their most salient features:

## *On the Institute’s Government:*

The theologian and Lasallian scholar Brother Michel Sauvage, made an excellent decision when he provided the theological-pastoral foundation for the delicate issue of “authority”, in accordance with the progress made by theology in that particular moment in history, namely the 1960s, emphasising the sense of authority starting from the Holy Trinity and, subsequently, of the Church and the Institute of Brothers of the Christian Schools. Nevertheless, within the context of that time, authority was predominantly if not exclusively seen as power of command, control, hierarchy, doctrine, discipline, and order. Reviewing the last 50 years, we noticed that we moved:

*From centralised government to decentralised government:* authority was closely linked with the Superior General, the Assistants, the Visitors, and the Directors. Authority was vertical and was administered from the centre to the periphery, without any major role played by the grassroots. Hence the shift

towards Brothers at all levels taking personal and collective responsibility in the destiny of the Institute;

*From authoritarian government to collegiate government:* only those who held leadership positions – often coercively – played a major role, concentrating legislative and executive power in their hands. This led to exercising participatory and collaborative power and decision-making. Government of legislative power is passed on to General Chapters and District Chapters. Executive power goes to the Superior General with a major role played by the General Council, to the Visitor, with the help of the District Council and the Mission Council, and to the Community Director, with the support of the Brothers who are members of each fraternity;

*From bureaucratic government to charismatic-entrepreneurial government:* if what prevailed was oversight for compliance with the standards and the Rule, there is a shift towards oversight for risk, i.e. for the discernment of the signs of the times and places of the body of society in its global, regional, district, and/or community here and now. The culture of projects appears as a strategy: personal project, community project, educational project, community budget...;

Times have changed and theology has progressed. With reference to Authority, starting from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, changes occurred also in terms of the Trinitarian approach. Authority is increasingly understood as a form of sharing and service (the washing of the feet), but it also has to do with ability to coordinate gifts, charisms, talents, co-existence, and tasks for the growth of the people, the community, the Church, the Institute, and the efficacy of the mission assumed by Brothers and Laity in the spirit of the Association.



Therefore, over and above highlighting the richness of Brother Michel Sauvage's considerations, within the context of that time (the 60s) it is crucial to emphasise another approach to the topic of Authority in Christianity and, of course, in the Catholic Church and the Institutes of Consecrated Life – of which our Institute is part – i.e. Authority as service.

There is one point that Brother Michel Sauvage briefly touched upon, and that it would be good to recall, as it is essential these days: the principle and practice of subsidiarity. Faced with dangerous trends of concentration of power in the hands of the established authority with increasingly severe restrictions to the importance of the local community, and community participation in decision-making, the principle of subsidiarity should also cover the acknowledgement and the increasingly important role to be played by the participation of lay people in our educational charism.

### *On the Formation of Brothers:*

At the time of the 39th General Chapter, the scope and content of the expression “Religious Formation” was limited and applied with particular reference to Consecrated Religious Life. However, the world, the Church, and the religious congregations have changed. As a result, at present and for the future, it is important to consider that the term “Religious Formation” has acquired a wider sense, different from the one it had in the 60s. At that time, the expression was limited to the “formation of the La Salle Religious Brothers”. Today, one must recognise that formation cannot be disconnected from community life and the educational mission, which is carried out “together and by association”, between Brothers and Laity; a set of joint formative processes and plans are created for this purpose.

In the 60s, when a young man was presented to become a La Salle Brother, one started from the assumption that “the family, the school, and the Church” had provided basic formation to this young man, in the human, Christian, civic, and ecclesial sense. At present, with all the changes that have occurred in the families, at school, in the Church, and in the world, we often have to offer to the candidates for religious life a predominantly human, Christian, and ecclesial formation before we put them into the typical formative processes of La Salle Brothers. Without these bases, continuous formation will be doomed to failure. The option for the following of Jesus Christ, as a La Salle Brother, requires the formation of the human being as a whole, in all its dimensions: a human, Christian, and ecclesial formation. Looking at our recent history, we can see the path along which we moved:

*From globalised formation to inculturated formation:* from a universal concept of formation ruled from the centre of the Institute, a concept of formation emerges that is included in the regions, in each country and situation, created by and for the Brothers of each portion of the Institute. This is referred to as district formation projects.

*From formation made available to the masses to personalised formation:* from providing the same common formation to everybody, the centrality of the person appears as the main character of its own formation. Therefore, there is a shift from formation models to formation approaches and plans.

*From formation for consistency and holiness to formation for human growth and maturity:* an ideal formation that led to mirroring in one's life what the Rule said about the search for perfection in holiness, to formation horizons where what counts is first of all

the best processes and practices for the development of personality within a continuous lifelong process. Therefore, this is referred to as a 'formation journey.' The work is carried out with narrative identity.

*From a self-taught formation to a university vocational formation:* it was not enough for each Brother to go through his own intellectual and scientific development pathway, the world of education required university degrees. Hence, the Brothers who studied on their own or only in houses of formation, enter into university campuses and follow careers in all the areas of knowledge. Experience taught that in basic formation priority must be given to biblical, theological, catechetical-pastoral, and pedagogical studies, and the remaining scientific areas should be tackled at a later stage.

*From just an initial formation to a continuous formation:* immersed in a constantly changing world, it was not possible to provide formation the way it had been done throughout the decades, once and for all. Throughout our lives, permanent apprenticeship, continuous updating, relentless recycling are required. A formation that is now continuous takes the lead. To achieve this goal, courses, workshops, meetings at the regional and Institute level are organised. The International Lasallian Centre (CIL) has played an unparalleled major role. The necessary formation for the total growth of the person, in all aspects of life, is taken into consideration. It is not enough to simply favour one aspect of formation, whether religious or professional. The aim is to guarantee and value the com-

munity dimension of our Consecrated Life, beyond personal projects and personal promotion.

*From formation focused on Brothers as the sole protagonists of the mission to formation aimed at being leaders of communities with an apostolic spirit:* The Book of Government of the 39th General Chapter did not manage to see the future of this feature, either. However, the dynamics it proposed would allow to converge into it later on. Therefore, formation thought only for

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Brothers shifts towards the qualification of all the members of the charismatic family, in their sense of belonging, leadership, and mission. Classic formation programs for Brothers in their aspects of consecrated lay life are consolidated, and formation programs for Brothers and Laity appear within the sphere of the shared educational mission.

## **Review of a period**

Against this background, a spontaneous sense of gratitude to all the Brothers of the 39th General Chapter arises. With their risk-taking and innovative capabilities, they laid down the foundations for a better future, which we currently enjoy, a new Lasallian Religious Life that responded to a new world that emerged. However, one should not forget that the profound transformation of the being and functioning of a Congregation like ours comes with shadows and limitations along its path. We can review at least two elements that had profound echoes in this history, which were not always positive.

The first one arose owing to the necessary impetus in eliminating the dependence model that had been so deeply rooted over the decades. A patronising and infantilising model that has luckily been removed and nobody would dare to revive it today. Nevertheless, this process generated within the Institute a whole stream of individualism as well as self-centred and narcissistic searching for self-fulfilment. The communities became federations of independent individuals, Districts became federations of independent communities and the Institute became a federation of independent sectors. The right to decide how to live, where to live, and what type of service to provide prevailed over the perennial values of the whole Lasallian Consecrated Life. Our communities and Districts became safe havens for self-centred individuals. It was not easy to restore a balance of personal, community, and institutional aspects.

The second element appeared as a consequence of the above. Decentralisation deteriorated until it practically turned the Institute into an archipelago of islands without the relationships and interactions that are typical of a globalised international Congregation. The centre of the Institute in Rome weakened and lost its leadership, the Districts and the local communities strengthened, but became disconnected from one another, and lost the sense of

Region. It was not easy to restore a harmonious new style of overall collaboration without the stifling Roman centralism, but also without the total independence which dispersed the efforts. At last, a new era had dawned.

## A new life is born

Looking at the future, we no longer are what we were, but we are not satisfied with what we are, either. We have succeeded in outlining and living an adult and interdependent Lasallian Religious Life.

However, we found a new era along the way, very different from the previous one, which invites us to rethink and reinvent our Lasallian charism. We have a wonderful symbolic capital, made of new formation and government practices that proved to be effective and enable us to proceed steadily towards different pathways. Our identity is clearer and more precise than ever. We keep on examining and building a community spirituality

full of mysticism, prophecy, and hope. Our fraternities, although numerically small, have enabled us to live in a more evangelical way and share our life and mission with countless Lasallian lay people who are enthusiastic about St. John Baptist de La Salle's spirituality and pedagogy.

***Against this background, a spontaneous sense of gratitude to all the Brothers of the 39th General Chapter arises. With their risk-taking and innovation capabilities, they laid down the foundations for a better future, which we currently enjoy.***



### *What will future government be like?*

**W**e do not know. We can only dare say that it will continue with the best practices that we have inherited as collective construction of the last five decades, where Lasallian global leadership and animation will continue to be carried out within the Institute, in close connection with the Regions and the Districts.

**A** collaborative, interdependent government, in constant contact with Brothers, laity and all those people of good will who partake in the different educational charisms within the Church. An increasingly networked government at the regional, international, intercultural, inter-institutional and inter-congregational level.

## *What will future formation be like?*

**W**e do not know that, either. There have always been new generations, they follow one another over time without interruption. As a result, elderly people, adults, young people, and children live in the same period, the new generations with which they are completing their life cycle.

**T**he course of history has been marked by a constant alternating or intermingling of generational clashes and intergenerational dialogue. Within these historical dynamics, formation achieves one of its most important goals, namely being a bridge, a connection between those who begin their pathway of Lasallian religious life and those who are in the middle of it or those who are reaching its conclusion. It is all about sharing experiences, expertise, knowledge, an exchange of world views, values, and cultural traditions.

**W**e envisage formation to integrate the best from the past with the new, formation based on trust and testimony, a living environment to prepare for transparency, solidarity, community life, shared mission, competence, and leadership formation that is closer and closer to God, more in solidarity with the poor, in inter-charismatic and inter-congregational communities, open to new frontiers.







# Let us revive the fire of our lamps

*BR. SYLVAIN CONSIMBO, FSC. - DIRECTOR OF THE NOVITIATE OF BOBO DIOULASSO*

*BR. ESTEBAN DE VEGA, FSC. - DIRECTOR OF THE NOVITIATE OF MADRID*

*BR. VINCENT FERNANDEZ, FSC. - DIRECTOR OF THE NOVITIATE OF LIPA*

*BR. THOMAS JOHNSON, FSC. - DIRECTOR OF THE NOVITIATE OF CHICAGO*

*BR. ARNO LUNKES, FSC. - DIRECTOR OF THE NOVITIATE OF PORTO ALEGRE*

Programs for the training of the Brothers, however excellent they may be, can never dispense with the responsibility which each Brother has for his own formation. The achievement of a personal vocation is the life-long task of every individual through fidelity to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit. All true formation is a personal discipline which involves frequent moments of self-study, constant readiness to examine and accept new ideas and the rejection of any complacent reliance on a purely mechanical technique. This spirit is the essential condition for the authentic growth and development of a human person.

Declaration 15,2

## Introduction

In a time of great transitions, the 39th General Chapter discerned the ways of renewal that the Institute needed to better respond to the joys, hopes, challenges and crises of the contemporary world. Even in the midst of difficulties, the Chapter inspired a spirit of constant renewal. This spirit has led us to look every day at the needs of children and young people far from salvation and to rekindle the fire in our lamps in order to illuminate the path we walk with them. The questions that inspired that renewal can also help us today: What is the meaning of religious consecration in the world today? Why do we continue as religious Brothers today? What is the purpose of Brothers today? What are we telling the world? Is our life and message really significant for today's people?

The authors of this article, all working directly in the formation of Brothers, would like to encourage all Lasallians to become aware of the journey they have travelled over the past 50 years. We want to contribute to this movement of renewal based on our baptismal and religious consecration in order to seek together the Will of God as the best possible response to the educational needs of children, young people and adults. So as to organize our response we present first, the central points arising from the 39th General Chapter concerning consecration and vows; second, the way in which these ideas have developed during the last 50 years; third, the centrality of the faith that animates our consecration; and finally: the challenges that we perceive for the immediate future.

## What quality of lamp and oil are we using?

The 39th General Chapter helped us to realize the quality of our own consecration as Brothers. The documents of this Chapter, particularly the Declaration, challenged us to seek a living synthesis of all aspects of our vocation. Three aspects of this integration, among others, seem central to the Declaration: the baptismal roots of our consecration, the integration of the constituent elements, and the unity of the vows in consecration. Perhaps from today's perspective, such ideas seem obvious, but these were the foundations for an adventure of renewal that continues even today.

Harmony and the living synthesis between the various dimensions of our vocation is undoubtedly a special richness that gives unity to the consecrated life of the Brother and avoids any dichotomy - no more divisions between life of prayer and apostolic life. St. John Baptist de La Salle did not live this dichotomy and warned us seriously against it. The exercise of the mission is an expression of the consecration and an encouragement to live our commitment. Mission makes consecration the occasion for listening to the Word of God, which, in turn, enlightens and promotes the vowed commitment. Community life is at the same time a mediation of the consecration and a missionary proclamation of the love that God desires for humanity in Jesus Christ, "that they may all be one for the world to believe."

This integration is also manifested in the continuity and specific relationship that consecration has with regard to baptism. All Christians have, through baptism, an apostolate that has its origin in the mission that the Son receives from the Father. Baptism is not only associated with original sin but with our calling to be disciples and apostles. The earlier notion of consecrated life as a state of perfection separated from the “world” for personal salvation has been changed by the notion of consecration for mission, availability for the people of God and immersion in the world as witnesses. Religious life, like the Church itself, is understood as mission. One’s being is mission.

Finally, unity is also manifested in the relationship between consecration and the vows. Consecration is expressed in the vows more as a unit than in each separate vow. In fact, the vows are not practical instruments for achieving something, to make the life of consecration profitable, but as a whole, they are a manifestation of the love of God who consecrates and who counts on us. In this way of thinking, consecration gives unity and meaning to all the commitments it inspires.

The Declaration was the result of a process of reflection, dialogue and discernment that allowed Brothers from all over the world to identify themselves in its calls for personal and community renewal. However, it was not primarily a point of arrival, but a starting point. The answers given by the Declaration gave room for new questions.

## “The oil of the vessel shall not be exhausted” (1Ki 17,14)

After the 39th General Chapter, renewal was not a smooth process. We lived a period of conflict and reaction that resulted in the loss of many Brothers, the diminution of new vocations to the Brothers, and the growth in sharing the mission and charism with others. At the beginning, the very diverse reactions of the Brothers were evolving towards a polarization between two extreme positions in the Institute: those who wanted renewal, change and insertion into the world, and those who wanted to maintain practices and traditional understandings of religious life. The first were enthusiastic, sometimes with false expectations, or looking at the changes without dealing with the concrete needs or strategies to assume them. The second felt threatened by the post-Conciliar changes and sought to return or, at least, not to remove anything without ensuring a structure replaced it. One of the consequences of these dramatic changes in many Brothers was an exaggerated empha-

sis on self-realization and individualism as a reaction to the previously enforced uniformity. Many other Brothers felt there was loss of unity and brotherhood, and that the “common life”, characterized by many traditional community practices, was weakened. An example of these conflicts at the level of Institute is the report submitted by the Commission “Consecration and Vows” in 1975 and the rejection by the 40th General Chapter of that report the following year.

**A**t the same time that we were living these conflicts, we were beginning to rediscover the original notion of Lasallian Association thanks to the work of Michel Sauvage and other Lasallian researchers. Twenty years and two General Chapters later, we retrieved the pronunciation of the vow of Association and little by little this vow helped us describe our original and distinct vocation as partners with each other, in community, motivated by faith and consecrated to the mission of providing a human and Christian education to the young people, especially the poor.

**T**he Declaration did not mention the vow of Association, it is true, but the central points raised therein were the seeds of the idea that, for the Brother, the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience are unified in the vow of association. From being only a specific vow it became an umbrella that encompasses all the vows and gives them a different meaning, particular and proper to us. This vow helps us to deepen the awareness of our unique identity within the Church. In our origins, association was the concrete way of living our consecration to God for the mission - all the rest came to us as an addition.

**T**oday the Rule presents to us our consecration with a single charismatic dynamism that expresses our specificity and unity through the vow of Association for the Educational Service of the poor along with the vow of Stability. The vows of obedience, chastity and poverty complete the sequence, identifying ourselves with all other religious. Certainly in the future we will continue to reflect on our own consecration so that we may find an even more consistent manner of expressing it through the vows.

**T**he movement of reflection in these 50 years has given continuity and newness to the ideas of the Declaration. Its fruits are not just for us. Many of its inspirations are reflected in the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life: “Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church”. It has taken us a long time, but we can already find signs of a better balance

***Today the Rule presents to us our consecration with a single charismatic dynamism that expresses our specificity and unity through the vow of Association for the Educational Service of the poor along with the vow of Stability.***



who wanted change and those who wanted to maintain traditional practices of religious life. We have appreciated the act of sharing the mission and inviting many laypersons to share it. Many of them have assumed this mission in which we work together for the sake of young people, not just as a job but as an attitude of life and a vocation. And to the extent that they delve into this dimension, they enrich the experience of our own vocation in a real communion of identities that are complemented by the mission. In this long journey that is ongoing, the centrality of faith has been our point of reference. The Gospel of Jesus remains there directing us towards each one of our neighbors.

## “Let your light shine” (Mt 5.16)

John Baptist de La Salle made clear to his Brothers the centrality of faith. This insight of the Founder is even more significant in the current context, in which we run the serious risk of transforming faith in the God who has revealed himself to us into an exercise in the fabrication of God himself. The central experience of Jesus is what motivated the work of La Salle and what sustains our life.

“Let us open ourselves” to the light of Christ, because our light comes from Christ, Eternal Light. We shine not by ourselves but by the mystery of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and His pledge of quality and fertility in our consecrated life and our mission at the personal, community and Institute levels. Opening ourselves to God so as to be filled with his light is the enduring challenge we face as Christians and as religious. This challenge will be greater in a world that offers humanity everything to distract and fill up eyes, heads and hearts.

“Opening ourselves up” allows us to look with greater clarity and breadth at what has happened to our surroundings and where we are going. In these fifty years there have been many changes, transitions, and disturbing situations that affect our contexts. We, as Brothers, have tried by many means to find the meaning of these changes so as to read the “signs of the times” better and make our works proactive,



responsible, relevant and effective. Despite real difficulties, let us thank God for awakening in us a concern to respond from our lives to the reality that is challenging us. At the present time, there is a growing interest in basing our identity and initiatives on the perspective of the Founder and the first Brothers. In Circular 466, “They Will Call Themselves Brothers”, we have been given an account of who we are, and what we need to be and do in our works, and in our constantly changing world. We are invited and challenged to keep our feet on the ground so that we can dialogue with the world, without seeking to isolate or protect ourselves from it, but not yielding or giving up our standards and values in the face of it. This dialogue needs to be rooted in our Lasallian tradition of faith and zeal, leaving us to affect the realities of the ever-changing and evolving world.

## “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2,5)

**W**ithout knowing the future or wanting to make predictions, let us consider three areas to which we must pay special attention, because they present an impressive potential for renewal, insofar as we accept the proposed challenges.

**F**irst, we are seeing a smaller proportion of Brothers in the mission. We could say that we are passing from numerical visibility to the visibility of the yeast. The Institute continues to experience a decrease in vocations to the Brothers and a decrease in the number of active Brothers. This reality challenges each of us to live more authentically as witnesses for our students and other Lasallians. This decline is offering us the opportunity to deepen our sense of mission and presence in our institutions in order to be more effective, reaching beyond our self-imposed barriers. But it also offers the challenge of the formation of our Brothers and Lay Lasallians. If we do not do it effectively with the help of the Spirit, the depth of our Lasallian spirituality could disappear making it an empty inheritance or a brand name.

**S**econdly, we are seeing a more unified and integrated understanding of our vocation. The opportunity presented to us is an invitation to have a deep spiritual life that profoundly inspires our community life, our mission and our witness. The challenge is to maintain a spiritual life that is nurtured by the current reality and the response of the apostolic community. This will be more difficult, but also more necessary, in sectors that have a higher proportion of Brothers who are growing older.

Third, we are seeing new ways of responding to the poor in all senses of the word “poor”. We are developing our creativity and putting into practice association with the laity for reaching those who need us most. The challenge is to achieve a balance between our Districts and institutions in circumstances in which some Districts and poorer institutions are struggling to survive while others with more resources are serving a more secure population. If we do not face this challenge we could easily fall into the situation of having schools only for those who can afford them.

To these three challenges there is added another that has to do with the whole of our life and which involves conversion. This conversion is only possible with a deep desire for renewal, training along with a committed outlook. We will be juggling the future and the life of the charism in formation - not only intellectual formation, but a formation that allows for understanding all of life as a permanent process of conversion to the will of the Father. We must do this in communion and co-responsibility in a process that can and must be lived with other Brothers and Lasallians. And it costs us to make it real. We have experienced situations where the personal has prevailed over the community, and the community has not had either authority or strength to enlarge each Brother’s life and capacity for service and response, in a process of continuous creative fidelity.

*We could say  
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numerical  
visibility to the  
visibility of the  
yeast.*

New generations are coming looking for fraternal life, a real-life community response to the call of a mission that requires all of one’s life. They are seeking this vocation with all the fragility and inconsistency of spirits that are part of being young and idealistic, but they also discern with honesty. We have to help them to live in love of great causes and good projects; without however being limited to causes and projects. We must encourage them to drink from the wellspring of the Spirit; because if they do not drink from this wellspring and do not help us do so in community, life dries up and the heart ends up having no root. Whoever is nourished by the wellspring will enjoy a strength that will not depend on his own resources alone, because “he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, which extends its roots to the current; it shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves will be green; in year of drought it is not distressed, nor cease to bear fruit” (Jr 17.8). If it is the Lord who sustains us, to whom we raise our eyes, our life will enjoy endless vitality, our being and doing will know a profound unity, and we will bear much fruit.





*SYMPOSIUM OF LASALLIAN WOMEN, MAY 2017- SALTILLO, MEXICO.*

# Lasallian women: past and present

*DR. ROXANNE EUBANK*  
*SAIN'T MARY'S UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA*

The renewal of the school calls for teachers who are prepared to meet the needs of modern man. “But the teachers realize that to the greatest possible extent they determine whether the Catholic school can bring its goals and undertakings to fruition” (GEM, 8). An Institute committed to the education of the youth of the world will contribute to the renewal of the school only to the degree that it emphasizes and develops the value of the teacher’s vocation.

Declaration, 48, 1

# Introduction

At the 39th General Chapter in 1967, there was little mention of past, current or future roles of women in Lasallian ministries. The chapter documents state that the Brothers, from that point forward, could now run co-ed schools and teach in co-ed classrooms. Significant though this change was it did not herald the beginning of women providing support for Lasallian education. In fact, women are present throughout the founding story – not as teachers or students – but in many other influential roles.

Trish Carroll, a Lasallian from the PARC region, reminds us that, quite understandably, Brothers wrote Lasallian history for Brothers. The focus was on their own evolution. Of course, this makes sense. There is no reason they could have foreseen the diversity of modern Lasallian Schools. It is important that we do not rewrite history but add to it. The study of Lasallian women does not change our shared history, but it does indeed provide another window into how the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools came to be.

Carroll was one of the first people to do serious inquiry into this topic. She presented her research at the first Lasallian Women's Retreat sponsored by PARC and held in Thailand in 2012. At that retreat, she presented her work on two very important topics:

*Our girls need to know about these women as a historic touchstone. Our boys need to see how women contribute to the educational project.*

First, she provided a window into the world of De La Salle and the women who supported him and the early teachers in their work.

Second, she discussed association between male and female religious figures in 17th Century France that provide a historic perspective on association for mission between men and women.

Another Lasallian Women's Retreat was held in ARELAN in 2014. In 2017, there were retreats for Lasallian women planned in New Zealand and Mexico. There seems to be a great interest in the Lasal-

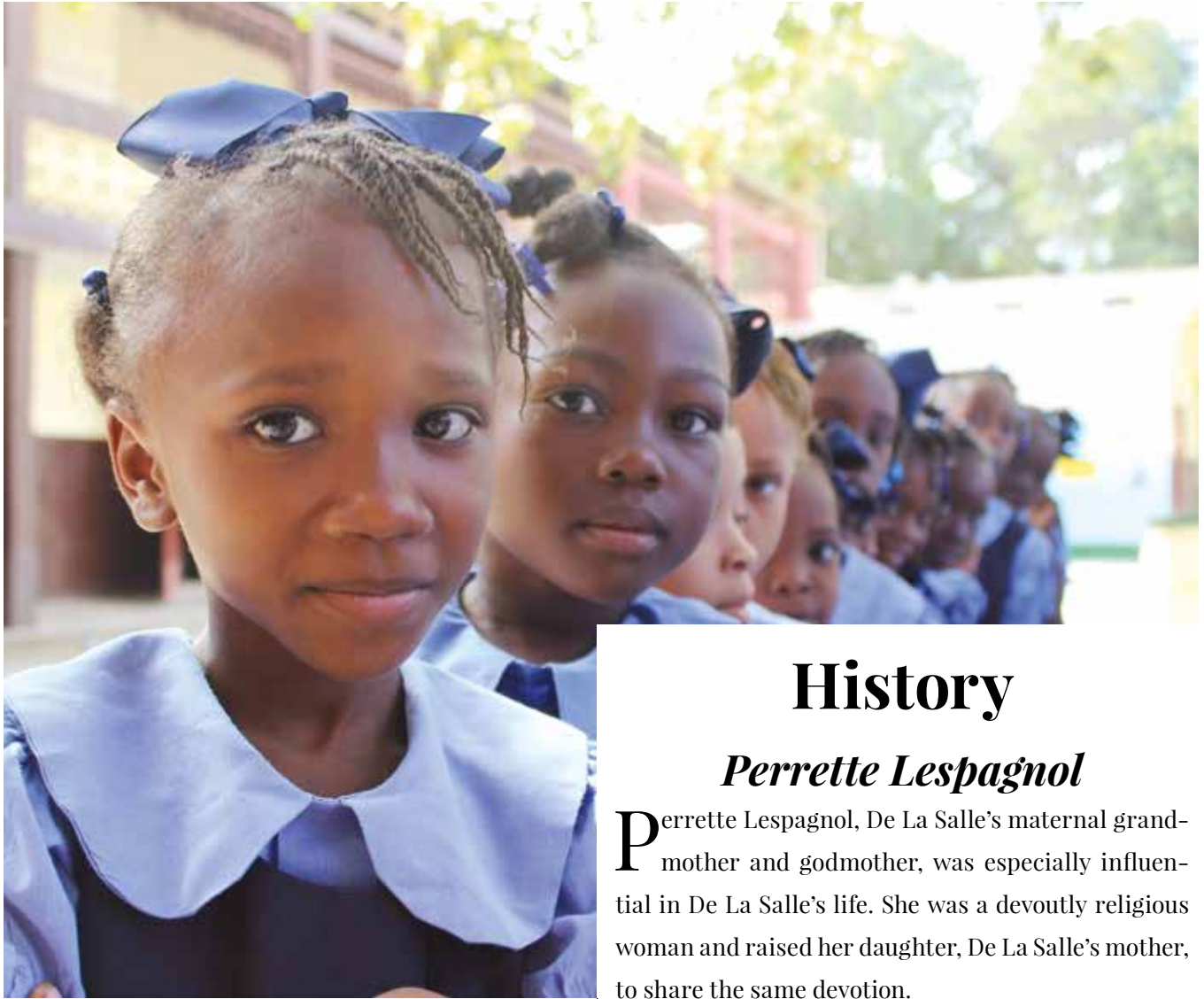
lian network to understand the roles of women from the founding story to today.

Interest in the roles of women in the continued evolution of Lasallian education arises from many areas of consideration. Certainly, chief among these is the necessity of providing Lasallian female role models for all students and teachers. Our girls need to know about these women as a historic touchstone. Our boys need to see how women contribute to the educational project. Surely,

all Lasallians benefit from a deeper understanding of how association and shared mission between Brothers and partners and across genders are manifest in our lived reality.

Various Lasallian histories document the contributions made by women to De La Salle and the early teachers. Women funded schools, gave shelter





and provided food, offered guidance and sent their own children to the schools. The contributions of these women were instrumental in helping the early schools survive.

This article begins with a short overview of this history followed by a discussion of Lasallian women in today's ministries. In the interest of brevity, I will only provide a brief overview of the topics addressed. Readers should not assume that this is the complete story.

## History

### *Perrette Lespagnol*

Perrette Lespagnol, De La Salle's maternal grandmother and godmother, was especially influential in De La Salle's life. She was a devoutly religious woman and raised her daughter, De La Salle's mother, to share the same devotion.

It is probable that baby John was born in her house with her attending the birth. She doted on her grandson and he was often at her home. Upon the deaths of De La Salle's parents, Perrette provided grandmotherly love and much more. She headed the family council that determined the distribution of the estate. She was a shrewd businesswoman who advised a young De La Salle on both business and family matters.

She supported John's work in the ministry of education and she took on the care of the younger De La Salle children. She remained an important person in De La Salle's life until her death in 1691 at the age of 73.

## *Madame Maillefer*

One of the most interesting women in the founding story is Madame Jean Debouis Maillefer. The story of Madame Maillefer is included in most of the books about the founding story. However, there are significant differences in the stories told about her. Blaine describes her as a repentant woman who gave up a life of vanity to embrace the poor. Others suggest that her behavior was consistent with that expected of her social class and that she was dedicated to the poor evidenced by her charitable works.

Madame Maillefer and her husband were generous benefactors. They provided funds to start schools for poor girls in Rouen. Since there were already schools for girls thriving in Rheims, the Maillefer's hometown, she decided to provide funds for a school for boys. She was familiar with Adrienne Nyel's work of starting schools for poor boys in Rouen and provided Nyel with a letter of introduction to take to Sister Françoise Duval, the head mistress of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Rheims. Maillefer's letter thus set the scene for the meeting between Nyel and the Founder. Madame Maillefer hoped that this would provide an opening into the political structure of the church in Rheims.

## *Sister Françoise Duval*

Sister Françoise, Head Mistress of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, knew Father De La Salle well. He had completed the paperwork and negotiated the political structure of the Church in France to help get the letters of patent for the sisters. Given that he had experience navigating the political and social structures of the Church in Rheims, he would be an excellent advisor for Nyel. When Nyel arrived with the

letter from Madame Maillefer, De La Salle, providentially, was in the adjoining parlor. Sister Françoise invited De La Salle into the meeting and into the work of providing a school for poor boys.

There are several questions about how the meeting happened. Was the meeting a providential accident? Did Françoise Duval plan the meeting? We may never know with certainty but we do know that Madame Maillefer was the catalyst in the founding of the first school for boys in Rheims and that Françoise Duval pushed De La Salle to take his first step toward involvement in the school for poor boys. That school, started by Adrienne Nyel and later supervised by De La Salle, is often referred to as the first Lasallian School.

## *Madame des Croyères*

Sister Françoise Duval's contribution did not end with this "providential meeting". Sister Françoise also assisted Nyel in procuring funding for the second school he started in Rheims by introducing him to Madame des Croyères, a benefactor of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. Madame des Croyères may perhaps have been a bit suspicious of this over eager man from Rouen, but when she was informed that Father De La Salle was engaged with the schools, Madame des Croyères requested to meet with him.

She knew De La Salle from the previous administrative work that he had performed for the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. She both respected and trusted him. When she met with De La Salle, she indicated that she would only provide funds for the second school in Rheims under the condition that De La Salle take a more active role in the school. She asked him to see to the quality of religious instruction and

the appropriate behavior of the teachers. He agreed. Madame des Croyères died prior to finalizing the arrangement in her will. Her heirs, knowing of her enthusiasm for the project, fully honored her promise and provided the endowment.

Madame des Croyères insistence that De La Salle be personally involved with the teachers precipitated the next instrumental step for De La Salle toward becoming founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. De La Salle's commitment to his promise to Madame des Croyères led him to try a number of methods to improve the teacher's behavior. He increased their schedules and was present at their house on a more regular basis. However, he was still not comfortable with the Christian depth and self-control demonstrated by the schoolmasters. Eventually, De La Salle invited the schoolmasters to live in his home. Bernard emphasized the importance of this event as central to our founding story when he stated, "For it was on that alone that the edifice of the society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools depended, and it was there that a start would be made to lay its foundations."

### *Sister Louise Hours*

Sister Louise Hours may be the most well-known of the women in the founding story. Most biographies of De La Salle describe her as an illiterate shepherdess who was the foundress of the retreat house at Parmenie. While accurate, this is only part of what made her such an amazing woman.

Louise Hours a devoutly religious woman, who the local people called "Sister Louise", devoted her life to the rebuilding of the church at Parmenie as well as lodging for retreatants. For seven years

she lived next to the chapel, along with two other women and some goats, in a hut made of mud and sticks. They had no fire, no water and little food. Nevertheless, she persisted in creating the shrine to the Blessed Virgin.

When she and De La Salle met in 1714, they were elderly by early 18th century standards: Louise was 68 and De La Salle was 63. Both had lived lives in response to God's call. Both had made significant sacrifices to do so.

La Salle would have preferred to stay at Parmenie, conduct mass and provide spiritual direction for the pilgrims who arrived there. Sister Louise needed a spiritual director to work with retreatants.

The fact that De La Salle was such a spiritual and reflective man must have led her to want him to stay. One cannot overlook the sacrifice that Louise made when she told De La Salle that he must honor his vow of obedience to the Brothers. She had spent her life building the chapel and retreat center at Parmenie. She was thrilled with De La Salle's contributions to the work. Still she advised him to leave and return to the Brothers.

### *Mothers*

Perhaps the least studied women in the Founding Story are the mothers of the early students. Families of the artisans and the poor worked diligently to provide for their families. Poverty and hunger were a part of their precarious daily-lived reality. The smallest financial setback could devastate a family. In order for families to survive, every family member needed to contribute. Women in this class worked in almost every job in which men worked. They did not



*GLOBAL WOMEN SYMPOSIUM 2017, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, JULY 2017*

receive the same compensation as men received and could not join the artisan guilds. However, the meager wages they could earn meant the difference between poverty and becoming homeless beggars.

**T**hese women experienced a high rate of infant and maternal mortality. Maternal mortality rates estimate one maternal death in every 10 births. It was common for women to have five or more pregnancies. This put their chance of dying in childbirth at 50% over the span of their child-bearing years.

**I**nfant mortality rates were even higher. Estimates are that 42% of infants did not survive to their first birthdays. Women returned to work as soon as possible after giving birth and often left their infants in the care of a wet nurse. Infants cared for by wet nurses had a higher mortality rate than those kept with the mother.

**O**nce a healthy son was born, he was the family's future. His contribution to the economic viability of the family would be crucial. Most artisan families put their sons to work in their family businesses as soon as they were old enough to hold a hammer. When these mothers and fathers chose to send their boys to school it was, clearly, no small sacrifice.

**T**he mother would have been the one who made sure the son had bread to take to school for lunch, clothes mended for modesty, head deloused, and the rare and occasional bath completed. She may have walked him to school, but she was never welcomed inside the doors. In essence, mothers turned over their most prized possessions to the Brothers and the great unknown. In a world where every day was a struggle for survival, the leap of faith and hope for the future this simple act displayed, is amazing.





*FRATELLI PROJECT, LEBANON*

## *Women beyond France*

**W**hen John Baptist De La Salle began working with schools for the sons of the artisans and the poor, the world was a very different place than what we live in today. The men who joined De La Salle focused completely on the education of boys. As the Institute grew, more men joined the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The world of the Brothers of the Christian Schools remained almost completely, but not exclusively male until the Chapter of 1967. As the Brothers expanded beyond France, they needed generous benefactors to support their work. Many of those benefactors were women. In addition, the rigors of the work of the teachers was all consuming. The

Brothers often required cooks and housekeepers to assist the endeavor of keeping their entire focus on the task of being teachers. Women were the primary providers of that support.

**O**ne example of note is that of Rosella Mary (Mrs. F. W.) Colquhoun, AFSC. Rosella was a native of New Orleans in the Louisiana Territory of the United States and attended St. Patrick's Parish. In 1853, during a yellow fever epidemic, she noticed that the newly arrived Brothers from France were not attending Mass. She learned that they were all ill with yellow fever. Arriving at the Brothers' residence, she insisted upon caring for them. At first, Brother Adronis, the community director, refused. Nevertheless, Rosella persisted. She would not leave the residence. She



slept on the floor, nursed, fed and cleaned for the seriously ill brothers. She stayed at the residence without leaving until the last Brother was well. In 1869, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools formally presented her with papers of affiliation. The Brothers referred to her as “Mother Colquhoun”. From the time the Brothers withdrew from New Orleans in 1900, until her death in 1911 she prayed that the Brothers would return to New Orleans.

Similar stories often occurred as the Brothers extended their ministries beyond France. Many of the stories of the Brothers and these women are lost to time. It is essential that we document the ones that we retain in our Lasallian memory.

The tremendous influence of women on modern Lasallian education is an under researched portion of the heritage of the Lasallian family. For all of the first two centuries, our Lasallian schools were not allowed to employ women. While this may have been the official policy, most Brothers will acknowledge that women were working in the schools and supporting their mission long before that. Often, during wartime, it was a necessity to hire a female teacher when a male teacher could not be found.

In 1967, the 39th Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian schools determined that the Brothers could run and teach in co-educational schools. Since that historic Chapter, the increase in the number of females who are teachers and students in Lasallian schools is dramatic. Our network even has all girl schools, something the early Brothers and De La Salle would have never foreseen.

***Similar stories often occurred as the Brothers extended their ministries beyond France. Many of the stories of the Brothers and these women are lost to time. It is essential that we document the ones that we retain in our Lasallian memory.***

# Lasallian Schools in Modern Times

In 2016, the Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Robert Schieler, FSC, released data from an extensive demographic study of Lasallian ministries around the world. Included in the data is a breakdown of the gender of employees of Lasallian ministries.

In 2016, laywomen represented the largest group of employees (54%). Today, women can be found in all professional roles in Lasallian ministries. In PARC, RELAL and RELEM women are the majority of employees while in RELAN they are approximately 49% of the population. In RELAF women are approximately 26% of employees of Lasallian Ministries. Below is a table of data provided by the Institute in 2016:

	PARC	RELAF	RELAL	RELEM	RELAN	TOTAL
Brothers FSC	250	224	569	281	155	1479
Non FSC religious	39	83	176	73	84	455
Lay men	7098	2469	12248	11753	5393	38961
Lay women	9920	958	16164	20420	5330	52792
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17307</b>	<b>3734</b>	<b>29157</b>	<b>32527</b>	<b>10962</b>	<b>93687</b>

The “Non-FSC Religious” category includes religious from other orders and priests and does not differentiate by gender. We do not have quantifiable data on the numbers of male and female students in our schools. Individual regions or districts may collect that information but is not available as consolidated data. This information could be critical in contextualizing the current realities of Lasallian education.

The International Symposiums on Lasallian Research has had a round table discussion dedicated to research on Lasallian women since 2014. As a community of researchers, participants realize that this is a rich area for research. Several studies are currently in process as a response. Studies on modern Lasallian women in leadership positions, John Baptiste De La Salle’s letters to women, association of women and men, and women in Lasallian history are currently underway. While this is great, there is so much more we do not know. But, given the dramatic demographic shift of Lasallian ministries in the past 50 years, we really need to do better. We need to understand our past and present in order to prepare for our future. We owe it to our students.



# A future of hope

*BR. ANTONIO BOTANA, FSC.*  
*ARLEP DISTRICT*

The school will be molded into a community only through an educating community rich in diversity and in the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers are happy to collaborate with the laity, who bring to the teaching community a contribution that comes from their knowledge of the world, their experience in family life, civic affairs, and labor organizations. The Brothers should act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved by occupying their proper place in the whole life of the school: with catechesis, apostolic movements, extra-curricular activities, as well as in administration and management.

Declaration 46, 3, § 2.

# Times have changed: The novelty that emerged in the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

In the post-Vatican II social and ecclesial landscape of that period, the 1966-67 General Chapter took up the challenge of specifying and giving substance to the programmatic affirmation with which Chapter 3 of the original Rule had begun: *“A true spirit of community shall always be shown and maintained in this Institute”*.

On the one hand, there had been clear anthropological and sociological changes that affected the Brother as a person, and made unbearable and counter-productive the *uniformity* with which that chapter of the Rule expressed the above-mentioned principle - which had been strictly maintained in the 1946 Rule. Then, the blurring of individual personalities appeared to be an essential prerequisite for the community to exist.

The comment made by Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon with reference to the *life review* that the new Rule proposed in Bulletin 194, p. 39, drawn in turn by the Comment to the Rule that he himself prepared in those days is emblematic: “How times have changed! That’s not the way things were back then, for sure. People were less personal, because they didn’t have this culture which opens minds in various directions and differentiates personalities as they develop. ... *Times have changed*, and so have characters”.

With the awareness of these changes, the Chapter’s documents propose a community that is growing to come of age, accepts as a positive factor the dynamism and tension between the different personalities that form it and the common will to build together a community for the mission.

A symbiotic relationship is established between the individual persons and the community. However, the starting point is the Brother as a person. Persons are an end, not a means, and require all the attention of the community and the Institute, in themselves, in their entirety, not only according to the apostolic tasks they carry out. On the other hand, the Brothers are asked to do all they can to build the community and dedicate themselves completely to the common mission: *“The Brothers build the community by the joyful gift of themselves for the service of others”*. (1967 Rule Chapter 3, b). Persons achieve their personal fulfilment through the community.

In this assessment of the whole person, this once dreaded and restrained ability, i.e. *affectivity* could not be neglected. It emphasizes its importance in the framework of personal development: “The community must therefore be conducive to the development of personal affectivity... Within the basis of community relations, friendship enables to express and receive affection, and at the same time it develops the ability to be kind, generous, open to everyone...” (Fr. Paul-Antoine Jourjon, Boletín 194, pp. 113-116).

Since the acknowledgement of differences, personal and community discernment is put at stake, and the exchange of opinion is seen as something beneficial to the search for truth.





However, the Chapter did not confine itself to provide guidelines which may be considered “psychologically mature.” *“The return to the sources to be found in the Gospel and in the origins of the Institute”* (Declaration, 2), which set the tone for the whole debate of the 39th General Chapter, also supports the ultimate reasons for this new way in which the community is conceived. The Gospel references recall that this community draws inspiration from Jesus, in his union with the Father, and is forged thanks to the Spirit of love.

The picture offered by the Declaration about the community (or rather, the ‘community dimension of the Brother’s life’) is much richer than the one we find in the Rule that was adopted almost simultaneously. There, the community is brought to our at-

attention as the place where one lives and interprets the Founder’s charism, as “Saint John Baptist de La Salle founded a living community of Brothers with whom he shared his apostolic ideal and who in turn passed on this ideal to their successors” (D 7, 1). It is in community that one undertakes to live his consecration and his commitment to mission (D 20, 1). In particular, this last article that we have just quoted – with which the Declaration starts describing “Community Spirit and Community Life” – is a true “starting signal”, which makes the Institute participate in the race for recovering the awareness of the importance of association to understand our charismatic identity and the peculiarities of the Lasallian community. Undoubtedly, the privileged and prophetic mind of Brother Michel Sauvage is behind it.

# *The community opens up: the developments in the last 50 years*

It is easy to see that between the 1967 Rule and that of 1987 and its later review edited in 2015, with reference to Community Life there is no breakup, but rather great continuity, since the majority of the former's contributions can be found verbatim or partly re-edited in the latter.

Continuity seems even greater when the 1987 and 2015 editions are compared with the text of the Declaration (with regard to "Community dimension of the Brother's life", No. 19-21, but also 25,4 and 26,4). We can say that the insights of the Declaration are better exploited and more specifically explained in the 1987 Rule - and even more so in the 2015 Rule - than in the 1967 Rule.

The development of those insights, enlightened by the reflection that the Church and the Institute have developed during these last 50 years, is going to lead to new nuances or openings which highlight the difference between the current Rule and that of 1967, as we will see later on.

Over and above all the appearances of psychological and affective maturity, the community de-

scribed in chapter 3 of the 1967 Rule contains a certain hint of retrenchment, self-contentment with the "warm nest" that Brothers and only Brothers form. Of course, in subsection "g", the community is reminded that it "must fulfil the apostolic task of education", however, this task never ceases to be "outside" the community. Starting in 1987, this same sentence is picked up and continues in the 2015 text (R 54), with a substantial change, though: instead of "task", mention is made of "ministry", and this is no longer a task but it constitutes an *identity*.

***Identity is something that comes from inside, it has an impact on the entire community life, the same way it affects the entire Brother as a person.***

Identity is something that comes from inside, it has an impact on the entire community life, the same way it affects the entire Brother as a person. It is no longer a conventual community dedicated to an evangelising task, but rather a *ministerial community* which makes God's salvation present in education - especially of the poor - with its own presence, and feeds its own consecrated life and its

fraternal life on this saving presence. The 2015 Rule expresses it in the following way: "The primary responsibility of the Brothers, and their distinctive contribution to the shared mission, is the witness of a ministerial community, living its religious life in fraternal love and in solidarity with the poor by its educational service" (R 15).

*Shared mission* is the new perspective from which the community - not only the mission - is viewed. This expression originates from the 1987 Rule (No.17); however, it takes on its full meaning when it is

elaborated within the ecclesial context. The reflection of the Church, especially through the Synods that followed the II Vatican Council has been built around pillars such as these ones which are already a part of the ecclesial body of faith: *The mission is unique and is shared by all members of the Church. Communion represents both the source and the fruit of the mission.* Building on this ecclesial line of reasoning, in those days when it drew on the source of its origins, the Institute has better identified the features that define its charismatic identity, and it paved the way to share charism and mission in communion with other Lasallians.

**W**e heard John Paul II calling the religious “experts in communion,” asking them to foster the *spirituality of communion* (Vita consecrata, 46 and 51) and avoid confining it within the boundaries of one’s own community. We had become “experts in closure,” and had to radically change our way of looking at the community in order to live it in accordance with the other Christians. The first step has been to go back and shed light on what should never have been darkened: “the Brothers live the ‘*new commandment*’ of charity as the central focus of their lives and as the first commitment of their religious consecration” (R 46.2).

**I**t is a dynamism that creates *fraternity*, fraternity for the mission, because this is the *Lasallian association* and it aims at expanding: “The Brothers seek to share the fraternity they foster in their community with many other people. The community, a house and school promoting communion, is actively and generously accessible to others...” (R 52). Among these others, first of all those with whom the mission is shared are indicated. With them, “in the spirit of association,” the community of Brothers “contributes to the fraternal atmosphere which, marked by mutual respect and freedom, aims to create a community of faith in the context of the educational community” (R 54.2).

## ***Lasallian fraternity of Brothers and Lasallians: a future of hope***

**T**he future is open to possibilities that one could hardly even suspect 50 years ago. Brothers have become more aware of the *foundational charism* as a source of dynamism of the Lasallian identity. At the same time, we have discovered that it is not an exclusive belonging, but rather “a gift for the Church and for the world” (R 54,4). Other Lasallians, not just the Brothers take part in it. Also our Lasallian Family is taking shape, following a sign of the times that finds its way throughout the Church with the expansion of the foundational Charisms in the respective families.



We feel at ease with this invitation, which is a guiding principle for the recent Vatican document *Identity and Mission of the Brother Religious in the Church* (2015): “In the charismatic family Religious Brothers place themselves together with other Christians and in function of them. It is *with them* that the Brothers build a fraternity for the mission, motivated by the foundational charism; *for them* they are signs of that same brotherhood that they are called to live in their consecrated life” (No. 38).

The community of Brothers opens up in many ways to “export” and develop communion with the other Lasallians. Charism, which is always creative, gives rise to new forms of Lasallian communities: “Attentive to the movements of the Holy Spirit, the Institute is open to new forms of community life” (R 54.4). This way, the *association for the educational service of the poor* grows and expands, and the mission benefits from it.

It is perhaps one of the most precious results that are being achieved in the Lasallian field: today’s new communities that bring together Laity and Brothers in the service to the mission. The community appears to be the most decisive and prophetic feature of the Lasallian charism: the community as a response to the mission of educating the poor. It is not a specific type of community, but rather a dynamism that creates bonds among people and fosters this structuring into different forms of community according to the culture, personal processes, and identities, and according to the invitations that the Spirit proposes to us. There is a great variety; however, there are already many situations of this kind that we may find in the Lasallian world today:

- ***Communities of Brothers*** that, on a regular basis, share their lives with the lay people who participate in certain aspects of inner life, or with lay volunteers who are completely integrated in the community for a specific period of time.

- ***Communities of Lasallian Laity***, some of them with moments of Community meetings characterized by different frequency in such meetings; others even living together under the same roof, with a daily rhythm of community prayer and a high level of communication and sharing of goods.

- ***Mixed communities***, made of Brothers and Laity, married couples and/or singles, united by the same Lasallian charism, with community structures that respect the peculiarities of each member, and at the same time enable them to share the richness of their different identities, as religious or lay faithful.

As a place that recognises the new forms of Lasallian life, the District will have to adapt and find the appropriate structures to facilitate the communion of this variety of communities.

The new pathway is already being traced; however, it will not progress without the *proactive* role played by the Brothers in the development of new Lasallian communities. The urgent request transmitted by the text drawn up by a Lasallian lay person of RELAL in Bulletin 254 (“Stories of Hope”), 5 A, reflects the feelings of many others who have been reached by the Lasallian charism: “As a community, we need to live fraternity, support one another in the faith, and make ourselves ‘credible’ ...This is what gives hope. It also makes present the voice of Jesus



in our schools and brings God’s love to so many children in our institutions who are suffering ... Brothers, allow us to be your collaborators. Let us form true communities of love and support. Titles or appointments are not that important – trust us – since we also want to contribute our charism to enrich this work of the Church.”

More than simple “collaborators”, those who enter into these community dynamics end up taking the responsibility of being mediators of the Lasallian charism. This is the experience of a community of lay people of the ARLEP District: *“Being the heart and the memory of John Baptist de la Salle* is not a specific dream, but it opens us to common identity, shared with many other educators, lay people and Brothers. As *heart and memory*, it is our responsibility

to discover the thirst for meeting and meaning that many of our young people have. It is a matter of seeking spaces for profound dialogue, personal communication, and meaning, also with our fellow educators who feel this need.”

*“..The community realises that its mission constantly needs to be discovered.”* This statement, that the 39th General Chapter established in the 1967 Rule (chapter 3, g), has been kept until the 2015 text (R 54). It is a seed of life that the community holds within: it keeps it open to the Spirit. It is the challenge that drives us as Brothers, as Lasallians in general, to walk towards the future looking most of all at the living mission, not at the inherited structures. Today this mission needs to be lived and shared in communion with all those who recognise themselves united in the Lasallian charism.

# The lay character of the institute

*CARMELITA I. QUEBENGCO*  
*LASALLIAN EAST ASIA DISTRICT (LEAD)*



The Church emphasizes her community character as the People of God and the sacrament of the presence of God among men. For this reason she teaches the importance of the apostolate as witness. The Church is defined as missionary by nature and gives prior concern to those who are separated from her. When the members of the Church receive the sacrament of baptism they assume their responsibility for the salvation of the world. Yet the Church respects the diversity of charisms which the Spirit imparts to each of her members of the apostolate.

Declaration 10,2



# Introduction

In 1969, when I first worked with the De La Salle Brothers in the Philippines, I was not really aware of formal Lasallian formation programs. I learned the Lasallian story, either from the Brothers' sharing or lecture, and learned about the Lasallian ways of being and doing from their role modelling. This was the time when Vatican II was calling for great renewal throughout the Church and little did I know that the 39th General Chapter in 1966-1967 was the Institute's way of responding to this call. I realized later on that the 39th General Chapter was a major event in the Institute's history and its main output, the Declaration, is a significant document that contains the main propositions for institutional renewal.

This year, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 39th General Chapter, I return to the Declaration to reflect on the lay character of the Institute—its development, growth, and future prospects.

## Bringing Up to Date

The Second Vatican Council used “aggiornamento” as one of its key words. It is an Italian word that connotes ‘bringing up to date’ and which implies renewal and relevance. It is within this guiding spirit that decrees of Vatican II primarily called the Church to change paradigms:

- from a state of perfection to the People of God;
- from ‘above’ to alongside the People of God;
- from separation from the world to presence in the world.

The Declaration, for its part, translates this renewal or this ‘bringing up to date’ within the Institute as something that “must be continuous, re-discovering in the present the dynamic principle, the charism that gave birth to the Institute at its origin” (Campos, M. et. al., 2014). That origin, as we know, brings us back to St. John Baptist de La Salle, a priest who founded a congregation of exclusively lay male religious (Brothers not priests) to serve Christian schools for poor youth. Throughout St. La Salle's life, the Brothers took vows of association, and stability, and obedience among themselves, and only vowed the evangelical counsels of poverty and chastity much later, following the Bull of Approbation. In keeping with this, the 39th General Chapter states that “the lay character of the Institute was willed by the Founder” and identified specific reasons for affirming the lay character of the Institute, including the above-mentioned Bull of Approbation.

## Declaration of the Brothers in the World Today

On June 1, 1966, an overwhelming majority of the Capitulants of the General Chapter voted for and affirmed the lay character of the Institute and intended it to remain that way. It also affirmed other foundational principles of the Institute and explained these in the Declaration.

The apostolate of the De La Salle Brothers, as it originates from the Founder, is service of the poor in education, not necessarily only through formal schools. Brothers are encouraged to be creative and innovative in their approach to education, depending

on what is appropriate to new and actual needs of the world, especially the marginalized youth. Br. Michel Sauvage (in Campos, et. al., 2014) states that “the renewal’s most vigorous objective is to convert the Institute to the service of the poor... the educational purpose of the Institute must expand without fear of non-school activities”. The Declaration likewise emphasizes that to be effective, education of the poor needs to be viewed in broader terms to include dealing with the root causes of poverty at the economic, social, political, and global spheres. Necessarily, this also includes categorically denouncing all policies, programs, activities, and practices that deny social justice, and working seriously towards societal transformation to bring about freedom, equality, and justice, especially for the poor. Lasallian educators, Brothers or lay teachers, are expected to develop in their students an orientation towards this perspective in thought, words, and deeds.

## Brothers and Lay Partners

“**T**he figure of the Brother points to belonging to the People of God in its basic sense, not hierarchical sense”, as in “All of you are brothers (Mathew 28:3)” (Botana A, 2011). This renders working closely and collegially with Lay Partners more effective as it facilitates the joint conduct of ministry. Their being called Brothers (image of siblings) rather than Father (image of a male parent) makes the development of fraternal relationship easier and more natural to realize. Brothers are also more accessible and with more time for work as this becomes their main and major concern.

**L**ay teachers, for their part, are described by the Declaration as “... a staff rich in diversity but with unity among members. For this reason, Brothers work closely with lay teachers who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world of family life and of civic affairs” (Salm, L. 1994). In this regard, Br. Herman Lombaerts (2014) asks these very relevant and prophetic questions: “Would it be unthinkable for a secular lay person to be a bearer of the same Lasallian charism but in a different way? Could there emerge among these people another model, a mediator of the Gospel with a different identity, married, and a parent? To the question of what then differentiates the role of the Brothers from their committed Lasallian lay colleagues, the 39th General Chapter specifies this as “the heart, the memory and the guarantors of the shared mission... guarantors of its Lasallian character” (Meister M, 1994). The Declaration required a change in perspective among the Brothers, relative to their role in the world, the conduct of the Lasallian Mission, and in professionally and fraternally partnering with lay men and women staff in their apostolates.

**T**he first years of the Declaration were spent mostly in trying to completely understand the vision it propagates, and more important, how each District and Region is to read the signs of the times, what plans are appropriate as response to the new needs, and how to best implement them.

# Lasallian Family

Since the release of the Declaration, the variation and need for the Apostolates of the Brothers has increased. It became apparent that the Brothers would need to get help from laymen and women, who believe in and pursue the Lasallian Mission with the same vigor and commitment. This implies the necessity to create new structures, appropriate policies, and Lasallian formation programs for both Brothers and lay educators to be able to effectively collaborate in responding to new challenges posed by the Mission.

During the 40th General Chapter in 1976, the concept of Lasallian Family was highlighted. Article 45 of its propositions states, “Individual persons or groups of persons can be associated with the apostolic activity and to the life of prayer of the Brothers without completely sharing in their community life” (Salm, L. 1994). This statement implies being like siblings in a big family where there is substantial sharing in the Mission, though the identity of the lay persons are different from the Brothers.

Br. José Pablo Basterrechea, in his letters to the Brothers as Superior General, stressed the need for a full integration of lay educators in Lasallian apostolates and the wisdom of offering them Lasallian formation programs to further deepen their Lasallian spirituality. After the Declaration, the Brothers responded to this call with the establishment of formation programs at the international, national and district levels, among them: the *Centro Internazionale Lasalliano* in Rome, the Leadership Workshops of the International Association of Lasallian Universities, and various Mission Assemblies in the different Districts and regions. The Visitors, in their 1981 Intercapitular Meeting, followed suit and added the need to give lay educators leadership positions in the conduct of the Lasallian Mission.

***Br. José Pablo Basterrechea, in his letters to the Brothers as Superior General, stressed the need for a full integration of lay educators in Lasallian apostolates and the wisdom of offering them Lasallian formation programs to further deepen their Lasallian spirituality.***

# Shared Mission

Following the concept of the Lasallian Family, the 41st General Chapter in 1986 developed the paradigm of the Shared Mission, then considered a radical idea, primarily due to its implication of equality in the conduct of the Mission between Brothers and lay educators, with both learning from one another rather than the Brothers teaching and guiding their Lay Partners. In 1987, the phrase, Shared Mission, was used in the revised Rule. The following year, Br. John Johnston, then Superior General, coined the term Lasallian schools (rather than Brothers' schools) as "the more appropriate term because they would be defined by the vision of De La Salle, a vision shared by many different kinds of people on their staff... an articulation of new roles for lay Lasallians and Brothers was necessary for this renewal to occur" (Salm, L. 1994). There were Brothers who insisted that this new sharing of the mission should be a relationship of mutual learning from one another and not directing the lay on the conduct of the Mission as an entitlement.

The General Chapter of 1993 was historic because for the first time, lay educators were invited as Consultants. It was an opportunity to share their thoughts and provide inputs regarding issues and concerns raised about the Mission. It was also the first time they were called Lasallian Partners, defined as "those who share the Brothers' Mission in its multiple educational, catechetical, apostolic, and professional aspects... and make it possible for the work of schools to be accomplished" (Salm, L. 1992). This and other participatory types of assemblies such as the International Assembly of 2006 and 2013, as well as the Mission Assemblies in Regions and Districts were initiatives to find appropriate and viable structures

of communion, giving both Brothers and Partners voice and vote in the identification of Mission priorities, and the development and/or alignment of relevant policies and programs now being implemented throughout the Institute and at different levels. For the same reason, Mission Councils in Districts are meant to regularly and substantially engage Lay Partners at the local level. These imply that Lasallian Partners occupy an "equal and complementary place with the Brothers in the execution of Mission" (Salm, Luke. 1992) the core of which is the inspiration of the Founder and commitment to the Mission. Of the Lasallian Partners, some have been formally affiliated and/or associated by the Institute because their lives are clearly marked by Lasallian characteristics such as service of the poor and fraternal relationships.

"Statistics from 2004-2011 show a real educational commitment to the service of young people in situations of precariousness and poverty. There were also more universities established that contributed to an open ended study of education by holding five international colloquia that analyzed four important aspects of the new educational environment all over the world – globalization, the family, the megapolices, and new information and communications technology." (Capelle, 2013)

There are now more co-educational Lasallian apostolates compared to Brothers' schools exclusively for boys. In all the regions and most Districts and Sectors, the shift has been made from being Brothers' schools to Lasallian schools, where the Lasallian Partner commitment to the Lasallian Mission is more pronounced. There are also many more apostolates other than just formal schools. From a recent survey of some Brothers in the different Lasallian regions, it is clear that there are new works





with renewed and stronger focus on serving the poor and more creative approaches to responding to new needs. What used to be a centralized government has given way to granting more autonomy and responsibility at the local levels.

As of 2016, there were 976 La Salle schools serving almost a million students, with a total professional staff of 92,160—1,849 of them or about 2% are Brothers and 89,716 or 98% are Lay Partners, a majority of whom are women. If one views the Institute as strictly the Brothers, one will be tempted to think that the Institute is shrinking; however, if one views

the Institute as the viability and vitality in the conduct of its Mission, one can confidently say that, indeed, it has not only remained relevant and vibrant but has grown much in creative ways, considering the growing number and variety of apostolates being implemented throughout the world.

Several years after the Declaration, the variation of Lasallian apostolates has likewise increased. Br. John Johnston (published at 2012 in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*. Saint Mary's University of Minnesota) ) describes the renewed Lasallian apostolates as:

- Program for the illiterate, street children, orphans, migrants, itinerants, physical and mentally disabled, youth with learning impediments, and youngsters with behavioural problems.
- Pastoral centers, centers for sports, and other forms of recreation and social activities.
- Programs for infants, children, adolescents, young adults, veteran adults, people in a variety of cultures, races, heritage, and language... Catholic but also Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindu, Shintoists, Confucians, traditional religions and no religion.
- Represented in developed, moderately developed, and extremely poor countries.
- Enjoying peace but many are ravaged by division, violence, and war;
- Facing political realities – with some countries supportive of the Lasallian Mission, and some totally opposed to it.
- Operating as Lasallian apostolates but with no Brothers.
- Brothers' schools that have now evolved into Lasallian schools.

Evidently, the Declaration has developed in the Institute a stronger spirituality that is more gospel-oriented, more opened to new ideas and the world, and more focused and concerned for persons rather than on administrative structures and minutiae. The process and outcomes of this renewal can, in reality, serve as a living model of how an exclusively lay religious congregation effectively responded to the challenges of renewal by Vatican II. Particularly remarkable is the way the Brothers were able to inspire and engage their Lay Partners to substantially share the Lasallian Mission and Charism, thereby making these also their own. “In the growth of association with men and women who walk side by side with them and identify themselves today as the sons and daughters of St John Baptist de La Salle, the Brothers see a sign of the times which fills them with hope” (The Rule of the Brothers, 2015).

***The Institute  
can be one of the  
organizational  
world leaders in  
the education of  
the poor.***

# Continuing Challenges for the Institute

Fifty years after the Declaration, poverty has become even more visible in a world where social inequality is widening, the environment continues to be degraded, individualism and secularization are stronger, and the poor are vulnerable especially in war-torn countries and in the more developed countries where they seek refuge. These conditions pose continuing challenges to the apostolate of the Institute and yet at the same time point to the continuing relevance of the Lasallian Mission throughout the world.

According to a World Bank report in 2015, there will be a decline in poverty, but this will happen slowly and the eradication of poverty as a goal will remain a highly ambitious target. Reaching this global goal will depend on a highly complex combination of consumption, trends and processes, resilience, progress, stability, and, above all, a more deliberate granting of access to opportunities to those in poverty both at the local and national levels. Addressing poverty and inequality should be an integral part of every Lasallian apostolate's mission, vision, and policies. This should translate into strong advocacies in all Lasallian schools and education programs.

In Lasallian universities, research can be focused on policies and programs that are more innovative, aimed at the status quo, and advocating for structural change as well as change in government policies and priorities to benefit the poor sector first and foremost. Becoming involved in these advocacies may be viewed

by some as “political”, but it should not really be an issue if one remains non-partisan, in the sense that one does not support political candidates, leaders, and political parties.

Strengthening linkages, working in close collaboration and taking joint action with other national, regional, and international organizations of the same persuasion the way some NGOs do may be an option worth exploring. Lasallian universities doing research on policy development and programs for poverty alleviation can also work with local and national governments whose responsibility it is to serve the poor. Outputs can likewise serve as inputs in orientation and training programs for new local government and national leaders both at the legislative and executive branches of government. There are international and regional organizations that commission and fund action research done by universities with the goal of implementing the study outputs in remote and depressed localities, where a big portion of the population are poor. Educational innovations may likewise be initiated and pilot-tested in different countries, refined to become more effective, and then proposed to funding agencies for implementation support in less developed countries.

The Institute can be one of the organizational world leaders in the education of the poor. There are currently 71 Lasallian universities throughout the world. Certainly they have many competent professionals in various disciplines, including the field of education. Though the Institute has had a series of international assemblies and colloquia in education and related fields, the participation has mostly been by Lasallians. This can be done jointly with other network and international organizations also interested in surfacing, for instance, pressing issues and concerns in education,

alternative pedagogical approaches, distance education, and teaching-learning effectiveness in schools for the poor. Such collaborative colloquia/conferences make more impact on educators and can potentially exert a more significant influence on national education policymakers and other relevant organizations that provide services which directly benefit the poor.

There are also some propositions which evolved from the Declaration that can be better clarified, strengthened and renewed. Since the 80s, the Lasallian Mission has been officially considered a shared mission of the Brothers and their Lay Partners. As a general concept, this is understood by all and practiced to a significant degree in collegiality and fraternal relationships in the conduct of Mission. Its more specific and finer implications however now also include sharing the Lasallian charism as stated in Article 19 of the Rule of the Brothers (2015) – “the Brothers joyfully share the Mission together with their Partners who recognize and live the Lasallian charism. Together, they ensure the vitality of this charism by creating or developing organizational, formation, and research structures in which each one deepen their understanding of their vocation and of the Lasallian Mission.”

Enfleshing this in the conduct of the Lasallian Mission has invariably raised a number questions: How is it translated into more specific and realistic terms? How should formation programs be renewed to be more effective in developing a stronger sense of shared charism among Lasallians, both Brothers and Lay Partners? What “structures of communion” should be put in place to be able to sustain throughout the Institute the sharing of the Lasallian charism? What new policies should be defined and implemented to nurture its sustainability? Answers to these questions and the evolving lived experience of the Brothers and Lay Partners in the

conduct of their apostolates will determine the future of the Lasallian mission.

Within this sharing, will the role of the Brothers remain as “the heart, the memory, and the guarantor of the Lasallian Mission”? Article 157 of The Rule of the Brothers (2015) responds to this – “...the Brothers feel they have a special responsibility to share their pedagogical and spiritual heritage with all those they work. Through this sharing they receive the calls of the Spirit to be Brothers today – the call to be brothers with them and to live fraternally as a sign for all Lasallian educators – the call for them and with them as channel for the light with which God Himself enlightened the hearts of those He destined to announce His word to children – the call to be among them and with them, the heart, the memory, and the guarantor of the Lasallian charism”.

Does this then mean that since the Mission is already shared, when the Lasallian charism is also effectively shared and lived by the Lay Partners they too will become guarantors of the Lasallian mission and charism? Br. Antonio Botana replies – “This group of persons and communities form a nucleus that we can define as the heart, memory, and guarantor of the founding charism in the family. Without that nucleus which is not reserved to religious, the charismatic family could not survive”. This answers questions often asked by Lasallians, such as “Can you imagine a Lasallian school without Brothers?” “What will happen to the Lasallian Mission in Districts where there are no more Brothers?” Though success in genuinely sharing the Mission and the Lasallian charism with Lay Partners has happened in some cases, this is not yet as common as desired. The challenge is to further promote and en flesh this throughout the Institute, and their best practices shared with others so they may be adapted where appropriate.





## On the Future of the Institute and of the Lasallian Mission

**W**hat is the future of the Institute? Though no one can say what this will be, there are trends that point to possible general directions. For exam-

ple, while the Lasallian Mission continues to grow in different parts of the world, together with a marked increase in the number of Lay Partners who commit to the Lasallian Mission, there has been a declining trend in the number of Brothers. This has resulted in more and more Lay Partners taking over leadership positions in apostolates usually led by Brothers.

**I**n different Lasallian regions, there are also apostolates where there are no longer any Brothers and run solely by Lay Partners. In such situations,

the Lasallian character of the apostolate remains, through its continuing link with a Lasallian District, the Lasallian formation of its leaders and personnel, and the animation of Brothers who sit on school boards. In some countries, the specification of criteria or indicators of the Lasallianness of a school is done in a consultative manner, which Lay Partner leaders in charge integrate and implement in the conduct of the Lasallian Mission. It is possible that situations like this will increase through the Institute. What are possible ways of dealing with this?

**I**n a recent survey of Brother-leaders of the different regions, the preferred scenarios are:

- Turn over the schools to Lay Partners already involved, formed as Lasallians, and have proven commitment to the Mission, and live the Charism.
- Turn over the schools to the Diocese of which it is a part, or to a Lasallian association like the Signum Fidei, or to a group of alumni willing to take over.
- Turn over the schools to a Catholic foundation.
- The Institute establish a new Lasallian Foundation with a trust fund. The most competent Lay Partners and some Brothers can comprise its Board of Trustees that will ensure the continuity and sustainability of the Lasallian Mission throughout the world.

**R**egardless of whether there will be more Brothers or less of them in the future, the Lasallian Mission will continue to be relevant especially in responding to the challenge to eradicate poverty. The Brothers with their Lay Partners who substantially share the mission and the spirit of the Institute, and their apostolates can, no doubt, take on that challenge by making quality education accessible, especially to the poor, and together with relevant national, regional, and international organizations become a world leader in development education and a most certainly staunch advocate of social justice.





# A necessary treasure

*BR. BRUNO ALPAGO, FSC.  
DISTRICT OF ARGENTINA-PARAGUAY*

In their community, the Brothers listen attentively to what God is telling them. They help each other to interpret the calls that the Lord directs to them by means of the multiple events of each day. They question each another to find the answer that they should give, and endeavor to remedy the faults that they observe amidst them.

Declaration 20,5

## Asceticism In the past

“There shall be no bodily mortification that is a rule in this Institute.” In 1947, like in 1718, this was the beginning of Chapter 5 of the *Common Rules* on “The exercises of humility and mortification that are put into practice in this Institute.” There were, however, some fasts and abstinences in addition to those commanded by the Church, such as the requirement of silence outside of Rule-based recreational moments (especially during the nightly “rigorous silence” and the Holy Triduum), in addition to all the ascetic practice demanded by prudence and love in the framework of consecration, community life, and the practice of mission.

Certain specific prohibitions, not mentioned in the *Common Rules*, were explicitly mentioned in the *Governance Rule* (Reglas de Gobierno, 1949, Spanish edition): games of cards (XIX, 93), liquors (III, 5, XVIII, 15) and, insistently, tobacco (I, 14, V, 9, XVIII, 15, XIX, 97)<sup>1</sup>. It was the demanding responsibility of the Directors and Visitors to have them observed. The energy they displayed in it, and the results they obtained, were not uniform across the Institute. In many cases, in fact, such prohibitions had become a dead letter.

The 39th General Chapter (1966–1967) had to deal with this subject. Its pronouncement is contained in the *Proceedings of the 39th General Chapter*, nos. 127–140. In general, the configuration of the Brother with the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, his participation in the Lord’s Work of Salvation, and his incorporation into a community of consecrated persons should turn

<sup>1</sup> Two mentions of the tobacco prohibition in meditations: MD 76,3; MF 92,3.

into a lifestyle consistent with these radical realities. In particular, the Chapter commissioned the Superiors of Regions and Districts to judge and resolve the problems related to tobacco, liquors, and the like with a spirit of love, and to encourage the Brothers, especially the young, to abstain from tobacco and liquors for reasons of voluntary asceticism and religious poverty. As a consequence, this specific topic remained definitely outside the Rule.

But asceticism was still working deep inside.

## Asceticism In our days

By its etymology, asceticism is somewhat related with sports. The former can be associated with the ideas of training and discipline; the latter includes some deprivations in opposition to what is enjoyable.

Training and discipline give way to performances that, without these precautions, would be unattainable. In this sense, training and discipline are properly liberating.

As Brothers of the Christian Schools, we consecrate ourselves entirely to God to procure His glory as much as we can and He demands us to. And for this we associate among us permanently in order to serve the poor through their education, wherever they may be, and we perform the functions assigned to us by the Body of the Institute or its Superiors. It is a consecration *to do* more than *to deprive us of*. Being faithful to this commitment – which God inspires us, to which we feel called by Him – is basically a gift from God. Welcoming it with gratitude and making it fruitful demands, among other things, training and discipline; that is, asceticism.

**W**e can approach the Rule as a guidebook especially adapted to the training and discipline required by “our sporting activity.”

**A**nd it is really – the whole of it – like this. In its own words, “the Rule shows the charism of the Institute and offers the Brothers the meaning of their lives today. It points out to them the way to live the Gospel in the style of the Founder. The Brothers, personally and communally, study the Rule, meditate on it, and assimilate its riches and spirit. By being faithful to it, it is Jesus Christ whom they follow and serve” (art 158).

**T**he following are some examples of what is proposed to us (and what we propose).

## “I entirely consecrate myself to You ...”

**T**herefore, thanks to an unceasing effort of inner purification and self-control, we commit ourselves, as far as possible, to carry out all our actions “guided by God, moved by His Spirit, and with the intention of pleasing Him” (art. 8).

**O**ur consecration takes us on a process of permanent conversion that unifies and directs our life (art 56.2), which is nothing more than an itinerary of identification with Jesus Christ, “the firstborn of a multitude of brothers,” to be a remembrance of his love and continue His ministry of salvation (art. 23).

**T**he vows, by which we express our consecration to God, call us to training and discipline.

**E**vangelical obedience, for example, is communion with the Holy Spirit, which progressively identifies our will with the will of Jesus Christ, who did not come to do his own will but to do the will of the One who sent him “so that none of these little ones perish” (art. 33). Sometimes it gets hard and may create an opposition to some legitimate personal convictions. Once we expressed our point of view to the community and to the Superiors, if we do not find the solution in them, we accept, in an attitude of faith, the decisions of the Superiors (art. 34).

**T**o follow Jesus Christ, and as an expression of our total surrender to God, we commit ourselves to live chastity in celibacy in our community. This mystery of death and resurrection, sacrifice and fecundity, which testifies to the world what is the value of a life in which love is put at the service of all, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, it is a commitment to live our affectivity according to the values of the Gospel. Consequently, we strive to be fully responsible for our own affective life, acting with discernment and discipline in our relationships (articles 36 and 38).

**T**o follow Jesus Christ, who became poor out of love to enrich us with his poverty, we become poor and we resolutely commit ourselves to love the poor and fight against poverty. Working with them and sharing their condition, we joyfully accept the risk of losing our social prestige. In our lifestyle, we make an option for simplicity (art. 40, 40.1, 40.3).

**“To this purpose, I promise and vow to unite myself with the Brothers and remain associated with them...”**

**W**e know that our community is a prophetic but fragile sign. Attentive to the daily wear and tear that can affect it, we take care of its constant renewal (art. 48.1).

**T**here is no common life without asceticism. This is why we accept and love each other, with our differences and affinities. We strive to be kind to everyone and burdensome to nobody (art. 49.1). We let ourselves be questioned by one another. We share sufferings and joys, as well as the dedicated moments and the different services that life in common requires. By this active presence and by this delicate attitude towards one another we believe that the cohesion of the community is strengthened (art. 49).

**I**n the challenges of community life we read an invitation from the Holy Spirit to grow in love, understanding, and forgiveness (art. 71). Each Brother gives priority to the common project on his personal proj-

ect and he subordinates his own interests to it (art. 33). We are all in solidarity with the decisions taken in community and endorsed by the Brother Director, and each Brother is committed to putting them into practice (art. 57.2).

**T**he unity of the community demands a permanent effort of conversion. Called by God to live together, we commit ourselves to help each other to grow in faith and mutual love (articles 71, 72).

***There is no common life without asceticism. This is why we accept and love each other, with our differences and affinities. We strive to be kind to everyone and burdensome to nobody (art. 49.1).***

**“... to conduct together and in association schools for service of the poor ...”**

**A**nd “in any place to which one of us is sent, and to carry out the task to which he was destined, by the Body of the Society, as well as by his Superiors,” we add each one of us when taking our vows.

**T**his brings us to secularized, multireligious, and multicultural contexts, with which we strive to enter into a respectful dialogue. This attitude presupposes on our part an openness and a willingness to listen, to learn, to witness to the values of the Gospel and, as far as possible, to proclaim the Word of God (art. 14.1).

Our mission feeds on God's passion for the poor (art. 18). The poor, in fact – the economically poor, the victims of social injustice, the criminals, and those cast out of society –, are the favorites of our educational ministry. Special attention shall be paid to students with major learning difficulties, with personal problems, or to those who suffer social or family maladjustment (art. 29). By following the example of our Founder, we see our life as a journey of affective, intellectual, moral, and religious conversion which commits us more and more to the cause of the poor (art. 29.2).

The zeal for the glory of God urges us to adopt the attitude of Jesus Christ servant, and give generously our time, talents, and energy, and even our own sufferings, to the service of those entrusted to us by God. Because of this, we must strive to improve day by day our skills – on a professional and apostolic level –, the quality of our relationships, the testimony of our life, and the vigour of our faith (articles 21, 99).

Therefore, from the initial stages of our formation as disciples of La Salle, we measure ourselves with an educational service that, while open to all, gives preference to the poor (articles 91.3, 92). And when age or ailments impose a slowing down of our activity, motivated by our faith and zeal, and with the help of our community and the Superiors, we seek an adapted form of our ministry, in response to the new call from God (art. 18.3). This adapted form can be no other than the patient acceptance of our sufferings as a participation in Christ's sufferings (articles 21, 54.1).

*Effort*, that surpasses the tendency to neglect; *Itinerary*, certainly upward; *Conversion*, contradicting previous ideas, value judgments, and ways of working; these are some of the significant words that

have come to our mind. They evoke something expensive. Something like a price to pay. Like a pearl that fascinates us for which we are willing to do all this and more.

## Prayer In the past

The *Common Rules* of 1718, chapter 4, enumerated the “Exercises of piety that are practiced in this Institute”. The first sentence was to be constantly remembered since then: “The Brothers ... should love very much the holy exercise of [mental] prayer and should consider it as the first and most important of their daily exercises ...”. Other chapters indicated detailed and generous schedules: about three and a half hours were devoted to vocal and mental prayer, Mass, spiritual reading, and examination of conscience; religious studies occupied another good hour. This was the regime of an ordinary day of school activity. The 1947 edition of the same Rules did not depart sensibly of these total times, except for the diminution of the obligatory time of religious studies.

The vocal prayers were those common to all the faithful (*Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo, Angelus, Veni Creator, consecration to the Sacred Heart, Rosary ...*), along with some specific prayers of the Institute. An important place was dedicated to the litanies of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, the Passion, etc. On some occasions, parts of the Divine Office (of the deceased, of the Holy Founder, etc.) were recited. More and more the Brothers used a bilingual daily missal. Little by little the movements of biblical, liturgical, and catechetical renewal began to be felt within the Institute.



The General Chapter of 1956 demanded that the Brothers' vocal prayers be closer to the liturgy of the Church. Consequently, certain developments in the morning and evening prayers have been introduced since 1957. The evening prayers, in particular, became closer to the office of Compline.

The Second Vatican Council gave an important signal in producing, as a first document, the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. In keeping with the constant tradition of the Church, the Council recalled that the hours of Lauds and Vespers, which are the two hinges on which the Daily Office turns, were to be considered and celebrated as the chief hours (SC 89 a), and it mentioned the religious, even with their own offices, as thereby performing the public prayer of the Church (SC 98).

For its part, the decree on the Renewal of Religious Life commanded that "... books of prayers... and such like be suitably re-edited and, obsolete laws being suppressed, be adapted to the decrees of this sacred synod" (PC 3).

The 39th General Chapter collected the indications of the Council, as can be seen in the Proceedings of the 39th General Chapter, Nos. 62-92, and in the Rules and Constitutions, Chapter 10. Among other provisions, it entrusted the Region or District Chapters (*Actas* 85), and the communities to determine the order of the common exercises of each day according to the following enumeration: Lauds, morning prayer, Mass, Vespers, and evening prayer. For the common or private prayer, Sext and Compline or Litany of the Blessed Virgin remained (*Rules X*, 1). And it indicated some temporal indications: half an hour for the [mental] prayer of the morning, and half an hour for the evening prayer

together with Vespers; two hours a week or half an hour a day for the spiritual reading (*Rules X*, 2.4), in addition to the Rosary or another practice of Marian devotion (*Rule* 5).

Consequently, Districts and Regions adopted one or another form of the *Liturgy of the Hours* in use in the Church. But also, inspired by it, valuable adaptations for Christian educators were drafted (e.g. *Let us praise the Lord*, with its various *Supplements*, in the Argentina-Paraguay District).

The Institute multiplied in its different levels of responsibility, its aids to sustain the life of prayer of the Brothers. We can emblematically mention the *Symposium on Prayer and the Year of Prayer*. And we should not forget about the 44th General Chapter which, in its dense and poignant document on *Inner Life*, challenged the Brothers and their communities to "unleash unrestrained processes of conversion that help us respond to what God demands of us on a personal, community, District, and regional level, within the whole Institute" (Circ. 455, p.9).

## Prayer nowadays

*The spiritual life of the Brothers* is the title of Chapter 5 of the Rule. It immediately reminds us of the unifying invitation of the Founder: "Do not make any difference between the duties proper of your state and those related to your salvation and perfection" (art. 63). "State," "profession," "task," "ministry": names which, without much concern to differentiate them, La Salle used to point to the concrete condition of existence of the Brothers.

**W**e embrace this “state” in response to a call from God to collaborate, all together and by mutual association, in His Work: through our educational action, we make the means of salvation available to young people – the poor in the first place (cf. MR 193,3).

**F**or this we need to pray. Because to save is the Work of God, who sent his Son Jesus Christ to the world to implement it. Collaborating with his saving work requires us to identify with Him, the Saviour, as the source, model, and goal of our ministry. Identify ourselves: to change our thoughts for those of Jesus Christ, our values and our wisdom for his values and wisdom, our way of acting (actions, attitudes, intentions) for his way of acting. This means: to convert our mind, our heart, our hands. In other words, to evangelize our lives. All this exceeds us, and we must receive it from Him. And ask it to Him. And be prepared to receive it.

**W**e need to pray. But it costs us. And we experience that “we do not know how to pray properly” (Rom 8:26). That is why we must not get tired of repeating: “Lord, teach us to pray” (art. 66).

**I**f we do not get tired, we begin to perceive the power of the gift we receive from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And throughout our days a response made out of praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and request for forgiveness emerges (art. 66).

**P**raying is something we can learn. And here the need for training and guidance reappears.

**E**xercising in prayer takes time. Our present Rule is very sober in temporal indications: “Throughout the tasks which fill their day, the Brothers make an effort to remain united with God” (art. 68); “... they congregate at least in the morning and in the evening to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours” (art. 73). The organization of the prayer life of each community is part of the community project (art. 56.1). On the other hand, each Brother has the responsibility to pay special attention to his personal prayer and to the search for moments of silence. In the oratory, where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved, we dedicate personal times of adoration (articles 65.1 and 73.3). We

***“Do not make any difference between the duties proper of your state and those related to your salvation and perfection” (art. 63).***

also have the celebration of the Eucharist, if possible on a daily basis, and daily examination of conscience (articles 74 and 70). But what we consider to be “the first and principal of our daily exercises” remains our mental prayer, in which we unite ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ in his mysteries,

his virtues, and his teachings (art. 69). Our journey is marked by the reiterated and frequent remembrance of the presence of God.

**I**n addition to training, guidance, ultimately, our teacher of prayer is the Holy Spirit who “personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words (...) and the prayers that the Spirit makes for God’s holy people are always in accordance with the mind of God” (Rom 8: 26-27). But we also need human guides. In fact, La Salle left us a *Method* to help make our mental prayer a true encounter with Jesus Christ. Several recent works of analysis and popularization reveal the bonds of this *Method* with the *Lectio*

*Divina* at the same time as its current validity. In the *Symposium* on prayer, Brother Fermín Gainza clearly presented its internal articulation and its connection with life. In the issue no. 50 of the *Cahiers Lasalliens*, Br. Michel Sauvage and Br. Miguel Campos explored its great richness. In our days, by means of his precious little book *Día tras día. Palabras para la vida interior* [Day after day. Words for our interior life] (Rodríguez Mancini, 2016, p. 46-48), Br. Santiago Rodríguez M. makes it available to every educator. These are just some samples of a much broader production.

**T**he Church offers us the guidance of her Liturgy of the Hours. It is wise using it, as we are doing.

**I**n addition, we have abundant literature, both printed and digital, which helps us to pray our life by illuminating it with the Sacred Scripture. We must be grateful to God for living in this time of such richness in biblical matters (cf. *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, p. XLVIII).

**O**ur ministry of Christian education, and the world we know through our human relations, the media, and the social networks, made incense on the altar of zeal “for the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (cf. MR 202,1), raise the aroma of worship and thanksgiving, or, perhaps more spontaneously, the aroma of the request for forgiveness and intercession.

**A**s a matter of fact, in the mind of our Founder, zeal is a (or the?) great unifier of our spiritual life: it is true that “you have exercises that have been established for your own sanctification; but if you have a zeal for the salvation of those who are to be educated by you, you will better not fail to do them and refer them to this intention”(MR 205,2).

**I**n this perspective, our whole life of prayer could be called a life of “apostolic prayer” (cf. art. 7). Through it, also those who are no longer on the “front line” of school or the like, participate, and give a crucial contribution, in the Work of God that all Lasallians carry out “together and by association.”

## Towards the future

**W**hat are the perspectives of asceticism and prayer for all Lasallians in the framework of their shared mission?

**F**or educators and their assistants, asceticism can include a “yes” and a “no”. “Yes”, at least, to professional responsibility, to solidarity with fellow missionaries, to promote the greatest good of the students, with all the dedication and patience required. “No”, among other things, to the culture of consumerism, superficiality, and waste.

**F**or the students, “yes” to what develops in them the sense of social justice, solidarity with the poor, and respect for creation; and “no” to what is opposed to it.

**A**s for the Brothers, their first responsibility and their specific contribution to the shared mission is the testimony of a ministerial community that lives its religious life in fraternal charity and solidarity with the poor in view of the educational service (art. 15).

**T**he educational ministry, lived with the attitude of Jesus “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20), justifies the “there shall be no bodily mortification that is a rule in this Institute”



And how about prayer? It is as if it had always been there, waiting for us, like a treasure so necessary as difficult to possess.

Young people do need it. They live “in secularized, multireligious, and multicultural contexts” (art. 14.1) where “spontaneously, feelings are given more value than the will, impressions more value than intelligence, the body more value than the spirit, plurality more value than the unit, and the temporal more value than Eternal” (Circ. 455, 9-10). But a thirst for spirituality is still alive in the depths of them. All of them, not just the baptized, need guides who help

them develop some proper form of personal relationship with God (cf. 17.1-2).

The educators need it, as they are called to be such guides. That is why the Brothers welcome them to share the community prayer and offer their help when they ask for it, to be initiated to prayer (art. 73.2).

We the Brothers do need it to re-evangelize our lives every day. In this way, our total and gratuitous consecration will become true day after day, in order to procure, always together and by association, the glory of God in the educational service of the poor.





# **Lasallian education: an answer for the modern world**

*BR. DIEGO MUÑOZ, FSC.  
LASALLIAN RESOURCES AND RESEARCH  
GENERALATE, ROMA*



Every period of significant change in our civilization has known similar crises. In every case, the solution consisted not of suppressing the school or abandoning it, but in renewing it. Today there is an opportunity for the Institute to make its contribution to the necessary renewal of the school, to help bring to birth the kind of school that will be capable of preparing people for the twenty-first century

Declaration 44, 5

## Two milestones in the Institute's history

On December 6, 1967, the Chapter assembly gathered in Rome approved, almost unanimously, the text of the *Declaration on the Brother in the Modern World*. In this way, the 39th General Chapter delivered to the entirety of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a founding text in the light of which all the other chapter documents should be read, including the new *Rules and Constitutions* that were just being drafted. For the first time in the history of the Institute, the Brothers had participated in a long process of intercapitular discernment, listening to the signs of the times from a Church and a society that had radically changed; the time had come to push forward an adapted renewal of the Institute.

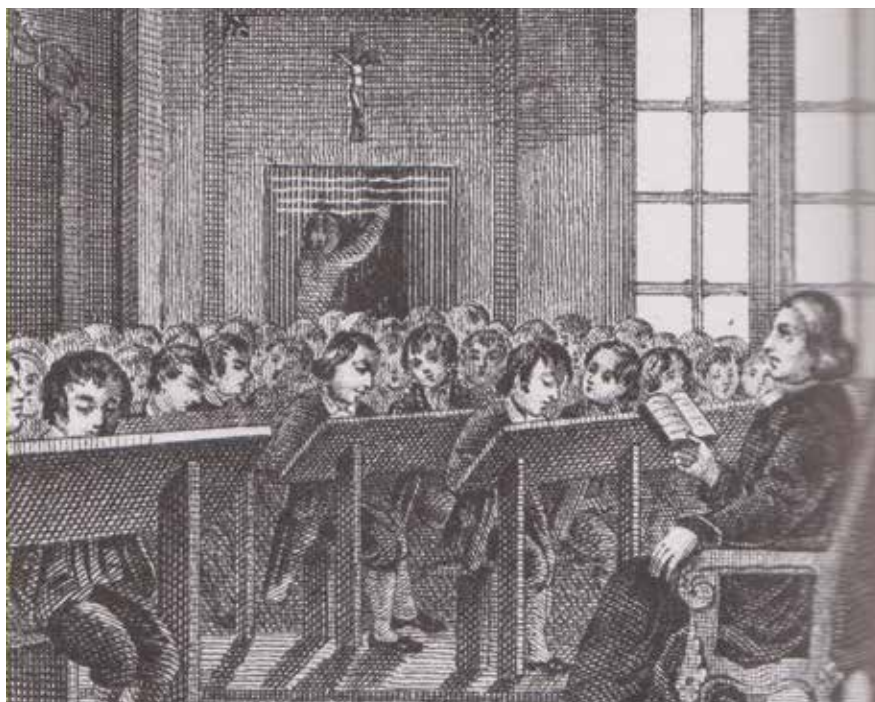
Forty-seven years later, on May 23, 2014, the 45th General Chapter assembly approved, almost unanimously, the drafting of a *Declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy*. It is not the end, but only the beginning of a journey; thus, we don't refer to a text but to a "founding commitment" of discerning together the shared mission of all Lasallians.

With this chapter assembly decision, we, the Brothers, have taken on, from 2014 onwards, in line with the 2nd International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission (IA), the responsibility of reflecting – together with the Lasallians committed to the educational mission – on the particular characteristics of Lasallian pedagogical practices in the 21st century. Five decades after the founding event of the *Declaration* in 1967, a Chapter that has dared to ask if the Institute still has a viable future (Circular 469, 1.3), has chosen to discern their passion for the educational service of the poor, that is, their *raison d'être* in the world.

What, then, does the drafting of a *Declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy* mean for the present and the future of the Institute's mission?

## Starting point

I was born one week after the inauguration of the Second Vatican Council, and I entered the Institute in 1980, the year of the Tricentennial celebration. My Novice Director had participated in the 39th General Chapter. From him, I received a first-hand account of who had drafted the *Declaration* and the new *Rules and Constitutions*. Later, in my life together with the Brothers of the Institute, I began to understand that something deep had happened inside each one of



them; they had decided to go forward with their life project, understanding that the Institute would never be the same again. More than three decades after this first moment of my life as a Brother, I realize that I was formed in an atmosphere of nostalgia.

As a former student of a Lasallian high school, and having lived out a profound learning experience with the Brothers and the Lay Professors, I was a young Brother proud to pass down a unique and unrepeatable pedagogical experience. Something had left its mark on my life – and the life of my classmates, the third mixed-gender generation of my school – and because of that something, it was still worthwhile to consecrate my life to the education of children and young adults, above all, the most poor of our Latin American societies.

What did the Declaration on the Brother in Today's World mean for us, the post-conciliar generation, with regards to the commitment from the Christian school to the service of the poor?

## A pedagogy that is born as an answer for the poor

Rereading the text of the *Declaration*, I continue to be struck by what the Chapter Brothers in 1967 reflected to an Institute of almost 17,000 Brothers: not only did they ratify their identity and originality in the Church, but they invited the Institute to renew their specific reason for being: the service of the poor through education (D 28,1). It was important in that moment to say *who they were as Brothers of the Christian Schools* (D 1-27), but beyond that, for *whom they had been called* (D 28-52).

In this way, the Brother drafters of the Declaration invited the whole Institute to ask themselves – in the society of the sixties – who the poor were (D 29). Starting with them, it was possible for the Institute to rethink their pedagogical proposal. The Chapter



Brothers had understood, in this way, their fidelity to the intuitions of their Holy Founder. For this reason, the reality of the poor committed them to: renew their gaze of faith and their zeal for the defenseless (D 29,2), evaluate and renew their educational centers (D 31,1) and, above all, rethink the Lasallian pedagogy in light of the primacy of the person, above structures (D 31,2).

Certainly, it was a time of change, of social critique. The Brothers, through the Declaration – in line with their historical trajectory – opted once again for education as an answer, and above all, for the collective promotion of the poor (D 31,5), the formation of consciences (D 32,1) and the building up of universal brotherhood (D 32,2). They knew that they were beginning a long process; as a consequence, they affirmed that there was a need for “...imaginative effort coupled with a personal and community search to discover new and adaptive forms of education for those who are ‘the poorest of the poor.’” (D 33,1).

## A profoundly Christian pedagogy

The Brother drafters of the *Declaration* opted for reaffirming the commitment of the Institute to Christian education (D 35). The urgency for attending to a youth “fount of hope and base of the future” (D 36,1), the need to have well-trained educators (D 36,2) and the demands of the right to an education, “recognized and proclaimed publicly” (D 36,3), helped to highlight more clearly the role of the Lasallian apostolic educational mission (D 37,1). The Brothers found in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, the Christian roots of their mission in the Church, in fidelity to the Holy Founder (D 37,2).

In that way, in dialogue with the charismatic sources of the Institute, the Declaration affirmed two fundamental options of the Institute in its three-hundred year history: the centrality of

catechesis in the Lasallian school (D 38-42) and the Christian education of youth in all its expressions and modalities (D 43-52).

The Brothers of 1967 already had a coherent theological-pastoral structure to dialogue with the modern world; they were far from the situation experienced by the Brothers at the end of the 19th century. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Church had manifested its trust in the future of humanity (GS 4) without avoiding warnings about the possible imbalances of progress and its consequences (GS 10). The Brother of the Christian Schools, lay religious, baptized and a catechist by vocation (D 38,1), had been invited by the Council to share the mystery of Christ in dialogue with the realities of the modern world (D 38,2). It meant rereading the Lasallian intuitions with new eyes: there was no disassociation at all between catechesis and the efforts for the human formation of youth (D 40). Educating for life was preparing youth for full humanization (D 41). Because of this, all initiatives were welcome, after discernment.

Christian pedagogy, organized centuries before by the Brothers, acquired, in the *Declaration*, a renewed, modernized language. It was no longer about a proposal of confrontation with the world, but of openness and dialogue that demanded, inside the Lasallian schools, “an effort of authenticity and cul-

tural relevancy” (D 45,1). From that basis, the Brothers committed themselves to evaluate the quality of the studies (45,2) and to renew the objectives, programs and methods of the Lasallian schools (45,3), especially of the education in the faith (45,5).

Two big tasks were foreseen in the *Declaration*: the formation of the teachers as an essential part of the educational community (D 48) and a review of the works, whose renewal would be an indisputable sign of vitality (D 49). The Brothers were realizing that the time had come for deep changes, but they didn't hide their trust – at a personal and community level – in the progress and development of societies, in science, in politics, and in society as a whole. Thus, they ratified at the end of the *Declaration*: “...the future of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers” (D 53,2). Each individual was called to be a protagonist of a historic moment.

***From our outlook as educators, we have seen how society has moved from optimism to disenchantment. Significant sociopolitical projects have not resolved the problems of inequality and social injustice.***

## A difficult fifty-year journey

The five decades since the *Declaration* have been marked by profound changes in the world and in the Church. From our outlook as educators, we have seen how society has moved from optimism to disenchantment. Significant sociopolitical projects have not resolved the problems of inequality and social injustice. Even globalization, at the end of this period,





*INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG LASALLIANS*

is being strongly questioned, when we had already experienced the creative strength of networks and joint projects. Technology has become indispensable in our lives and continues to challenge our way of life in today's world.

**T**hese fifty years have also not been enough for the Catholic Church to enter into a deep process of renewal. We have witnessed interesting initiatives that have given a new outlooks on pastoral processes. Nevertheless, clericalism and traditionalism have hindered the advancement of the laity and its full participation as the People of God. The vocation of the lay religious has lost ground and continues to be misunderstood.

**A**t the same time, the Institute has maintained its desire to promote the protagonism of the laity in the Christian school. As an essential part of this new dynamic it has encouraged the shared mission with the educators, now more than 90,000, working in the promotion of the Lasallian works in 77 countries. There are more than one million students; 30% of whom are in higher education institutions.

**T**he middle-aged Brothers, those of us around 40 or 50 years old, were youth formed during this long period of the Institute. We learned from the wisdom of our Brothers, protagonists of these deep changes; they were our visitors, directors, and heads



of formation. We perceived their nostalgia, but also their firm decision to continue forward. We learned from our companions on the journey, from the Lasallian Educators, the richness of a teaching vocation that has found in La Salle a new perspective of faith that has marked their lives; they have also been our heads of formation. With them we feel the commitment to continue forward in the mission.

## So, why have a Declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy today?

The 45th General Chapter was celebrated under the sign of Parménie, icon of hope in the midst of the tempest being experienced by the nascent Institute. Today we feel that this cry of hope also calls us: the educational service of the poor continues to be relevant and makes its call on the future of the Lasallians. The *Declaration* of 1967 was directed to the Brothers; today, 90,000 Lasallian Educators are protagonists of the educational mission of the Institute, and with them we build the future.

That is why, when we participated in the 2nd International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission (IA 2013) we felt the need to discern together regarding the “real” pedagogy that forms part of our daily experience. What are the criteria that determine that a school is Lasallian in its conception and its practice? Where do we find ourselves, Brothers and Lasallians, in the world educational system? How can we be, together, creatively faithful to an ecclesial charism that has been treasured by the Institute for over three hundred years?

These concerns were collected by the 45th General Chapter, and that is why, today, we are on the path towards the drafting of the *Declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy in the 21st Century*

It is the voice of the Lasallians that we desire be expressed in an original fashion together with that of the Brothers; with this gesture, we wish to verify that the ministry of Christian education is lived out generously by the Laity in the Church-Communion. It is the People of God that feels called, through different vocations born in the school, to build a project of fraternity of God the Father. Thus, the process of discernment between Brothers and Lasallians will bring about a way that appropriately expresses our deeply Christian pedagogy in today’s world.

## Big challenges

We need to “understand ourselves” in the light of the pedagogical-educational itinerary of the Institute; deeply contemplate the past journey of the current pedagogical models that form part of our daily experience and the criteria that we utilize to evaluate the quality of our educational centers. It is not about thinking of a theory, but about critically putting into systems what we really live out, confronting ourselves with the world educational system and renewing our teaching practices.

That is why we insist once again that the *Declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy in the 21st Century* must have the explicit voice of the current protagonists, of all the Lasallians – men and women – with their cultural, professional and spiritual richness. How will we walk together; with what criteria; with what formation? How will we take on our identity of “Lasal-

lian” when we are so different? And to what extent does this diversity enrich the common project?

**T**he Lasallian pedagogy continues to be deeply Christian and Catholic, that is, universal, open to the world, ecumenical in its radicality. So, how can we continue to encourage the faith-culture dialogue in the midst of a profoundly secularized and multicultural society? To what extent could this enrich the process of the Lasallian pedagogy? What does it mean, then, to be a catechist today in the school?

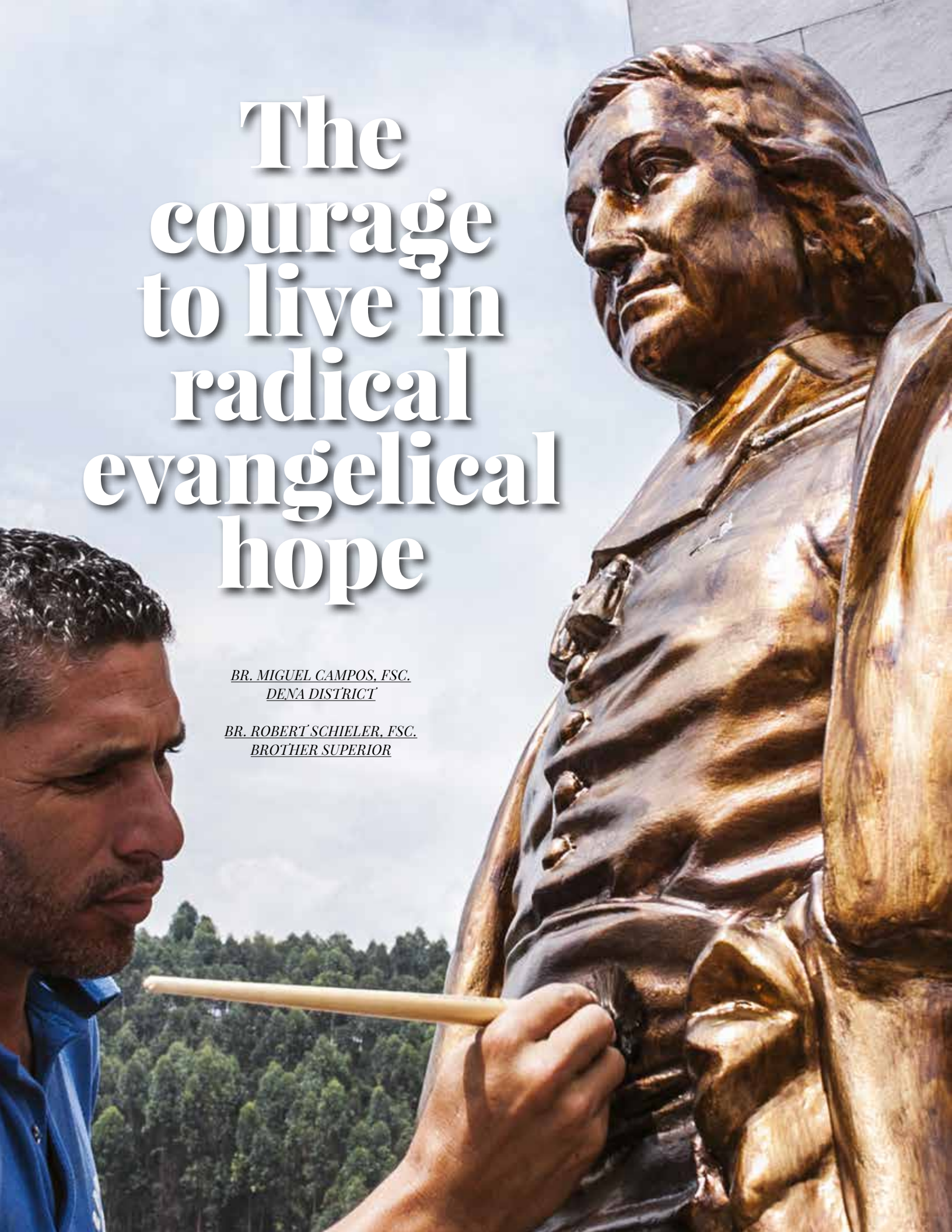
**F**inally, at the end of the 1990s, the Institute made an option for the defense of children’s rights. Today we believe that the Lasallian pedagogy cannot ignore the consequences of the right of children and youth to education, and, above all, the role of women in the defense of these rights. Where a woman’s rights are respected, the rights of children are safeguarded, especially among the poor. Rights and citizenship go hand in hand; this means that Lasallian education is invited to contemplate its sociopolitical

dimension. What can we, the Lasallian Educators, say about the construction of a global citizenry for the 21st century? In what way can we impact and transform the society of the future? And in that process, what is the voice of the Lasallian Woman in today’s world?

## Conclusion

**T**he 45th General Chapter has invited us to go beyond our borders. Perhaps, starting from the faith, we can go beyond what we imagine, what is humanly possible. Walking together in the drafting of a pedagogical declaration can sound like a teenager’s dream or a deep conviction of faith. I prefer to think that the Lasallian educational mission is more alive than ever and that education is a necessary answer in today’s world. We are instruments in the hands of God; of a Father God that has left us the responsibility of a Kingdom announced by his Son among us and who guides us with his Spirit. Everything else will depend on the creative fidelity we take on as a community.

***The Lasallian pedagogy continues to be deeply Christian and Catholic, that is, universal, open to the world, ecumenical in its radicality.***



# The courage to live in radical evangelical hope

*BR. MIGUEL CAMPOS, FSC.*  
*DENA DISTRICT*

*BR. ROBERT SCHIELER, FSC.*  
*BROTHER SUPERIOR*

Societies, like individuals, grow old and die once the habits inherited from the past outweigh the will to Renewal. It is not easy to balance fidelity to the intuition that sparked our origin and the requirements of life today. The destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers.

Declaration 53, 2

The future of humanity is in the hands of those who know how to give the following generation reasons for living, reasons for hope”

Vatican II: G.S. 31

## Introduction

Rather than focus on the approval of the Rule and Constitutions, as was expected, the 39th General Chapter spent time reflecting on “the many facets of the Brothers’ life and mission in the world of today”. In the early days of the Chapter, the Delegates rejected the planned agenda replacing it with one of their own; this was to be their Chapter. A vast consultation process was put in place and “as Delegates studied the questions of the vows, formation and our life of prayer and community, the Chapter increasingly sensed the need for an authoritative statement that would serve as the foundational and unifying principle of the Chapter’s work (cf. Declaration 1967). Seeking to procure the glory of God and desiring to revitalize the Institute’s fraternal life and apostolic ministry of human and Christian education, the Delegates eventually decided to publish a Declaration regarding our identity and mission in the Church and society.

The Brothers enthusiastically responded to the Spirit’s promptings, engaged in intense dialogue, wrote and approved The Brothers of the

Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration (1967). These hope-filled men sensed that new and creative Gospel-centered initiatives were needed to revitalize their community of faith and their apostolic ministry. The socio-religious culture that nurtured them as young religious was rapidly disappearing while their desire to share in the joys and suffering of people, especially children, the young and the poor was as compelling as ever.

Our senior Brothers will recall the challenges of the ensuing 50 years; a half century marked by a frenzied-at-times search for new ways to joyfully announce the Gospel and to reinvigorate community life. While seemingly timeless cultural traditions and trends were losing relevance, new paradigms were emerging. During both the bright days and tempestuous times, our senior Brothers remained steadfast in their commitment to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom.

Meanwhile, Brothers who were in initial formation when the Declaration was published were encouraged by the winds of change. Well intentioned, but often without sufficient critical thinking, many embraced a new global youth cul-



ture that tended to question many facets of personal life, relationships and social organization. They vibrated with the challenges and signs of the times regarding the needs of the poor, the constitutive elements of our vocation, human and Christian education, the lay character of the Institute, rising secularism and a growing practical interest in spirituality. These Brothers, too, were faithful witnesses to Jesus and the Reign of God.

As we reflect on the impact of the Declaration, we can see that an important shift had occurred in 1967. The Declaration, not the Rule and Constitutions, would be the authoritative statement in light of which we were to read and understand all the texts of the Chapter. While this irreversible movement of renewal was underway, an unexpected and earth-shaking event compromised the stability of the Institute: the departure of thousands of Brothers who suddenly realized that the cultural story that had given meaning and direction to their personal and communal stories was gone for good. Over the past 50 years, society, the Church and the Institute experienced the upsetting collapse of significant cultural foundations.

Our Lasallian mission of human and Christian education and our fraternal life, however, did not implode under the pressure of massive departures and the disappearance of the traditional socio-cultural underpinnings of religious

life. In terms of the mission, we see the increasing ministerial involvement of lay women and men whose hearts and minds are deeply touched by the charism and the pedagogy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. These new protagonists give strength and vitality to our mission.

As for our fraternal life, we experience communities that are smaller and more intentional, clearly focused on new approaches to the Pastoral Ministry of Vocations and increasingly responsive

to Christ's call to bring the Good News to the poor and vulnerable in new and exciting ways. These communities witness to Christian hope and the primacy of service to the least of our sisters and brothers.

In what follows, we would like to explore with you, in the first place, how the Institute, prior to the Declaration, perceived the world and society. Secondly, we will take a very brief look at our history: three centuries of living under the guidance of the spiri-

tual and pedagogical vision and structures created by John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers. Believing that their inheritance - the vision and structures - were an expression of God's will, the Brothers were firmly rooted in the past.

The last decades of the 20th century became both a time of radical hope and a period of confusion for many Brothers and their lay colleagues. Brothers and Partners were entering the

*These hope-filled men sensed that new and creative Gospel-centered initiatives were needed to revitalize their community of faith and their apostolic ministry.*



21st century with a desire to respond creatively to their contemporary world and the joys and sufferings of all people.

Thirdly, we suggest that in the present situation we become like a parable that illustrates our collaboration with God’s plan of salvation. Finally, we will invite you to place the Declaration in its proper historical context and consider that today’s realities require new responses and strategies that will renew our fraternal life and reinvigorate our joyful proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Connecting with the modern world

The proclamation of the Declaration was indeed remarkable when we take into consideration that 20 years earlier, following the Second World War, Superior General Brother Athanase Emile at the 1946 General Chapter sought to protect the Institute from new societal trends introduced by modernity. He had attempted to obtain from the Holy See a quick approval of the Rules with the intention of preventing any future changes to them. Brother Athanase’s misguided and misleading maneuvers ended in failure. It is, however, tragic to note that the leadership of an Institute engaged in the service of human and Christian education was

attempting to turn its back on history: walking forward while living in the past.

The fear and mistrust for societal trends were, of course, reinforced by the general resistance and at times belligerent opposition of the Church towards the modern world. Religious men and women in the service of Catholic education seemed to be more comfortable with the past and very cautious regarding innovations.

*The fear and mistrust for societal trends were, of course, reinforced by the general resistance and at times belligerent opposition of the Church towards the modern world.*

For 240 years, since the approval of the Institute as a religious congregation in 1725, other than the (Preface to the...) *Bull of Approbation*, we did not have an authoritative document equivalent to the Declaration. The Bull included the approval of some particular chapters of the Rule. The identity of the Brothers and the purpose of the Institute are described without any possibility of deviation or ambiguity. The Brothers are religious searching for “perfection”. They join this state of life in the

Church for the purpose of their own salvation and the salvation of others. They live in community under the authority of a superior, professing the classic triad of vows: poverty, chastity and obedience. Protected by two walls – the Rule and their vows – they separate themselves from a corrupt world and from lay people.

In 1946, Brother Athanase brought these ideas to their logical conclusion: Stop the changes! The



secret to achieve perfection would be blind obedience to the superiors and rigid fidelity to the Rules. The apostolic dimension of the Brothers' life was deemphasized and the centrality of our specific vows (association and stability in the Institute) was blurred. It would take more than 40 years to rectify this situation.

**T**he underlying theology of religious life that motivated Brother Athanase and the Institute was in open contradiction with the Institute's foundational journey. Subtly guided by the Holy Spirit, the Institute, slowly and deliberately, did not fall into the temptation of opting to become an irrelevant entity. Many Brothers were inspired and informed by unprecedented and exciting movements of renewal that were underway generally in Europe and particularly in France. In the middle of the 20th century,

these Brothers were exposed to some of the best representatives of the Catholic intellectual tradition who were encouraging the examination and reformulation of the Church's theological language.

**R**enewed guidelines for research highlighted a classic return to the sources. Encouraged by the orientations of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), researchers began to apply critical hermeneutical tools in order to better understand ancient texts of the Bible.

**T**hese various movements of return to the sources, linked with the renewal of parish missions, also influenced strong theological movements at the Jesuit Scholasticate at Fourvière (Lyon) and at the Center for Dominican Studies of Saulchoir. Signifi-



cant theological collections appeared such as *Théologie* published by Aubier and *Unam Sanctam*, published by CERF. Themes that would become part of the language of the Second Vatican Council germinated during these years: new images of the Church, an emphasis on community, gospel foundational journey and purpose of mission are some examples. Authors including Father Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar and Marie Dominique Chenu were symbols of this springtime of the Church (Campos et al, 2014, p. 85-86).

**L**iturgy was the experimental field par excellence, for through prayer and the Eucharist new insights could find a practical pastoral application. Catechetical renewal was underway in Germany and

research in *kerygma* in Austria. In France, René Voillaume's book *Au Coeur des masses* was a landmark for religious life.

## Entering the 21st century: embracing new trends

**F**rom the time of the 39th General Chapter and the publication of the Declaration, the Brothers, through the eyes of faith, discerned new education trends, learned to dialogue with the modern world and sought, more and more, to witness to Jesus and his Kingdom. They studied, embraced and responded to emerging trends in education. They created innovative structures both for formal and non-formal education.



Superiors General identified particular trends such as the link between service to the poor and social justice (Brother José Pablo); the shared Lasallian mission (Brother John Johnston); and, the primacy of the vow of association and association for mission (Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría).

**H**owever, former Superior General Brother John Johnston and others have suggested the time we live is in radical discontinuity with our past. This is a time of radical cultural transitions: old paradigms are fading away and new patterns and trends are emerging.

**T**he passage from modernity to post-modernity has devastated many cultural and mega-narratives. For more than 50 years, our world, our Church and our Institute have been searching for new sustaining narratives. For the world, the narrative of modernity has lost its meaning; we now speak of living in the post-modern or transmodern world, a world still in search of a definition. For our Church, the Second Vatican Council brought the Church into the modern age just as that age was giving way to post-modernity. Fifty years ago, the delegates to the 39th General Chapter and the authors of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, began to write a new narrative for our Institute. The Declaration is a catalyst that continues to move us to develop this new narrative.

**W**e are cautioned, however, to be aware that the Declaration is a time-bound document. A Gospel-driven response to today's cultural trends demands a new language. The Declaration spoke about renewal, today we speak about re-foundation.

## The Courage to Hope, a Parable for our Times

**B**efore looking at the unfolding of this new narrative, perhaps a story from an unlikely source can cast light on the path before us. The story describes an act of radical hope by the Crow people, an Indigenous Nation in today's United States of America. These people experienced the devastation of their culture in the late 19th century. Plenty Coups, the leader of the Crow People, recounted to his biographer the experience when the white man arrived and threatened the Crow people with the loss of their culture, their narrative and their way of life: "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this, nothing happened." (Lear, 2006, p. 2)

**I**n other words, the Crow lost a definition and a vision for themselves; they lost their "narrative". Confronted with a catastrophic situation, Plenty Coups asked himself what traditional resources he could call on to understand the Crow's predicament, analyze their options and offer his people hope.

**L**ike many ancient people, he turned to his dreams where the traditional bird-icon of the Crow nation, a chickadee, revealed itself. For the Crow culture the chickadee:

... is least in strength but strongest of mind among his kind. He is willing to work for wisdom. The Chickadee-person is a good listener. Nothing escapes his ears, which he

has sharpened by constant use. Whenever others are talking together of their successes and failures, there you will find the Chickadee-person listening to their words. (Lear, 2006, p. 80)

The chickadee listens to others and learns from them. We could say the bird discerns the signs of the times to learn what God wills for his people. As an Institute, we seek to know God's will for our generation. What are we hearing? What are we learning? What is the way forward? Plenty Coups, through his dreams, learned that in uncertain times - when a culture is being eradicated - a necessary virtue for the Crow people was courage. "Plenty Coup's call for courage inspired the Crow Nation to be creative, and to take initiative and responsibility for their future. To confront the unknown with intelligence and openness, without lashing out in anger or engaging in consoling illusions, is a kind of courage we often ignore." (cf. Furrow, 2007)

Plenty Coup's actions were in contrast with those of the Sioux Nation under Sitting Bull. The Sioux Nation rested its hope on a savior who would punish the white people and enable the Nation to return to its old ways. Unlike the Crow, the Sioux turned away from the future in favor of an unrecoverable past.

"Plenty Coups was able to communicate this new ideal of courage in the face of the unknown exemplified by the Chickadee-person, and it would give the Crow the flexibility to create new definitions of a meaningful life despite their inability to conceptualize their future" (cf. Furrow, 2007). This, according to the narrator of Plenty Coups story, is radical hope.

Was this not also the case of Yahweh's Chosen People? The people of Israel, in the face of oppression by the Chalcedons, expressed radical hope in this way: "The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late." (Habakkuk 2:2-3)

## The Declaration: a path of hope

The 39th General Chapter and the Declaration indicated a path of hope for us by "looking to a future to be invented, and calling for creativity, initiative and responsibility" (Campos et al, 2014, p. 413).

The Sacred Scriptures, John Baptist de La Salle's Itinerary and the Declaration are among our traditional resources. We constantly seek sustenance in the Word of God, our principle Rule. We study, mediate and share God's Word with one another (Rule, 8). Like our Founder, we return again and again to the Gospels and for 50 years we have been inspired and motivated by the Declaration.

In the biography of Brother Michel Sauvage, we read that the development of the Declaration involved a long process of maturation. This process of maturation continues today. Successive General Chapters, revisions to our Rule, and publications such as *The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission*, Circulars 461 (*Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an Act of Hope*) and 466 (*They Will call themselves Brothers*) are all pointing us to an exciting future.



**S**aint John Baptist de La Salle's legacy inspires us to move ahead with hope: "We like to think of our Founders...as being ahead of their time.... The fact is that they are radically [in their roots] people of their time, immersed in their time, responsive to their time. Often their time is the beginning of a new time... [T]hey intuit that the world which the Spirit is remaking is, even now, already breaking into the present." (Lee, 2004, p. 5)

**T**he discovery of the Lasallian vocation for our Partners is part of the Lasallian world the Spirit is remaking:

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

**I**n 1990, former General Councilor Brother Patrice Marey wrote:

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... The coming of many 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. (The General Council, 1990, p. 35)

**D**uring the past five decades, and continuing today, the commitment to our charism by thousands of women and men is a clear sign of hope for the viability of the mission: "In the growth of association with men and women who walk side-by-side with them and identify themselves today as the sons and daughters of John Baptist de La Salle, [the Brothers] see a sign of the times which fills them with hope." (Rule 157, 2)

**C**reative responses to the needs of our time give us hope. Examples of vibrant Lasallian educational communities that witness to Christian hope include: Yourtown in Australia; vocational and technical training for orphans and street children in Sri Lanka, Peru, and Kenya; schools for girls in Pakistan; and, San Miguel schools in the United States (Please see the Bulletin N° 253, Children and Youth at Risk, A Lasallian Response, 2011).

**C**ollaboration among our universities, the commitment to evangelization and catechesis in our secondary schools, the Fratelli Project with the Marist Brothers (Lebanon), Solidarity with South Sudan and Signum Fidei projects in Madagascar and the Philippines are hopeful signs of the evangelizing power of the Lasallian network. The enthusiastic participation of Young Lasallians in immersion experiences and volunteer movements are also signs of hope.

**L**asallian association is a sign of hope for the Institute today. At the same time that we see a demographic decline in the number of Brothers, we see



an increase in the number of ministries. We are beginning to develop organic structures that empower Brothers and Partners to discern the needs of our contemporary mission.

**T**he restoration of the centrality of our vow of association is a sign of hope. The 39th General Chapter seriously considered the suppression of our specific vows of association and stability. Forty-seven years later, the 45th General Chapter reaffirmed “the centrality of the vow of association both for the educational service with the poor and also for understanding the Brother’s identity” (*Circular* 469, 2.13). The continuing actualization of the centrality of this vow announces a revitalization of the Pastoral Ministry of Vocations. “For a pastoral

ministry of vocations to become an effective invitation to share the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, it is necessary:

- that by their own lives, the Brothers witness to the presence of God among people, to the liberating force of his Spirit, and to the tenderness of his love;
- that communities which make a point of being open and welcoming, put into practice, in a fraternal and apostolic way, the words of the Gospel ‘come and see’;
- that the Institute works effectively to renew itself by responding to the most urgent needs of the world of young people waiting to be evangelized. (Rule, 86)



**O**ur commitment to fostering all Lasallian vocations, especially to our life of vowed fraternity, is the fullest expression of our vow of association. It unites us in our “dedication to God’s will in order to accomplish his work [And our] association achieves solidarity and stability because the Brothers are deeply united by love” (Sauvage et Campos, 1977, p. 137). When fully lived, association also becomes a sign of hope for all Lasallian vocations.

## Conclusion

**“H**ope requires imagination about alternatives, a firm belief that things ought to be different. The difference between imagination and hope is that hope is open to God’s imagination, but it is our own active imagination that prepares the way... New communities are incubated in the immediacies of profoundly lived, accurately interpreted, and deeply felt experience filled to the brim with memory and hope” (Lee, 2004, p. 6).



This was the narrative that Plenty Coup offered to the Crow people. In his dream he heard the Spirit speak of the coming end of their traditional way of life and the destruction of their culture. Therefore “we must do what we can to open our imaginations up to a radically different set of future possibilities” (Lear, 2006, p. 93). But he lived in the hope that something good would arise from the devastation of their traditional culture. In order to believe this, the Crow needed courage to go forth into the unknown future.

God’s chosen people also went ahead with the sure hope that God’s promise would be fulfilled, would not disappoint and would arrive on time.

What about us? Are we filled with courage to live in radical Christian hope? Are we prepared to be experts in the promotion of communion with all women and men? Are we ready to be happy and enthusiastic messengers of the Good News of Jesus Christ to peoples of various cultural and religious traditions? Are we committed to the re-foundation of the Institute?

Once God has touched us in the midst of our struggles and has created in us the burning desire to be forever united with him, we will find the courage and the confidence to prepare his way and to invite all who share our dream for the Lasallian mission to wait during this short time for the day of completed joy. With this new courage and new confidence we can strengthen each other with the hopeful words of Paul to Titus:

... God’s grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all the worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus<sup>1</sup>. (Titus 2:11-13)

***What about us? Are we filled with courage to live in radical Christian hope? Are we prepared to be experts in the promotion of communion with all women and men? Are we ready to be happy and enthusiastic messengers of the Good News of Jesus Christ to peoples of various cultural and religious traditions? Are we committed to the re-foundation of the Institute?***

<sup>1</sup> Give us This Day: Daily Prayer for Today’s Catholic. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. Author and issue unknown.

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