

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

FROM HOPE TO COMMITMENT: UNDERSTANDING LASALLIAN VOCATIONS

CIRCULAR 475



La  Salle

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FEBRUARY 9, 2020

**From Hope to Commitment:
Understanding Lasallian Vocations**

GENERAL COUNCIL

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Presentation

Dear Brothers and Lasallians,

We are pleased to present to you a Circular letter on a theme of central importance in our lives as we bring the Year of Lasallian Vocations to a close. It represents the fruit of four years of encounters, research, and dialogue on contemporary experience in the Institute and Lasallian Family.

The impressions gathered through our travels in the Institute and Lasallian Family served as our starting point. Given that ours is a “spirituality of journey” taking place in vastly different cultures and contexts, we were not surprised to find that “consecration,” “belonging,” “identity,” “vocation,” and “association” are lived and articulated in different ways. As a General Council, we were driven to a deeper sensitivity of the Institute’s and Lasallian Family’s dynamic diversity. At the same time, we also encountered the values that are commonly embraced in our communities: dialogue, hospitality, solidarity, compassion, fraternity, freedom, and love.

What Circular 461 stated nearly ten years ago about association—that a longing for charismatic communion and sharing fosters a dynamic movement in the Institute (3.11)—remains true today. This dynamic movement continues to develop and mature at the level of ideas and experiences. We encourage the reader to keep this in mind as we participate together in giving shape and form to what we believe is the action of the Holy Spirit of God.

For these reasons, we wish to emphasize that through this Circular we are not offering a definitive word on Lasallian vocations and association, but rather offering an invitation to engage in dialogue and action. We believe such an engagement will generate creative insights and encourage new understandings that inspire hearts and nourish our shared commitment to serve God and one another.

As the Year of Lasallian Vocations comes to a close, we are reminded of the rich blessings of our call and ministry. May we continue to bring this year's energy into the challenges and commitments we live each day. May this Circular Letter serve as a guide to help each of us to live our calling to the fullest. And may our fidelity serve as a sign of the presence of God among us and in the midst of the world.

Brother Superior General and
Brothers General Councillor



Introduction

For some time now, the expression “Lasallian vocations” has been gaining ground in describing the movement of the Spirit’s action within the Lasallian Family. For a while now, we have wanted to provide a message to all of you about vocation ministry, so as to revitalize our efforts, recognize the new movements of the Spirit, open ourselves to the Church’s own reflection, and develop new understandings that can have an impact on both hearts and pastoral practices.

Through this Circular, our desire as a General Council is to offer unity and direction in the area of vocation ministry. Unity is achieved when there is a vision that all can share and in which all of us can see ourselves involved. Direction is achieved when what is proposed can present and direct us towards an inspiring horizon from the specific place where we each find ourselves.

Our reflection in this Circular has been influenced by the tension between a Christian theological framework that supports our vision and the reality of multi-religious contexts in the Institute and growing secularization globally. Therefore, we have asked ourselves: *Do we speak from the Christian faith perspective or do we need to be more inclusive? Do we run the risk of losing the core of the Lasallian vocation by seeking inclusivity? How do we speak to everyone about God, Jesus, and His call while respecting and embracing each one's situation? How do we speak about vocation to young people and educators from other religious traditions? Do we have the capacity for an engaging accompaniment that also enables those who do not believe in Jesus to discover their vocation?* We were motivated by concern for all the young people and educators with whom we live out our mission. Recognizing the need for appropriate contextualization and accessible language, we believe that the content of this Circular and its vocational proposals are valid for all.

The underlying theme of the entire Circular concerns the topic of vocation and the various specific vocations that give expression to one's primary vocational call. In the Catholic tradition, the common vocation of the baptized Christian is to follow Jesus. This can be lived out within the various charismatic families in the Church with their specific characteristics, including within our own Lasallian Family. For Lasallians, our common vocation is guided in Faith, Service, and Community by the charismatic experience of our Founder and is lived concretely in various forms of Christian life: for example, in religious life (as Brothers and Sisters), Associates and other diverse forms of commitment.

The following of Christ, the central reference point for the Christian, is expressed in the fulfillment of his new commandment: "love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). The mutual love experienced in the service of others is at the center of Jesus' message and has an attractive power for all men and women, whether they are Christian or not, believers or not. The proposals in this Circular are based on the choice of a way of life centered in Jesus Christ and the reign of God. We believe, however, that love for each person and respect for their dignity demands that what we propose must be adapted to each particular reality and context.

We have reflected on what is happening throughout the Institute and the Church with regard to vocation ministry. In the light of that reflection, we have developed the first chapter of this Circular. This chapter aims to promote widespread reflection, mindful of the diverse and complex reality, and cognizant of the challenges and uncertainties of vocation ministry, societies, and young people.

The second chapter, on the "Culture of Vocation", is an invitation to all to live one's own life as a vocation and thus to create the appropriate environment, context, and means by which all Lasallians can discover this common treasure that we share. From that perspective, we invite the entire Lasallian Family to commit itself to the three vocational approaches that will be presented in chapters three to five.

The first approach is focused on those who are closest to our charism, that is, those who, by their connection with Lasallian communities and ministries, are open to an experience of God, meaningful community relationships, and service with the poor. This is "Lasallian Vocational Ministry" and it is the theme of Chapter 3. In that chapter we hope to address those who live as Lasallians, that is, those who live their vocation "shaped by what is Lasallian."

The second and third approaches are focused on those who may feel the attraction to deepen their Lasallian vocation as a fundamental life option, either as an Associate for the Lasallian mission, or as a Brother or Sister. We have called these approaches: “Vocation Ministry for the Process of Association” in Chapter 4, and “Vocation Ministry Focused on Life of Brother and Sister” in Chapter 5.

We are aware that, in different countries, expressions such as “culture of vocation”, “vocation ministry”, “Lasallian vocation ministry”, “Associate for the Lasallian mission”, or “association process”, all have different nuances with their own history and specific context. We encourage all to approach this reflection on vocation ministry with a positive attitude and an openness of mind and heart. The aim is to get to the core of the content with a view to adapting it to local contexts.

Lasallian as an adjective with vocation ministry indicates that there is a clear intention to propose the Lasallian charism as a way of “shaping” one’s vocation and of inviting others to “be Lasallians.” Our understanding of “Associate”, Brother or Sister is inspired by the Rule of the Brothers, by Circular 461 – *Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of Hope*, and by Circular 466 – *They will call themselves BROTHERS*.

Although we wrote this Circular as the General Council of the Brothers, from the outset the Lasallian vocation of the Sister was present in our reflection. We believe that in those contexts in which the Sisters are present, everything that is said here about the Brothers can also be applied to them. Sometimes in this Circular, reference is made to “Brother and Sister” and sometimes only to “Brother”. Generally, the expressions used are interchangeable.

We recognize that there needs to be further reflection and development on each of the approaches mentioned above. The testimonies offered at the beginning of each chapter are reflections on the topic from personal experience. Chapters 2 through 5 each include a chart of best practices and a chart of evaluation criteria that may be useful for understanding each of the approaches.

We have chosen the Parable of the Sower (Mt.13) as the guiding image for the Circular. The images of the seed, the soil, and the sower are deeply evocative. We believe that these images, along with the ideas presented here, can guide us on a path “from hope to commitment.” A vocation is a path, a process, a journey. We hope that the pathway that we present in this Circular will inspire all to accompany each other as we journey together with young people, educators, families, and all engaged in our works.

01

**Times of
Generosity
and Creativity**

“

Many times they speak of us, young people, as a lost generation. I cannot disagree more. Looking at myself and my friends, I discover a lot of generosity and eagerness to live to the fullest, even if we do it in new ways. All one needs to do is look at how many of us are involved in volunteering. What we do not care for is “it's always been done that way” or suggestions that seem only for strange people. Do we have a vocation? I do not know. So where can we look?¹

”

¹ An anonymous young person.

This first chapter of the Circular presents an analysis of the reality of approaches to vocation ministry found in different parts of the Institute. We are aware that the approaches or scenarios presented in this chapter are inevitably caricatures of the reality given the brevity of the presentation. The intention is simply to highlight some key features that characterize each approach rather than offer an in-depth exploration of each. We hope that reflecting on these key features will generate insight and creativity. We believe that this is a good way to understand what the signs of the times are telling us and, ultimately, to choose where to focus our generosity.

Pope Francis, at the opening of the Synod on Youth in 2018, said:

*Let us work to “**spend time with the future**”, to take from this Synod not merely a document – that generally is only read by a few and criticized by many – but above all concrete pastoral proposals capable of fulfilling the Synod’s purpose. In other words, **to cultivate dreams**, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire in young people – all young people, with no one excluded – a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel (Pope Francis)².*

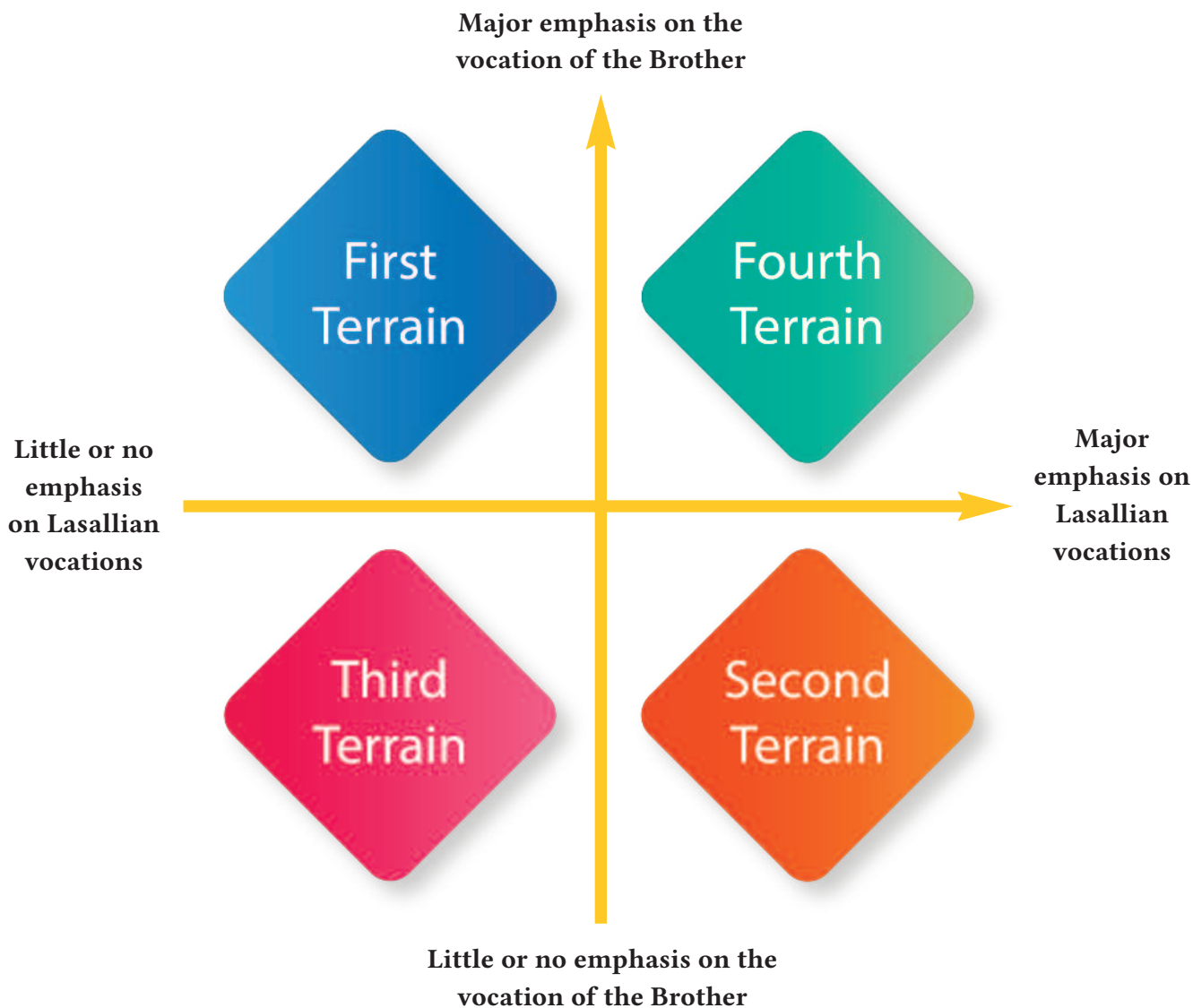
This is our objective in vocation ministry: equipping ourselves with the ability **to cultivate dreams** and allow hopes to flourish. To do this, without trying to say everything, we will consider:

- 1) Four different realities of vocation ministry found in the Lasallian world.
- 2) Two types of evolving societies in which we seek to sow the Gospel.
- 3) The main characteristics we find in young people, particularly with regard to the religious dimension.

1. Analyzing the four different vocation ministry realities found in our Lasallian world

The reality of vocation ministry in the Lasallian world is very complex. We think it would be useful to organize the global reality of vocation ministry into the four most homogeneous realities. As suggested above, we recognize that all classification cannot completely capture the reality because it simplifies it. However, we think it is necessary to focus and understand the complex world that surrounds us. There were two variables that influenced the grouping of these four realities: the emphasis that vocation ministry places on the **vocation of the Brother** and the emphasis placed on **Lasallian vocations**. In some cases, these two emphases have been seen in opposition, but we firmly believe that it is possible to embrace them in a complementary way just as it is possible to neglect both. The following diagram illustrates the two variables and the four “terrains” that arise when we explore them,

² Pope Francis, *Opening Address, Synod of Bishops*, October 2018.



We will make use of the Parable of the Sower (Mt. 13). Our reality in vocation ministry can be like the different types of land on which the seed can fall (Mt.13). What grows in each terrain? What kind of land are we? And, more importantly, what kind of land do we want to be?

1.1 First Terrain: A major emphasis on the vocation of the Brother and little or no emphasis on Lasallian vocations

In these contexts, the **Brothers** are concerned about their own identity. They observe with concern the decrease of vocations to religious life and the increase in the number of lay partners participating in the mission. The Brothers in these contexts think that one solution is to insist on their distinction from lay partners. Essentially, it is a culture that considers the vocation to religious life above that of the laity. The Brothers often conclude that the role of the laity is a threat to the future of vocations to the Brothers. In lived reality, the Brothers feel that they are the owners of the charism. The vocation of the Brother is self-referential in this “field.”

In these contexts, religious life usually continues to be shaped in a monastic, traditional style. The **communities** are normally cloistered from the laity. They keep to themselves the richness of the dynamisms of religious life, with regularity as the predominant value. The Community Annual Plan does not seek to dialogue or incarnate itself with new needs, but rather ensures compliance with the demands of religious life. Communities are of, and for, the Brothers while remaining distant from the laity.

Lay Partners in these contexts expect leadership to be held by the Brothers. They have great respect for religious life and see it as an ideal that they would like to approach and imitate but one that is difficult to attain. The laity express a sense of belonging focused on maintaining traditional roles. Within the mission, they are dependent and have learned to wait for the initiative or directives by the Brothers. In these contexts, the Brothers occupy the most influential positions. It often happens that the District Mission Council does not exist or does not influence decision-making. Lay Partners perceive themselves as learners with respect to the charism.

A District in this context sets up **vocation ministry** aimed at identifying and recruiting young people willing to consider consecrated life as a way of life, either as a Brother or with other men’s or women’s congregations. It mainly organizes vocational activities and prayers focused on the Brother’s vocation. They seek candidates who will integrate well into regular and traditional communities that will continue the mission. The District strives for the continuity of its identity as it has been lived historically. There is a longing for the success of the past when the Brothers were numerous. The hope is that “perhaps those times will come back.” The **District** repeats familiar strategies while running the risk of remaining distant from new needs that surface in attending to inculturation and reading the signs of the times.

The District strives for the continuity of its identity as it has been lived historically

This first terrain is also inhabited by elements of the **Church**: when it longs for the Christian world of the past, privileges traditionalist groups, focuses on medieval liturgical forms, and forgets the commitment to bring the Gospel to today’s world. The seed planted in this field represents a vocation ministry, both in the Church as well as in religious orders, which hopes to recapture the prestige of the past.

1.2 Second Terrain: Major emphasis on Lasallian vocations and little or no emphasis on the vocation of the Brother

This terrain is found in contexts in which the **Brothers** feel their vocation will disappear. The Brothers value the commitment of the laity and see it as the only option for the future of the Lasallian Mission. The Brothers invite young people and Lay Partners to grow in the Lasallian charism, but they hesitate to invite young people to join religious life because it is an invitation to an Institute and lifestyle that is weary. They think that the charism will have to be sustained without the presence of Brothers. There are no plans to wait for an evolution of religious life nor a spirituality that will nourish a new vision for the future of the Brothers and religious communities. The Brothers have a sense that God has abandoned them. These are Brothers who appear to lack passion and who value other forms of life more than their own because they consider that religious life has become sterile.

In these contexts, there exists **communities** of Brothers with enough cohesiveness to allow for the presence of lay people. Within these communities, it is the other Lasallians who often contribute to the quality of relationships more so than the Brothers. The other Brothers' communities tend to minimally live the internal and external dynamisms of community life. The mission no longer excites the community and there is a strong temptation to settle into individualism. The Community Annual Plan is repetitive, formal, and often static. Prayers are held in common but not the faith in a God who is present amongst the community. In short, they are communities without vitality.

In this field, the **laity** admire the history of the Brothers, but they do not perceive life among the Brothers either in the present or as a possibility for the future. They expect the Brothers, sometimes with frustration, to provide a sense of purpose and vitality. The laity involve themselves in the mission and are attracted to the charism. They try to respond to challenges in whatever way they can. They accept responsibilities and leadership positions, occupying the roles that the Brothers occupied historically. However, at times, some lay people have difficulties in accepting leadership from other lay people. They have opportunities for formation and leadership in the structures of animation. The future only points to the laity, but they often feel alone, insecure and abandoned in facing the challenges that come with the mission.

They expect the Brothers, sometimes with frustration, to provide a sense of purpose and vitality

In this second terrain, the main concern of the **District** is the continuity and maintenance of the current apostolic works. It invests many resources in the formation of the laity, and in accompaniment structures. There is a risk that the District will be satisfied with the status quo and lose, over the years, the prophetic dimension that the vocation of the Brother ensures: placing God at the center of all, living community-oriented relationships that are fraternal and authentic, denouncing situations of injustice in society, offering criticism when the Church does not follow Gospel values, proclaiming Christ through the witness of one's life, and holding a preferential commitment to the poor.

The District's **vocation ministry** efforts are focused on encouraging lay partners to take on new commitments. It is organized and creative. Vocation, as approached with the laity, tends to focus on the mission, and tiptoes around the spiritual and community dimensions of our charism. The vocation for Brother is not made explicit, or approaches and models are repeated that are attractive neither to young people nor to adults.

1.3 Third Terrain: Little or no emphasis on Lasallian vocations and little or no emphasis on the vocation of the Brother

We find this “ground” in the contexts in which vocation ministry has been seriously neglected or completely abandoned.

In this terrain, the **Brothers** are focused on the management of the educational ministries. Normally, they are not able to imagine a different future or explore how to respond to new poverties and cultural changes. The Brothers are more concerned about academic degrees than about human and Christian depth. They are very busy in what they do but have no significant presence among the laity. With no consistent spiritual life, they evade the deep questions about their own vocation and do not dare to speak about their vocation in public. They see the Lasallian Association as a useless remedy for something that is dying because they cannot imagine that institutions can continue without them. Their attitude is: “the last one out, turn off the light”.

In the case of **communities**, there is usually little cohesion due to disappointment and weariness. They are overwhelmed or fragmented by maintenance of the educational institutions without time for reflection and a genuine encounter with one another. They maintain the external forms of community life but rarely with any effective internal dynamisms. They show no interest in sharing with lay partners. They seem like communities of bachelors, willing to do anything to defend their stability and positions of power. The little movement in Brothers changing communities serves to reinforce these limitations. These communities of survival avoid welcoming or accompanying vocations, either of Brothers or lay partners, and are communities in danger of extinction.

Most **laity** are accompanied only at the beginning of their work in ministry. They have no continual, quality formation opportunities that will sustain the charism. They have no institutional involvement and, if they do, they show little or no sense of belonging to something greater than their own educational ministry. They have always seen the Brothers as the owners of the institution. They secure their salary and take advantage of the good reputation of the Lasallian name and heritage, but they do not have the resources to offer more than other educational services. Some do seek purpose and spirituality, but they do so with other ecclesial movements or in other places because they do not find the sensitivity nor opportunities present within the Lasallian School. In short, they are laity without a Lasallian identity.

The **District** fails to guarantee the identity and evangelizing character of the educational works. The spiritual, community and mission-centered dynamisms are extinguished by daily urgencies. **Vocation ministry** is non-existent or exists only to keep up the appearance that something is being done. The Brothers do not worry about the vocation of the laity, nor do the laity themselves feel called to develop it. In the end, it is a District in the process of becoming extinct.

1.4 Fourth Terrain: Great emphasis on Lasallian vocations and on the vocation of the Brother.

This is a terrain that fills us with hope. We find it in many contexts throughout the Institute and within the Lasallian Family, sometimes as a small, modest seed and, sometimes, as an abundant fruit. In these contexts, many Lasallian partners love and identify with the charism because they have experienced quality Lasallian formation and appreciate the value of the Brother's vocation. They are involved in transmitting the values and teachings of the Gospel and, by living their own spiritual journey with openness and willingness to follow the movement of the Spirit, they have nourished their own vocation.

Here, again reflecting upon Circular 461, we acknowledge the contribution of **Lasallian women** who now compose more than half of the total personnel involved in the Mission and who, in consequence, have a significant role to play in Lasallian vocation ministry. As the Circular points out, Lasallian women bring distinctive qualities to the Lasallian mission as “they help to construct a more humane and community-centered society; help to reexamine ways of thinking; help to situate the entire Lasallian world a bit differently in history and help to organize social, political, economic and religious life in a way that can be more intuitive and relational”.³ They enrich the charism through the contribution of their own identity. They provide leadership, not only in the pedagogical and management field, but also in Lasallian spirituality and formation. These women live their educational and Christian vocation with special sensitivity through personal accompaniment and commitment to the most disadvantaged.

When we see that much emphasis is placed on all Lasallian vocations including the vocation of the Brother, we see diverse and enriched Lasallian communities emerge

When we see that much emphasis is placed on all Lasallian vocations including the vocation of the Brother, we see diverse and enriched Lasallian **communities** emerge. With regard to the **Brothers'** communities, they integrate moments to deepen relationships with each other while, at other times, they are open and share the experience of community with the laity. They adapt their schedules to ensure significant moments of community life and they open their times of prayer and retreat to people in search of experiences of spirituality. They commit themselves effectively to develop and live their annual Community Plan and they nurture the prophetic dimension of religious life in order to be with the most marginalized and go “beyond borders.” We also see **communities** inclusively formed by **Lasallian Partners and Brothers** where the impact of “together and by association”

touches not only the ministerial work but the whole person, in their deepest identity and vocation as persons.

In this terrain, the Brothers are committed to the value of their own vocation, which finds synergy with other vocations and identities. Available for the educational service of the poorest, they are willing to go beyond the borders and divisions that the world establishes. By their vow of association, they commit themselves to live in deep solidarity and co-responsibility with lay partners with whom they share the mission. They are Brothers on an unceasing spiritual search with renewed practices of accompaniment and fraternity. With a proactive spirit, the Brothers explore the vocation of the lay religious of the future.

³ Circular 461 (1.14).

The Districts represented in this area are characterized by a shared leadership between Brothers and lay people. They have a MEL Council committed to the identity of the ministries, processes that favor Association, and focused attention to the poor. They insure and implement consistent and progressive Lasallian formation programs for all those involved in the mission. The District's vocation ministry is focused on all vocations. It is a dynamic ministry, centered in an ecclesiology of communion, that responds to the needs of young people and offers spaces for faith sharing among adult communities. It explicitly promotes Association, whether through the lay vocation, religious life, or the priestly ministry. The District dreams of Lasallian communities that accompany each educational ministry. In short, they are Districts with a future in which Lasallians, Brothers and Lay Partners, are oriented to the needs of people, share equal dignity among different vocations, participate in the renewal of the mission, and are willing to be generous with who they are. As in the parable, "some give a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."⁴

This analysis of the four "terrains" that we have presented is an analysis of attitudes. By undertaking this analysis, we realized that we also need to understand some key variables. We focus on two in particular: the society in which we develop our mission and the young people we are called to serve in vocation ministry.

2. Two types of evolving societies in which we try to sow the Gospel

The Parable of the Sower makes no reference as to how the weather influences the seed's growth. Staying with this Gospel image, we can detect two environments or climates in which the sowing and growth take place. These are two different types of societies that are on the extremes of a "continuum" in which all societies could be placed. Regardless of where each society is currently located, we recognize that there is a "climate change" as societies are moving, more or less quickly, from a Type I society to a Type II society.

⁴ Mt 13:8.

Type 1 "Climate" or Society

1. A traditional society that values the "status quo" and prefers few changes in social structures.
2. A hierarchical and patriarchal society which assigns a subordinate role to women and which is organized around the values of power and domination.
3. A society bound to the religious and clerical tradition.
4. A society present more in the rural world than in the urban world.
5. A society subject to classical forms of family, sexuality, authority, religion, production etc.
6. A society that offers the security of what is familiar.

Type 2 "Climate" or Society

1. A secularized society in which public religious expression disappears or moves into the private sphere.
2. A society that fosters skepticism and sees institutional religion as antiquated.
3. A scientific, technical, and pragmatic society.
4. A materialistic society focused on consumption of goods and quality of life.
5. A pluralistic, diverse, and liberal democratic society that promotes personal freedom with alternative views of family and sexuality.
6. A society that values cultural and eastern religiosity but is suspicious of institutionalized, traditionally western, religions.
7. A society desiring the absolute and yet searching for something more.

The traditional society in Type I facilitates the continuity of the “**first terrain**” in which the emphasis of vocational ministry is placed solely on the vocation of the Brother. On the other hand, the secularized society in Type II facilitates the development of the “**second terrain**” in which the major emphasis is placed on Lasallian vocations. Access to the “**third**” or “**fourth terrain**” will depend on personal decisions and the contexts in which the Lasallian mission develops locally.

The “climate change” towards secularization seems inevitable and irreversible. However, we cannot get carried away by the predominant cultural climate. We feel we have the responsibility, within climate I or II, to be proactive and generate “microclimates” that favor each person responding to God's plan with freedom, authenticity, and determination.

It is a great challenge for us to be creative and toil in the fourth terrain (great emphasis on Lasallian vocations and the Brother's vocation). Yet, our vocational commitment in this terrain will help us both to ensure the future of the Lasallian charism and to continue to reveal God to an increasingly secularized society. Creativity will require making decisions, establishing priorities, and renewing our attitudes and actions.

Lastly, we need to consider the reality and characteristics of young people that impact on vocation ministry.

3. The main characteristics we find in young people, particularly with regard to the religious dimension

The third analysis we offer, before moving into our proposed vocational approach, is a description of the traits of today's youth. Again, we recognize that it is unreasonable to try to address this issue in a few lines, but our intention is not to be exhaustive but rather to provide some focal points for common reflection based on what we have seen. We offer the following traits that appear common to many contexts and directly impinge on vocation ministry.

Common Traits among Young People

1. They have better job training and skills. They can establish meaning and purpose.
2. They are in the process of maturing and are unpredictable.
3. They are willing to get involved and be passionate about what they do even though their motivations are not always clear. They can, and know how to, get what they want. They like to feel co-responsible.
4. They need recognition and sustained emotional support. They value the body, emotion, and sexuality.
5. Personal relationships are fundamental for them. They desire a sense of belonging to a group and being involved in community experiences.
6. They have difficulty integrating their ideal of community life with what they are willing to offer in it. They are very critical of community experiences.
7. They are greatly affected by peer and family pressure when it comes to decision-making. They can be easily persuaded or confused.
8. They are willing to work together to accomplish a certain task but sometimes become too caught up with their personal needs.
9. They are open to a discernment process that is consistent with their personal journey and therefore are willing to accept formation and accompaniment.
10. They resonate with the need for action but, at the same time, are afraid to act. They are willing to commit themselves to several things at the same time.
11. They are drawn to the preferential option for the poor and the opportunity to serve others. They connect with the social dimension of the Gospel.
12. They value the significant impact a commitment can make more than the duration. Short-term commitments are more important than a lifelong commitment.

Young People and religious sensitivity

When it comes time to distinguish each terrain and help prepare it to receive seeds, it will be necessary to consider how these young people situate themselves vis-à-vis the religious dimension, specifically with regard to Catholic Christianity. And so, the following categorization may help us:

Young people who live and long for the traditional

Young people who are indifferent or have no desire for anything religious

Young people who are searching for the spiritual

Young people who live and long for the traditional

1. Young people from a sociological religious background by influence and not by personal choice; more present in societies where Catholicism permeates the entire culture.
2. They appreciate, and need, the externals that give them security: hierarchy, patriarchy, doctrinal clarity, purity of the liturgy. They are more concerned with the external forms than with the content or message.
3. They are a minority in the most secularized societies. If they do not evolve, they can make their religiosity a refuge that, in the best of cases, will soon be small and from which they will have to move beyond.
4. Educated in more traditional families, they like the external forms of the Brother's religious life: habit, the religious playing a more vital role to that of the lay person, presence in leadership positions...
5. Little sensitivity to the social dimension of faith; motivated more by personal salvation.
6. The temptation towards falling into fundamentalism or entrenched Christian traditionalism is present.

Accompaniment in this context means welcoming the young person and inviting him/her to a process of personal faith development, connecting them with the core of the Gospel, helping them discover the value of justice and solidarity in religious practice and the necessity for enculturating the faith beyond the historical forms.

Young people who are indifferent or have no desire for anything religious

1. They are young people who are indifferent. They do not feel the need for the spiritual nor do they discuss religion.
2. They may have a religious background but they are non-practicing and live without religious points of reference.
3. Some are baptized but their faith has not evolved or matured. Others have never received a consistent message or have not participated in a pastoral process of accompaniment.
4. These are mostly young people in post-industrial societies. There are more and more of them in developing societies.
5. Some of these young people grow more contrary, inflexible and aggressive towards anything that smells of religion and can come to publicly reject it. They do so without having reasonable criteria and so it is difficult to establish dialogue with them.
6. Some have lived through negative personal or social experiences that influence their rejection of the religious.
7. Others are indifferent because they have not had profound experiences in which to encounter themselves and God. There is great potential in them.
8. They usually consider religious life a relic, the remnants of an ancient and obsolete time. They can identify with the mission of the Brother but they question the purpose of consecration.

Accompaniment here means helping them heal the wounds of the past, deconstructing the irrational or little-argued ideas with which they approach the religious, and prioritizing involvement in the mission before addressing religious formation. In all cases, bring them closer to significant experiences of spirituality, fraternity, and service.

Young people who are searching for the spiritual

1. They are young people who are more open to the “spiritual” than to the “religious” and are more inclined towards the “mystical” than to the “liturgical.”
2. The search for meaning, not refuge, opens them to the Gospel.
3. They question the materialistic and pragmatic perspective towards the development model of societies.
4. They are a minority. But the trend points to a religious awakening.
5. They can feel drawn to, and trapped, by gnostic spirituality or movements.
6. They collaborate and participate with the local Church provided they are given space and attention. They seek a Church that is “less institutional and more relational”.
7. They are open to vocational questioning even if religious life is not the first option.
8. Their journey may already have drawn them close to the Lasallian charism and provided them with significant experiences of community and mission. They are able to identify with the Lasallian charism.

Accompaniment of these young people means offering them experiences of belonging to adult faith communities, formation to avoid the temptation of a “cafeteria religion”, and mission-rooted opportunities with those most in need that allow them to grow with a sense of spiritual realism.

This first chapter has invited us to take a critical look at the vocational reality with the aim of discovering and interpreting the signs of the times. We cannot live in the past but, in the words of Pope Francis, we must “frequent the future.” In the following chapters we will offer an encouraging vision, hope-filled approaches, and concrete vocational paths that will nourish self-giving.

02

**Culture
of Vocation**

“

When I was younger, I always asked myself: Who am I? What do I want?

But these questions did not really resonate in the environment in which I found myself ... until I came to this school. Here they have challenged me to face them and to deepen them. [...] What challenges me the most is the reality of poverty and injustice. I would like to do something to change it. [...] I still do not have answers and I cannot guarantee that one day I will have them; but I try to do a lot of listening and what I can say with certainty is: 'I am a vocation, I am a mission'.⁵

”

⁵ A young man in discernment.

Many young people and adults today are asking the same questions and cannot find the spaces to deepen and explore them. The questions come from the deepest part of their being; as inner movements that they often do not know how to interpret or even recognize. Suffering, poverty and life-threatening situations provoke the need to listen: to listen to themselves, to God and to others. Each of these individuals need an accompaniment that gives them the tools to move from those internal movements to the confidence of a faith-filled vocation. We firmly believe that a reflection on the "culture of vocation" responds to this need and will also help us to move personally and institutionally to the "fourth terrain" referred to in the previous chapter.

We understand the "culture of vocation" as a social environment, a "humus", an atmosphere, created by members of a community and/or an educational work that promotes the understanding of human life as a vocation⁶. It is an environment which enables each individual, whether a person of faith or a non-believer, to enter a process where a sense of meaning allows them to discover their passion and purpose in life. Taking on such a culture demands a true conversion, a change of heart, both in mindset and practice. It is not enough to keep doing what we have been doing and now call it a "culture of vocation." This will be our focus for this chapter.

1. A hand extended to all

In a certain sense, a "culture of vocation" is a hope. Somehow, we intuit the need for it and want it to become a reality. There are some places where there are clearer signs of this transformation; and we know, in faith and hope, that this is the direction we must follow even if the fruits are not completely visible⁷.

We want to invite all Lasallians to contribute to the creation of a "culture of vocation" in whatever setting they find themselves. It is directed to all, **whether Christian or not, poor or rich, to those who live the Lasallian charism and those who do not.**

"All" is a fundamental word for Christians and therefore Lasallians since their efforts must always be inclusive. The word "all" recalls Paul words at the beginning of De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, written for all educators: "God is so good that he not only wills that all come to the knowledge of truth but also that all be saved."⁸ The concept is also present in the *Lumen Gentium* constitution of Vatican II: "If, therefore, in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity."⁹ Even if we are not walking along the same path, we all share a common vocation to holiness, that is, to fully live our human and Christian vocation.

⁶ SIERRA, J. *Come and See. Key Ideas for Fostering a "Culture of Vocation"*. Madrid: Institute of Religious Life Theology. University of Salamanca, 2015, p. 8.

⁷ Cf. MARTOS, J. C., *Go and Plant. Two Urgent and Priority Vocational Tasks*. Madrid: Claretian Publications, 2017.

⁸ Cf. MTR 193.1 and 193.3, citing St. Paul: 1 Tm 2:4.

⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 32.

2. The hope of a “culture of vocation”

This culture is **not yet** fully shared; it is constructed by promoting a certain way of thinking (mentality), feeling (sensitivity) and acting (praxis)¹⁰. It is an environment in which there is a mentality by which everyone feels called to, and involved in, a mission, a sensitivity that is open to a universal and inclusive vision, and an educational and pastoral praxis in which the vocational component is a transversal axis of the entire educational plan.

This culture facilitates the emergence of questions about the meaning of life, inquiring about that which is a “mystery” and initiates the person towards a search for answers. It is an atmosphere where speaking about vocation is something normal and opportune because everyone feels involved and interested. Speaking to everyone about vocation, particularly in secularized, multicultural and pluri-religious contexts, is complicated and even confusing if we forget that “vocation” is a way of expressing an interior experience, both human and divine, narrated in very different ways in the Bible and other sacred books. Vocation is a life-long process and it is not reduced to the one individual call. Rather, it is seen as a succession of calls and responses, a dialogue in freedom between God and each human being, which is concretized in a mission that *must be discovered continuously in the different stages of life and in relation to new realities*.¹¹

The fundamental call is to be fully human in our love and to contribute with our whole being towards the humanization of our societies. To follow Jesus radically is to love as he loves, without limit. Therefore, a vocation can be understood at various levels:

- On a **human level**, it refers to the particular way in which a person structures their life in response to a personal call to love and serve. A vocation includes all aspects of one's life and gives it purpose, direction, and harmony.
- At the **religious faith level**, it is the free and personal response to the way of loving that God wants for each person.
- And at the **Christian level**, it is an answer to the God who has loved us first. It is a call to deepen intimacy with God expressed through actions that bring unity and goodness to all humanity. We bear witness in our daily lives to our belief that we are called by God to live and love in our own circumstances and contexts just as Jesus Christ lived and loved.

The fundamental call is to be fully human in our love and to contribute with our whole being towards the humanization of our societies.

¹⁰ Cencini, Amedeo. Theology of Vocations. 2nd Latin-American Continental Congress of Vocations. 2011.

¹¹ Rule 54.

Therefore, a “culture of vocation” creates the conditions that enables each person to discover how God desires them to love as well as the place to carry out this particular vocation as a response to the needs of the world, especially those of the poor.

An increasing number of those who do not identify with a religion, in the traditional sense of belonging to a specific creed, do consider themselves spiritual. They represent the wonderful challenge that comes with discovering the meaning of their life and place in the world (**human level**). In organized religions, each person discovers in themselves the path of life to follow (**religious faith level**) through their religious experience. In the Christian faith, each person discovers their way of belonging to a Church or faith community, the lifestyle that fits their vocation, and how to continue to develop their vocational calling (**Christian level**). All these vocational processes, whether explicitly religious or not, need accompaniment.

3. Young people and the meaning of life

Our main concern is young people as they are the center of our mission. Although a “culture of vocation” is addressed to all, as Lasallians, young people are a very important group when reflecting on this topic. We are particularly concerned about young people who do not have the opportunities to fully develop their personal vocation. We are also concerned for those young people who do not have a religious identity/tradition or who are simply not believers but are interested in discovering the deep meaning of life, or who feel drawn to the Lasallian story.

The Lasallian mission of human and Christian education is completed when each young person discovers the meaning of his/her life, deepens his/her particular way of serving God in humanity, and develops the means and actions that make it a reality. The educational challenge for each young person is to recognize a fundamental path to which they are called and which guides their life along this path. As Lasallians, the challenge is to go beyond our own borders to reach young people in vulnerable situations— young people who need to be accompanied more closely so they can ask themselves, with hope, the question about the meaning of their life and the question about the mystery of God.

These two questions are intimately linked in a “culture of vocation”. Deeper understanding about the mystery of God helps us to discover the meaning of our life and vice versa. God calls everyone. God calls us to life, to know Him and to relate to Him since we are all called to holiness. It is from such a perspective that we share this purpose in life. But God also calls each person to a specific purpose and invites each person to a particular response. For that reason, each person needs to discover their unique and concrete vocation to which they are called. This call which, on the one hand is universal and, on the other, personal is lived in relation to others. From our Christian tradition, we find the meaning of life in the following of Christ as lived and celebrated in the Church, a community at the service of the Reign of God and those most in need¹².

¹² Cf. Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, 2018.

4. A commitment for everyone

By reflecting on the fruits we wish to see as good sowers, we know "that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters are anything, but only God, who causes the growth."¹³ With Him, we would like to imagine and dream the future that is possible. We would like our educational environments to be places that make it easier for each person to find and strengthen the meaning of their life and purpose; and for Christians to deepen their vocation as missionary disciples.¹⁴ We would like to see in each Lasallian ministry a mentality, sensitivity and educational praxis that help each person in the process of recognizing their vocation as the meaning of their life. More concretely, we would like all Lasallian communities and ministries to have a Culture of Vocation Plan that includes all Lasallians involved and is addressed to all.

A "culture of vocation" requires a cultural shift and challenges us to commit ourselves to this change. In the context of the Lasallian family, this cultural shift presents three challenges: involvement, collaboration, and intentionality.

INVOLVEMENT: We have the challenge of overcoming a reductive vision of vocation ministry as something that belongs exclusively to, and for, some people. We need to open ourselves to an inclusive and universal vision in which all vocations are recognized, valued and empowered and in which all are involved. This is a "culture of vocation" where the entire Lasallian community knows they are involved and recognizes it as part of the Church's mission. Thus, a change in mentality is required.

COLLABORATION: There is the challenge of collaborating with the local Church or with local human development entities. We are talking about collaboration with whoever contributes towards promoting a sense of vocation among human beings. It involves a change of sensitivity, a feeling, that helps us overcome the "self-referential" tendencies that turn us in on ourselves. For example, there are Muslim, Buddhist and other organizations without any religious affiliation (e.g. Doctors without Borders, Save the Children, etc.) that interpret vocation as service to those most in need and with which Lasallians are involved. Thus, a need for a greater sense of collaboration.

INTENTIONALITY: Finally, there is the challenge of including the "culture of vocation" as a concept in all our educational projects and formation programs. This is not just another "issue," but must be present in a transversal and explicit way. Hence, the need to change educational practices.

¹³ 1Cor 3:7.

¹⁴ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119-121.

Communities of Brothers and Lasallian communities can:

- include in their Community Annual Plan some specific commitments that develop a “culture of vocation” in their local setting¹⁵;
- create spaces that are welcoming and encourage community-building with people locally;
- participate in vocation activities and initiatives organized by the local Church or other institutions;
- willingly offer themselves to accompany young people and adults on their vocational discernment journey;
- clearly express the joy and hope of their own vocational call to be who they are: Brothers.

Educational ministries can:

- review the table of best practices in this chapter and examine which of these practices could be adapted to the local reality;
- establish a specific Culture of Vocation Plan;
- promote formation around a “culture of vocation” throughout the educational community in a way that helps provide a deeper understanding;
- work as a team, as a network, and in collaboration, both within and outside the apostolate, particularly with the local Church.

Districts can:

- promote the intentional formation of coordinators and/or animators that will assist the development of a “culture of vocation” as well as training an expert in this field;
- collaborate with the Church and with other congregations in such formation;
- create or reinforce suitable structures that respond to the needs and demands of vocation ministry today;
- inform the Center of the Institute of progress made in the District’s Annual Report.

¹⁵ Cf. 45th General Chapter, Circular 469. Proposition 23.

Regions can:

- encourage collaborative networks between local and District teams;
- develop a general framework for the promotion of a “culture of vocation” adapted to their reality;
- support Districts with difficulties so that they can benefit from the good practices in vocation ministry in other Districts.

The Center of the Institute can:

- provide adequate resources to promote a "culture of vocation";
- offer formation opportunities that promote a “culture of vocation” according to the needs of the Districts, Regions and the Lasallian Family in general;
- improve and enhance the "Vocations" publication so that it includes more specific elements and shares best practices of a “culture of vocation”;
- ensure that every publication from the Generalate always has a vocational component;
- collaborate with other religious institutes and Church organizations to clarify the understanding of a “culture of vocation” while enriching each other in the process.

5. Conclusion

A “culture of vocation” is just a first step but necessary and fundamental to sustain the approaches offered by this Circular. Without this culture, all vocation ministry lacks solid roots and is inconsistent. With it, we can address those who seem drawn to the Lasallian charism and help them discern if they feel called to live their Lasallian identity as a vocation. This is the focus of Lasallian vocation ministry that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Table: Culture of Vocation Best Practices

1. Local culture of vocation teams, representing different life callings, exist in each educational center.
2. Involvement of local administrators on vocation ministry teams.
3. Consistent and sustained formation programs for culture of vocation animators.
4. "Vocation Weeks" in which there is reflection, discussion and deepening of themes related to "culture of vocation".
5. Knowledge of how other religions approach questions on the purpose of life.
6. Share vocation experiences with other spiritualities and religions.
7. "Vocation Panels" in which individuals with different vocations share their experiences so as to encourage young people to discover their own vocation.
8. Culture of Vocation Conferences.
9. Include vocation themes in the curriculum (e.g. religion classes), professional development etc.
10. Include vocation-related topics in debate programs, speech contests, writing projects, choir, the arts, class projects, retreats, etc....
11. Promote experiences that facilitate contact with the marginalized and with realities of poverty that raise questions about the meaning of life and responses to this.
12. Groups that systematically meet to reflect on vocation.
13. Collaboration with the local Church and with other congregations that contribute to the development of this culture.
14. Student-led service projects with a See-Judge-Act methodology.
15. Provide means by which to implement the motto adopted by UMAEL (World Union of Former Lasallian Students): Enter to learn: Leave to serve.
16. Spiritual retreats to reflect on life's journey.
17. Use of social media networks to promote vocational messages that are consistent with a "culture of vocation".

Possible criteria for evaluating the proposed "Culture of Vocation" approach

1. In this Circular, the Center of the Institute has proposed a clear and well-developed anthropological and theological definition of a "culture of vocation" as well as a vision of what it wants to achieve.
2. The International Lasallian Vocations Commission has proposed a common instrument to periodically evaluate the real impact of "culture of vocation" action plans and surface best practices.
3. The Institute/Region/District offers formation sessions in which they work towards a deeper understanding of a "culture of vocation".
4. The District/Region has adapted its formation programs with regard to a "culture of vocation" to respond to local needs.
5. The Institute/Region/District has included evaluation criteria in its action plans.
6. The Institute/Region/District has provided spaces for fostering a "culture of vocation" with other entities of the Church.
7. The District has proposed clear guidelines for preparing a local "culture of vocation" action plan.
8. In each Community of Brothers and Lasallians, and in each Lasallian educational apostolate, there is a local culture of vocation action plan.
9. The local action plan is shared at District and Regional levels with special attention to best practices.
10. Each Lasallian - administrator, teacher, educator, catechist, vocation animator, lay person, Brother, Sister, active or retired - is personally involved in the promotion of a "culture of vocation" based on the local action plan.

03

**Lasallian
Vocation
Ministry**

“

As a young Buddhist, the opportunity to study at a Lasallian Catholic school became a gift I discovered. Upon entering the school, I became a Lasallian without wanting to, but now I am a Lasallian at heart because I learned that being Lasallian does not depend on religion, color, race, or culture, but rather on who I am and my ability to let the greater good shine through me. It also occurred to me that religion, color, race, or culture does not make one different from others but in a very beautiful way I learned that who I am for others, and what I do for the benefit of those in need. is what makes the difference¹⁶.

”

¹⁶ A young Lasallian
from Sri Lanka.



This image of a Lasallian contemplating the immensity of life can move us to know God and experience His love, to discover His will for us and remind us of the mandate of Jesus: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."¹⁷ The ultimate goal of all pastoral ministry is discovering the love of God and sharing it with others because where there is love, there is life. In the end, the way to make known our way of loving and living is through our vocation.

As sons and daughters of God, we take on a certain disposition that allows us to listen to His probing call and discover our vocation given that His word "requires time to be understood and interpreted; the mission to which God calls is gradually unveiled"¹⁸ with time and through processes of personal discovery. All life experiences are a way to discover, understand, and journey forward. On this path, we can discover that we are all called by God to holiness and to the fullness of love: "be holy because I, the Lord, am holy."¹⁹

¹⁷ Jn 13:34.

¹⁸ 2018 Synod, *Final Document*, 77.

¹⁹ Lev 20:26.



For Christians, baptism marks the beginning of our journey and becomes the source of vocation and mission. It is the foundation of our faith life that demands a concrete personal response.²⁰ The Apostolic Exhortation invites us to: “Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life,”²¹ with all pastoral ministry directed toward it.

We know that all pastoral ministry is vocational because “vocation is the hinge around which all dimensions of the person are integrated. This principle concerns not only the individual believer, but also pastoral ministry as a whole. So it is very important to clarify that only in the vocational dimension does all pastoral ministry find a unifying principle, because here it finds its origin and its fulfilment.”²²

²⁰ Cf. Pope Francis Catechesis. Rome 18/04/2018.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, 15.

²² 2018 Synod, *Final Document*, 139.

Precisely because it concerns overall ministry, the vocational dimension requires a commitment to all and focuses on all vocations. Our vocational animation goes beyond the Lasallian dimension. In fact, many Lasallians in our educational works opt for other charisms and lifestyles. We are aware that Christianity is a minority religion in many parts of the Institute and for the Lasallian Family. However, we are also aware that we are mediators of God's call for other paths of life and service both in the Church and in other cultures and traditions. In these contexts, the Declaration reminds Lasallians that by giving people “the means to cultivate the earth so that it produces its fruit and becomes a home worthy of the human family, by preparing them to know enough to take part in the activities of social groups, by bringing them to self-knowledge and self-mastery - in all of these ways the image of God in the human is perfected, and it becomes possible for humans to fulfill their God-given vocation...” to care for the earth.²³ The dialogue and respect that must underpin any interaction with these cultures, religions and traditions is beautifully captured in a statement of the Asian Bishops when speaking of dialogue with local religions: “In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation. In them, we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations.”²⁴

As Lasallians, let us ask ourselves:

What is God’s call for me?

How do I come to know God's plan for my life?

What does being Lasallian mean to me?

These are questions that arise when the seed, once tossed, has managed to take root in each person and becomes the soil for an effective “culture of vocation”. We are convinced that some seeds have been sown in the Lasallian field, and without neglecting other possibilities, we are also aware of our responsibility for those who wish to continue walking vocationally in the Lasallian charism. Hence, in this chapter we want to propose some key elements in a Lasallian Vocation Ministry.

²³ The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A DECLARATION - 41.3 (Revised 1997).

²⁴ FABC - Taipei 14.

1. The Lasallian Charism

Regarding “charism”

Normally, we use the expression “charisma” in reference to the set of talents, gifts, natural abilities or qualities that people have and that gives them a certain “magnetism” and influence on others. From the Christian perspective, we understand charism as a gift that the Holy Spirit gives to people, not because they deserve it, or are better than others²⁵, but to share it freely, putting it at the service of the community and of a mission. A charism is dynamic, creative, and constantly seeking to respond to the challenges and needs of all people. This is why the Spirit always generates new charisms and gives rise to new ways of expressing them.²⁶ And through Church tradition we know that a charism is incarnated through a particular style of following Jesus, and that it can be lived in different forms of life whether religious or lay.²⁷

Our Lasallian charism

The Lasallian charism, as a gift that the Spirit provides to the Church and society,²⁸ allows us to discover, value, and respond to the human and Christian educational challenges of children, young people, and adults today, especially those most in need. This gift was granted to Saint John Baptist de La Salle and since then incarnated in the Lasallian community.

The Lasallian charism helps all Lasallians, especially educators, “in their efforts to make their life more integrated. They take up their Christian vocation, given at Baptism, and recognize that salvation is a community experience, which encourages them to live the evangelizing mission through the school”²⁹ as an expression of our love for God and for others. There continues to be a great need for the Lasallian charism today because children, young people, and adults, especially the most vulnerable, need committed individuals to accompany them in their personal, spiritual and educational journey and to safeguard their rights.

We recall that the various groups within the Lasallian Family (Brothers, Sisters and the different fraternities of lay associates) share a common charism. In a special way, we share our particular character with institutions who are charismatically similar because “fraternal spiritual relations and mutual cooperation among different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are sustained and nourished by the sense of ecclesial communion.”³⁰ Our charism is always lived in communion with the Church and with all the other religious traditions present in our educational ministries “since only the unity of all makes the body alive and harmonious.”³¹

²⁵ Cf. Pope Francis. General Audience 1 October 2014.

²⁶ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

²⁷ Cf. GARCÍA PAREDES, J. C. R., *Theology of Christian Lifestyles. Vol. II: Fundamentals and Identity*, Madrid: Claretian Publications, 1999. Pg. 14.

²⁸ Cf. Rule 54,4.

²⁹ Cf. Br. Diego Muñoz. Digital Journal of Lasallian Research (1) 2010: 61.

³⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, 52.

³¹ 2018 Synod, *Final Document*, 85.

2. The Lasallian Vocation

A gift for service

All Lasallians are an original gift from God waiting to be discovered.³² Discovering ourselves as a gift is a fundamental part of every vocational journey. Thanks to the seed sown through the ongoing development of a “culture of vocation”, we know that a part of our uniqueness comes from our Lasallian identity. We come to this identity through different paths, processes, and experiences but the reality is that we have been touched by it. We also recognize that, like faith, we freely receive it as gift.

As the original gift that we are, we receive many talents. What we freely receive, we are invited to freely share with others.³³ Our personal originality is open to the call of God and is placed at the service of God’s People. God invites us, through the needs of the world, especially those of the young and the poor, to formation in the Lasallian charism alongside others so that we can all conform to Christ and become missionary disciples who contribute to the Church’s mission of human development and evangelization³⁴.

Call and Response

Vocation is always a personal response to the call of God. It is He who takes the initiative. One of the key elements of a “culture of vocation” is the recognition that God calls everyone and calls continually. A response to this call requires an open, dynamic Lasallian vocation ministry that helps “to discover the concrete way to carry out the project of life to which God calls.”³⁵

This process of call and response is revealed over time and requires the ability to listen and an attitude of discernment. Listening to God's call requires that we train our eyes, ears and heart since He speaks to us in many diverse ways and in very different circumstances, for example:

- Through the personal encounter offered in prayer.
- Through the experiences of mission and particularly through encountering those who are marginalized.
- Through fraternal relationships with others offered in a group or community.
- Through personal discernment offered in the daily reading of the Word.

We live our Lasallian vocation as a religious or lay person, male or female, celibate or married, in the diversity of cultures and contexts that make up the Lasallian map of the world, whether as a Catholic, Christian, member of another religious tradition or other beliefs, and we all share the same commitment for the dignity of people. The Spirit blows where it wills and its charisms, its gifts, surpass any type of structure.³⁶

³² Cf. NVME 13 c.

³³ Cf. Mt 10:8

³⁴ Cf. C. 461,2.4.3-5.

³⁵ Cf. Pope Francis. Address to the International Congress on Vocational Ministry. Rome, December 2017.

³⁶ Jn 3:8.

3. Lasallian Vocation Ministry

Definition:

We understand Lasallian vocation ministry as an invitation to develop life according to the Lasallian tenets of faith, service, and community. It involves living one's Lasallian identity, nourished by the Lasallian charism, and includes commitment to ministry that provides pastoral programs 'from infancy to adulthood, to help the young find their place in the Christian community'³⁷ which, in our case, involves the Lasallian community.

It refers to:

In our educational ministries there are people of all ages, religious backgrounds, professions, and different states of life who identify with the Lasallian charism. These are women and men open to God, with a "can do" attitude towards life, with a special sensitivity to the needs of people and the world, with a commitment to the most vulnerable and a desire to live community. Thus, we find educators, young people, parents, catechists, volunteers, athletic coaches, prefects, alumni etc. who feel called to live faith, community, and service inspired by the spirituality of our Founder. These are people who are willing to engage in formation experiences to deepen their Lasallian identity.

It refers, therefore, to those who are willing to live a process that leads them to deepen their Lasallian identity, to discover their own vocation, and to share their God-given talents in the context of the Lasallian charism. In short, these are Lasallians who desire to develop their relationships within a Lasallian community or ministry, sensitive to the poor and to the movements of God in their own lives.

It has as a general objective:

The general objective of Lasallian vocation ministry is to help each person discover their specific vocation within a Lasallian context. In this way, the Lasallian charism, with which we identify ourselves, will continue to bear abundant fruit.

With the following specific objectives:

Lasallian vocation ministry strives to ensure:

- a) That young people and adults, coming to know the Lasallian charism, can identify themselves as sons and daughters of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, building their personal story in light of the Lasallian story and salvation history.
- b) That all members of Lasallian educational communities have adequate resources and opportunities to live their own vocation.

³⁷ 2018 Synod. *Final Document*, 16.

- c) That all with whom we are connected contribute from their own personal contexts to the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education, especially to those most in need.

To achieve these objectives, and to ensure adequate discernment and commitment, it is necessary that those who are most directly involved in Lasallian vocation ministry, both in the Districts and Regions, collaborate with one another, with other networks, and initiate programs that provide experiences, formation, and accompaniment.

A Proposed Approach to Lasallian Vocation Ministry

Lasallian Vocation Ministry is about offering personalized, welcoming, participative and dynamic programs with adequate pedagogy and explicit accompaniment. To achieve this, we invite Districts to ensure that their *Vocation Ministry Plan* includes a process for fostering a *Lasallian Vocation* that allows for greater understanding of our charism, way of life, and identity.

This plan should:

- a) Facilitate concrete experiences of faith, service and community adapted to the age, condition, and circumstances of each person.
- b) Develop a well-grounded anthropological, Christian, and Lasallian formation in faith, fraternity and service in the local context as well as in the context of the world-wide Institute. This formation plan, in line with the new Formation Handbook, “*Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook*”, will allow individuals to consider their own experiences through the Lasallian tenets of faith, service and community.
- c) Provide for appropriate accompaniment both at the personal and group levels. On the *personal level*, this accompaniment highlights the uniqueness of each Lasallian who feels recognized, valued, encouraged, and loved. In this way everyone can continue to grow and discern. On the *group level*, this accompaniment provides for the fostering of meaningful relationships, friendship, and mutual support in experiences of faith, service and community within each group.
- d) Contribute to personal **discernment**, in a special way, through the impact that these experiences of faith, service and community have on their lives and on the call to be Lasallian.
- e) Offer the possibility of a Lasallian commitment that allows them to serve others, especially those most in need.
- f) Organize opportunities for **encounter** and **celebration** for those involved in vocational discernment at local, District and Regional levels.

There are already good initiatives that can provide guidance. Hence, we present some best practices that can be shared and developed further.

Table of Best Practices

1. Volunteer and service group activities that address local needs with regard to human development and evangelization.
2. The Lasallian Youth and Young Lasallians movement (voluntary groups and experiences for each level of students in schools, colleges/universities, or other educational ministries).
3. Lasallian formation programs or courses for members of the educational community.
4. Lasallian formation opportunities for groups of adults who are a part of the educational apostolate: teachers, administrative staff, service personnel, catechists, volunteers, athletic coaches, supervisors, alumni, parent associations, mothers' guilds, prayer groups, etc.
5. Lasallian formation and advocacy programs for young adults, university students or professionals.
6. Invitations from Brothers' communities to different local Lasallian groups, including Lasallians who profess different faith traditions, that allow for sharing moments of faith and fraternity with them as well as experiences of service to those most in need.
7. Celebrations in which all local Lasallians are invited to share and celebrate the common Lasallian vocation: responding to the needs of young people and the poor.
8. Publicly recognizing those who are examples of living a Lasallian vocation: alumni associations, educators, associates, Signum Fidei, affiliates, Brothers, etc.
9. The Brothers' Community invites others to share their vocational experiences.
10. Vocation Ministry is part of the animation and government structure of the District.
11. There is a full-time person in place who coordinates a team implementing a specific plan.

4. Commitment to Lasallian Vocation Ministry

Commitment

The development of the Lasallian charism requires people who are deeply committed in their vocation. The future of our charism is in God's hands, but He asks all of us for an unambiguous commitment. After all, it is the responsibility of the entire People of God³⁸ to awaken, cultivate, accompany, and discern Lasallian vocations. By way of this Circular we invite all Lasallians to a greater involvement and commitment to Lasallian Vocational Ministry at all levels of the Lasallian Family.

The previously stated call to action can be made explicit through the following lines of action:

Communities of Brothers, Sisters, Lay Associates commit themselves in their community projects to:

- Encourage collaboration with all types of Lasallian vocations in their local area.
- Provide short-term community experiences for those who wish to deepen their Lasallian vocation.
- Offer opportunities for sharing their prayer life and spirituality.
- Specify the occasions locally in which to make known the Lasallian vocation to others.

Educational apostolates in their annual plan commit themselves to:

- Make known the Lasallian vocation.
- Review the table of "best practices" that can be found earlier in this chapter and see which ones can be incorporated into their own reality.
- Encourage participation in experiences of faith, service, and community provided in the educational apostolate.

The Districts commit themselves to:

- Establish a plan with significant experiences of faith, service, and community to offer to those who wish to deepen their Lasallian vocation.
- Make it possible for all Lasallians to participate in those experiences that are in keeping with their vocational stage, age, and commitment.
- Guarantee that a sufficient number of Lasallians are prepared and willing to accompany the Lasallian vocation.
- With local communities and educational ministries, analyze how the commitment to those most in need is being lived and enable Lasallians to participate in these experiences.
- Offer possibilities to experience other Lasallian apostolates and/or Church activities.

³⁸ Cf. Rule 84.

The Regions commit themselves to:

- Ensure that their Regional networks support vocation ministry efforts, coordinate common projects that allow for experiences beyond local and District contexts, share best practices and provide evaluation tools.
- Ensure that “beyond borders” communities are places to experience the Lasallian vocation and an international community in accordance with the spirit of the 45th General Chapter.⁴⁰

The Center of the Institute commits itself to:

- Encourage dialogue and best practices among all those responsible for youth and vocation ministry and ensure that the guidance offered and the processes suggested respect the reality of the different contexts.
- Provide analysis, generate reflection, share resources, and publicize best practices that can contribute to a vision for the future.
- Promote the International Commission of Lasallian Vocations, “networking” at the inter-Regional level, and launch a Vocation Database.
- Participate in vocation activities with the Church and share best practices inter-congregationally, especially with Institutes of Religious Brothers.
- Continue to make known the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his contribution to the Church and the world. Encourage throughout the Institute the proposals of the 45th General Chapter regarding the pastoral care of vocations.

Some evaluation criteria

Finally, we provide a series of evaluation criteria for Lasallian Vocation Ministry to advance and create dialogue. These can be adapted by each community, District, Region and the Institute.

³⁹ Proposition 21, 45th General Chapter.

Proposition 27, 45th General Chapter.

Evaluation Criteria for Lasallian Vocation Ministry

1. The District / Region has a handbook where any Lasallian can find clear guidelines on how to live the Lasallian vocation through faith, service, and community. All Lasallians are aware of, and have access to, this document.
2. The District ensures gatherings focused on raising awareness and deepening the Lasallian vocation for both Lasallians and others who may be interested.
3. The District has access to people who can share how they live their Lasallian vocation in different life commitments, ministries, and social environments. They are available to share their stories through formation experiences and other vocation-focused gatherings.
4. The District has several Lasallians, Brothers and Lay Partners, trained in spiritual and vocational accompaniment who work as a team and who are available to Lasallian educational communities. The objective of this team is the accompaniment of all Lasallian vocations.
5. The District ensures that every Lasallian has experienced an initial and/or ongoing formation process on Lasallian identity and charism.
6. Communities of Brothers and/or lay partners plan regular meetings of a vocational nature to encourage, share, and promote the Lasallian charism.
7. Those responsible for communications at the local, District, Regional and Institute levels promote the Lasallian charism and vocations through their networks. The Center of the Institute promotes awareness of best practices in vocation ministry.
8. The Center of the Institute ensures that the International Commission of Lasallian Vocations will provide guidance on how to respond to the orientations on Lasallian vocations approved by the 45th General Chapter.

5. Conclusion

All Lasallians are called to be the memory and guarantors of the Lasallian charism.⁴¹ This calls us to commit ourselves to develop a vocation ministry for all Lasallians. We are invited to live this call with enthusiasm and, making our own the words of Pope Francis, we are challenged to be "a memory that can rekindle and renew in us the *capacity to dream and to hope*,"⁴² recognizing "that the main conversion is that of the heart."⁴³

In the following two chapters we address two ways of developing Lasallian vocation ministry: vocation ministry for the process of association and vocation ministry for the life of a Brother or a Sister.

⁴¹ Cf. R 157.

⁴² Homily of Pope Francis at the inauguration of the Synod of Bishops, 2018.

⁴³ Cf. MF 175,2,2.

04

**Vocation
Ministry for
Association**



My first contact with De La Salle was when I started working as a teacher. I was looking for a job where I could develop my educational profession. Little by little, through formation, I discovered the vitality of the Lasallian charism, and I became involved in the educational mission with those most in need ... 'from one commitment to another' I felt that not only did I have the need to share the mission, but also the spirituality and community experience. After a period of formation and experience in community, I have now decided to begin the Association process.⁴⁴



⁴⁴ An anonymous teacher

The great genius of Saint John Baptist de La Salle was not the creation of the Christian school, as it had already been invented. His great success was that each school should be animated by a community.⁴⁵ “*Together and by association*” was the soul, the essential piece that ensured the success of those original communities. For more than 250 years, a unique “tree” grew in the “Lasallian garden”, the Institute of the Brothers with an original vocation: apostolic religious life.

Since the second half of the last century, an unexpected seed began to grow in our “Lasallian garden”—a new type of “tree”, a vocation, that of the Lasallian.⁴⁶ Initially, they were timid collaborators in the Brothers’ mission; then, they were “partners”; and later, in the year 2000, as result of the 43rd General Chapter, some became Associates. Little by little, without having foreseen it, the Brothers ceased, in many places, to be the only ones in positions of responsibility and protagonists of the Lasallian school.

Among Lasallians who commit themselves to the mission, there are those who also want to share community⁴⁷ and find new ways of living “together and by association.” These Lasallians live their spirituality in a unique way, and come to provide an essential contribution to the Lasallian mission. Today, we cannot think of the “Lasallian garden” without sowing, encouraging, and caring for the vocation of those in association as Lasallian Partners. This is vocation ministry for the process of Association.

1. Developing the Lasallian Vocation through the Association Process

In this chapter, we focus on those who perceive a call to develop their desire to be Lasallian. They are people who may be married, single⁴⁸, committed to a family life, or currently unmarried, each involved in some way (as educators, administrators, catechists, volunteers, parents, alumni, etc.) in the Lasallian mission and who want to develop and deepen their Lasallian vocation.

Becoming an Associate is open to those of other religious beliefs as long as they meet the five criteria of Association: that is

- 1) “a vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values;
- 2) a life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts;
- 3) a community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members;
- 4) a mission of some duration which provides individuals with the educational service of the poor; and
- 5) an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the specific/local and immediate environment”.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Br. Pedro Gil,
<https://youtu.be/HuHg9Boos30>

⁴⁶ The vocation of the Lasallian Sisters also emerges during these years.

⁴⁷ “Association implies being a member of a community for the mission.” Circular 461, 2.1. Also, “The Institute strengthens its “unity in diversity” by realizing that its principal goal is to secure the future of the Lasallian mission through vibrant expressions of community life.”, 6.9.

⁴⁸ There also exists within the Lasallian Family a good number of religious from other congregations and priests who share in the mission and who can also feel called to Association.

⁴⁹ Circular 447. Pgs. 4-5.

While it is true that, in a broad sense, all Lasallians participate in the mission “together and by association,” here we are speaking of a direct invitation to consider Lasallian Association as a life-long commitment. God calls Lasallians in association for the mission to share in the building the Kingdom of God in the manner appropriate to their state of life.⁵⁰ We are connected to the same Church that is increasingly promoting the development of charismatic families. It is evident that there is a greater awareness that the charismatic family ensures the future vitality of each congregation’s charism.⁵¹ Today, the Lasallian charism needs the complementarity of all Lasallian vocations: Brothers, Sisters, Associates, and other Lasallians.

With respect to Association, we recall what has already been said in Circular 461. It states that Association represents the link that unites all those committed to the Lasallian Mission, that is, those who see themselves responsible for it and who contribute to its vitality. This link can be expressed in different ways:

- For the Brothers, it is a vow that forms part of their religious profession.
- Some Lay Lasallians will choose to express it publicly after a process determined by their District.
- Other Lay Lasallians will live it out implicitly through their commitment in the Lasallian Mission, lived according to the characteristics described in this Circular. They are associates *de facto*.⁵²

Association is a process, and somewhere in this process a Lasallian comes to a moment of discovering the call to a lifelong commitment. Consequently, not every Lasallian is an Associate⁵³. Association is progressive, not a final moment or an acquired status⁵⁴. Association offers a Lasallian the opportunity to live a vocation with the same commitment to holiness as, for example, the vocation of the Brother.

On the human level, the process of Association is the inner call to participation in, and identification with, community and mission in consonance with Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s charism and its values. On the Christian level, it is the call of the Holy Spirit to live fully one’s own baptismal commitment as a lay person in an intentional group or community⁵⁵ for the mission and through the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle.

⁵⁰ Brothers of the Christian Schools. 2010. *Circular 461 - Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an act of HOPE*. Rome, (2.5.1).

⁵¹ Cf. AMCG Association - Charismatic Families. Fundamental Elements to elaborate the Charter of Identity of the Charismatic Family. Rome 12 May 2018.

⁵² Cf. Circular 461 (4.10).

⁵³ Circular 461 (4.18).

⁵⁴ Circular 461 (2.4.1).

⁵⁵ Intentional refers to the desire of the members of these groups or communities to live explicitly the Lasallian dynamisms Cf. also Circular 461 (6.10)

Therefore, an Associate can be understood in the following way:

An Associate is a person, who while sharing the Lasallian mission in one of its many forms, feels a call to deepen the spirituality and community dimensions of the charism. Associates follow a dynamic journey⁵⁶ in order to develop: their Lasallian vocation; a ministry with the poor; a life of faith; a sense of belonging in community; and their openness to the universality of the Lasallian mission.⁵⁷ They will have made considerable progress in their Lasallian formation process⁵⁸ and they make a commitment to association for a defined period of time.⁵⁹

2. Making the Intangible Tangible

In the life process of a group or community there is a need to express belonging. The relationships that are experienced, the rich contributions of each person, and the feeling that God's presence accompanies them need symbols and rituals. These symbols and rituals help the community to keep the flame of vocation alive. Among Lasallians who want to deepen their vocational call, there is this need to name and give expression to their sense of belonging. When these symbols and rituals resonate with those of the Brother's vocation, we can all sense that we are associated in the same charism.

To be in Association is not only about an interior feeling or only about being very dedicated to one's professional work.⁶⁰ It means to participate in a community that finds space and time to share faith on a periodic basis, and to allow oneself to be guided by the God who calls one to venture beyond the well-marked path. The vocation of a lay Lasallian in association also involves rituals and symbols in community that renew and nourish this calling.

To propose Association as a Lasallian vocation to those discerning this call requires:

- Developing stages of formation for Association since it requires a lifelong process lived in freedom: "It does not occur *ipso facto*"⁶¹.
- Creating structures of accompaniment, discernment and specific programs for those on the path to Association.
- Sharing, journeying together, with Brothers and Communities of Brothers.⁶²
- Participating in a common, basic model of vocation ministry for Association.
- That the District acknowledges this vocation, through signs and rituals.

⁵⁶ Circular 461 (2.1)

⁵⁷ Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2000. Circular 447, The Documents of the 43rd General Chapter. Rome. (p.4).

⁵⁸ Circular 461 (4.20).

⁵⁹ Circular 461 (2.7) Calls upon the District and its Council to establish the possibility of this commitment. (Cf. 4.12) also Circular 447 (p.5).

⁶⁰ Circular 461 (4.10.1)

⁶¹ Circular 461 (4.10.1)

⁶² Br. Robert Schieler. Set out in Haste: Association for the Lasallian Mission. December 2017, pg. 13.

3. Committed to Vocation Ministry for Association

We are aware that working in this ministry first implies a change of mentality among us. It is not easy to change one's mentality. But by opening one's heart and giving oneself the necessary time, it becomes possible to:

- Overcome the idea that only Brothers have a vocation.
- Let go of the fear that giving importance to the vocation of Lasallians threatens the vocation of the Brothers.
- Understand that Association is not about giving more work and responsibilities, but of sharing spirituality, community and mission.
- Recognize that Association is not the answer to the lack of vocations for the Brothers but a natural evolution of the role and responsibility of the laity in the Church and in the Lasallian Family.
- Be innovative in creating Lasallian communities, formed by Brothers and Lasallians, which can be a sign of the presence of God's love in our educational mission.
- Develop an attitude of recognizing, celebrating and accompanying this new vocation. If an educator wants to start the Association process, who should respond? Who should offer accompaniment and follow-up along the way? In which community? Who is responsible for these decisions?
- Strengthen the relationship with the Signum Fidei Fraternities and other Fraternities, the Lasallian Sisters, and other groups or communities...
- Recognize how the vocation of an Associate broadens the Lasallian mission and offers the Brothers the opportunity to renew and deepen their own vocation to Religious Life.⁶³

We offer some suggestions below that can enhance efforts in the vocation ministry for Association:

Through educational ministries:

- Offer a Lasallian identity formation plan with different levels. Through this plan, ensure that all those involved in the mission have a basic and consistent, community-centered level of formation.
- Offer vocation formation and vocational experiences about Association to all educators and administrative personnel.
- Create opportunities and specific occasions to share not only work, but also life experiences and spirituality. This can subsequently facilitate the Association process.
- Ensure that vocation ministry for Association has a significant presence in the educational ministry.

⁶³ Br. Robert Schieler. Set out in Haste: Association for the Lasallian Mission. December 2017, pg. 19.

Through communities of Brothers:

- Be present at those activities that are a part of the ministry promoting Association.
- Open the local community, especially times of prayer, for gatherings with Lasallians.
- Deepen the local community's formation and understanding of Association.
- Designate a Brother within the community as responsible for accompanying processes related to Association.
- Invite specific Lasallians to consider the vocation of Associate.

Through the District:

- Ensure that there is formation of Lasallian identity in each ministry of the District because in the places where there is deep, systematic formation in Lasallian identity there are usually people who want to deepen their sense of Lasallian belonging.
 - Identify and promote intentional communities that welcome Lasallians who desire formation and a community experience.
 - Create an Association Commission, or other accompaniment structure, formed by Brothers and Lasallians, to design formation sessions, plan gatherings, etc. to cultivate and encourage commitment to the Lay Lasallian vocation.
 - Ensure that there is personal accompaniment of Associates.
 - Increase the formation and understanding of Association among all Brothers, especially those in initial formation, and ensure shared formation experiences for all Brothers.

Through the Region:

- Help those Districts that need human or formation resources to develop this ministry.
- Foster collaboration by creating joint teams that ensure quality formation opportunities, gatherings, and retreats in the Region.
- Offer opportunities to share best practices in the processes of Association.

Through the Center of the Institute:

- Offer some common guidelines for the processes of Association.
- Promote the *Letter of Identity of the Lasallian Family*.
- Establish an international network of Associates and Communities with Associates.
- Propose a common model for the commitment formula for Association.
- Foster reflection on the future presence of the Brothers, and of Brothers' Communities, in light of this developing new reality of Association.

Best practices of Vocation Ministry for the Association Process

1. Personal accompaniment for discerning the vocation of an Associate.
2. Talks or presentations on vocations in the Church that explicitly include the vocation of Associates along with that of religious Brothers and Sisters.
3. Creating intentional communities of Brothers that promote the vocational process for Association.
4. Retreats and talks about the 5 criteria for Association.
5. Community experiences for people with vocational concerns for Association.
6. Promoting joint Brothers-Lasallian formation to increase the level of understanding of Association.
7. Encouraging communication and gatherings with Signum Fidei Fraternities and other types of Fraternities.
8. Preparing protocols for responding to requests for Association and sharing these protocols with the Region and Institute.
9. Sharing with other congregations the formation programs, protocols, and pastoral experiences around the process of Association or similar efforts.

4. Dreaming of a possible future

Vocation ministry for the process of Association leads us to dream of new Lasallian communities that will ensure the future of the Lasallian Mission. These communities need people with a deep sense of vocation that is life-giving and which contribute to the vitality of educational ministries. We dream that in each educational ministry there is at least one “reference community,”⁶⁴ capable of sustaining the Lasallian mission. It would be a community where Brothers and Associates commit themselves to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in their locality. For those most in need, these communities would be a reference point to that which sustains them, the presence of God. In the beginning of the Institute, the Brothers’ community was that sign. Today, a new form of Lasallian community is emerging which we understand as an expression of creative fidelity.

⁶⁴ Cf. citation 1: Br. Pedro Gil.
<https://youtu.be/HuHg9Boos30>

This dream is already a reality among us, the seed is already sown, but not in every place.

It is already present in, and among:

- Signum Fidei Fraternities⁶⁵.
- Fraternités Éducatives La Salle⁶⁶ in France.
- communities of Lasallian Volunteers who share faith-community-service for a specific period of time.
- existing communities composed jointly of Associates and Brothers, or of Associates on their own in various Districts.
- Inter-congregational communities, with the participation of lay people, which are emerging in some places.
- Groups such as the "Union of Catechists".
- the commitment of Young Lasallians.

Yes, as indicated above, this dream is already emerging but **not fully realized. It lacks:**

- the necessary planning and implementation of Lasallian formation at the Institute and District levels.
- the facilitation of Association structures at the Institute and District levels.
- a vocation ministry team responsible for Association in each District.
- solid vocational accompaniment in each District and community.
- a structure at the international level that facilitates communication and coordination among the entire Lasallian family.
- the existence of this “new community”, which we referenced above, in each educational ministry.

In the parable about the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13), Jesus tells of the five wise women who took a reserve of oil and the five foolish ones who believed that what they had was enough for them. As in the parable, the Lasallian mission has a future if we are proactive, wise, and creative in nourishing this new community to which the Holy Spirit seems to be moving us through the vocation of Lasallian Associates.

⁶⁵ Cf. Signum Fidei – Style of Life.

⁶⁶ Cf. Texte Inspirateur (2011).

⁶⁷ Br. Robert Schieler. Set out in Haste: Association for the Lasallian Mission. December 2017, pg. 26.

Evaluation criteria for a Vocational Plan for the Association Process

1. There are formation plans in the District and Region to foster this vocation for the Association process.
2. Communities of Brothers welcome lay people in the process of Association.
3. The Institute and each District, provide structures for the Association process.
4. In each District, there is a team that is responsible for vocation ministry for Association.
5. Each District and community ensure vocational accompaniment for the Association process.
6. Within each educational ministry this new Lasallian community exists.
7. In the Districts there are Lasallians who have expressed their public commitment through the process of Association and who become protagonists in this vocation ministry.
8. At the international level there is a structure that facilitates communication and coordination throughout the entire Lasallian Family.

⁶⁸ Br. Robert Schieler. Set out in Haste: Association for the Lasallian Mission. December 2017, pg. 26.

05

**Vocation
Ministry
for the life
of a Brother
or Sister**

“

When I think about the way I want to live my life, the possibility of becoming a Brother keeps coming back. It is an idea that I reject, but it always comes back. Although it is not something that is in my plans, it represents something that appeals to me. I do not want to talk to others about it for fear of the impact that it could have on the way others treat me. I already have a plan for my life, a plan in which I find inspiration. What use is it to consider the possibility of becoming a Brother?⁶⁹

”

⁶⁹ A young Lasallian.

Consecrated life reflects values that are attractive to many young people. These include total self-giving, communion of hearts, spirituality, and altruism. At the same time, the life of consecrated religious is lived at a far distance from the current reality of youth, and the vast majority of young people neither get to know nor understand such aspirations, and therefore they do not end up considering it as a real possibility in their lives. We believe, however, that among Lasallians who do know, understand, and appreciate this way of life, there are indeed young people who God is calling today to live their Lasallian vocation as Brothers. This vocation still needs to be promoted, proposed, discerned, and accompanied even if responses seem to be fragile in many places today.

We understand “vocation ministry for the life of a Brother and Sister” as the pastoral practices that support the direct invitation to consider this vocation as a viable life option for individuals.⁷⁰ These pastoral practices consist of a formation process that includes awakening interest in this vocation, explicitly proposing it as an option, and discerning that option with each person. Obviously, accompaniment is essential in each of these stages. We will dedicate this chapter to developing some elements of this focused area of vocation ministry in the hope that it will motivate greater commitment.

1. A Significant Vocation Today

The Lasallian vocational path that was explained in the previous chapters also leads to vocation ministry for the life of a Brother and a Sister. With that in mind, we cannot look at these pastoral practices with the same eyes as before. Perhaps we will continue to do many things that have been effective in the past, but we want to do them today with new eyes and new intentions.

Young people today are different, as we saw in the first chapter of this Circular, and they surprise us every day. Community life impacts young people greatly when it involves communion, prayer, contemplation, personal witness, intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, unconditional love, and the challenge to go beyond borders to the existential peripheries.⁷¹ Vocation ministry for the life of Brother is, above all, directed to those who may be called to consecrated life.⁷² In vocation ministry, we want to purify any self-referential intentions in order to share with the young our deepest gift and secret, that of being Brothers.

Lasallian Partners, with whom the Brothers share an educational ministry, are distinguished by their dedication and openness to the Spirit. Among them, as we saw in the previous chapter, the calling to be an Associate may surface, as may the vocation of Brother. All of these are true and full vocations in service of the mission. The Lasallian Family needs men and women who are the memory and guarantors of the charism.⁷³ We want new vocations, not in order to maintain control of the educational mission but to be signs, with all Lasallians, of the dignity and importance of this key educational commitment to young people and the poor⁷⁴, witnesses of fraternity and teachers of spirituality.

⁷⁰ Cf. Circular 466, “They will call themselves Brothers”. 3.25 and 3.30.

⁷¹ Cf. Synod of Bishops, 2018. *Final Document*, 88.

⁷² Cf. Circular 466. 3.33.

⁷³ Cf. Rule 157.

⁷⁴ Cf. Rule 11.

The Church today also needs the vocation of the Brother. Rather than seeking an ecclesial recognition of this religious vocation, a vocation that is so often misunderstood, we want to share this vocation as a contribution to what we believe the Church needs today. We live in a historical moment when the damage that clericalism has caused among the People of God is deeply felt. The Brothers' prophetic experience of fraternity, accompanied by the commitment to assume the way of life of Jesus, reveals the evangelical value of fraternal, non-hierarchical relationships.⁷⁵

Inspired by the *Rule* of the Brothers, we should remember the beauty of this religious vocation. The vocation of the Brother, in the following of Jesus Christ, is a call of the Holy Spirit to incarnate the charism of John Baptist de La Salle and consecrate oneself to procure God's glory, exercising "together and by association" the apostolic ministry of education in community.⁷⁶ Therefore, we would like all single, Catholic Lasallians, men and women, to be open to a specific invitation to enter into dialogue with God and discern if they are called to the Lasallian consecrated life. The challenge here is to provide the necessary mediation so that this dialogue with God may happen. Paraphrasing Saint Paul, we say:⁷⁷ *"How, then, will they respond to the one they have not listened to? And how will they listen without anyone approaching them? And how will they approach if nobody invites them?"*

As a General Council, we are particularly concerned about the perseverance of Brothers in their religious vocation and in their creative fidelity in service to the Kingdom of God. Consequently, it needs to be recognized that the dynamism within this process does not finish when a person enters a formation house or begins a formation process. This ministry, as part of a "culture of vocation", must involve ongoing accompaniment and discernment through the various life stages, particularly in moments of transition and/or in times of personal or communal crisis.

2. Yes, everybody is involved...but each community is indispensable

This vocation ministry for the life of Brother concerns single, Catholic Lasallians, men and women, who are open to considering consecrated life in community as the way of life toward which God may be calling them. If they are the beneficiaries of this ministry, the agents of this pastoral work are all Lasallians. There are more and more Lay Partners who, together with the Brothers, commit themselves to work as a team in order to promote the vocation to consecrated life. Their participation and commitment become an incentive for many Brothers to similarly commit themselves to the promotion of the Brother's vocation in an effective manner.

While the participation and commitment of all is necessary, the role of each community is indispensable. No marketing strategy, nor the good will of many Lasallians, can supply the same joyful and prophetic witness of a community of Brothers. For religious vocation ministry to become an effective invitation to embrace the life of a Brother of the Christian Schools, it is necessary.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ CIVCSVA. Identity and Mission of the Religious Brothers in the Church, 7 and 25.

⁷⁶ Cf. Rule 2.

⁷⁷ Romans 10:14-15.

⁷⁸ Rule 86.

- that the Brothers give witness with their lives to the presence of God among them, to the liberating force of His Spirit, and to the tenderness of His love;
- that communities live the Gospel message to "come and see" in a fraternal and apostolic way, and that they resolve to become open and welcoming to others;
- that the Institute truly pays attention to its own renewal by responding to the most urgent needs within the world of young people, a world which it is called to evangelize.

The 44th General Chapter insistently urged the Brothers communities to be “companions for others along the pathway of their own spirituality. We need Brothers and communities that live the Gospel authentically. We need Brothers and communities that unleash an unstoppable process of conversion that will help us to respond to what God asks of us!”⁷⁹ This involves creating communities of Brothers that are visible, credible and fraternal, where life and faith are generously shared with the young and with adults⁸⁰. Being visible is to draw our communities closer to the reality that is lived by young people, so that our communities are transformed into places where the young can express themselves without fear of being judged. “To be visible is to make the house of the Brothers a space in which young people [...] can find answers for their life.”⁸¹ If this is true for all young people, it is particularly true for all Lasallians.

3. Some key points for a renewed vocation ministry for the life of a Brother and Sister

The commitment and witness of each community must be complemented by a vocation ministry plan. There are four key activities involved in this process: to promote, to accompany, to propose and to discern.

Promote the vocation of Brother and Sister. The aim is to awaken interest in these religious vocations and to communicate the value and beauty of Lasallian religious life with a language that is significant and familiar to the target audience. For this, the visible, credible, and engaged presence of Brothers and Sisters in communities and ministries is essential.

Accompany young people and adults on their journeys. This means being present among young people and other Lasallians in order to get to know them, support them, and appropriately challenge them. A spiritual and apostolic accompaniment that allows them to grow as missionary disciples can also open their hearts to listen to such a radical call. Quality accompaniment requires that more and more Lasallians are trained to accompany and allow themselves to be accompanied. Only through such accompaniment can one recognize the right moment to take the next step.

⁷⁹ Circular 455. The Documents of the 44th General Chapter. 1. Interior Life, 2.9, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Idem 2. Community life, 2.2, p. 21.

⁸¹ Circular 466 “They will call themselves Brothers”, 3.26.

Propose consecrated life as an option at the right time. Accompanying allows us to intuit and recognize in each person the "right moment" for them to consider the vocation of Brother.⁸² Such a proposal is a personalized and direct invitation to discernment.⁸³ Youth ministry activities often provide opportunities for such moments to take place.

Discern a vocational path. Vocational discernment in this context refers to searching for, and identifying, the signs of one's vocation.⁸⁴ It shapes an attitude of continuous discernment, one that will continue to be active, as a Brother, in vital moments of transition. Discernment is enriched by formation, both initial and ongoing, and aims to fully develop this commitment as it is affirmed throughout one's life. This discernment is complemented by the Institute's discernment on the suitability of the person for the consecrated life as a Brother.⁸⁵

4. How to move from fear to hope?

This question is one of the subtitles in the third section of Circular 466 (3.35): *They will call themselves BROTHERS* which addresses vocation ministry. The challenges of vocation ministry, focused on the life of the Brother, can also provide some adequate answers to this question. For example:

WITNESS. Nothing is more important than the joyful and visible witness of a community that lives its mission and its consecration with faith. Almost the entire third part of Circular 466, cited above, refers to the need for this form of witness. This witness increases our capacity to present the positive worth of the consecrated life.⁸⁶

MINISTRY WITH THOSE MOST IN NEED. Religious life is called to be prophetic in the midst of the Church, especially in its mission with the poor. The renewal of the life of each Brother and Community, as well as that of the Institute, comes through the concrete response to the educational needs of those who suffer and those whose rights have been violated.

PRAYER. Of course, all of this requires ensuring opportunities to pray for vocations in community, in ministries, among the parents of students, teachers, friends, and among young people themselves.⁸⁷ However, well-organized prayers are not enough. The vitality of our prayer life is much more profound and personal. Prayer provides for conversion of heart and opens us to a deeper dimension of faith.

SHARE. Today, the vocation of the consecrated person is lived together with the lay vocation and alongside many people who share the same mission and charism. A community of consecrated persons is continually challenged to openly share its spirituality, community, and mission with others.

Mindful of these challenges, we note below more concrete ways to develop a renewed vocation ministry for the life of Brother.

Communities of Brothers can:

- step out of the community to be in contact with young people and Lasallian educators;

⁸² Circular 466, "They will call themselves Brothers" 3.31, 3.32.

⁸³ Guide for Formation, 1991, 81-84

⁸⁴ Idem, 87-88.

⁸⁵ Guide for Formation 91

⁸⁶ Cf. Guide for Formation, 1991, 65.

⁸⁷ Rule 85

- give visibility to the retired Brothers, not as display pieces but as witnesses;⁸⁸
- invite Lasallians who are single into the community to experience fraternity and a personal and communal prayer life;
- give priority to youth/vocation activities among the other ministerial activities;⁸⁹
- involve the laity in the efforts that are made for those open to the consecrated life;
- bring renewal to the way it prays for vocations and include others outside the community in this effort.

Educational ministries can:

- make known the Brother's vocation and invite young people to consider it;⁹⁰
- support vocation ministry as part of the regular programs of educational ministries and movements;⁹¹
- encourage volunteer experiences, immersion programs, and commitment with the poor;⁹²
- ensure that there are people who serve as reference points for vocation ministry and who provide local support and accompaniment;
- offer formation opportunities so that more Lasallians may be open to the experience of being accompanied and are willing to accompany others in their vocational journeys.

Districts can:

- ensure there is a person responsible at District level, along with a team and the necessary resources;
- coordinate efforts for all forms of Lasallian vocation, Brothers and others;
- use social media and communication networks in the promotion of vocations;⁹³
- ensure that there are communities where young people can experience fraternity, the preferential option for the poor, and a life of prayer;⁹⁴
- facilitate opportunities for young Brothers to encounter and interact with Lasallians in those Lasallian schools that no longer have a presence of Brothers.

⁸⁸ Circular 418, 49-50.

⁸⁹ Idem, 48.

⁹⁰ Circular 466, 3.30.

⁹¹ Rule 84.2.

⁹² Idem, 84.3.

⁹³ Circular 466, 3.33.

⁹⁴ Idem, 3.39.

Regions can:

- emphasize the Brother's vocation in Regional vocation ministry networks;⁹⁵
- promote and develop formation programs for vocational accompaniment and discernment toward the life of a Brother;
- promote opportunities where the best practices of vocation ministry for the life of Brother may be shared Regionally;
- keep this issue on the agenda of the Visitors' conferences in order to promote collaboration among Districts, particularly among those that face the most difficulties in this area.

The Center of the Institute can:

- ensure that vocational networks place emphasis on the life of the Brother, as proposed by the 45th General Chapter;⁹⁶
- coordinate the promotion of the Brother's vocation on an Institute level, through the Brother responsible for this ministry.⁹⁷

Finally, as in the previous chapters, we share below some possible criteria to evaluate advances in this specific area of vocation ministry.

5. Conclusion

All forms of consecrated life are seeking new models of vocation ministry. In addition, this is one of the priorities that has been repeated at all General Chapters. The new model of vocation ministry for the life of Brother can only be found today within the framework of a “culture of vocations”, a Lasallian vocation ministry that is well-developed and in complementarity and mutual collaboration with a vocation ministry for Association. With this new mentality, awareness, and pastoral practice, vocation ministry for the life of the Brother demands that we awaken an interest in the life, identity, and mission of the Brother. We can only effectively convey this message through the perspective, culture, and language of young people. Accompanying them closely, and with total freedom, may bring about the opportune moment to invite them to consider discerning the vocation of the Brother. At all times, however, we are aware that this is God's work. It is He who “causes the growth” (1 Cor 3:7).

⁹⁵ Circular 469, Documents of the 45th General Chapter, proposition 21.

⁹⁶ Idem.

⁹⁷ Idem, proposition 26.

Best practices of Vocation Ministry for the life of Brother

1. Personal accompaniment for vocational discernment of the Brother's vocation.
2. Talks or presentations on vocations in the Church that explicitly include the vocation of Brother.
3. Active presence of Brothers in vocation activities that are promoted by the local Church and/or other religious institutes.
4. Accompaniment programs that include vocational discernment opportunities for young people with an interest in the Brother's life.
5. "Come and See" community experiences for those interested in the Brother's vocation.
6. Vocation experiences that consist of an intensive program of vocational activities for young people interested in the Brother's vocation.
7. Mission immersion experiences that include an intense, but short-term, experience of association for the educational service of the poor for young people interested in the Brother's vocation, one in which activities of human development and evangelization are promoted.
8. Direct and explicit promotion of the Brother's vocation in the District vocation ministry plan, with a full-time person in charge, supported by a team and the necessary resources.
9. Mixed communities of Brothers and lay people in which the Brothers feel encouraged and challenged to live their vocation authentically.
10. Inter-congregational communities that highlight the identity and mission of the religious Brother.

Possible evaluation criteria for Vocation Ministry for the life of a Brother or a Sister

1. All Lasallians know and can express the identity and mission of the Brothers.
2. Brothers' communities are open and available to reach out to, welcome, and accompany Lasallians in their vocational journeys, particularly the young.
3. Members of the educational community know the Brothers of the local community or those who visit the educational ministry regularly.
4. Members of the educational community express appreciation for the contribution of the Brothers to the mission.
5. There is an increasing number of Brothers involved in vocation ministry focused on the Brother's vocation.
6. Communities and educational ministries encourage prayer for vocations in a creative and committed way.
7. All Lasallians have the opportunity to directly encounter Brothers.
8. Vocation activities at each educational ministry communicate to Lasallians the consecrated life of the Brother as a call from God.
9. Brothers find increased satisfaction with their lives of faith, community life, and ministry.
10. Brothers participate in local vocation ministry activities and in the District's efforts with the poor.
11. Brothers participate in local and District vocation gatherings as a way of giving witness to their way of life.

**To conclude,
or to continue...**

We hope your reading of, and reflection on, this Circular will encourage you to greater commitment to this ministry and mission. We have used the parable of the sower as an analogy for God's work. On the one hand, we are like the land that receives the seed that is sown by God; and on the other hand, we are like mediators of the Sower, working so that His seed reaches every land.

Vocation ministry involves each Lasallian personally as well as all communities and educational ministries. The leaders of Districts have a particular responsibility in this ministry. It is they who identify, name, encourage, and accompany those who carry out the specific work of vocation ministry. A vocation ministry plan must be developed, organized, and implemented by specific people. These people assume the leading role in the development of this plan while counting on the co-responsibility of all.

Sometimes those charged with the responsibility for vocation ministry, in addition to sowing, would like to see more tangible results in the mission entrusted them. This is why sometimes we have to integrate moments of loneliness, frustration, and discouragement with those of joy, encouragement, faith, and hope. As Lasallians, we must make vocation ministry part of our own identity as well as support and encourage those charged with leading vocation ministry. These individuals often do so with generosity, commitment, and on many occasions wear themselves out. It is important to sustain them with our direct, personal support and with our prayer, ensuring their well-being, their physical, spiritual, and vocational health. It is the responsibility of District leaders to accompany them and ensure that they have opportunities for ongoing formation, for reflection and renewal, and to ensure a quality vocation ministry adapted to the challenges of today's men and women.

The conviction that the field and the harvest are both the work of God allows us to take on vocation ministry with a perspective of hope, service, gratitude, and faith. Towards the end of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, John Baptist de La Salle invites us to consider the reward that God grants us in this world. We recognize that, through the Lasallian Family, many young people and adults come to discover their vocation in response to God's plan of salvation. De La Salle invites us to thank God every day for this gift and to "ask him fervently ...that he will be pleased to make your Institute grow and produce good day by day, so that, as Saint Paul says, the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and in justice" (MTR 207.3).

Finally, it is important to remember everything that is part of a "culture of vocation" is the foundation of all of our work in this field. God calls us all to live our personal vocation, whatever our specific way of life, age, or our particular mission. Therefore, we can offer the treasure of a Lasallian vocation to all who believe and also to those far beyond our Church. Lasallians all over the world, with their concrete and daily commitments, give genuine life to this ideal and continue to be open to new ways of discovering the presence of God within our Lasallian family.

Lord, God of all hearts,
We give you thanks for planting in our hearts
the seed of our vocation.
Thank you for the gift of the Lasallian charism,
a charism that you inspired in Saint John Baptist de La Salle
and the first Brothers,
and a charism that comes to us today with renewed strength.
Thank you for the many wonderful Lasallians
Who, over time, have made so much good possible.
Today, you call us to do the same
so that our charism can continue to bear abundant fruit.
Thank you for allowing us to discover and share together
the gift of knowing that we are called to follow you
as men and women
committed to this educational mission, especially for those most in need.

Bless this work which is Yours.
Bless all families, children, youth, and adults.
Bless all those who give their lives to you and to others, especially Lasallian educators.
Bless those who commit themselves to the pastoral ministry of vocations.
Bless those who help others to discover, discern, and accompany their vocation.
Bless, in a special way, those who have been entrusted with the Lasallian vocation ministry.

Open, Lord, our hearts so:

- That we may not give in to discouragement but live in the joy, courage, and hope of knowing that we are all in Your hands.
- That our shared faith strengthens our own commitment to the ministry of Lasallian vocations.
- That we accompany others, and let ourselves be accompanied by others, in order to discover the vocation to which each one is called.
- That Lasallians, Sisters, Brothers, priests and others engaged in the Lasallian mission live their own vocation as authentic witnesses.
- That we recognize, with You, that great things are possible.

We invoke the intercession of Saint Benilde, Lasallian apostle of vocations,
And of Mary, Queen and Mother of all Vocations.
Amen.

Brother Superior General and
Brothers of the General Council

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