



# Lasallian Reflections

No. 2

Brothers of the Christian Schools

June 2001

## **Guidelines to Help Us Read and Assimilate the Documents of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter**

[Adapted from a document prepared by the District of France]

Dear Brothers,

You have just received Circular 447 containing the documents produced by the last General Chapter. You probably followed the debates on Internet, or you received news of the Chapter some other way. Perhaps you have had a chance to speak with a capitulant, see the videos that were shown at the beginning of the Chapter, or be present at some PowerPoint presentation.

You are now invited to another stage in the process of understanding the work of the Chapter. This stage consists in getting to know what the capitulants thought, the guidelines they offered and the propositions they made. This involves careful reading of the text and personal and community reflection.

We know from experience that it is not easy to assimilate a document resulting from discussions in which we didn't take part. When we read a text rapidly, superficially and purely out of curiosity, we run the danger of missing the basic point it is trying to make.

That is why we believe it a good idea to provide you with a reading guide to help you assimilate the contents of the text. It can be used on an individual or a group basis (in community, groups of communities, assemblies...). You are, of course, completely free to use this guide in any way you think suitable.

What is essential is that you "immerse" yourself in the thinking of the General Chapter. With the eyes of faith, we can read the text as representing "what the Spirit is saying to the Brothers in the year 2000".

### **The Importance of the Texts**

When you first glanced at the Circular you probably noticed that most of its sections are structured similarly: observations, guidelines, recommendations and propositions. The different background colour distinguishes the last two from each other.

The **difference** between them lies in the way they were drawn up, and in their importance.

1. Only the propositions were formulated in the general assemblies: observations, guidelines and recommendations were drawn up in commission meetings and voted on as a block in the general assembly, and their formulation was not discussed by all the capitulants.

2. Their respective importance is as follows:

- Observations give the basic facts about the present-day situation to which the question under discussion refers.
- Guidelines indicate the goal to aim for.
- Recommendations define a plan of action.
- Propositions formulate decisions that are binding on those concerned.

It is important also to be quite clear about who has been given the responsibility to take action.

While the “weight” and the importance of these texts varies, it is nonetheless true that they are all Chapter texts and, as such, require us to treat them seriously and take them into account.

## The Questions

The questions that follow in this “study guide” are divided into two sections.

**The first set of questions** corresponds to a “cursory reading” of the text. They presuppose that the Circular has been read through completely. When we read through the text completely, there are two approaches we can adopt.

1. We can **identify** in each section **the link or connection with the theme of the Chapter** - “Associated for the educational service of the poor: a Lasallian response to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. When we read the text in this way, we should try to identify how the capitulants demonstrate their concern to ensure that their reflection and decisions serve to promote association (not only Brothers and Partners) so as to offer a better service to children and young people in difficulty.
2. We can **identify** how, by comparison with previous Chapters and, in particular, with the 42<sup>nd</sup>, this Chapter has promoted evolution, has stressed certain points, has introduced new things. The thing to see here is whether this Chapter has respected continuity with the past while at the same time innovating.

**The second set of questions** corresponds to an “analytical reading” of the text. They presuppose that the Circular will be read a section at a time, so as to concentrate on the subject it treats, see what point of view it develops, try to understand it and compare it with one’s own views and situation.

In all of this it is important to remember that the questions in this “study guide” were drawn up by capitulants of the 43rd General Chapter, with different questions having different purposes.

- Some wish to draw attention to some point or other in the text.
- Others invite us to question the way the Institute and the District live, and to reflect on the way we live out our vocation today.
- Others challenge us directly on a precise situation in which we find ourselves today, and invite us to look at it in the light of the guidelines of the Chapter.

We invite each of you to study the documents of the Chapter in your own way. Good luck!

# **The First Set of Questions: For a cursory Reading**

## **1. Listening to the text and understanding it**

- Identify clearly who the text is meant for.
- Can you see a recurring theme in it?
- What are the underlying concerns?
- Have you found anything difficult to understand?

## **2. Your reactions to the contents of the text**

### **2.1. The observations**

- What I (we) think is correct.
- What I (we) think is debatable.
- What has been left out?

### **2.2. The guidelines (underlying principles for action)**

- What seems especially relevant?
- What seems utopian?
- What is insufficient and needs further thought or certain distinctions to be made?

### **2.3. The recommendations (suggested action)**

- What concern(s) do they reveal?
- Do you think that the suggestions given are capable of responding to these concerns?

### **2.4. The propositions (decided action)**

- Do you think that they involve people? Who?
- What could hinder their implementation?
- What can help us to overcome these obstacles?

## **The Second Set of Questions: For an Analytical Reading**

### **1. Associated to respond to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (pages 1 to 18)**

#### **1.1. Associated for the educational service of the poor (pages 1 to 8)**

##### **1.1.1. The reality of the present world**

1. In your community context, have you noticed the formation of any groups by persons wishing to associate in order to satisfy their aspirations and influence the course of events?
2. What contact do you have with secular and with Church-based associations? Which are the associations or organisations that you work with?

##### **1.1.2. Lasallian association - the present situation**

3. What constituted the association formed by De La Salle and his 12 companions when they made the 1694 vow (the choices it implied, its purpose, the commitments it entailed)?
4. How is association for the educational service of the poor implemented in your District and in your community?
  - in the community apostolate and in the work of the Brothers in community?
  - in the organisation of community life?
  - in your relations with your Brothers and other communities?
  - in your life of prayer?
5. What measures can the District Chapter take to enable the District and communities to promote among Partners and Associates:
  - knowledge about the Lasallian mission?
  - discovery of the characteristics of association based on the Lasallian charism?
  - personal commitment?
  - the birth of associations or groups?
6. How could your community involve itself in these 4 activities?
7. In this connection, what suggestions can you make to the District Chapter? To your community?

#### **1.2. Leadership and accompaniment structures (pages 8 to 12)**

8. Which of the observations apply to what is being done in the District to offer leadership and accompaniment to collaborators?
9. What is being done that is not mentioned?
10. What has been mentioned but is not being done?

11. What can you recommend to the District Chapter on the basis of the observations?
12. Among the lay persons you know, are there any who live a form of association with the Brothers, or who wish to?
13. How is this manifested?
14. Do you know any lay people who live a form of association among themselves?
15. What is there in the guidelines that challenges you? Why?
16. What is there in your personal life and in that of the community that demonstrates a commitment on your part and on that of the community to the service of the poor?

### **1.3. The participation of Lasallian associates in Lasallian mission decision-making bodies (pages 12 to 15)**

17. In the organisation of the District and of its services, which are the bodies in which Lasallian Associates are involved in decision-making regarding the Lasallian mission?
18. Do propositions 5 and 6 go further than present practice in the District?
19. What decisions will the District Chapter have to make in order to implement Proposition 6?
20. What is new about Proposition 7 by comparison with past practice in the Institute in general and District Chapters regarding the participation of Partners or Associates?

### **1.4. Formation of Brothers and Partners for the Lasallian mission (pages 15 to 18)**

21. How do the observations reflect what is done or not done in the District regarding the formation of Brothers and Partners for the Lasallian mission?
22. How do you understand the expression “Lasallian spirituality” (Guideline 1)? How do you understand the statement that follows which maintains that this spirituality is the central integrating factor of the formation process as a whole?
23. In the four guidelines to ensure a better formation of individuals, which, do you think, are the most important points to bear in mind?
24. What is in place already in the District regarding the contents of Recommendation 5? Do you think that Proposition 11, when applied to collaborators and Lasallian Associates, is realistic?

## **2. The mission today: urgent needs and hopes (pages 19 to 33)**

### **2.1. The educational service of the poor (pages 19 to 23)**

1. What types of poverty do you see around you? How do they affect the children?

2. Do you agree with the following statement of the General Chapter: “The Institute is not perceived sufficiently clearly as being dedicated to the educational service of the poor”?
3. Pick out from the observations what you think demonstrates the realism of the capitulants in their analysis of the present situation of the Institute.
4. Do you think that, besides those mentioned in the observations, there exist other signs of a “discrepancy between what we profess and what we do” for the poor?
5. In the educational establishment where you work, what aspects make it possible to identify it as a Lasallian institution?
6. What are the signs that indicate that the members of your community “live as persons of modest means and have contact with such persons” (Recommendation 6)?
7. What would need to be changed to ensure that your life and that of the community reflected Recommendation 6?

## **2.2. Evangelisation (pages 23 to 26)**

8. In your present situation, how much attention do you pay to the way young people live their daily lives, to their culture and their attitudes regarding faith in Christ?
9. How informed are you about the religious beliefs of the young people you know and who belong to other religions?
10. What calls from God do you discern in the behaviour of young people today, in particular with regard to religion?
11. After reading the observations, do you think that the General Chapter has taken sufficiently into account the questions posed by evangelisation?
12. Have you noted what is said in the observations, recommendations and Proposition 13 regarding the various approaches to the evangelisation of young people in Lasallian schools today?
13. What approaches to evangelisation should the District Chapter encourage and promote as a matter of priority?
14. What services have been set up by the District for the evangelisation of young people? Are you informed about their activities?

## **2.3. Urgent educational needs (pages 26 to 33)**

15. Of the four urgent educational needs proposed by the Chapter, which do you think is a matter of priority for the District?

### **2.3.1. The rights of children**

16. Do you know the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Observations on page 26)?

17. What information do you have regarding organisations which work in your area for the promotion of the rights of children?
18. Have you discovered or heard of infringements of the rights of children among the people you are closely associated with?
19. What suggestions can you make to the District Chapter regarding the implementation of Proposition 14?

### **2.3.2. Educational renewal**

20. Do you know what steps the District has taken to promote the educational renewal of Lasallian schools?
21. Which points in Recommendation 11 can be included in your community programme?
22. What in Recommendation 11 and Proposition 15 repeats or complements what is said about evangelisation on pages 23 and 24?

### **2.3.3. Explicit proclamation of the faith (pages 29 and 30)**

23. Why is this subject treated separately, given that it could have been included in the pages dealing with evangelisation (pages 22 to 24)? (Correction of an omission? Emphasis?)
24. What does it add to these pages that is new?

### **2.3.4. Lasallian presence in multi-religious societies (pages 31 and 32)**

25. Does what is said concern the area in which you live or work?
26. What is your spontaneous reaction to cultural and religious differences? (indifference? intolerance? respect?)
27. In what way can a Lasallian educational mission statement promote inter-religious dialogue?

## **3. The Brothers today: identity and formation (pages 33 to 55)**

### **3.1. The identity of the Brother (pages 33 to 40)**

1. Do you agree with the observations made regarding the reasons why Brothers call their identity into question (page 34)?
2. Are there other reasons which are not mentioned? Which?
3. Of the reasons for uncertainty and insecurity among the Brothers (page 34), which are the three which you think affect the Brothers in the District most?
4. Of what is said about “community life and identity”, what reflects most closely your own experience? With which of the observations can you identify most closely?

5. Which two points mentioned in the observations would you propose to improve or correct in your own life and in that of the community?
6. Pick out from section 3 on “Association and identity” and from the guidelines that follow, the attitudes and practices which will help you, in your present situation, to understand and live out better the vow of association.
7. What decisions could your community take in order to “establish and/or reinforce practices” which will help its members to remember and express who they are as Brothers (cf. Recommendations 14 and 15)?
8. In what way does Recommendation 16 challenge you?
9. What suggestions could you make to the District Chapter for the implementation of:
  - Recommendation 17 regarding the creation of new opportunities for experiencing community life for young people and Associates?
  - Recommendations 18 and 19 regarding the planning of institution and the administration of goods in order to upgrade the educational service of the poor by giving certain institutions this specific priority?
10. Which are the basic points of De La Salle’s spirituality that the District should recommend to the attention and practice of the Brothers during the year devoted to the renewal of community life requested by Proposition 18 of the Chapter?

### **3.2. Facing our demographic situation and living by association for the educational service of the poor (pages 40 to 46)**

11. What was your reaction when you read the observations on pages 40 to 42?
12. Which observations struck you most? Why?
13. In what way do Guidelines 1 and 2 challenge you? What practical conclusions do you draw for yourself?
14. What is there in the District that reflects what is said in Guidelines 3, 4 and 5 (page 43)?
15. Does the call for creativity in Guideline 6 concern you? Can you give some recent examples of creativity in your District regarding the educational service of the poor?
16. What struck you in particular about Guidelines 7, 8, 9 and 10?
17. How do you pursue your apostolate today in the situation in which you find yourself, and at your age?
18. What is your reaction to Proposition 20?

### **3.3. Formation of the Brothers (pages 46 to 52)**

19. What is there about your life that shows that you are still interested in ongoing formation? In what areas in particular do you try to improve yourself (professional, relational, spiritual theological, intellectual)?

20. Regarding the formation of the Brothers, the Chapter suggests three lines of action that need to be considered (cf. sections 1, 2 and 3 on pages 46 to 52). Which do you agree with most? Why?
21. Which are the principal shortcomings mentioned in the observations on page 47?
22. What is your reaction to the Chapter statement that personal accompaniment is needed throughout our lives? Are you convinced that this true? Do you avail yourself of this accompaniment ?
23. What has the District done in the areas mentioned in Guidelines 3 and 4 on page 48?
24. Do you know of any schemes in your own District that are similar to those described in the observations on pages 48 and 49?
25. What means do you take to keep informed about the “causes of social injustice”, the “mechanisms of economic and commercial exploitation”, and the phenomena of secularisation and globalisation? Do you know what means the Institute has taken since 1993 to study these causes, these mechanisms and these phenomena?
26. What does the District do to offer Brothers the possibility of personal involvement in the educational service of the poor?
27. Pick out from the observations on pages 50 and 51 examples of the progress that has been made in formation of formators in the Institute, as well as of its shortcomings, over the past 7 years.
28. Which two guidelines on pages 51 and 52 concern you the most in your present situation?
29. Taking into account the situation of the District, which Guideline ought to be given priority by the District Chapter? Why?

### **3.4. The promotion of vocations to the Brothers (pages 52 to 55).**

30. In the observations on the vocations ministry, which of the positive points highlighted, and which of the major difficulties stressed, are true of the situation of the District?
31. Which points mentioned in the guidelines do you think it is most important for you, your community and the District to bear in mind?
32. In what way are Recommendations 26, 27, 28 and 29 already being implemented by communities and by the District?
33. What proposition could the District Chapter adopt “to give fresh impetus to the vocations ministry”?
34. What are the underlying convictions of the Chapter’s thinking regarding the promotion of vocations to the Brothers? To what extent do you share them? To what extent do you not share them?

## **4. Government and administration (pages 56 to 70)**

### **4.1. Government (pages 56 to 60)**

1. What are the major difficulties encountered by sectors of the Institute mentioned in the observations? (Here sector means District, Sub-District or Delegation).
2. Which factors promote and increase the vitality of the Brothers and of the Institute today? (cf. guideline 2 on page 56 and 57).
3. Pick out from recommendations 30, 31, 32 and 33, and from proposition 27, the ways in which the principles of interdependence and subsidiarity are applied in the Institute.
4. Do you know which structures, commissions or associations promote the collaboration of Institute Districts and Regions in Europe?

### **4.2. Management policies (pages 60 to 67)**

5. Pick out from pages 60 to 67 facts which show how interdependence and subsidiarity are practised in the Institute.
6. What measures have been taken by the Institute to face the financial consequences of the progressive decrease in the number of Brothers?
7. “Communities could, through solidarity, revise their budget and perhaps even their lifestyle, and contribute” to the increase of the Lasallian Formation Fund and the Sharing Fund (page 65). This Chapter appeal is an opportunity for us to look at our own and our community’s use of the money that is available. How can you respond to this appeal in your community by a stricter management of the community budget and a more modest lifestyle?

### **4.3. Communication (pages 67 to 70)**

8. What interest do you show in publications coming from the Centre of the Institute or from the District?