

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

**“The vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will
not disappoint; if it delays, wait
for it, it will surely come, it will
not be late.” (Habakkuk 2:2-3)**

Brother Robert Schieler, FSC
Superior General
December 25th, 2014

“Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree (cf. Mt 13:33), and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds (cf. 3:24-30) and can always pleasantly surprise us. The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of hope!”¹

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 278, p. 182.

Dear Brothers,

In this year dedicated to the promotion of our Consecrated Life, I greet you with the words of Pope Francis. Let us rejoice in the belief that the kingdom of God is already present in our world in so many different ways. There is much to be hopeful for in our Lasallian world. As the Pope urges us, let us not remain on the sidelines, but be convinced that “the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint....”

Some of my encounters confirm this conviction. In the weeks following our 45th General Chapter, I participated in the Young Lasallian Gathering in Brisbane, Australia, and shortly after, attended the Constitutive Assembly of what will become the new District of La Salle Bolivia-Perú on January 1, 2015. Also on January 1st, the former Districts of Medellín, Ecuador and Venezuela will become the District of Norandino. You’ll recall the former Districts of New Orleans-Santa Fe and San Francisco became the District of San Francisco New Orleans on July 1, 2014. A fraternal spirit characterized the deliberations leading to these new Districts.

The various Regional and District gatherings of young Brothers, young Lasallians and Lasallian youth are continuing signs of our vitality. As are Lasallian movements such

as Signum Fidei. While in Perú I visited the “Manos de Dios” School. Located in a favela in Lima, the school is a collaborative project of the local Signum Fidei Chapter and the District of Perú.

The July meeting of Young Brothers in Lebanon occurred amid the fighting in Gaza. The Brothers attending represented our presence in Spain, Portugal, Egypt, Lebanon, and South Sudan. The group included two young Brothers who participated in the General Chapter. Their activities included reflections on the outcomes of the General Chapter. The Christian community in Lebanon was pleased to see these young men from abroad and drew much hope from sharing their daily life in spite of the very tense situation created by the fighting between Israel and Hamas.

All of these activities and events point to the vitality of the Lasallian mission shared by Brothers, Partners, young people and adults. They also speak to some of the priorities identified by our 45th General Chapter and the collaborative nature of our mission today, a mission whose network we must continue to develop and strengthen.

I sincerely thank all of you who sent congratulations and best wishes upon my election. I want to reiterate what I said at that time. I have had no better person to accompany me and the rest of the General Council these past seven years than Brother Álvaro. To be in close proximity to him, to his spirit, to his Gospel witness, good humor and gentle nature has been a privilege and a blessing. He has been a model for all of us. For this I am forever grateful.

I also thank you for the many Christmas greetings you sent and for your promise of prayers and support. Our fraternal life of Gospel service we share with one another sustains us in meeting the daily challenges that come our way.

Part I

The 1714 Letter of the Principal Brothers

The theme of the 45th General Chapter was “This work of God is also your work”. The theme recalled the 1714 letter of the principal Brothers to John Baptist de La Salle at Parmenie, commanding him under the vow of obedience he made in 1694 to return to Paris and “take up again immediately the responsibility for the overall government of our society”. We are indebted to Brother Jean Louis Schneider and the Brothers of France for the gift of the book *The Rendez-vous on the Hill*. The book recalls this seminal moment in the life of the early Institute. Among other things, Brother Jean Louis notes three highlights of the letter: the Lasallian mission is undertaken with the greater glory of God as paramount; it is accomplished for the good of the Church; and finally, “for the good of our society”.

Expounding on these same three points, Brother Miguel Campos says “Having in view the greater glory of God” is the fulfillment of God’s saving plan for those who were and are today marginalized and abandoned. The Church at the time, he says, was more than its institutional structure. The Brothers were becoming an ecclesial apostolic community, a new way of being church with the poor and hopeless children and youth. Also, the society that John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were bringing into existence was more than simply an organized and regulated structure. They were establishing an association for mission in which members are chosen, consecrated and sent as “ministers of the Word” in the professional field of education.

Pope Francis has this to say about the glory of God: “This is our definitive, deepest, and greatest motivation, the ultimate reason and meaning behind all we do: the glory of the Father which Jesus sought at every moment of his life... Beyond all of own preferences and interests, our knowledge and motivations, we evangelize for the greater glory of the Father who loves us”².

Returning to the first point, Brother Jean Louis Schneider writes, “The ‘glory of God’ is not our glory or our educational successes, but the triumphs of God in the lives of the young people entrusted to us”³. Today, this work of human and Christian education of the poor and the young continues. It is our work, yours: mine and our Lasallian Partners. The vision for this work in the early decades of the 21st century is the theme of this letter.

The 45th General Chapter

The delegates to the 45th General Chapter gave the Institute, the Superior and his Council 52 propositions to realize in the next seven years. A number of the propositions have a practical orientation, particularly with reference at the District and Regional levels. Fortunately, as is always the case, some of these propositions are already a reality in certain Districts and Regions. For this we are grateful. Again, we do not have to re-invent the wheel. We can and

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 267, p. 175.

³ Schneider, Frere Jean-Louis. *The Rendez-vous on the Hill: Parmenie 1714-2014*, p. 69.

should build on good foundations where they already exist. The seeds are present and while some struggle others flourish.

In my remarks at the close of the 45th General Chapter, I placed the themes of our Chapter in a historical context. Specifically, I referenced similarities among this Chapter's themes and decisions with those made at the 42nd General Chapter (1993). I also shared my belief that the previous three Chapters, viewed as a whole, addressed the constitutive dimensions of our life and identity – mission, consecration, and community. This understanding of our identity has its own evolution in the decisions leading to the writing of the Declaration (1967) and the Rule (1987). Each of us is personally responsible for integrating these constitutive elements in our life. Recall the words of article 10 in our current Rule:

Each Brother takes upon himself the responsibility for integrating within his own person these constitutive dimensions of his vocation: consecration to God as a lay religious, apostolic ministry of education, especially of the poor, and community life.

Of course these constitutive elements are not the full picture of who we are called to be as religious. As the last General Council wrote in Circular 466, *They Will Call Themselves Brothers*:

The Gospel is the fundamental reference for the life of the Brother. Each one of us must constantly ask himself in what ways he tries to integrate the gospel message into

his daily life, and how far he succeeds in unifying the constitutive elements of his vocation⁴.

At different moments in the various assignments I have had in my life, I have found it worthwhile to reflect on whether or not these elements are being lived in an integral manner. If so, all was well and good for the moment. If not, what was I going to do about it?

⁴ *Circular 466, They will call themselves Brothers*, Rome, 2013, p. 23.

Part II

The Vision still has its Time...

To gain insight into our vision for the early decades of the 21st century, I would like to start by expanding the line of thought I introduced in my closing remarks to the Chapter. To begin, let's view the work of the 45th General Chapter from the perspective of the three preceding Chapters. I do this for two reasons. First, we should see that rather than starting something new, in some cases we are building on previous Chapter decisions. In the desire to be bold in our visioning we might overlook the good we are already accomplishing. Not that we shouldn't always consider new initiatives in the face of ever-changing developments in our world, Church and Institute. Nor should we forget the personal conversion and renewal to which God is always inviting us. Second, we should try to discover any discernible trends reflected in the decisions of the past four Chapters that point us towards a particular future and our place in the world and Church today.

Do our last four General Chapters suggest any trends for the Institute in the 21st century?

Return for a moment to the 42nd General Chapter and another of its decisions. In addition to proposing the Mission 100+ initiative, delegates proposed a gathering of experts to observe broad worldwide concerns in the field of education. From this decision five colloquia were organized in the 1990's. These were:

- The Family Today and the Mission of the Institute (1994)

- Globalization in a Differentiated World and Lasallian Education (1995)
- The Megalopolis as a Social Phenomenon and Lasallian Education (1996)
- How New Information Technologies Challenge the Lasallian School (1997)
- Communicating the Faith Today (1998).

Why these five topics? The first coincided with the International Year of the Family. Then as now, the changes being experienced in this basic social unit have implications for schooling. The second colloquium, held in Sri Lanka, focused on north-south relations with particular attention to poverty, exploitation and the interface between Christian and non-Christian religions. Mexico City was the location for exploring how the Institute is or is not involved in issues of population explosion, migration, and urban violence. The revolution in technology and the speed of information exchange was an obvious choice for examination by an Institute dedicated to education. How are schooling and learning changing and how can the tools of technology contribute to our mission of human and Christian education?

At the conclusion of the first four colloquia that brought together over 250 Lasallians from around the world, the organizers asked themselves:

As we entered into this process, immersing ourselves in the conditions of daily life of young people, seeing them in their own surroundings (the Central Market in

Mexico, the slums of Colombo and other centers of poverty, the plight of children exploited by consumerism, by surfing the web, and in general, by the impact of digitalized images that lure them into virtual space) we kept ourselves open to the questioning that disturbs a Christian educator:

- Who are these young people?
- What are they opening our eyes to?
- What are they telling us about the anthropology of their lives?
- What importance do they attach to this tide of life which is impacting all of us?
- On what ground can we meet them in teaching the faith?
- Can we still convey to them a sense of direction?
- What manner of communicating the faith can be put in place?⁵

This last question led to the decision to hold the fifth colloquium in Rome. How best to announce the Gospel to the poor and the young in our globalized, post modern Lasallian world of diverse cultures and religions?

The Years since the colloquia

Brothers, 16 years and three General Chapters have passed since the fifth colloquium. How are we shaping ourselves,

⁵ “The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Institute Today”, *Institute Bulletin* No. 245, Rome, 1999, p. 82.

our message and our mission as a response to the needs of this new century? This is a question I am inviting the General Council, the Secretariats and various ad hoc committees of experts called for by the 45th General Chapter to consider in the coming months and over the next few years. By way of example, we might consider the following as trends that have occupied our attention:

1. A growing understanding of the link between our identity, mission and association: The link between the identity and mission of the Brothers is becoming clearer not only to the Brothers but also to our Partners. The apostolic purpose of the Institute and the ministerial vocation of the Brothers and Partners are in constant dialogue and complement each other in building the People of God, the Church.

2. The Priority of the Educational Service of the Poor: The Institute is needed more than ever because of the multiple educational needs of the poor around the world, particularly those who are on the borders or peripheries of society. This trend is tied to the global demographic shifts and increasing urbanization happening around the world. More fundamentally, “Solidarity with the people of today, attention to the appeals from the Church, our religious vocation which commits us to follow Christ in a special way, and fidelity to the specific intentions of the Founder – all clearly indicated to us that it is the poor to whom we are sent by preference”.⁶ Whatever our level of

⁶ *A Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*. Rome, 1967, No. 28.

satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our efforts to return to the poor, we know it is the path we must take in fidelity to our charism.

3. Government and Finances: Restructuring is a never-ending process. The principle is that the ongoing restructuring happening at the different levels of the Institute is at the service of the Spirit of the Institute. A personal and structural transformation/conversion should be a result of such changes. The trend of having less administrative units (Districts, Delegations) allows us to work beyond our own comfort zones. This trend also allows us to identify what resources can be pooled for the purpose of promoting Lasallian Formation activities and common Lasallian projects for the poor. It has further allowed new administrative units to be more prudent, and more accountable and transparent in their financial decisions.

4. Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Rise of the Individual⁷: The amount of technological devices that are on the market has given rise to the power of the individual. This has serious implications in personal formation, community life and ministry. The basic question is how do we leverage the ICT to enable us to develop our interior life, facilitate better community life and become more effective in our ministerial life. Further, the shift from the “brick and mortar” type of learning to “click and swipe” type of learning is changing the financial

⁷ European Union Institute for Security Studies. 2011. “*Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World*” (Pdf 4.84 MB).

landscape of the educational enterprise. We need to prepare ourselves and our ministries for these kinds of shifts.

No doubt we could cite other examples but these suffice for the orientation I am proposing for Institute planning and visioning.

As an international institute it is critical to situate our vision in the context of the universal Church. To guide this reflection on Institute trends I reference *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing The Catholic Church* (2009) by John L. Allen, Jr., a long-time Vatican correspondent and analyst. How are our Chapter decisions responding not only to the evolving reality of our Institute but also in response to societal changes in the larger world? According to Allen, there are 10 mega-trends shaping the Church in the 21st century:

- A World Church
- Evangelical Catholicism
- Islam
- The New Demography
- Expanding Lay Roles
- The Biotech Revolution
- Globalization
- Ecology
- Multipolarism
- Pentecostalism

Why these ten trends and what does Allen mean by “trends”? To help the reader he quotes from the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee’s book, *Civilization on Trial*:

*The things that make headlines are on the surface of the stream of life, and they distract us from the slower, impalpable, imponderable movements that work below the surface and penetrate to the depths. But it is really these deeper, slower movements that make history, and it is they that stand out huge in retrospect, when the sensational passing events dwindled, in perspective, to their true proportion.*⁸

It is these “slower, impalpable movements” Allen has in mind, when identifying something as a trend. Further, he identifies six criteria for determining what a trend is. He says they are global, as opposed to something associated with a specific country or region of the world. A trend has a significant impact at the Catholic grassroots level; going beyond a small group, whether liberal or conservative, coming from the left or the right. There is evidence that the official leadership of the Church is engaged in the issues related to a trend. A trend also has what he calls “explanatory power”, i.e. “it has to provide a context in which a wide variety of events, issues, and developments in the life of the Church...can be understood as expressions of a deeper impulse”.⁹ A trend also has predictive power that anticipates where the Church might be going. Finally, Allen says a trend cannot be ideologically driven. A key in all of this, he concludes, is that trends are not single issues such as the priest shortage or the role of women in the

⁸ Allen, John L., Jr., *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, Doubleday, New York, 2009, 9. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 416-417.

Church, but rather a combination of issues that might be impacting the Church's direction in the 21st century.

The Vision.... Presses on to fulfillment

Among Allen's trends are some that formed the topics of the five colloquia called by the 42nd General Chapter. Also, like our Church and the larger world, we can situate our Lasallian reality within other trends that he mentions. A world Church and the new demography that have radically changed the ecclesial geography of Catholicism over the past two centuries are examples of trends that are also impacting our Institute. Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, the Institute and the Church were dominated by the nations and cultures of the northern hemisphere. In this 21st century, as is now well known, two-thirds of Church membership exists in the southern hemisphere: in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Allen notes that another dimension of the new demography is a Church that once invested finances and pastoral energy in the young is now coping in the northern hemisphere with a rapidly aging population. Our Institute is no exception to this reality. Visitors and Community Directors know well the impact of aging. I am grateful for the priority given to the care of our senior Brothers who witness perseverance and who faithfully dedicated decades of service to the young. Three propositions from the 45th General Chapter concerning the welfare of our senior Brothers were overwhelmingly approved by the delegates. I am equally gratified that, despite fewer vocations and an aging Insti-

tute, the mission, with Brothers and Partners, continues to creatively respond to the needs of the poor and the young.

A Church that relied on the leadership of the clergy and a workforce of religious for implementing the mission now sees the increased participation of lay people in the mission. A laity, says Allen, that participates in the mission not only as leaven in the world but also in community building and ministries previously reserved to priests. Statistically, he noted that when Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978 the Church's global workforce – priests, religious and laity – was 1.6 million. When he died in 2005 it had expanded to 4.3 million and approximately 90% were laity. “Perhaps the most visible indicator of expanding lay roles is that there are more groups in the Church today whose explicit purpose is to encourage lay activism than at any other point in Catholic history. These forces are conventionally called the ‘new movement’”.¹⁰ Allen says that in the last 100 years more than 120 of these movements have been canonically approved.

In our own Institute we too have witnessed the rise of these lay movements, *Signum Fidei* being the most prominent. Also, in every Region, men and women who understand their professional work as mission feel the proximity and affinity with the Brothers. They are responding to what they perceive as a call to embrace the charism of our Founder. They are willing to go where we want to go, as they grow in the Lasallian spiritual and pedagogical traditions.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 187.

The low number of new Brothers and the aging and decreasing number of Brothers has coincided with the rise of the laity. The two may be related, but the former is not the cause of the rise or the fall of the latter. In our lifetime we have witnessed this spectacular reality that, in time of scarcity, new vocations have risen, not with the characteristics of the 19th and 20th centuries; but authentic vocations nonetheless. Paradoxically, as our annual statistical report reminds us, fewer Brothers carry out the largest mission in our history.

Accompanying the preponderance of laity is the increasing presence of women in ministry. This is a prime example of the impact of the new demography. Again, Allen notes that in 2005 in the United States, for example, 80% of the 31,000 lay ecclesial ministers were women. We in our Lasallian world are aware that a majority (52%) of our faculty and staff are women. As Circular 461, *Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an act of HOPE*, noted: “Just as more recently the education of both young men and women became the focus of the Mission so has the participation of women in the Lasallian educational network become essential”¹¹. Undoubtedly, the arrival and impact of women on academic life, learning styles, mission and governance is difficult to measure. It is an area of research waiting to be explored.

Reflecting on the generally successful colloquia of the 1990's, the Superior's Report to the 43rd General Chapter (2000) stated, “... there was an insufficient invitation to

¹¹. *Circular 461, Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an act of HOPE*, 2010, p. 19.

participation by women, given their important and irreplaceable role in our educational works”.¹² The assemblies of women in PARC and RELAN auger well for a greater appreciation and understanding of the gift these Lasallians are to the Institute today.

Some Brothers ask if our Partners will have the same sustaining commitment that vowed religious have for our shared educational mission. Institute Bulletin no. 239 reporting on those delivering commission reports during the historic two-week session with the 20 invited consultants to the 42nd General Chapter noted that: “The last reporter was the first woman ever to address a General Assembly”¹³. Her name was Lourdes María Fernández Guzmán from the District of Central America. When I returned to Rome last June, whom should I see but Lourdes. She was leading another group of her students on pilgrimage, her eighth, to Assisi, Rome and the Motherhouse. While she has since moved on to establish her own school, her commitment to the mission and her love for Saint John Baptist de La Salle has not waned in the 21 years since we last met. Lourdes is emblematic of many of our Partners’ commitment: men and women living their vocation under the inspiration of our Lasallian charism.

As we go forward, and as requested by the General Chapter, we must reaffirm our commitment to evaluating, support-

¹². “Report of the Superior General to the 43rd General Chapter”, Rome, 30 November 1999, p. 8.

¹³. 42nd General Chapter, *Institute Bulletin* No. 239, Rome, April 5 – May 15 1993, p. 41.

ing and strengthening the worldwide network for Association. We will undoubtedly continue to face challenges of identity and concerns about the appropriate structures and leadership necessary for our mission to the poor. By accepting this as a graced time for our Institute and Church, we will meet these challenges in the spirit of a pilgrim people where each vocation finds its purpose and the right structures are created to facilitate the development of our life of faith and compassion for the poor. I find it interesting that at the time of the 39th General Chapter, the renewal Chapter, the issue of our identity was in contrast to the priesthood. Now, the fact that the majority of Lasallians in ministry are not Brothers moves us to consider our identity in relation to our Partners. Here the revision to our Rule is helpful. It calls us to live our consecration as witnesses to God's eternal and loving presence in our world and to be in communion with others for service of and with the poor. In doing so we carry our foundational story forward through an intentionally more focused conversation **on our association as Brothers and our association with our Partners.**

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis, recognizing the reality of laity in mission, said "The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge"¹⁴. As an Institute we can be proud of our initiatives in this regard. For a number of decades, Districts, Regions and the Center of the Institute have

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) Rome, Citta del Vaticano, No. 102.

developed and offered quality formation experiences for literally thousands of Partners and Brothers together.

Again, in his report to the delegates to the 43rd General Chapter (2000), Brother John Johnston wrote: “In light of what has been done in Districts and Regions, it can be said that we in the Institute have passed from a stage of information and raising awareness among Partners with regard to the Lasallian mission to a systematic and diversified formation which opens up the path of a partnership lived in confidence with the Brothers, especially to a spiritual sharing with them”¹⁵. Indeed we have. Now, however, we must be even more intentional in this area. Not only to maintain and develop new formation experiences but also to ensure there is proper accompaniment. As I noted above, the Institute is profoundly impacted by the new demography. In the immediate years ahead, the number of Districts without Brothers actively engage in ministry will increase. The General Chapter acknowledged this contemporary challenge for the Institute. That is one reason why Chapter delegates linked quality accompaniment with our efforts in Lasallian formation. The thematic group *Formation and Accompaniment* specifically requested “that all levels of the Institute – Regions, Districts, Sectors and particularly communities – contribute to create a ‘culture of accompaniment’ for all Lasallians throughout their lives”. At the level of community we have an abundance of resources – our senior Brothers. The collective wisdom of these men

¹⁵. “Report of the Superior General to the 43rd General Chapter”, Rome, 30 November 1999, p. 13.

with decades in the classroom, in the chapel and in the community is a harvest to be reaped and shared with Partners, young Brothers and young Lasallians. This is the stuff of a community annual program! Brothers, when reviewing and revising the Community Annual Program, please do not limit yourselves to tweaking the schedule. We are better than this. We have so much to offer. Pope Francis says it well: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”¹⁶.

This, Brothers, is just an example of how to apply some of Allen’s trends to the lived experience of our Institute. Certainly we can point to other trends such as: the increasing role of higher education in the Lasallian mission; the creative response in our catechesis and evangelization in a multi-faith world; and, the recognition that we are challenged to deepen our interior prayer and fraternal life. Others will surface in the study by the General Council, the Secretariats and in our interactions with each of the Visitors’ Conferences. At those times, the task will be to prioritize and plan accordingly.

It is my hope that, by having a sense of where we have been and what we have said about who we are as an Institute we may go forward with a renewed spirit for our particular contribution to the building of God’s kingdom through our educational ministry.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) Rome, Citta del Vaticano, No. 9.

Part III

If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come...

Perhaps not the most challenging proposition, but maybe the most significant coming out of the General Chapter is the following from the Thematic Group *Life of the Brother for the 21st Century*:

That this inter-capitular period be intentionally constituted as a time of profound revitalization, looking to the living memory of the origins of the Institute in the light of the Gospel, that accompanies a faith-filled reading to renew our life and our mission, as a credible Gospel response in the Church and in the world of the 21st Century.

Brothers, read this proposition carefully! It can be argued that it contains all the deliberations of our 45th General Chapter and also of recent Chapters. Take a moment to digest the words and phrases: *intentionally constituted... profound revitalization... living memory of the origins of the Institute... renew our life and our mission... a credible Gospel response....*

The phrasing may be different from previous communications but the words and concepts behind them are not new. What we are about today is what we have been about since the 39th General Chapter, the Declaration and the 1987 Rule: the ongoing conversion of the Institute to the poor, to the young and to all who quest for the living God. As Pope Paul VI wrote in his Apostolic Letter, *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, we are pilgrim people in permanent

renewal. It has been and continues to be a long journey of renewal. Here also, Pope John Paul II's advice is helpful as we continue the journey: "Consecrated persons, therefore, must keep themselves as intellectually open and as adaptable as possible, so that the apostolate will be envisaged and carried out according to the needs of their own time, making use of the means provided by cultural progress."¹⁷

Each of our last four General Chapters has attempted to discern the needs of the time and to address them with the resources available to us. Yet, as experience has taught us, documents and Chapter Acts do not accomplish the mission. We do. Each individual Brother takes it upon himself to integrate the constitutive elements of our vocation. "Even the best adaptations to the needs of our time," the Council Fathers wrote in *Perfectae Caritatis*, "will fail to produce their effect unless they are motivated by a spiritual renewal". Both the Declaration and the 44th General Chapter's emphasis on the interior life concurred:

To renew oneself spiritually means first of all that one must again be aware that it is only the Holy Spirit who brings about the renewal of persons and institutions. There can be no renewal unless it begins in authentic prayer and includes a renewed effort of interior prayer and contemplation¹⁸.

¹⁷. Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), Citta del Vaticano, no. 71.

¹⁸. *A Declaration: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*. Rome, 1967, No. 3.2.

The genius of John Baptist de La Salle was to endow our Institute with the Spirit of Faith and a Spirit of Zeal enkindled by that faith. We stand on the shoulders of generations of Brothers who remained faithful to the original “yes” they gave to God. The enthusiasm of our first response to the beginning of our vocation journey is worth recalling amid the daily grind of day-to-day living. Or, as former Master General of the Dominicans, Father Timothy Radcliffe, says in his own inimitable way: “If we are to excite the world with our faith, to puzzle and intrigue our contemporaries, then we need to recover a sense of how God’s call will shake us up, undo and remake us, wring us out and renew the very core of our being”¹⁹.

Consecrated, open-minded and faith-filled. This triad does and will carry us forward. The vision of the reign of God’s kingdom still has its time, it presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint. The vision for our Institute in the 21st century has its time. The seeds are already present in so many small and different ways. Look around you. The Lasallian mission is being renewed.

It will not disappoint.

In the opening months of 2015, the General Council, assisted by the Institute’s Secretariats, will complete our discernment and identify significant Institute trends to guide the decisions and direction necessary to renew **the joy for our mission in association**, as a credible Gospel response in the Church and in the world of the 21st Century.

¹⁹. Radcliffe, O.P., Timothy. *Taking the Plunge*, Bloomsbury, London, 2012, p. 150.

How the vision will be fulfilled has much to do with our love for God, our love for those entrusted to our care, our love for our Brothers in community and our love for our vocation. It is clothed with this attitude of love that we then listen to the calls of the world.

I repeat what I have shared in the past: the belief of the spiritual writer Father Henri Nouwen that “if people lived the spiritual life radically, it would affect everything they touched. Not only would it have an impact on personal growth and relationships, it would also influence economics, politics, and social structures”.²⁰ Similarly, Pope Francis in *The Joy of the Gospel*, said: “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world”²¹.

Going forward, we Brothers and all Lasallians are encouraged to deepen within our daily lives and practices what already has been richly said in past General Chapters and in our Rule. We are called to be people who live according to the Spirit. The commitment of men and women of the Spirit never fails to unleash the creativity necessary to meet the needs of the Church, the world and our Institute just as it did for John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers at the foundation of the Institute. The vision now is the same

²⁰ Ford, Michael, (ed.) *Eternal Seasons: A Liturgical Journey with Henri Nouwen*, Sorin Books, Notre Dame, IN, 2004, p. 137.

²¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) Rome, Citta del Vaticano, no. 11.

vision as then. Men of the Spirit called De La Salle back to Paris in 1714. Let us live according to the Spirit and we will not be disappointed.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bro. Robert Schieler". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Brother Robert Schieler
Superior General