

Circular 461

September 2010

**Associated for the
Lasallian Mission
...an act of HOPE**

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

General Council

Rome, Italy

Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1 - Association: A Fundamental Characteristic of the Lasallian Charism	13
Chapter 2 - Fundamental Elements of Lasallian Association	23
Chapter 3 - Lasallian Association: Common Characteristics Experienced in Different Ways	31
Chapter 4 - The Need for Discernment	37
Chapter 5 - The Lasallian Family	47
Chapter 6 - Fostering Association	58
Chapter 7 - Concluding Remarks	65

Introduction

So they went out, got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus, was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not recognize Him. Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?” They answered him, “No.” So He said, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. (John 21: 3-6)

Association has existed since the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, but has developed in an altogether unprecedented way during the past forty years. The foundation event which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6th 1694, when John Baptist de La Salle and twelve of his followers came together to consecrate themselves for life, to the Christian education of poor boys. The link between this foundation act of association and the growing interest in association in the Institute today can be clearly seen. (43rd General Chapter, 2000, Lasallian Association, p. 2)

Dear Brothers and All Who Serve the Lasallian Mission

I.1. As the Superior General and the General Council of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, we take this opportunity to greet you in the name of our God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle, our Founder and universal patron of Christian educators. After centuries of communal life rooted in stability in the Institute and after decades of renewal in fidelity to our founding charism, we find ourselves now in 2010 living a time of both personal and institutional transi-

tion and transformation. These are indeed exciting times... times that invite us once again to a faith-filled act of HOPE in our collective future!

I.2. In the gospel, the risen Lord calls his disciples to a new future. Lost and uncertain about what to do, they decide to return to their former lives as fishermen. But as is often the case, Christ interrupts their routine to renew their call to follow him. Despite all that he had taught them before, they still needed to learn more. We might apply a modern lens to his invitation and call it a mandate for continuing formation. As Lasallians we too are called to cast our nets over the “right side of the boat” and not to return to our former “lives” ...lives that afforded us the comfort of the “known.” No, Christ is now “interrupting” our Lasallian journey with a new mandate to explore roads untraveled in faith and zeal.

I.3. And so we believe that the time has come to write to you about what it means in today’s world to serve “together and by association” in the Lasallian educational mission of providing a human and Christian education to the young, especially those who are poor. We also are writing in response to the call from the 44th General Chapter to take the initiative to construct a possible model of the Lasallian Family.¹ Many insightful Lasallians who have examined this topic in the past and many current studies, surveys, and reflections have influenced this circular, which we clearly state is neither exhaustive nor the final word on the topic of association. This circular is not intended to be normative nor intended to silence new research or experiences. We chose not to curtail

¹ 44th General Chapter, Circular 455, *Association for the Educational Service of the Poor*, 2007, p. 28.

but rather to fan into flame the work of the Spirit as new forms of association emerge and develop. We hope that this circular will motivate and inspire you to greater faith *in* and zeal *for* the Lasallian educational mission.

I.4. After a recent visit in the PARC Region to a small island named Buka – an autonomous sector of Papua New Guinea – one of the Brothers recounted this wonderful story of Lasallian commitment in association.

I.5. *Recent graduates of our De La Salle Teacher Training College in Mount Hagen had gathered in Buka to begin their teaching careers. Accompanied by their guide and experienced Lasallian teacher, Donald, and carrying all of their teaching essentials on their backs, they began their journey. Half way up the steep jungle path, one of the young teachers began to cry and pleaded, “This is much too hard. I can’t go on!” Donald responded, “Stop your crying! You are a Lasallian teacher. Don’t you know you must climb up the mountain to reach the children?”*

I.6. Each of us in his or her unique way knows the experience of climbing up the mountain to “reach the children.” Bonhoeffer might call it the cost of discipleship. Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens put it this way. *Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true.*² Both capture the passion and the commitment of what we call the Lasallian Charism. Both invite us to be dauntless bearers of hope in the world of education as we journey together in this 21st century.

I.7. Association is a fundamental trait of the Lasallian

² Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A new Pentecost?*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1974.

charism. **In this circular we highlight the essential aspects of Lasallian association by examining its lived reality, defining its relevant terms, and discerning its guidelines.** We discuss various ways to advance the concept of association locally, regionally, and globally. We conclude by examining what it means to say, “I am associated with the Lasallian mission. I belong to the Lasallian Family,” and provide some concrete recommendations for consideration. We believe that a comprehensive look at the make-up of the Lasallian Family will enhance and complement an understanding of association.

I.8. Any discussion of Lasallian association certainly must hinge on concepts such as “unity in diversity” and “response and flexibility.” Mandating change from a position of authority can produce an apparently desirable effect, but the result is often superficial and transitory. Without taking account of the local situation, a well-intended outcome might be either minimal (coming from “them”) or totally ignored. We invite you then to accept the wise invitation of the poet Rumi, *Out beyond ideas of right and wrong there’s a field. I’ll meet you there.*³

I.9. With this in mind, while standing in the same “field,” and in collaboration with the Lasallian Family and Association Secretariat, we have studied the results of the *Lasallian Association Survey*, sent to all the Districts in the Institute (2008-09). More than 40 of the Institute’s 53 Districts, representing every Region in the Institute, responded. Most replies came from the Brother Visitor of the District. Although the data are diverse, they reveal many common ele-

³ Sufi Mystic 1207-1273 A.D.

ments and offer a picture of “unity in diversity” requiring “response and flexibility.”

I.10. The survey included seven topics: (1) Lasallian Associates, Public or Private Forms of Commitment, (2) Formation, (3) Accompaniment, (4) Community Experience, (5) Finance, (6) Vocation, and (7) Lasallian Family. The results offer a kaleidoscope of diverse, creative, and interconnected patterns that shift and change with each ethnic or cultural lens applied. We are using the data to analyze what unites, rather than what separates, the international Lasallian world. Some Regions feature one or two dominant cultures with a common language of communication. Other Regions include dozens of cultures in which many languages are spoken and many “lenses” filter and interpret information. In this case, our rich diversity is also one of our greatest challenges.

I.11. We see three possible options: 1) establish universally acceptable principles to define and foster Lasallian association; 2) provide ample room for variety and adaptation, thereby possibly risking a dilution of Lasallian association or 3) accept the survey data and offer lenses to sharpen the cultural, ethnic, and national norms and to preserve the core element of Lasallian association: the mission of human and Christian education of young people, especially those who are poor.

I.12. We are proposing the third option above in the hope that the first two alternatives will also be part of the process. People committed to the Lasallian mission are free to define their personal process of association. We cannot impose the model of the Lasallian consecrated state of life on people

who have chosen another state of life (married, single, consecrated or ordained). Rather our goal is to discern together how each vocational response can be woven into a seamless garment of association for the Lasallian Mission. We therefore are encouraging a deepening of Lasallian spirituality among people from all states of life.

I.13. To deepen our own understanding of Lasallian association, we have studied, in addition to the Association Survey results, a number of reports and articles from the Regions, including the following documents.

- *A Better Understanding of Lasallian Association?* Conference of Brother Michel Sauvage, Cahiers Lasalliens, No. 55 pp. 308-338 (1998).
- *Lasallian Association for Mission: 1679-2007 – A personal reflection on an ongoing story.* Brother John Johnston, FSC (2004).
- *Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*, Bulletin of the Institute, No. 250 (2005).
- *Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*, Report of the International Assembly 2006.
- *Basis for a Present-Day Model of the Lasallian Family and Thematic Vocabulary of Lasallian Association*, by Brother Antonio Botana, FSC (2008).
- *Association for the Educational Service of the poor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Brother Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, FSC (2008).
- *Service “Lasallian Family & Association” in RELEM* (2009).
- *Furthering Association for the Lasallian Mission in PARC* (2009).

- *Together - perpetuating the Lasallian Charism* – Intervention of Brother Nicolas Capelle, FSC, Visitor Provincial of France (2009).
- *Guidelines for the process of Association in ARLEP – Spain & Portugal* (2009).
- *Regional Task Force Report USA/Toronto* (2009).

I.14. Although these documents do not provide a complete picture of the Institute’s international presence, they suggest the six topics that we will present in Chapter 6: (1) The Vow of Association for the Educational Service of the Poor, (2) Sharing our Charism, (3) “Association for”, (4) Lasallian Community Life, (5) Formation, and (6) Organizational Structures.

I.15. The following two recommendations will form a framework for this Circular:

I.15.1. We encourage the principle of subsidiarity in the various initiatives that each Region undertakes in Lasallian association.

I.15.2. We recommend that each Region of the Institute be a clearinghouse for sharing the best practices of its member Districts, with the goal not to mandate progress but to encourage every District to create ways of measuring progress locally.

I.16. Although we offer no single solution, universal application, or absolute conclusion, we do propose some common guidelines to mark the path that Lasallians will take during the next phase of the Institute’s collective history. We invite you to travel this adventurous journey in faith into the uncharted territory of *tomorrow* while keeping

firmly focused on the foundational story that has led the Institute to *today*.

I.17. This is a new moment in our history. It is one that is calling forth a fresh response from each of us. Much like St. Peter's "trance" in the Acts of the Apostles (10: 9-16) when a new "blanket" of possibilities was stretched out before him, and what was unthinkable before was now presented as an inspired path to grow and unite the young Christian community...we also are invited to see that what was true in the past must be nuanced today for the vitality of our Lasallian Mission.

Chapter 1 - Association: A Fundamental Characteristic of the Lasallian Charism

1.1. The dynamic of association, that is, of associating for a common purpose, is an essential component of the Lasallian adventure that appears in the Institute's first decade. The initial group of would-be teachers in 1680 gradually forms a community as Brothers who in turn create the Society of the Christian Schools, which the Church in 1725 approves as the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

1.2. In 1691 and 1694, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers explicitly proclaim this fundamental element of association: first, in the 1691 "Heroic Vow" of De La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart, and Gabriel Drolin, and then more definitively in the 1694 lifelong commitment of twelve Brothers and De La Salle. The 1694 vow becomes the prototypical expression of apostolic energy and spiritual motivation for every future type of Lasallian association. What are the basic characteristics of Lasallian association? How can they inspire Lasallians in today's world?

Association in the Beginning

1.3. Rather than offer a detailed history of association or an analysis of its juridical aspects, we choose to focus, first of all, on the meaning of association for the Founder and the first Brothers. Association is their response to the organizational crisis that they confront with the eyes of faith and a hopeful look to the future.

Crisis ...Crossroads of Opportunity

1.4. From 1681 to 1690, the group of teachers gathered around De La Salle gradually takes shape pedagogically, socially, and spiritually. The members create an organizational structure by choosing a unique style of clothing, by calling themselves Brothers (not schoolmasters), and by making a temporary vow of obedience. Furthermore, the community's geographical range expands when the Founder and two Brothers go to Paris in 1688. This phase of structuring and expansion, however, leads to a crisis. During this time, the Writing Masters, displaced by De La Salle's new schools, waged a veritable war against him and the Brothers. Exhaustion and disease took their toll on the fledgling community and many Brothers became ill and disillusioned. Also this new society struggled with issues of governance so that eventually, beset with what seemed insurmountable odds, half of the Brothers in Reims withdrew from the community between 1688 and 1692, and no additional candidates presented themselves. *The edifice threatened collapse just at the moment when it was being built* is how the Lasallian biographer, Canon Blain, later would write about this early period.

Eyes of Faith...Hope in the Future

1.5. Faced with this situation, De La Salle finds himself "plunged into great perplexity."⁴ Nevertheless, the Founder makes several decisions that exemplify his determination

⁴ Expression used by De La Salle Biographer, Blain. (cf. Cahiers Lasalliens, No. 7, **Blain**, Jean-Baptiste, *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, Reproduction photomécanique de l'édition originale : 1733. Tome I, 1961) p. 312.

not to give up. He still has faith in the value and the necessity of the Brother's life and mission.

- He buys a house in quiet Vaugirard, near Paris, so that the Brothers can rest, regain their health, and revitalize themselves in an annual spiritual retreat.
- He establishes a novitiate as a separate community to form the new members of the Society.
- He dedicates himself entirely to the Most Holy Trinity for the mission of education. In 1691 he joins two Brothers in a private consecration by vow. Three years later, in 1694, he proposes to 12 Brothers a public consecration by vow.⁵

1.6. In 1691 De La Salle and Brothers Gabriel Drolin and Nicolas Vuyart vow “association and union to procure and maintain the said establishment” (the Society of the Christian Schools). This vow was later referred to by Brother Michel Sauvage as “an act which relaunched hope.” *...Brothers had remained; these two among them. How could he abandon them when they had dedicated their lives with him? How could he abandon those young people, the poor for whom his commitment and those of the Brothers had caused hope of freedom to well up? He continues to say that this vow outlined a precise plan but not a rigid one. It did not impose defined obligations that simply had to be observed; in this way it expressed fidelity as a search to be carried out rather than a heritage to be passed on.*⁶

1.7. In 1694 De La Salle and 12 Brothers vow *to unite and live in society... to keep, together and by association, gratuitous*

⁵ Cf. Cahiers Lasalliens, No. 7.

⁶ Sauvage, FSC, Michel, *For a Better Understanding of Lasallian Association*, excerpted from talks given on November 18-19, to the French Lasallian Association, 1998, pp. 5-6.

*schools*⁷. Association, obedience and stability form the core of their decision and the content of their consecration. Furthermore, they address the Holy Trinity as their source and goal by participating in the love that unites the three Divine Persons.

1.8. The Society of the Christian Schools at this time consists of about thirty members. Although only twelve Brothers and De La Salle make the public *vow* of association, all the Brothers at the time dedicate themselves, in effect, to the Society's life and mission.

1.9. Our late Superior General, Brother John Johnston, recalls the narrative in this manner.

*The consecration of the Founder and the first Brothers... is total because it represents their primary commitment in life, against which they measure all other commitments. Having consecrated themselves explicitly and entirely to God, the Brothers declare their intention of living this consecration by associating for an educational mission to the poor. No one can read the early Lasallian biographies and not recognize that their consecration is total. De La Salle and the Brothers pledge to live a highly structured, religious, community life, to go wherever they are sent, and to do anything they are asked to do in pursuit of the objectives of their new Society. They resolve to persevere in association as Brothers, even if obliged to beg and live on bread alone. These pioneers experience no ambiguity about what living and working together and by association means.*⁸

⁷ *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Landover, MD, USA: Lasallian Publications, 2002, p. 204.

⁸ Johnston, FSC, John. Lasallian Association for Mission: 1679-2007 – A personal reflection on an ongoing story. In G. Short, P. Grass, T. Johnson, K. Dalmasse, & P. O'Brien (Eds.), *Lasallian Association: Experiences and reflections*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 200, p. 2.

1.10. For the Brothers, the vow of association is a synthesis of all life's dimensions: Mission, Consecration, Community. Ideally no difference is made between state of life and "work."⁹ They are seamlessly woven into a vocational fabric given as gift to those entrusted to their care.

Association Today

1.11. Association today plays a central role in Lasallian thought and action. The 43rd and 44th General Chapters, as well as the 2006 Assembly on the Lasallian Educational Mission and Association, stress this priority. As we reflect on this phenomenon, we recognize in today's quite different context the same factors that are present at the origin of the Society of the Christian Schools: (1) crisis/crossroads, and (2) eyes of faith/ hope in the future.

Crisis ...New Crossroads of Opportunity

1.12. One sign of the crossroads in which the Institute finds itself today is mirrored in the way in which different models of Church are envisioned. Contemporary scholars in the field of ecclesiology emphasize a new understanding of Church based on Vatican Council II and subsequent Church documents especially *Christifideles Laici*¹⁰. They highlight three fundamental aspects:

⁹ *It is a good rule of life to make no distinction at all between the work of our vocation in life and the work of our salvation and perfection. We can be sure that we cannot work out our salvation better or achieve perfection more surely than by discharging our responsibilities, provided that we accomplish them in view of the will of God. We must try to keep this precept ever in mind.* (De La Salle, Rules I Have Imposed on Myself, 3)

¹⁰ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* of His Holiness John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World. Rome 1988.

1.12.1. The Church is “the people of God,” not “the perfect society” whose hierarchical functioning assures everything needed for subsisting and fulfilling its mission. The Church is a “communion,” a “community of communities” (diocesan and local). The Church is a sign and a sacrament in human history of the loving and just relationships that Jesus Christ lives and prays for and that the Spirit endlessly inspires.¹¹

1.12.2. Everyone who is baptized in the Spirit has equal dignity and is called to holiness.¹²

1.12.3. The Spirit invites all baptized people, according to their state of life and their personal vocation, to participate in the Church’s evangelizing mission and bestows on them the charisms necessary to serve the common good.

1.13. For the Brothers today, a stark sign of the new reality is the descending demographic curve caused by declining numbers and by aging. This is a particular concern in Europe, Australia and North America yet a reality not experienced as harshly by the Institute in parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia. Simultaneously, the Lasallian Educational Mission in the past five decades has expanded globally in a manner unimaginable in the Founder’s time. While the number of Brothers declines, the number of young people served by Lasallian educational institutions increases. For example, the total in 1966 was 16,824 Brothers and 737,112 students, but in 2009, the statistics are 4,883 Brothers and 857,819 young people served. There are today 2,117 Brothers active-

¹¹ CP. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* Solemnly, Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI; Chapter II “The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church”. Rome 1964.

¹² Ibid.

ly involved in the mission along with 677 priests and other religious, 76,310 other Lasallians; 39,203 are women and 37,107 are men.

1.14. Having just cited the Institute's current demographics, we would like to specifically note the contribution of Lasallian women who now compose over half of the total personnel involved in the Mission. 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. Their presence, undoubtedly, will 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. Once again the founding story continues to be lived out anew...continues to move from crisis to crossroads; from discouragement to hope.

Eyes of Faith... Renewed Hope in the future

1.15. The Brothers are experiencing a dilemma in many countries, especially in places affected by the decline of membership in the vowed state of life: whether to abandon institutions by reducing the number of communities and ministries to a select few or to address new educational needs by joining with men and women from all states of life who are dedicated to the Lasallian educational mission.

1.16. Recognizing this as true and speaking very practically, we suggest avoiding two extremes: 1) Where Brothers are numerous that they occupy all of the positions of leadership in

our centers; 2) Taking the mission component away from the Brothers where they are few in number and relegating them to being only amiable and silent “signs of consecration.” Our collective future must lie somewhere in the middle.

1.17. Understanding the Institute’s origins and reflecting on the Church as the communion of all baptized believers leads the Brothers to view everyone working together and by association as *Lasallian*. Even as far back as 1959, Brother Maurice Auguste, referred to the term as follows:

*The name “Lasallian” has ceased to be a new expression in the eyes of many. For some decades now it has been used more and more frequently: it describes adequately – if not fully satisfactorily – those in history, literature, the teaching profession, and in spirituality, who are influenced by the person, written works, and social initiatives of the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, St. John Baptist de la Salle.*¹³

1.18. Most Lasallians who choose to live their baptismal vocation by participating in the Lasallian ministry of education and evangelization recognized by the Church, are believers in Jesus Christ. However we readily recognize the many sincere women and men of other faith families who center their professional and at times personal lives, on the founding Lasallian story.

1.19. Most Districts are organizing formation programs for all Lasallians together and undertaking educational initiatives that respond to local needs.¹⁴

¹³ Cahiers lasalliens, 1, simple presentation.

¹⁴ *Bulletin of the Institute*, No. 248, 2003, describes a number of educational initiatives.

1.20. Recent General Chapters have been preoccupied with reflecting on the meaning today of the Brother's vocation and mission in the world and in the Church. The 2007 Chapter returns the vow of association for the educational service of the poor to first place among the vows as the Brother's fundamental expression of consecration to God. That decision connects today's situation with the movement initiated by De La Salle and the first Brothers.

1.21. Many of the women and men either directly employed in Lasallian ministries or participating in an unofficial capacity are expressing their desire to participate in the Lasallian educational mission by exploring new initiatives and unique forms of commitment and by enrolling in Lasallian formation programs. Inspired by the Founder's life and message, they are undergoing a spiritual experience, a way of living their Christian faith. Examples include *Signum Fidei*, groups of associates (some living a community life), Lasallian Volunteers, Young Lasallians and other Lasallians committed to leading and staffing individual and networked educational ministries.

1.22. These experiences and various types of commitment are causing an evolution in the way that Lasallians view and situate themselves. The Institute's changing vocabulary highlights this evolution: *Lasallian Family* (1986 General Chapter), *Shared Mission* (1993 General Chapter), and *Association* (2000 General Chapter). This evolution also is leading, with different modalities and rhythms according to the Region and the District, to organizational structures of dialogue, discernment, and decision making in which all Lasallians, the Brothers included, participate at the same level. Examples are the International Assembly for the Lasallian

Educational Mission and Association (2006), the District Lasallian Educational Mission Assembly, and the District Lasallian Educational Mission Council.

1.23. Because of certain governmental, legal, cultural, philosophical and/or theological positions not all Lasallians are participating fully in this new dynamic of association. This calls for an attitude of respect, patience and constant invitation that encourages unity in diversity. However, an analysis of the experience of the last forty years and of the evolution in ecclesiology makes it clear that association is a major way to understanding the present and to prepare for the future.

1.24. As in the Founder's time, the Institute's future is not written in advance but involves risks and uncertainties. By identifying these challenges in the pages that follow, we hope to avoid any pitfalls and to confirm or to suggest the paths of reflection, decision, and commitment that will bring us a future filled with hope.

1.25. The Lasallian mission, the human and Christian education of young people "far from salvation," has no future unless built upon the fundamental traits of Lasallian association, both among the Brothers, and among all other Lasallians, who commit themselves in various forms to the Lasallian educational mission.

Chapter 2 - Fundamental Elements of Lasallian Association

2.1. In this circular we propose five fundamental elements to describe Lasallian association. Other elements undoubtedly exist, but these five are present both in the Institute's founding experience and in its ongoing tradition. The survey of the worldwide Institute conducted by the Secretariat for Lasallian Family and Association (2009) has documented a great variety of experiences and perspectives in association. The five fundamental elements that follow identify the experience of Lasallian association and promote unity in the ongoing, dynamic process of association across the Institute's Districts and Regions. New adaptations and experiences will continue to enrich these five fundamental elements. These elements are a rephrasing, for purposes of amplification and clarification, of those found in the Documents of the 43rd General Chapter of 2000 and cited in Chapter 4 of this Circular.

1. Association exists for the mission.
2. Association implies being a member of a community for the mission.
3. Association results from experience and is a dynamic journey, not an acquired status.
4. Association stems from faith, vocation, and state of life.
5. Association presupposes a freely made commitment.

2.2. *Association exists for the mission, the human and Christian education of young people who are "far from salvation."*

2.2.1. The immediate and ultimate goal of all Lasallian association is our educational mission. There is no point in talking about association unless the discussion focuses on this mission. These reciprocal and dynamic realities of association and mission make explicit the Lasallian approach to faith, service and community.

2.2.2. Associated for mission supposes a participation in a collective Lasallian identity. It can be framed in three fundamental dynamics. The first is Attraction; coming together around a common leader, a touchstone for discernment and a foundation for the guidelines for the life of all members. For the Institute, the founder is St. John Baptist de La Salle who becomes a life-model and spiritual guide, not only a symbol of union. Second is Co-Responsibility which makes sure that the members are ever faithful to their intended purpose. The final dynamic is Belonging. It signifies assuring cohesion among the members of the educational Mission. It is important to state here that this sense of Lasallian belonging transcends any local educational center or small circle of people known. It is an invitation to feel part of a common adventure and of a salvation history that supersedes any one project in which one may be involved.

2.2.3. Associated as Lasallians means being committed to an educational ministry within this reality. Pope Benedict XVI's opening speech at Aparecida, Brazil, reminds the Church, as the People of God, that "the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9)."¹⁵

¹⁵ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, 13 May 2007.

Being disciples of Jesus Christ means adopting the preferential option for the poor as a lifetime project. Lasallian educators, through their association, make a particular commitment to the educational service of the poor, to education for justice and to evangelization.

2.2.4. Since the General Chapter of 1966-1967 tremendous strides have been made in reinvigorating our commitment to direct service of the poor. This can be seen in every single Sector, Delegation and District in the Institute. Still, all Lasallians face questions about their role in addressing new educational needs. In some countries people accuse the Lasallian School, as an institution, of merely reflecting and not challenging the current societal structures; being elitist, rather than promoting full participation by everyone in a more just society. Having heard this observation we believe that it is critical to mention that from the beginning schools were established for many classes of people. The schools for wealthier students have always tried to be at the service of schools in direct service of the poor. Rather than criticize Lasallian brothers and sisters who serve more economically advantaged children, an effort should be made to be more concerned that these centers are teaching a doctrine of social justice focused on systemic change and empirically offering all students an opportunity to “know” and serve the poor and marginalized. Nevertheless, serving the poorest among the young should be a constant concern.

2.3. *Association implies being a member of a community for the mission.*

2.3.1. Lasallians, by their very presence in the mission, bring personal and communal life experiences to their serv-

ice in association. Their own experience of community relationships is a significant part of the vital role they play in the lives of the young. For it is these young people who recognize in them not only their professional expertise but recognize even more their experience of God, their ethical behavior and their ability to foster healthy supportive relationships.

2.3.2. Lasallian educational centers must be places where welcome, peace and respect are lived out in communities characterized by the acceptance of each human person. They must be places where cultural diversity is not an occasion for conflict, exclusion, or destructive tension but rather where being different is an enriching component of community life. In so doing these centers incarnate what “together” means in “together and by association.”

2.4. *Association results from experience and is a dynamic journey, not an acquired status.*

2.4.1. It is crucial that Lasallian association be seen as a vocational response to the God who calls. It is a “yes” to that invitation that forms the basis of all Lasallian commitment. It is a progressive conversion. The journey that begins with cordial and skilled participation in the mission can move to a freely chosen personal commitment that leads to service as a leader in a Lasallian ministry. Having said that, let it further be clear that association is a gift given and not a status attained.

2.4.2. What follows are essential elements of the Christian vocation and by extension, an invitation to apply them to one’s own Lasallian vocation. The Gospel of Mark highlights three elements in the vocation experience.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Mark 3:13-19.

2.4.3. Call: First, Jesus calls those he wants to be with him.

2.4.4. Formation: Second, in all of the Gospels, the formation process takes place during the years when the Apostles are with Jesus in an itinerant community. Their continuing formation is fundamental for their understanding and accepting Jesus Christ's project as their own lifelong project.

2.4.5. Commission: Third, the goal is the mission: being with Jesus in community and being his disciple means being sent to contribute something to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

2.4.6. Thanks to his biographers and his letters to the Brothers the story of the Founder's and the first Brothers' formative journey is well known. De La Salle works ceaselessly to transform the group of teachers into Brothers who share a lifetime Gospel project to undertake an educational mission together and by association.

2.4.7. Inspired by Jesus Christ's experience with the Apostles and by the Founder's life with the Brothers, Lasallians associated for the educational mission participate in a formation process that transmits the Institute's rich founding sources and develops the personal and professional qualifications needed to meet the challenges of the Lasallian mission. Associating with the Lasallian mission requires integration of the fundamental elements of the Lasallian charism in their personal, community, and professional life.

2.4.8. Lasallians in association carry out specific, mutually acceptable contractual responsibilities in support of the mission. Although no automatic relationship exists between association and appointment to a particular position, the

Lasallian perspective means that anyone assigned responsibility for the mission sees it as a service inspired by Gospel values.

2.5. *Association stems from the awareness through faith of receiving a vocation that combines personal and social aspects of the individual's own life.*

2.5.1. God, the Creator of life and the Lord of history, is always present in the world. Today, as in former times, God continues to call men and women to participate in building the Kingdom. God calls Lasallians in association for the mission to share in building the Kingdom of God in the manner appropriate to their state of life. Their mission is to be a “Gospel presence” in the world of education.

2.5.2. Because the Founder and the first Brothers viewed their surrounding reality with the eyes of faith, they observed current events from this point of view and discovered God's call in the faces of the urban poor children and young people excluded from advancement in society. Open, available, and increasingly capable of answering this call, these teachers in the revolutionary Christian Schools consecrated their life “together and by association” for the education of the children of working people and poor families.

2.5.3. This experience of association, like the experience of faith, has personal and community dimensions. God is present in the heart of an associated individual and in the community's celebration of faith as the members experience and manifest the presence of God in community. As members of the Church, “the People of God in Communion,” they participate in the Church's apostolic purpose by their call to holiness, their profession of the Catholic faith, their witness of strong

and authentic communion, their participation in the Church's apostolic goals, and their presence in human society.¹⁷

2.5.4. The Institute invites all Lasallians to renew daily their experience of God. As the Founder explains in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat: It is your duty to go up to God every day in prayer to learn from him all that you must teach the children and then to come down to them by accommodating them at their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated for them to you.*¹⁸ Like Donald declared earlier in the story from Papua New Guinea, “Don't you know you must climb up the mountain to reach the children?”

2.6. *Association presupposes a freely made commitment for a determined period of time, which might also include a position of official responsibility for certain aspects of the mission.*

2.6.1. Association also implies a process – a spiritual path that takes one where he or she might never have chosen to go. This graced journey is evident in De La Salle's own words, *God who conducts all things with wisdom and gentleness...wishing to draw me into undertaking entirely the care of the schools, has done so in a quiet imperceptible way...so that one commitment lead me into another without my having foreseen it in the beginning.*¹⁹

¹⁷ *Christifideles Laici*, 30: [English quotes from www.vatican.va: The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness... The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith... The witness to a strong and authentic communion... Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals... A commitment to a presence in human society...]

¹⁸ De La Salle, J.B. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, No. 6 (Translated by Loes, FSC, Augustine). Christian Brothers Conference, 1975, p. 62.

¹⁹ Cf. *Cahiers Lasalliens*, No. 7, p. 169.

2.7. Contemporary culture exercises a strong influence on the ideals that traditionally have inspired religious movements, including the consecrated life. The ideal of a lifelong commitment is perhaps one of the most challenged and affected concepts; nevertheless, any commitment to Lasallian association implies a definite length of time that will vary according to the person's circumstances and state of life. The implications for the community and the mission, however, require that the commitment to association be for a defined period of time.

History reveals that Brothers and all other Lasallians have committed themselves some for now and some forever to Christ's mission in the Church as entrusted to the Institute. Now, more than ever before, the call goes out to all Lasallians to ensure the future of the Mission.

Chapter 3 - Lasallian Association: Common Characteristics Experienced in Different Ways

A multicultural, multireligious reality

3.1. The original experience of *together and by association* that begins with John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers now continues in eighty countries on five continents. The Lasallian charism appears to have a new dynamism because of its presence in a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious settings. Educators throughout the world find in De La Salle and the Lasallian educational mission an inspiring element to integrate into their daily lives.

3.2. This new reality of Lasallian association in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and global context has common elements, even though Lasallians experience them in different ways. Two universal concepts however are essential: the relevance of human nature and the value of education.

3.3. The anthropological view of human nature that motivates Lasallians recognizes and dignifies every human being as being unique, unrepeatable, and educable. Discrimination based on gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation has no place in the Lasallian educational mission. As social beings, humans are capable of establishing meaningful relationships. As spiritual beings, they are open to transcendent reality and the search for life's meaning. This holistic view of human nature includes intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

3.4. Lasallians recognize that each person can and needs to be formed in a holistic way. Inspired by the Founder's writ-

ings and experience and by the living tradition of the Institute, Lasallians regard education as a process of integral human formation. They recognize human dignity in the face of everyone they meet. In keeping with the Lasallian tradition, they devote themselves especially to the education of young people who are in difficult and challenging circumstances.

A new reality in the Church

3.5. The movement in the life of the Church that the Spirit has inspired in recent decades makes clear that *having been born for the good of everyone, the charisms of the founders [...] must be placed at the center of the Church itself, open to communion and participation by all the members of the People of God.*²⁰

3.6. As stated in *Starting Afresh from Christ*:

The new phenomenon being experienced in these days is that some members of the laity are asking to participate in the charismatic ideals of Institutes. This has given rise to interesting initiatives and new institutional forms of association. We are experiencing an authentic re-flourishing of ancient institutions, such as the secular orders or third orders, and the birth of new lay associations and movements linked to religious Families and Secular Institutes. Whereas at times in the recent past, collaboration came about as a means of supplementing the decline of consecrated persons necessary to carry out activities, now it is growing out of the need to share responsibility not only in the carrying out of the Institute's works but especially in the hope of sharing specific as-

²⁰ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 31.

*pects and moments of the spirituality and mission of the Institute. This calls for an adequate formation of both consecrated persons and laity to ensure a collaboration which is mutually enriching.*²¹

3.7. By valuing the charisms of the founders of religious communities, the Church establishes new relationships of communion and participation among the baptized. A most significant innovation is the request by people who are not members to take part in the charismatic ideals of an institute.²² The request involves more than sharing the mission or carrying on specific professional tasks, important as they are. The request means, among other things, committing the person's life to a specific way of living God's call through an institute's charism. These new forms of communion and cooperation enrich both members and non-members, especially in mission, community life, and spirituality.

3.8. Unity in diversity is the goal of this new reality *It is essential to maintain a dynamic balance between unity and diversity in the Institute...This appears to be indispensable in a rapidly changing world that requires response and flexibility.*²³ Everyone's participation is important because everyone has a unique contribution to make. The Church accomplishes its mission of building the Kingdom of God through the participation of all its members.

Recent Developments Concerning Lasallian Association

3.9. The 44th General Chapter (2007) has invited the Broth-

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cf. 44th General Chapter, pp. 46-47.

ers to recover the original inspiration and motivation of the vow of association for the educational service of the poor. This emphasis on the centrality of the vow of association rearranges the story of the Brothers' association, making it the central element from which they view the other vows and their entire life. It should be noted that the focus on the Brothers' special vows of teaching the poor gratuitously and stability in the Institute has changed since the renewal General Chapter 1966-1967. *The first became a vow to serve the poor through education and the second became a vow of fidelity to be made at final profession. ... In 1986 the vow of stability was reinstated ...integrating the element of fidelity with stability. The mission vow was expanded to include the traditional and fundamental notion of association under the title of the vow of association for the educational service of the poor.*²⁴ This new context also means that the Brothers live their religious consecration alongside other people who share the same Lasallian charism, becoming "for them and with them, heart, memory, and guarantor of the Lasallian charism."²⁵

The Association Story of Lay Lasallians

3.10. The story of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in association has a long history and tradition. The same is not true for others who are now also involved in Lasallian educational ministry. Their movement toward association has been gradually developing. At the present time, no universal model or system of association exists for colleagues in Lasallian educational ministries. What does exist is a kaleidoscope

²⁴ *Lasallian Themes*, No. 2, Vows, Bro. Luke Salm, FSC, Rome, 1995, pp. 264-265.

²⁵ Cf. 44th General Chapter, p. 24.

of experiences lived out in various countries and cultures pointing to new directions for the future. These experiences appear in two complementary global contexts: Christian and multi-religious. New forms of communion and of participation in the Lasallian charism are emerging in both contexts.

3.11. From the Christian perspective, the desire of many colleagues in Lasallian ministries to participate in the charism of the Institute is one of the most significant trends in recent times. This longing for charismatic communion and sharing is fostering a dynamic movement in the Institute. The challenge and the opportunity for the Lasallian charism is clear. The challenge is to find ways to appreciate, acknowledge, and perhaps give form to this action of the Spirit. The opportunity is to identify and expand in the future this new and significant presence of the Lasallian charism in the world of the young, especially the poor.

3.12. In the global context of multi-religious societies, the Institute must continue to find ways to appreciate and to encourage people who are motivated and inspired by the Lasallian charism. The central question, perhaps, is not to create organizational structures but to strengthen existing links with these Lasallian educators and supporters by recognizing their original and diverse contributions to the Lasallian educational mission.

3.13. The 43rd Chapter also urges the Institute to take into account the situation of the women and men who participate in the Lasallian mission but do not share the Christian faith. “We should note that in the composition of these groups one can meet Brothers, other Christians, members of other religions, and persons of goodwill whose point of reference, as

the 42nd General Chapter indicates, is *the human and spiritual values recognized and pursued by all Lasallians (meditation, service of the poor, the family, the rights of children)*.²⁶ Let it be stated clearly and unambiguously that calling oneself Lasallian is not relegated only to those of the Christian faith. Many faith-filled people professing other creeds participate daily in the Lasallian educational Mission. They are a valued part of this community.

3.14. In turn the goal, in those places where Lasallians minister in a multi-religious context, needs to be the deepening of faith in each student. It is our hope that students of all religions would graduate from our Lasallian schools professing their beliefs more faithfully and be committed to the construction of a better world.

Toward a New Association Story

3.15. The centuries-old story of Lasallian association follows a well-traveled and meaningful road. More recently new horizons of understanding are emerging that enable Lasallians to revisit our founding story. The Spirit of the Lord is inviting all to discover new powers in the Lasallian charism so as to be able to respond to the educational needs of the children, young people, and adults whom God has entrusted to the Lasallian Educational Mission.

²⁶ 43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, Associated for Educational Service for the Poor, 2000, p. 6.

Chapter 4 - The Need for Discernment

4.1. During the past four decades, the renewed interest in association as a primary characteristic of Lasallian ministry has inspired many initiatives throughout the Lasallian world. This phenomenon also appears in other religious institutes, for a long time in some, more recently in others.

4.2. *Vita Consecrata* calls this movement an important characteristic of our time, one that is full of promise for the future: *We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the Secular Institutes or Third Orders, a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.*²⁷

4.3. Association initiatives in Lasallian educational ministries are diverse, depending on the District or the Region, on the pace of development and impact, and on the questions and discussions that certain initiatives provoke among Brothers and other Lasallians.

4.4. In their approach to association, some Districts offer a public form of commitment; others hesitate to do so. Some Districts conduct regular meetings at the District level and encourage shared decision making, including a Mission Council with appointed or elected officers. Other Districts prefer not to take this approach to association, or they consider the idea of association to be inopportune in their locale. As an Institute, we need to help the latter find ways in which to religiously and culturally adapt the movement of Lasallian association for mission so as not

²⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 54.

to risk losing any of our international richness -“unity in diversity.”

4.5. Given these diverse experiences and attitudes, we propose a method of discernment that will not “extinguish the Spirit,” to use the words of St Paul. In this circular we are attempting the delicate process of definition and clarification of vocabulary and of criteria for association. As we embark on clarifying concepts it might be useful to recall now the cautionary words of Cardinal Garrone, as quoted by Brother Michel Sauvage, at the time of the 1966-1967 General Chapter: *Everything that is vague is useless...everything that is clear is false.*²⁸

4.6. Language, although not the only means, is an important vehicle of communication. Yet in an international Institute such as ours it often falls victim to misinterpretation and biased cultural nuance. The risk of language confusion is not new in human history, as the story of the Tower of Babel reminds us. Moreover, many contemporary Christians and most believers in other religious and secular traditions have neither immediate access to nor understanding of our Institute’s Christian vocabulary.

4.7. We do not wish to cover the same ground as other excellent works in existence.²⁹ Therefore we will not propose a glossary of Lasallian terms in this document. We prefer to amplify in this chapter on discernment the meaning of association since it is central to the current discussion.

²⁸ Cf. Sauvage, op. cit. (footnote 6) p.11.

²⁹ Lasallian Essays, No. 3, Botana, FSC, Antonio, *Thematic Vocabulary of Lasallian Association*, FSC Generalate, Rome, 2008.

Lasallian Essays, No. 4, Botana, FSC, Antonio, *Basics for a Present-Day Model for the Lasallian Family*, FSC Generalate, Rome, 2008.

Association

4.8. *Association*, the most frequently used of the terms to be considered, has a variety of meanings, depending on the person using it, the locale, and the context (sociology, spirituality, law, or economics). Within the limits of this circular, we cannot define all the many ways in which the word *association* is used.³⁰ Instead, we are focusing on the various meanings of *association* in Lasallian thinking.

4.9. In the Lasallian tradition, the term “association” has a mystical connotation that goes beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Saint John Baptist De La Salle, association was a fundamental intuition that allowed him to respond with apostolic zeal to God’s salvific plan for the young, especially the poor. When they associated together, the first Brothers experienced through their lived history that their lives were irrevocably united by the incarnation of this Trinitarian call. That is why for all Lasallians today, the “together and by association” element of our origins, continues to have a strong and deep meaning.

4.10. Given this perspective, the term “association” should not be understood in a legal or canonical sense. It represents the link that unites all those committed to the Lasallian Mission, i.e. those who see themselves responsible for it and who contribute to its vitality. This link can be expressed in diverse ways:

- For the Brothers, it is a vow that forms part of their religious profession.

³⁰ Rivera-Moreno, Juan, A., *Associative Belonging*, MEL Bulletin, No. 15, Rome, 2005.

- Some Lay Lasallians will choose to express it publicly after a process and according to the customs of 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*.

4.10.1. Freedom is the primary element in the Lasallian understanding of association which, from the beginning, is always a voluntary action. It involves a free choice that touches all aspects of a person's life. One does not associate simply because of professional work. Going no further than a professional association, in our thinking, is collaboration. Association in the Lasallian context has a broader and deeper meaning. Respect for the freedom and for the lifelong journey of each individual is an essential aspect. Association does not occur *ipso facto*.

4.10.2. Association symbolizes and supports the personal conviction that solidarity and community spirit lie at the heart of the Lasallian mission of promoting the human and religious development of young people. Someone who works totally in isolation cannot claim to be associated.

4.10.3. The experience of association within a Lasallian ministry is a spiritual process in which faith in God is a moving force and, for others, a potential goal. The aspect of personal belief, whether explicitly expressed or a worthy goal to be pursued, is a vital component of the process whereby Lasallians associate.

4.10.4. Association has never been an end in itself. It is “for the mission”; with the clear purpose of giving a human and Christian education to “*the children of the artisans and the poor.*”

4.10.5. Often current Lasallian vocabulary links the terms *association* and *Lasallian family*. These two distinct terms exist in a dialogue that distinguishes between them but retains their mutual relationship. This dialogue will be considered more in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.11. Several types of association occur in today's Lasallian world.

4.11.1. Association as lived by the Brothers: The 2007 General Chapter stresses that in the Brother's vocation, association is the primary vow that gives meaning to all the other vows. It is the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools that constitutes the stable body within the family in which the link of association is the strongest. It is a vow of which the Brothers are proud.

4.11.2. Association as lived by members of a Lasallian intentional group: A public commitment expresses the intention after a process of discernment that involves the District administration and the leaders of the relevant Lasallian ministry.

4.11.3. Association as lived by people who integrate their commitment to education, their spiritual life, and the fundamental aspects of Lasallian association but choose not to join an intentional group or to make a public commitment.

4.12. However, being considered and described as an *associated Lasallian* involves some form of recognition, expressed in a variety of ways, such as a specific link with the District structures, a close relationship with a community of Brothers or other Lasallians, regular participation in Lasallian meetings and formation sessions, or participating in discernment and decision-making groups (such as a Lasallian Educational Mission Assembly or Council).

4.13. Some Districts ask whether Lasallian association ought to have a legal basis in civil law or Canon Law. Because the civil law of each country governs the various kinds of associations that can exist therein, juridical procedures and possibilities vary from country to country. It is not the purpose of this document to make recommendations based on local civil law.

4.14. The Canon Law of the Church recognizes the possibility of associations of the faithful³¹, but the statutes of these associations differ. To obtain the Church’s official recognition, public associations must be established by the “competent ecclesiastical authority” (canon 301); private associations must have their statutes “recognized by a competent authority” (canon 299). A pre-condition for addressing this question, locally or internationally, is the existence of Lasallian intentional groups that seek recognition within the framework of the Institute. Each situation requires local or international study, depending on the circumstances. There is a value in being cautious in seeking canonical status for Lasallian intentional groups. Lasallians have an enduring, rich and fruitful experience of association. And as long as there is a Superior General in Rome, and the Brothers and Lay Lasallians remain together, looking for new canonical models would not best serve current needs.

Criteria for individuals and intentional groups

4.15. The 43rd General Chapter (2000), concerning the topic of associates, has established five criteria for the District leader or the person responsible for a Lasallian intentional

³¹ Book II, Part. I, Heading 5, Canons 298-329.

group to accept a request for association. These criteria basically concern an individual's request for association.

- 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 the Scriptures 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 associates persons with the educational service of the poor.*
- 5) *An openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.*³²

Criteria for Lasallian groups within an Institution

4.16. Association has an institutional aspect when it involves having a specific role in an organization, a responsibility for allocating resources, a decision to make in common, or a diverse range of belonging (family, religious, church). To achieve harmony in Lasallian association, four factors must be in balance and these four factors form a system: (1) the purpose of association, (2) the needs of young people, (3) the people who request association, and (4) the organizational structure. The four factors are reciprocal; none must be eclipsed. The characteristic underlying their relationship is the coherence between what is said and what is done, between the ideal and what occurs in fact, between the means and the end.

³² Cf. 43rd General Chapter 2000, p. 4.

Criteria for discernment

4.17. Evaluating these initiatives, some of them temporary or limited in scope, while others are long-lasting and extensive, requires principles on which to base the discernment. Some criteria come from experience; others stem from an understanding of the Lasallian charism. Thus, posing the question, “Who is in?” or “Who is out?” of Lasallian association does not further the discussion any; just as vagueness or indifference risks relativizing the vocational call. The invitation to belong is ever-present and all inclusive. We do not want to marginalize nor create classes of Lasallians. Rather, our goal is to continue motivating, forming and inviting all members to deepen their association for Mission.

4.18. To say that *everyone* who is Lasallian is an associate is incorrect. Not everyone is an associate just as not everyone is a Brother. Along with the Brothers, those who *are* associates are more connected to the Institute’s structures for Mission and can help assure its stability and continuation.

4.19. Another misconception is to compare the ratio of Brothers (3% of the population) to the over 79,000 other Lasallians who share in the Mission. These men and women are not necessarily intentionally in association. This topic will later be developed in the Chapter on the Lasallian Family. Declaring oneself Lasallian means accepting the risk of being noticed, of being counter-cultural, not just by what the person says but by the attitudes, commitments, lifestyle, and the values advocated and lived.

4.20. Brother Antonio Botana, former Institute Secretary of Association, enunciates clear criteria for Lasallian discernment.

Inclusivity and exclusivity are radical positions, and it would be advisable to avoid them in the recognition of associates. It is wiser to engage in a process of discernment to recognize association “in fact,” which would always precede “formal” association, whether or not a “formal” association ever does take place. This association “in fact” is made manifest by:

- *a steady disposition of solidarity with other Lasallians and with commitment to the Lasallian mission;*
- *seeking to be sustained by Lasallian spirituality and seeking meaning from it; an awareness of collaborating in God’s work;*
- *a clear sense of belonging to the common Lasallian story and to the District; regular participation in District or area meetings, as well as in courses and formation meetings;*
- *participation in some community experience with other Lasallians;*
- *an interest in and openness toward the universality of the Lasallian mission.*³³

4.21. It is important to remember that this discernment of Lasallian association takes place in the lives of real people. Each of us can recognize a Lasallian when we see one in service of the young. However necessary the proposal of written criteria, the real proof is in the actual personal encounter. The following quote from a dedicated Lasallian associate bears witness to this sincere vocational discernment for mission. *“I am Lasallian. I am Lasallian 24 hours a day – in my work, with my family, when I pray. The values I hold, the person I try to be, the work I do and the relationships I have are all lived within this context. Being Lasallian is where I find God and it is*

³³ Cf. Lasallian Essays, No. 3, p. 36.

where I am called to try and live as faithfully as I can the values of the gospel.” (PARC Region)

Chapter 5 - The Lasallian Family

5.1. Just as that huge miraculous blanket was lowered from the heavens and St. Peter was invited to break with traditional norms and partake of food that was once seen as forbidden, so too Lasallians today are being invited to reformulate previous ways of association and to join in the bounty of multi-cultural, multi-religious and innovative ways of belonging to the Lasallian Family. The new blanket is wide. It is a bit mysterious, challenging and stretches to cover five continents. Spread out before us is a feast of opportunity. Willingness to approach the blanket and “eat” is the vitality that will identify 21st century Lasallians.

5.2. The 44th General Chapter charted a course for the Institute. One of the lines of action given to the Secretariat of Lasallian Family and Association states: *To take the initiative to construct in the next two years a possible model for the Lasallian Family as the General Chapter proposed* (Chapter 3,3.3).³⁴ This is the source, foundation and catalyst for our Circular on Lasallian Association. We felt it important to set the stage for any discussion on the Lasallian Family by beginning first with a reflection on Lasallian association. Not to articulate the first would have impoverished any presentation of the latter. In the first four chapters we presented a way of understanding Lasallian association that has hopefully clarified concepts and principles that the Institute has enunciated over time. Our hope is that in this chapter a similar goal can be reached.

³⁴ Towards the Year 2014, Circular 456. 2008, p. 21.

Family...a Human Perspective

5.3. Before defining the term *Lasallian* Family it is important to discuss some of the essential anthropological elements that contribute to the way the word “family” is perceived by any one group. First and foremost it is critical to admit that culture is the most significant element that must be respected when attempting to explain what the word infers. Using the word family in one culture may have very different connotations in another one. This can be seen in cultures where the nuclear family is experiencing a certain degree of disintegration while in other cultures it continues to be the backbone of all social order.

5.4. However, there are certain common elements that bear mentioning because they definitely will nuance one’s concept of the *Lasallian* Family.

5.4.1. Elements such as love, friendship, intimacy and mutual understanding, and the extent to which they are or are not demonstrated, are fundamental to all family relationships.

5.4.2. There is a common history that is understood or assumed by all family members who then in turn become authors of a new collective story to be passed on to future generations.

5.4.3. Healthy families will exhibit a strong sense of unity based on respecting individual rights and communal norms. While responding to the vital needs of its members, every healthy family is also the primary environment where human beings learn to be open to the needs of others.

5.4.4. Every member has a unique role and corresponding responsibility within the family system. Ideally, those who

exercise authority in the family do so not out of power but rather see their role as an avenue of service.

5.4.5. Occasionally convening meetings to seek consensus, share feelings, and/or to mediate a conflict promotes harmony in the family. This is also achieved by celebrating significant moments (birthdays, holidays, deaths...) in the life of its members.

5.5. It appears to us that these essential elements can be easily applied to the concept of the Lasallian Family. For our purposes, when we use the word “family” we are not referring here to any administrative structure; we prefer to see it as an ideal to be lived out, i.e. a lifestyle. Therefore, when we speak of Lasallian Family we do not see its members as interlocking gears that drive “the Lasallian Machine.” On the contrary, applying all of the elements mentioned above, we see the Lasallian Family as a human community – a living dynamic system that experiences life in all of its difficult and wonderful phases.

Definition

5.6. First appearing in the documents of the General Chapter of 1976³⁵, the term Lasallian Family has since taken on a variety of interpretations. For the purpose of this discussion we choose to employ the definition given by the 42nd General Chapter in 1993. *The Lasallian Family designates all those who participate in the Lasallian educational enterprise, especially those who are moving toward a sharing of the spirit and the mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle.*³⁶ It is clear that the def-

³⁵ 40th General Chapter, Circular 403, 1976, p. 78.

³⁶ 42nd General Chapter, Circular 415, Proposition 3, 1993, p. 49.

inition allows for great flexibility in the way a person belongs to the family. It is all inclusive by allowing for levels of depth ranging from profound to cursory. The word “especially” is significant in the definition. It refers to a more specific group who sees its belonging to the family as a process...a journey. As in the case of membership in any family, there may be an ebb and flow to this process. Belonging is never static. It presumes movement in the areas of personal, relational, intellectual and spiritual growth, all of which affect one’s incorporation into the family.

5.7. In earlier chapters we spoke of the process of discernment for Lasallian associates. By nature it implies a response to a vocational call lived out through specific observable criteria. Therefore it is incorrect to say that all members of the Lasallian Family are associates but the converse *is* true. All Brothers of the Christian Schools and Lasallian associates – officially recognized or not – are members of the Lasallian Family *de facto*.

5.8. As a definition of Lasallian Family develops there is another point to consider. It is the word “Institute.” It is used often and in many contexts. The canonical meaning of the term refers to the Brothers of the Christian Schools as a religious institute of pontifical right made up exclusively of Brothers. By definition only the Brothers belong to “the Institute.” Granted that more recently the term is commonly used to signify the “Lasallian world” or the “Lasallian Family” as well as the Brothers, we believe that this multiple usage causes confusion. A clear example would be the intended audience of this Circular; it is written to all Lasallians not just to members of the “Institute.”

Models

5.9. After years of study, reflection, surveys, workshops and discussions, we are of the opinion that promoting any *one* model for the Lasallian Family would be inadequate at best and counterproductive at worst. We believe there is no *one* model and that any model possesses both strengths and limitations in its attempts to symbolize a living reality. Any model, attempting to capture a lived reality through symbol, cannot be true at all times or for all purposes. One popular model sees the Lasallian Family as an “umbrella,”³⁷ under which everyone finds a home. Similar to our discussion on association, if we declare that *everyone* belongs to the family, (the umbrella) does that trivialize belonging? Another is the planetary system model which sees the Lasallian Educational Mission as the “sun” around which Lasallian “planets” navigate in distinct orbits.³⁸ A third interesting image is the tree which is rooted in the earth of the gospel and the founding story of Saint John Baptist De La Salle. Throughout the years new branches have grown and new ones may appear in the future.

5.10. These models are valid, but like all models, are open to misinterpretation. If Lasallian “planets” move in distinct orbits then how, where and when do they connect? What gravitational pull prevents them from orbiting together? Or this may very well be a useful metaphor for visualizing our “unity in diversity.” Seeing the Lasallian Family as a tree also has limitations. The Institute’s dilemma at the present moment is that some Regions/Districts are re-

³⁷ Cf. Lasallian Essays, No. 3, p. 85.

³⁸ Cf. Lasallian Essays, No. 3, p. 86.

questing a set of well defined criteria to determine who is a Lasallian associate and who is a member of the Lasallian Family. Other Regions/Districts see that approach as stifling the Spirit and running the risk of suffocating current and future initiatives.

Evangelical Families in the Church

5.11. A fourth model currently being considered by congregations in the Church is the Evangelical Family. An evangelical family is comprised of lay people and religious formed into communities with a view to the congregation's mission and center on the figure and charism of the Founder of the particular congregation. As this model is being adopted by some religious communities we felt it was important to reflect on the topic here within a Lasallian context.

5.12. There is no one unique model of an evangelical family in the Church yet they hold in common certain distinctive traits. Members come from different states of life in a desire to live out their baptismal consecration with greater intensity. The group animates its Christian life principally around the gospel of Jesus and in turn around the central figure of a founder whose foundational "intuition" results in the establishment of a specific community. There is also the possibility of a common mission. These flexible criteria allow for many differences among evangelical families. Although structurally based on the above criteria, they may also differ by foundational history, development and growth, apostolate, spirituality, geography and local Church culture. They also differ in many structural ways: orders whose Superior General is the prime authority figure or those who form

councils composed of federations of congregations and groups centered in the same charism.³⁹

5.13. Considering the current reality of the Institute, and without diminishing or obscuring the evangelizing dimension of the Lasallian Educational Mission, it seems now that “Lasallian Family,” is more appropriate than “Evangelical Family.” Yes, the Institute was born of gospel imperatives and is a vital part of the Catholic Church. By nature, the Lasallian Family is composed of Christians who come from diverse cultures and represent a variety of Christian creeds. These Lasallians need to be recognized and given opportunities to continue their spiritual journey in union with other Christians and to celebrate and witness their faith through their educational commitment and personal lives.

5.14. Yet the Lasallian Family is broader than this gospel-based group of Christians who are members of evangelical families. The Lasallian Family recognizes and embraces persons from other religions; believers from other faiths who share in the Lasallian educational Mission and call De La Salle “our” Founder. Many educational centers of the PARC (Pacific/Asia) and RELEM (Europe/Mediterranean) Regions are headed and/or staffed by committed men and women from other religions. They walk a Lasallian path precisely because evangelizing is not seen as proselytizing. Lasallians accompany one another by constantly inviting each colleague to deepen not only their educational commitment but at the same time their relationship with God. By using the term “Lasallian” instead of “Evangelical” the family embodies the

³⁹ Delizy, Bernadette, *Vers des 'Familles évangéliques'. Le renouveau des relations entre chrétiens et congrégations*. Les Éditions de l'Atelier, Paris 2004.

creative dynamic tension between Church and the Kingdom of God. “All who participate in the Lasallian educational enterprise” belong to the family.

The Lasallian Family and the Institute

5.15. No family can exist in isolation from external influences. Neither can an Institute of Brothers in the Catholic Church. Both are shaped by myriad outside forces that complement and help shape the internal life of each individual grouping.

5.16. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools cannot and does not exist in isolation. Vital to its life and mission is its wholehearted participation as a member of the Lasallian Family. As a religious Institute all of its members are *de facto* associates and members of the Lasallian Family. Yet at the same time this Institute draws life from many sources. It is first rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the founding story of John Baptist de La Salle. It is daily transformed by the young who allow the Brothers to accompany them as “older brothers.” The Institute is richer because of the many men and women who find inspiration in the Lasallian charism and spirituality: Sisters Guadalupanas de La Salle, Lasallian Sisters, Catechists of Jesus Crucified-Resurrected and Mary Immaculate, *Signum Fidei*, Lasallian Associates, Lasallian Alumni (UMAEL), Young Lasallians, Lasallian Volunteers, various Lasallian communities and groups... and the list will continue to grow. The Lasallian Family is also shaped by outside sociological, political, ecclesial, historical, anthropological and cultural “elements” that either promote or impede its growth.

Lasallian Family Challenges

5.17. All human families share joys and sorrows; quarrel and make truces; reach moments when decisions must be made. The Lasallian Family is no different. We will end this chapter of the Circular presenting some of the challenges we have heard from Lasallians as we travel from Region to Region listening to their concerns. Our goal is not to provide answers here, but through raising the questions, to widen the discussion and provide a forum. *Since all structures of association for Lasallian Mission are purposely established on the District level so as to permit cultural, religious and demographic adaptations, we believe that the following challenges are best treated on the local level.* They are cited here for the purpose of opening the door to discussion.

5.18. Brothers: There are Brothers who because of cultural norms and/or personal convictions experience difficulty in extending to all Lasallians the invitation to coresponsibility in the Lasallian Mission. This calls for patience, respect and openness by both parties always keeping in focus the General Chapters' call to association for the Lasallian Educational Mission. It is crucial to remember that establishing structures does not necessarily result in transforming personal beliefs.

5.19. Some Brothers believe that the message often transmitted from the Center of the Institute is that the Brothers are dying and "we" have given up on promoting the Brother's vocation as a valued way of living the gospel. Others feel they have only a secondary role to play in an emerging definition of Lasallian association. We state clearly that these assumptions are not true now nor have they ever been true. The

Brothers vocation is specific and unique in the Church. It is needed today in our world perhaps more than ever before. If there is to be “co”-responsibility in the Mission then both parts are essential. We live in the hope that more young men will embrace the Brothers’ vocation. It is not the first time in the history of the Institute that this phenomenon of diminishment has occurred. We would encourage Brothers and other Lasallians to continue to work together to promote vocations to the Brothers’ life.

5.20. We all are invited to commit ourselves to awakening and accompanying the different Lasallian vocations among the youth through an efficient pastoral ministry of vocations firmly rooted in the Lasallian charism.⁴⁰

5.21. Lay Lasallians: We articulated earlier in this Circular the position that no Lasallian is to be considered a “second-class citizen” in the family. As was also stated earlier, structures need to be established, where there are none, to ensure that this message of equality is conveyed.

5.22. We wish to emphasize that participation in the Lasallian Family *must* contribute to the building up of one’s own family and/or community life. It should *never* be seen as a hindrance or as an obstacle to family unity...much less put family life “at risk.” Those, whose vocation calls them to marriage, and perhaps parenthood, are to celebrate the fact that their primary community is their family. Belonging to the Lasallian Family should be a source of strength and balance that nourishes all Lasallian vocations.

⁴⁰ Cf. Circular 455, “Being Brothers Today: Open Eyes, Burning Hearts” Ch. 5. Pastoral ministry of Brothers and Lasallian Vocations; sections 2.2.3 and 3.3.1; p. 38.

5.23. Since the Institute does not exist in isolation it therefore must deal with real concerns in the lives of real people. In our educational centers we need to be aware of the implications of fostering social justice. It means respecting the rights and duties of each person as defined by the social norms and civil codes of each country. Acting justly also implies a mutual willingness to engage in continuous dialogue with an *a priori* confidence to seek what is true in the events and lives of all Lasallians.

5.24. As has been clear throughout this Circular, calling oneself Lasallian is an invitation to respond to God as a person “called and sent.” It means living a dynamic process that finds all of us on a journey into the unknown. It is an adventure much like the one that inspired St. John Baptist de la Salle over 325 years ago.

Chapter 6 - Fostering Association

The Vow of Association for the Educational Service of the Poor

6.1. Although the Institute on all levels, internationally and locally, has researched and reflected on the centrality and significance of this vow in the Brother's daily life, some lack of clarity remains. People often confuse the *vow of association* with the concept of *Lasallian association* among committed Lasallians from states of life other than the consecrated state. They use the term *association* interchangeably with the *vow of association*, whereas two complementary realities are involved. Both are based in the Mission and yet lived out in different lifestyles.

Sharing the Charism

6.2. *The charism of Founders appears as an 'experience of the Spirit' transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.*⁴¹ One of the fruits of this process has been the ever growing number of lay Christians who take part in the charismatic ideals of Congregations and Religious Institutes. This new dynamic has been experienced by many Religious Congregations as a time of true rebirth and has found its expression through shared mission, spirituality and innovative formation processes. Both, Consecrated Religious and Lay people, have been enriched and strengthened in their respective identities.

6.3. The International Assembly of 2006 reminds us that

⁴¹ Mutuae Relationes, art. 11, May 1978.

giving continuity to the Lasallian Charism is the responsibility of the whole Lasallian Family. Being heart, memory and guarantor of the Lasallian Charism means to promote association from a Church as People-of-God-Communion standpoint. In order for the Lasallian Charism to become a reality more shared and accepted by the members of the Lasallian Family, it is fundamental to see it as a “spiritual intuition” that permeates the entire experience of association. This mystical perspective must be consistent with Lasallian Spirituality, structures for mission, shared responsibilities and must maintain an open attitude enabling it to read the signs of the times in a multicultural and multireligious world.

The “for” of our Association

6.4. Following the Lasallian tradition and responding to the orientations of the International Assembly of 2006, *Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*, it is important to be continually reminded that the ultimate purpose of association is found in the expression, “**association for.**” Service in the Lasallian Mission is no mere abstract concept. Association exists *for* the educational advancement of the young, especially those who are poor. “The vitality of our mission depends upon how we, who associate ourselves with one another, respond to the needs of the poor. We value the effort that Lasallians make to liberate the poor from their different forms of poverty and we ask everyone to consider service of the poor and the promotion of justice as the heart and the main source of strength of the Lasallian Mission in the world.”⁴²

⁴² Report of the International Assembly of 2006, *Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*, Main Orientation No. 5, Educational Service of the Poor, 2006, p. 36.

6.5. These orientations from the International Assembly take on even more relevance when seen through the lenses of both old and new poverty which daily hold millions of children captive. It is often said that poverty has a face; the face of a child. So many young people are socially, spiritually, materially and even physically lost without any sense of direction. Association *for* means responding with creativity to their needs and accompanying them on their journey.⁴³

Lasallian Community Life

6.6. For more than three centuries, Lasallian community life has consisted of the Brothers, living “together and by association” according to a canonically approved Rule and governed “by the Body of the Society and by its Superiors.” The mission, the role and the identity of the Brothers remain clear. During most of the history of the Institute, the Brothers have been guarantors of the mission, serving as the heart and the memory of the Christian Schools and the local communities. Community continues today in service of the mission; however, a shift has occurred in the Brothers’ role as guardians of the Lasallian charism. *“We have become more aware of our responsibility to be heart, memory, and guarantors of the Lasallian charism for all Lasallians. At the same time, we rejoice when other Lasallians take on this responsibility.”*⁴⁴

6.7. We acknowledge that many of the fruits of Vatican II are

⁴³ The 42nd General Chapter invited us to be attentive to the following realities: *“migration phenomena, racism, urban violence, terrorism, drug-addiction, lost of human values, faith crisis, rejection of religious faith, attraction to sects, unemployment, HIV, hunger, illiteracy, street children, displaced persons, disregard for life, dysfunctional families...”* (Circular 435, on p. 22).

⁴⁴ Cf. 44th General Chapter, p. 27.

abundantly clear to us in this first decade of the 21st century. The time is “now” for the laity in the Church, and more specifically in our Lasallian Family, to accept co-responsibility for the mission. Even if we *were* still 17,000 Brothers strong, as in the nineteen-sixties, no one should be surprised by this movement of the Spirit. It is ours to embrace.

6.8. Over the past few decades, a new phenomenon has appeared in Lasallian community life. The Institute recognizes not only the communities composed entirely of Brothers but also the communities of various combinations of Brothers, other consecrated religious, single and married persons, priests, and deacons. These latter forms are more prevalent in the RELEM and USA/Toronto Regions than in the RELAL, RELAF, and PARC Regions, where some of the Districts view this development with reserve. Many of these communities include publicly committed associates, who in some cases devote a percentage or contribute most of their salary to support the community.

6.9. Reflecting accurately the Institute’s situation today, we must emphasize that we do not prefer one form of community life to another. What we want to clarify (because we often hear it as a critique) is that the reason for establishing these so-called mixed or lay communities is *not* merely because they occur in areas that have fewer vocations to the Brothers’ life. 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. The Institute welcomes and supports new forms of Lasallian community life because they have value in and of themselves, not because there is no other alternative.

6.10. We also highlight the existence of “non-residential” forms of Lasallian community life which fall under the category of “Other Intentional Groups” that the 43rd General Chapter has noted.⁴⁵ These groups of committed Lasallians choose to express their dedication to the mission through communities that (1) meet on a regular basis, (2) organize themselves around the central Institute values of faith, service, and community, and (3) act locally, “together and by association,” while recognizing their close ties with the District, the Region, and the Institute. These groups represent a new approach to community life for the sake of the mission. We hope that in the future they will become more “intentional” as they grow in their response to God’s call to serve the Christian education of the young, especially those who are poor. Our hope does not rest on the assumption that they will adopt a new form of religious consecration. On the contrary, we realize that these groups will evolve naturally and at their own pace. Our main concern is that everyone associated with the Lasallian Family will move forward in “unity in diversity.” We encourage that each Region and District value and support all communities whether comprised of all Brothers, of members from various states of life, of all single or all married persons, or are residential or non-residential, that are associated for the work of Christian education in the tradition of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Formation

6.11. We acknowledge that although formation is absolute-

⁴⁵ Cf. 43rd General Chapter, p. 6.

ly necessary for any form of Lasallian association, in itself it does not guarantee that an individual will internalize the experience and become “Lasallian.” Effective formation is rooted in the experience of a community of learners. Thanks to 21st century technology both actual and virtual formation programs are now possible.

6.12. The principal themes of Lasallian formation include community, commitment, charism, the founding story, spirituality, pedagogy, and mission. Formation presupposes a free decision that participants base their commitment on their personal vocational call. Quality Lasallian formation is essential to keep alive the Lasallian charism as a gift for the universal Church.

6.13. Besides the international formation experiences that take place in Rome - CIL (International Lasallian Center) and SIEL (International Lasallian Studies Session) - many Regions and Districts have examples of extremely creative Lasallian formation experiences. Some programs are now on-line, as in the District of Australia-New Zealand-Papua New Guinea. Others are university degree programs in Lasallian Studies, as in Italy and in the USA. CEL, in Spain, is an example of a long-term, residential program. The District of the Philippines has created a sequential, well-organized program on all aspects of Lasallian association. Whether in Argentina-Paraguay or São Paulo, in Madagascar or Lwanga, in Francophone Canada or Midwest USA, in France or Proche-Orient, or in Penang, India, or Rome, the landscape is marked by exciting and innovative ways to form all Lasallians to be heralds of the charism that has graced the Church during the past three centuries.

Organizational Structures

6.14. All the General Chapters of the Institute since 1966 have urged the Districts to establish organizational structures that promote and enhance Lasallian association. The decisions range from the 40th General Chapter (1976), which formally recognized the *Signum Fidei* Society, to the 44th General Chapter (2007), which called for a restructuring of the General Council to better meet the needs of our educational Mission for all Lasallians. The 2006 Assembly in Rome, “Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor,” is another historic signpost on the road to restructuring the Institute’s resources to achieve the Lasallian shared mission. In the last four decades the Institute has gradually included committed Lasallians who are not Brothers in the CIL and SIEL programs, as well as in major assemblies, symposia, inter-capitular sessions, and General Chapters. These international gatherings embody and strengthen association.

6.15. In addition to these international events, most gatherings in the Regions and in the Districts are now occasions that enhance, value, and celebrate association among all Lasallians. Moreover, on a District level, Lasallian discernment happens in common at MEL Councils and Assemblies.

Chapter 7 - Concluding Remarks

“So, He said, cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something. So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.” (John 21: 6)

7.1. Picture the faces of the disciples as they again cast their nets in disbelief that one side of the boat rather than the other would be of any consequence. Imagine now their faces as they try to gather in their bursting nets. Doubt and frustration are quickly transformed to awe and amazement and finally into the joy of recognizing the Lord they had so sorely missed. Is this not part of our story too? Are we not living in an age that invites us to go to the “other side of the boat” and lower our Lasallian Educational nets “together and by association” hoping to fish a great quantity of “souls far from salvation?”

7.2. Just as the disciples had returned to their former way of life, believing that hope was extinguished and dreams had vanished, some too today might feel abandoned by the very God who once called them “to fish.” As the Israelites were so often taunted on their desert journey with the question “Where is your God?” some also now question why they ever took that first step to Brotherhood, to Lasallian association. Let our prayer then be that of St. Augustine when he speaks to God as his ever-faithful companion: *Here I am before you with my strength and my ignorance. Where you have opened the door to me, welcome me at the entrance; where you have closed the door to me, open to my cry; enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen!*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Widely attributed to St. Augustine.

7.3. The image of a God who welcomes, who walks alongside of us, who asks us to trust in the unimaginable, is the daily act of faith that has sustained the Brothers of the Christian Schools for more than three centuries. This image also symbolizes the vocational call of all Lasallians to confide in a God who calls “in a quiet imperceptible way...so that one commitment lead[s] ...into another without... having foreseen it in the beginning.”⁴⁷ This was De La Salle’s miraculous adventure with a God who always welcomed him. All you who serve the Lasallian Mission remember what God has promised us. As He spoke to the prophet Jeremiah so He speaks to us today: *“I know what my plans are for you, plans to save you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and to give you hope...When you call on me I will listen...I will gather you up from among all the nations... I will bring you home”*⁴⁸

7.4. Let us all rejoice in this pledge of hope...this bright future...this life-giving dream that invites us to remember always the holy presence of God and to touch the hearts of the young, especially the poor, together and by association.

St. John Baptist de La Salle...Pray for us.
Live Jesus in our Hearts...FOREVER!

**Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria,
Superior General
And the members of the General Council
Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General**

⁴⁷ Cf. Cahiers Lasalliens, No. 7, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jeremiah 29: 11-14.

Brother Jacques d'Huiteau, Brother David Hawke,
Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba,
Brother Alberto Gomez Barruso, Brother Edgar Nicodem,
Brother Claude Reinhardt, Brother Robert Schieler,
Brother Gabriel Some

