Br. Armin Luistro: “We need to get deeply immersed in the Regions”

From 4 to 9 September, 2023, the Casa de Encuentros La Salle in Medellin (Colombia) is hosting the **Meeting of the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL) with the Superior General and his Council**. 51 Brothers and 8 Lay Lasallians are taking part in this unprecedented experience of fraternity, spirituality and discernment.

What steps does the Region need to take in the coming years to respond to its realities in the context of the Institute? What does the Region need from the Institute? and what can the Region offer to the Institute? These are some of the major questions that this unique meeting seeks to answer, based on listening and dialogue, and in a synodal perspective of communion, participation and mission, inspired by the Magisterium of Pope Francis.

“Our encounters with the Regions are part of the General Council’s plan, and our meeting with RELAL is already the fourth at Regional level”, remarked Brother Armin Luistro, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, anticipating that “next month we will have the fifth encounter in Africa”.

On the peripheries, living with the smell of the sheep

“These encounters in the Regions are very important for us, because, as Pope Francis asks us, ‘we must live with the smell of the sheep’,” continues Br Armin. “Of course we could have a meeting in Rome and invite all Lasallian leaders to talk about their Regions, but that would not work. **We need to get very deeply immersed in the Regions**,” says the Filipino religious.

In this sense, Brother Superior General underlines that “it is not just a matter of gathering in one city”. “Before coming to Medellín, the ten members of the Council were divided into different groups, we **went to different sectors, especially to the peripheries, and we met with students, teachers and, above all, with those who are our associates, those who work with us**. Then we came to this meeting, and we realised that culture, language, atmosphere are

very important for dialogue. So we are able to understand much more what the Region is like (…), what the Regions are doing and what the challenges are for us today.

For his part, Brother Martín Digilio, who is a member of the General Council, explains that this methodology "stems from an indication of the 46th General Chapter to approach the Regions from the perspective of Appreciative Inquiry, but it is also **a pastoral way that the General Council has wanted to develop, approaching us to listen** and establish an agenda of 'strong points', of challenges, of objectives that are in development and of objectives that we need to develop".

Dialogue, listening and understanding

With regard to the term in office of the Superior General and the 'Squadra' – as the General Council is known – Br. Martín emphasises that "we cannot wait seven years to start up actions and processes, but we are trying to do it right now; and this means being able to dialogue, listen to each other, and understand what we can contribute from the Institute to Latin America and the Caribbean, and above all **what this Region can contribute to the Institute, in a sense of profound unity and in the face of the challenges of a continent marked by inequality, political confrontations, migrants, indigenous peoples** in situations of abandonment and so many other realities that include the cries of the Earth and the environment". For this reason, "this meeting aims to highlight a common agenda so that we can work together," concluded the Argentinean Councillor.

This is why the option of holding encounters with the five Regions of the Institute has an extended character, since "**there are not only the Brother Visitors, but also the leading teams of the Districts**, and these teams are made up of Brothers and Lay Lasallians", as Brother Carlos Gómez, Vicar General, explains.

Towards new models of governance

"We have to find new models of governance and revitalise the Regions from particular points of view", Brother Carlos emphasised, recalling the mandate received from the General Chapter in May 2022. "**We feel called to take on this time with prophetic audacity**, and a first step is to get to know the Institute

from the grass roots, not only in the Visitors' meetings, which are important, but are not enough to appreciate the scope of the reality".

"This option will necessarily lead us to begin to **find points of joint work between the different Regions, which handle the formative processes of Brothers and Lay Partners, and the missionary processes,** as well as the new borders and peripheries to which the Chapter calls us", concludes the Vicar General.

In fact, before the RELAL Meeting – between 24 August and 1 September – **the Superior General and his Council had the opportunity to visit some works and communities in the Lasallian Districts of Brazil-Chile, Argentina-Paraguay, and Central America-Panama**, several of them located in the peripheries. Likewise, from 11 to 16 September they will continue their itinerary in some countries of the continent, approaching particular and challenging realities for the mission of Lasallians and their option for the most empoverished and most vulnerable.