

Brother Carlos Gómez: “The Leaven that our Lasallian mission requires the capacity to create, to dream and to risk”.

One of the fruits of the 46th General Chapter of the De La Salle Brothers – held in May 2022 – was the Leavening Project. “There is no doubt in my mind: **the Holy Spirit has done his work and has set us immense challenges**”, said Brother Carlos Gómez, Vicar General of the Institute, at the beginning of his address at the meeting of the Lasallian Region of Latin America (RELAL) with the Superior General and his Council held in Medellín (Colombia) from 4 to 9 September.

Almost a year after the Superior General and his Council presented the Leavening Project, Brother Carlos believes that although “the magnitude of the decisions exceeds our strength; nevertheless, they show **pathways that if we take the risk to traverse, they will lead us to new ports, to the revitalisation of our consecrated life, to the renewal of our mission**, and to the creation of new horizons and responses”.

A transformative movement

In fact, with the Leavening Project “we have all been invited, we have all been convened to be part of a ‘transforming movement’ with **prophetic audacity and sincerity of heart: in the service of the impoverished and vulnerable**, from below, from within, from nearby”.

Of course, the Leavening Project raises basic and profound, uncomfortable and provocative questions. Above all, “prophetic and questioning questions about our being, doing, and dreaming”: “**Where is your brother? where is your sister?** Perhaps we could consider our answers today in the Region, in our Districts, in our communities, and in the heart of each one of us”, says the Vicar General.

Taking stock one year later

Through interpellations that necessarily imply a permanent call to conversion, Brother Carlos invited us to make a sincere assessment of the first year of the Leavening Project: “On a personal level, we could ask ourselves, **what steps have I taken to encounter my brothers and sisters? Is there leaven in my life, in my prayer, in my daily actions?** Do I experience the joy of having achieved something of what I proposed? Is there a breakthrough that, however painful, has entailed peace and spiritual calm? Is it all ‘business as usual’?”

These questions are also transferred to the community and District level: “Are there any liminal, daring, frontier decisions? **Have we taken any District decisions that decentre us, move us to the peripheries, make us leave our comfort zone?** What do the District and the Region visualise as bodies to be a new leaven in our countries, towns and Districts?”

Consistency and radicalism

Brother Carlos also stated that “it would not be consistent, and this is something to be reviewed in each District with serenity and a spirit of discernment and self-criticism, if the decisions of the District Chapters have been less bold and more lukewarm than those taken by the General Chapter”. In truth, “**the leavening project does not call for the spectacular but for constancy; it does not call for the wonderful, but for the radical;** it is not the torrent that sweeps away what is in its path, but the drop that by its constancy pierces the stone; it does not manifest itself in the extravagant, but in the whisper of the gentle breeze”.

In fact, in his message, he twice referred to St Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, to endorse that ‘conversion’, that difficult word that can also be a cause of frustration, is not so much “in the amazement of sudden blindness”, but “in an interiority that begins to blur our permanent myopia with constant steps that transform our lives, our communities, our mission, and our comfortable lives. **It is not an invitation to endless prayers and noisy liturgies, nor to fill the daily life with artificial religious language, but to humble and unostentatious contemplation, in painful and silent renunciations, in steps that move us towards the peripheries and away from our comfort zones**”.

Leaven in Latin America

With regard to the ‘Leavening Projects’ proposed by the Districts of RELAL –

many of which were visited by the Superior General and his Council between August and September – the Vicar General noted that “**there are very significant works in terms of creativity, commitment and prophetism in Latin America** (...). In fact, there is more than each of us knows and imagines: the missionary vitality of RELAL is impressive!”.

However, he also urged coherence and the aforementioned conversion in the face of the ‘Leavening Projects’: “Are these marvellous works animated by vibrant, transparent, passionate, prayerful communities, centred on Jesus Christ, with radical availability to God? (...) Do we pray with honesty? Do we pray the educational process? Does community life palpitate at the heart of the educational project for its quality and joy? (...) **Is it experienced with austerity and congruence with the realities we serve? Or is it a comfort zone stuck on the periphery?**

Cross-pollination

Undoubtedly, “**the leaven gives us a hermeneutical key to interpret reality and to live the mission**”, Brother Carlos continued. In fact, “every new Lasallian project that we dream of in the Region should pass through this sieve: is it really a response to exclusion, injustice, inequality, poor education for the poor (...)? It is Leaven if we enrich our mission through ‘cross-pollination’”. Only in this way will there be the “overflow of the germinal” to which Sr. Liliana Franco, President of CLAR, referred in her reflections at the beginning of the meeting on the challenges of consecrated life today.

“The necessary Leaven that our Lasallian mission requires is the capacity to create, to dream, and to risk”, the Vicar General underlined, while at the same time delving into some crucial issues to move in this direction:

- “In building our community programs we could be attentive to **put a good dose of Leaven in the reflection**”.
- “There is the possibility that, looking with the eyes of faith and with all the wealth that our inspirational documents give us, we may understand that **there are works that are flour that does not resist leaven. Why not recognise it?** There are pasts that we want to continue stretching and that no longer give any more; they have fulfilled their purpose (...) Something has to die so that other things can be born”.

- “The Leaven to which the Chapter urges us and which the Project takes up could also **foster and strengthen the South-South dialogue in our Institute**: meetings and common reflections between Africa, South East Asia and Latin America”. Likewise, “**the sad reality of migration** is a meeting point between North and South, a challenge to the internationality of the Institute”.
- “Our **concern for the Amazon and integral ecology** has to remind us that the Congo River basin in central Africa is the world’s other green lung, ‘the African Amazon’, equally threatened and with fewer mourners”.
- “We could be more Leaven if we move forward in the **consolidation of the Regional Novitiate, even thought of for the Portuguese-Spanish area** of the Institute, although it is always open to all (...). An International Novitiate, with a good accompanying team and a large inter-District group, generates interesting dynamics and a formative process more consistent with reality and with our being Brothers today”.
- “(...) **To opt for proposals which overflow from the Leavening Project** and which can constitute the new fronts (...) which today could be identifiers of the Lasallian proposal, for example, rurality, native peoples, migration and migrants, higher education within the reach of those who are on the existential and educational peripheries”.
- “Think liminally, not about how we are going to bring some poor people to our campuses, but how we would bring our campuses to meet the most vulnerable. **May our prestige become a commitment to the cause of justice, equity, peace and sustainable development.**”

The great challenge for the Lasallians of RELAL has to do with “**being protagonists in helping to create the new face of La Salle in Latin America**”. This requires “a large dose of leaven for the years to come” which will contribute to transforming realities.

“Hopefully the leaven will lead us to sow new seeds and take risks for the most impoverished ones. We have resources, we have possibilities, we have capable people; **it is a question of deciding, taking risks and walking.** The good God will do the rest”, concluded Brother Carlos Gómez.