Brother Richard Böhi: 1,000 climbs, 90 years and a vocation in the service of the Lasallian Mission

On 30 June, Brother Richard Böhi, FSC, completed his 1,000th climb of Chaumont, a mountain rising 1,170 metres above the Swiss city of Neuchâtel. At the age of 90, this Brother of the Christian Schools continues to demonstrate extraordinary physical vigour, but behind this sporting achievement lies a much deeper story: that of **a life dedicated to education, faith and the service of children and young people, lived with the simplicity and joy characteristic of the Lasallian charism**.

Every climb, a spiritual moment

From a very young age, Brother Richard has enjoyed sport and cycling. At the age of 17, he decided to follow in his elder brother's footsteps and join the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. During his early years in religious life, he put sport aside, but **rediscovered cycling on his 50th birthday, when the Brothers in his community gave him a bicycle**. He then set himself the challenge of cycling from the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Neuchâtel, where he lives, to the summit of Chaumont.

Since then, each ride has ceased to be merely a physical activity and has become a special moment that allows him to draw closer to God. "Every climb is a spiritual moment. **Every time I go out on my bike, I pray part of the rosary. I think of my friends, of the people I know, and I pray for them**", explains the De La Salle Brother.

During his rides, Brother Richard often stops to take photographs of the natural

world. “**I contemplate creation and often think: how good God is! Everything he has created is marvellous**: the stunning landscapes, the flowers, the trees”, he adds.

Sport in the service of the Lasallian Mission

For Brother Richard, **sport has never been an end in itself, but rather a way of living out his vocation as an educator more fully**. “Sport did me good and, thanks to that, I was able to teach young people better”, he recalls.

Convinced that taking care of one’s body also strengthens one’s willingness to serve others, he believes that cycling enabled him to live out the educational mission entrusted to him by Saint John Baptist de La Salle with greater joy and closeness. “**When I was playing sport, I was more willing to communicate and share my joy with young people**. Otherwise, I might simply have been a teacher doing his job, nothing more”.

Today, Brother Richard also believes that sport can be a tool for giving young people on the margins access to spirituality and to the message of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

“In my community, I have truly lived out the mission to the peripheries; it was an important part of my life. **This is the heart of the Lasallian charism: going out to the peripheries. It is what we must continue to do**”, reiterates the Brother, for whom the Lasallian Mission always begins with an encounter with the individual and the ability to touch their heart.

Carrying on cycling with our eyes fixed on God

Having reached the milestone of 1,000 climbs of Chaumont, Brother Richard is not setting his sights on new records. Since he began keeping track of his climbs in 1987, he has also conquered other Swiss mountains dozens of times, such as the Chasseral, Mont Vully and La Vue-des-Alpes. But today he prefers to leave the future in God’s hands. “**I’ll keep cycling as long as God grants me good health**”, he says calmly.

And if one day I could share one of those walks with Saint John Baptist de La

Salle, I know exactly what I would say to him: “I would simply thank him for having founded the Institute and for having inspired me to live out this calling, this vocation as a Brother of the Christian Schools”.

* *Article written by Natalia Mendoza. Photos: personal archive.*