Lasallian Mission in Tabatinga and Utopia: A Representation of the Peripheries

Getting closer to the peripheries is one of the premises left by the latest General Chapter and which the Brothers of the General Council wanted to initiate in their most recent trip to Colombia, and the next one to Kenya, with their approach to valuable Lasallian experiences which will be a reference point for their work in the years to come.

For three days Brother Armin Luistro, Superior General, together with Brother Carlos Gómez, Vicar General, and Brother Councillors Anatole Diretenadji and Chris Patiño got to know Utopia, belonging to Universidad de La Salle, while Brother Councillors Joel Palud, Ricardo Laguda, Martín Digilio, and Brother Sergio Leal, secretary to Brother Superior General, went to the community of Tabatinga, in the Amazon.

Tabatinga, the point of the triple border

The Brother Councillors who visited Tabatinga, in the Amazon, encountered another reality: a region with enormous shortages, minimal access to basic resources and huge neglect by governmental entities. On the other hand, they were able to meet various religious communities that work together to connect with the traditions, the environment and the needs of these indigenous peoples.

And there La Salle is present; this community has a strong pastoral and social work with indigenous communities in the three countries that converge in this part of the world: Brazil, Colombia and Peru. “It is interesting to see the difference in the way the authorities deal with social problems in such a small space. Despite this, for example, in Santa Rosa (Peru), which is a very neglected area, we have perceived a lot of fraternity, we were surrounded by children and families who came to greet us”, says Brother Joel Palud about his experience in this Amazonian area.

Brother Martín Digilio remarks, “from the experience in Tabatinga I was

surprised by the Church, incorporated into the world of the poorest, the Church as a sign of hope for indigenous men and women with all the flaws and needs they may have. Here the Church accompanies, it fulfils what Pope Francis asks of us: to restore links between people, nature and ways of understanding the world".

Utopia, a place where innovation happens

The Utopia project is an innovative educational initiative for the rural population of Universidad de La Salle; it is the first rural university campus in Colombia. The university calls on young people in the most vulnerable municipalities of the country affected by war and poverty to study here on scholarships and to be trained as agricultural engineers or agricultural and livestock farmers. This Unisalle campus is located in the municipality of Yopal, in Casanare: a department in the eastern plains characterised by its warm, humid, tropical climate and the richness of its soils.

The Brothers were introduced to the production lines. This is where the students apply what they have learned in the classroom and work during their training process, from harvesting to agro-industrial processes. There were also opportunities for dialogue with students, the staff of workers and teachers on the campus, and with former students. There was an opportunity for cultural events in order to get to know the most symbolic scenarios of this place. The day ended with a special tree planting in honour of the guest Brothers. In the words of Brother Chris Patiño, "Utopia teaches us that when we have a clear mission, we can generate unity, share the same spirit and have an impact together wherever we go".

At the end of their session in Colombia, Br Armin Luistro concludes, "I am blessed to begin the first steps of this leadership of the Institute from this perspective. In these seven years to come when we meet walls on the road, I will remember that I was in Utopia, that we were in Tabatinga, and that change is possible, and that new paths will be blessed by God because we believe in Him and in what the Spirit shows us".

We invite you to read the chronicle of this visit written by Universidad de La Salle here (https://www.lasalle.edu.co/Noticias/UnisalleNoticias/uls/Asi-fue-la-visita-del-Superior-General-de-los-lasallistas-a-Unisalle).

By:
Adriana Garzón for La Salle Global lasalle lasorg – Communications and Technology Service.