OPENING ADDRESS TO THE 45TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Rome, April 22, 2014

Dear Brothers,

Welcome to our 45th General Chapter! I wanted to say a few words of welcome and thanks for your presence and availability in the important work of discernment that we will have during these days. We begin the Chapter at the beginning of Eastertide which is a total sign of hope and life in the risen Jesus and in the strength of his resurrection. Happy Easter and a very warm welcome to all the Chapter delegates, consultants and guests, and to all the Brothers who will help us in our tasks during these weeks. Special thanks go to the Brothers on the Preparatory Commission who with dedication and efficiency have spent many hours and much energy in order to facilitate our assembly as we will see in the coming days. Thanks also to the Rule Commission for the arduous work they have done. Our gratitude to Brother Ambrose who has coordinated both of these commissions with great ability and effectiveness. Thanks for the long and frequent trips to assure their success.

At this time we ought to feel spiritually united to all the Brothers in the Institute, as the Rule reminds us: The General Chapter is, since the days of the Founder, the ultimate expression of the communion that exists among all the Brothers. It perpetuates among them the living fidelity to the special charism of the Institute (Rule 103). Their prayers and their interest will accompany us as will that of all the associated members of the Lasallian Family. We can think of so many young people and children who have found in many Brothers a helping hand and we cannot let them down.

At another time I will have the opportunity to share and dialogue with you about my vision, my convictions and what I would like to call my final recommendations as the leader of the Institute. At this time I would like to offer a reflection on the importance of discernment during our Chapter as we saw in the Report of the Brother Superior that you have already studied. The letter that the principal Brothers sent to the Founder in 1714, whose 300th anniversary we are commemorating, is an excellent example of Lasallian discernment in terms of the idea that this work of God is also ours. There are three criteria that should guide our discernment: the greater glory of God, the good of the Church and that of our society. When the Brothers speak of "our society" they about those poor children and young people who, thanks to the Christian and gratuitous schools, have found new opportunities for their future, a response to their needs, and an evangelical path for their lives.

Lasallian discernment is, first of all, an invitation to discover in the very core of life the
presence of a God who teaches us how to look at our history and the history of our contemporaries in terms of God's movement. That movement starts from life itself, it leads us progressively, day after day, to a deeper center to which we arrive in and through the signs recognized in light of Scripture and in the heart of the apostolic community gathered together to work and to pray. Imbued with the presence of the living God, the second movement in discernment consists in reading the Gospel in order to contemplate the words and actions of Jesus, to admire and to observe how he acted with his disciples, to observe his sensitivity in facing human suffering, his preferential love for the poor, in order to learn to do the same. In light of the Gospel, a third movement emerges that leads us to confront the reality in which we live with the contemplated Word in order to open ourselves and to welcome the transforming strength of the Spirit which identifies us with Jesus and his saving actions. The Word of God and historical reality are the two coordinates of authentic Lasallian discernment.

Discernment, as expressed in the report, reminds us that our association for the mission as Brothers consecrated to the Trinity in community should always be enlightened by this double purpose, so well expressed at the beginning of our Institute and which today could be summarized with the words of the plan of Jesus: *Proclaim the Gospel to the poor* (Luke 4: 18), which in Lasallian terms we can identify with the purpose of the Institute, as formulated by our Founder: *to give a Christian education to the children of artisans and the poor* (Rule of 1718, Chapter 1). This discernment, then, should start from the needs of the poor, marked by the old and new forms of poverty and God's saving plan for the poor, to which we are committed.

The tercentenary of the letter of 1714 should be for us during these days of the Chapter an invitation to a creative memory and not just a fond recall of the past. A questioning of our commitment and transformational change in light of the values of the Gospel and the original insights that brought us into being.

Let us ask God's Spirit to accompany and enlighten us and to make our own, at the beginning of our Chapter and each day throughout these weeks, the invitation that the Founder makes to us in his meditation for Pentecost: *Pray to God to give you today the same grace he gave the holy apostles, and ask him that, after filling you with his Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, he also communicate himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others* (Meditation 43.3).

Let us also ask Our Lady, as Mother and Queen of the Christian Schools, Saint Joseph, our Patron, our Founder and all our Lasallian Saints and Blessed, to accompany and enlighten us in our discernment of God's will for us, our Institute and our mission.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General